

**THE MANCUNIANS AT WAR: A NEW MILITARY
HISTORY OF THE MANCHESTER BATTALIONS
DURING THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR, 1899-1902**

by

Dawid J. Mouton

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the degree

DOCTOR PHILOSOPHIAE (HISTORY)

in the

Department of Historical and Heritage Studies

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

Pretoria

Supervisor: Dr Ian Macqueen

2023

“I think it is only doing justice to the Lancashire people to let them know their county regiment is doing its share ... I have seen in the papers other regiments praised and ours left out.”

Private J.W. Evans, 1st Manchester Regiment, a month after the Battle of Elandslaagte (21 October 1899).

For *Oupa* Dawie, whose love of history led me on this journey. I wish he was still with us to read this. And to Margaux, who ‘sent me off to war’ and supported me throughout.

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the experiences of British soldiers during the South African War (1899 – 1902), from the perspective of the Manchester Regiment, as a subset of New Military History. To reconstruct their experiences, the dissertation draws on letters, diaries, and other documents in the Manchester Regiment Archive, and the large but underutilised source of soldiers' letters published in British newspapers. The latter is the main origin of the Manchesters' 'voices'. This thesis represents the first in-depth application of the systematic, thematic-chronological approach to a single British regiment during the South African War. It begins with the send-off from Manchester and the journey to South Africa. Once in South Africa, their dichotomous perceptions of the environment and its people are explored. The research demonstrates how the Manchesters quickly resorted to looting, especially to supplement insufficient rations, before the 'scorched earth' phase of the war. Life on campaign was dominated by duties and associated drudgeries, especially marching, insufficient hygiene, and lack of sleep. To cope with the various discomforts, the Manchesters distracted themselves through various methods, such as sports. Death and danger, however, was always close. On occasion the Manchesters engaged the enemy in battle and skirmishes, although the Boers proved a frustrating enemy to fight, often well-hidden and rarely stood their ground. Illness, especially typhoid, was the other far more dangerous threat. One of the key factors in almost all of the Manchesters' experiences was the influence of the environment they campaigned in, which although beautiful, was also the source of much of their challenges. The Manchesters adapted, but in the process, the distinction between the professional British soldier and the militia-based enemy began to be blurred.

Keywords: South African War / Anglo-Boer War / Boer War; New Military History; combatant/soldier experiences; late-Victorian soldiers; British soldiers; Manchester Regiment; military correspondence/soldiers' letters in the press/newspapers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This was a long and hard journey, and I owe a debt of thanks to numerous individuals who guided and supported me. To start with, I would like to thank Professor Fransjohan Pretorius, who introduced me to the field of New Military History during my Honours degree at the University of Pretoria. He also introduced me to Professor Edward Spiers, who I would like to thank for his advice and guidance. It is fair to say that he is the main reason why my focus settled on the Manchester Regiment. Moreover, Spiers invited me to the University of Leeds, where he educated me on how to access and use military correspondence published in newspapers, not to mention being a gracious host.

This study would have been impossible without the help of the archivists at the Tameside Local Studies and Archives Centre. Sadly, I do not remember all their names, but I did correspond with Larysa Bolton. However, visiting Manchester and Prof Spiers in the United Kingdom to learn about and collect the primary sources would not have been possible without the financial assistance of my father and grandfather, both named D. J. Mouton. Moreover, the University of Pretoria, through the Department of Corporate International Relations, subsidised a part of my research trip with a travel bursary, and I would like to thank Ms Louise Euthimiou, who handled my application.

Regarding the gruelling process of researching and writing a PhD thesis, several people deserve my gratitude. Professor Fransjohan Pretorius features once more, as he helped me lay the foundation for the thesis as my initial supervisor. Sadly, due to various factors, I was forced to pause my PhD for several years. During this interim, Professor Karen Harris of the University of Pretoria, and Professor Alex Mouton (no familial relation) of the University of South Africa, kept the embers alive until I was able to resume my PhD.

This brings me to my current supervisor, Dr Ian Macqueen of the University of Pretoria. He did not have an easy task, because he essentially inherited a PhD topic which he did not have a hand in forging. Despite this, he excelled in his role, knowing exactly how to calm my admittedly frequent bouts of anxiety. At the same time, he asked challenging questions which forced me out of my comfort zone. I could not have asked for a better supervisor.

In the background, Professor Karen Harris, now the Head of Department of Historical and Heritage Studies at the University of Pretoria, continued to encourage me. And at times, cracked the metaphorical whip to keep me focused. It is difficult to truly express how important her support was, and I would like to thank her once again for believing in me.

Family and friends were equally important, and often suffered neglect as I worked feverishly to complete this thesis. First, my wife Margaux, who encouraged me to resume my PhD, and

then supported me unconditionally. My parents, Dawid and Elmarié, who suddenly saw their son far less frequently, but endured with little complaint. I did, however, regret missing so many of my father's frequent *braais* (barbeques). I would also like to mention Mr Carel Greyling (soon to be Dr Greyling), a Geography lecturer at the University of South Africa, and a friend. We both sat for long hours together working on our respective PhD theses. In addition, he is also responsible for the maps in this thesis, which I believe add immense value to this study. Lastly, I would be remiss if I did not mention the cats, particularly my blind ginger cat Fudge, who kept me company for long hours, and patiently waited each night for me to finish.

CONTENTS

1.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1	Brief historical context of the war	3
1.2	Literature study	4
1.2.1	Academic military history	4
1.2.2	Historiography of the South African War	10
1.3	Sources and methodology	18
1.4	The Manchester Regiment.....	24
1.4.1	The 1 st Battalion - the 'Fighting First'	24
1.4.2	The 2 nd Battalion - 'Rundle's Hounds'	29
1.5	Overview of chapters and themes	37
2.	OFF TO WAR	40
2.1	The British Army by the end of the nineteenth century	43
2.2	The soldiers' background	45
2.3	Nationalism, imperialism, militarism, and Social-Darwinism in late-Victorian Britain	49
2.4	The 1 st Battalion send-off from Gibraltar	52
2.5	Private send-offs from Manchester	52
2.6	Equipping for war	61
2.7	Public send-offs.....	63
2.8	The voyage to South Africa.....	71
2.9	Conclusion	79
3.	IN A STRANGE LAND	82
3.1	Landscape.....	83
3.2	Weather.....	88
3.3	Animals.....	93
3.4	White civilians	98
3.5	The Boer combatants.....	101
3.6	Africans	109
3.7	Women.....	114
3.8	Conclusion	118
4.	SUPPLIES	121
4.1	Supplying the troops through official channels: methods and challenges	123
4.2	Supplies as gifts	127
4.3	Water.....	128
4.4	Food	130
4.5	Tobacco	151
4.6	Alcohol.....	153
4.7	Clothing and boots	155
4.8	Blankets and tents.....	159
4.9	Paper and ink	162
4.10	Miscellaneous items.....	163
4.11	Conclusion	164
5.	LIFE ON CAMPAIGN	168
5.1	Duties	170

5.2	Drudgery	187
5.3	Distractions	210
5.4	Conclusion	237
6.	DEATH AND DANGER	240
6.1	Perceptions of combat	242
6.2	The experience of combat	248
6.3	Disease: the greatest enemy in this country	286
6.4	Perceptions of death	290
6.5	Conclusion	292
7.	CONCLUDING THE WAR.....	295
8.	LIST OF SOURCES.....	303
9.	APPENDIX.....	316

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CIV	City of London Imperial Volunteers
Lt Col	Lieutenant-Colonel
Lt Gen.	Lieutenant-General
OFS	Orange Free State
VBMR	Volunteer Battalion Manchester Regiment
ZAR	South African Republic

LIST OF FIGURES AND PHOTOS

Figure 1: Captain Tilland's sketch of an old African woman.	112
Photo 1: Harrismith, where the 2 nd Manchesters spent a significant amount of time during the course of the war. Note the rows of white tents a few hundred metres outside the town, where the rank-and-file would have slept.	85
Photo 2: Captain Hastings and Lieutenant Foord with five geese.	95
Photo 3: Lieutenant Ellershaw with his buck trophy.	95
Photo 4: A Manchester posing with a cat.	97
Photo 5: Manchesters greeted by a dog.	98
Photo 6: Manchesters relaxing with a dog.	98
Photo 7: Africans performing a war dance for the Manchesters.	113
Photo 8: A group of Manchesters posing with two lady visitors. Their identity and the context behind the photo are unknown. But the soldiers, presumably officers, look pleased.	116
Photo 9: Five African women in traditional garb, photographed by the Manchesters.	118
Photo 10: This photo is titled "Searching for Loot", and dates from c.1901, when looting had become an accepted part of the overall British strategy, and provided a welcome supplement for poor rations.	140
Photo 11: A 2 nd Manchester Cape cart. I do not think this one belonged to Captain Trueman, but it gives a good indication how this cart looked and how much it could carry. The horses were named Castor and Pollux, and the African driver was called Hans.	143
Photo 12: A blockhouse garrisoned by a section of Manchesters.	176
Photo 13: Sheep slaughtered by the Manchesters to deny the enemy a source of food.	183
Photo 14: A section of 2 nd Manchesters enjoying the benefits of modern transportation in an open cattle truck.	201
Photo 15: A horse-racing stub from Harrismith, 27 January 1901.	212
Photo 16: The Manchester band practising on the veld.	228
Photo 17: F Company's football team.	230
Photo 18: The 2 nd Manchesters playing football in the veld.	230
Photo 19: Under the photo it says "Sports at Harrismith, '01". The 2 nd Manchesters swimming in a makeshift pool.	232
Photo 20: Two Manchesters playing table-tennis on the veld.	233
Photo 21: Unknown 2 nd Manchester officer, playing golf on his Sunday day off.	234
Photo 22: A 2 nd Manchester sketching while sitting on a termite heap, according to a description below the photo.	235
Photo 23: The grave of Private Gilligan.	291
Photo 24: The grave of Captain Noble.	291
Photo 25: The grave of Privates Taylor, Ishmael, and Baley; killed in action, 6 November 1901.	291

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: A sample of weather events recorded by the 1st Battalion's staff diary while in Ladysmith. .. 93
Table 2: Scorched-earth operations of the 2nd Manchesters from May to July 1901..... 186

LIST OF MAPS

Map 1: The 1 st Manchesters' main movements during the war.	27
Map 2: The 2 nd Manchesters' main movements from 17 April–3 December 1900.	32
Map 3: The 2 nd Manchesters' main movements from 3 December 1900–4 September 1901.	35
Map 4: The 2 nd Manchesters' main movements from 4 September 1901–31 May 1902.	36
Map 5: The rail lines in the Boer republics in 1899.	124
Map 6: The Battle of Elandslaagte, with the most recent cartographic data.	251

TERMINOLOGY

Several military terms are used throughout this thesis. To better inform the discussion and to avoid misunderstanding, a short list of relevant terms is explained and contextualised within the bounds of their use in this thesis:

- 1st and 2nd Manchesters** These were two popular terms the soldiers of the Manchester Regiment Battalions, and the Manchester public and media, used to refer to the two individual battalions. It was, and is, much easier to write than “1st or 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment”, and this logic extends to this thesis.
- Ambush** Unlike a skirmish, an ambush is usually planned by one of the fighting factions, where one party would lay in wait for the other and attack unexpectedly, or when one party approached the other unseen and launched a surprise attack, typically on a fixed position such as a camp. In most cases, ambushes in the South African War tended to be brief and small-scale affairs, although sometimes it could be a battle, as was the case for the Battle of Platrand on 6 January 1900, when the Boers launched a large surprise attack on the British fortifications protecting Ladysmith.
- Battalion** In the context of the late-Victorian army, a battalion was a smaller military formation which belonged to a regiment. There were two battalions in a regiment. A battalion could contain up to 1 000 men, although usually, as will be seen with the Manchesters, it could vary to as few as 600 men, depending on circumstances and casualties.
- Battle** Largely inspired by John Keegan’s definition in *The Face of Battle* (1976), a battle in the context of this thesis was a notably large fighting action between the Boers and the British, fought on and around a specific geographic position, within a specific timeframe, of which the main aim was to hold or conquer a position. In the case of the 1st Manchesters, this included the Battle of Elandslaagte on 21 October 1899, the Battle of Platrand on 6 January 1900, and the Battle of Bergendal fought from 21 – 27 August 1900.
- Brigade** This is a large military formation consisting of several regiments or battalions, but is significantly smaller than a division, and from the

perspective of the Manchesters, this was the most relevant military formation during the war, since their activities usually occurred within the bounds of a brigade's military objectives.

Combat Much like the term 'engagement', combat in the context of this thesis is a loose term used to refer to fighting the enemy. The term applies equally to large and small fighting actions. It is the main term used in Chapter 6: Death and danger, which focuses on how the Manchesters experienced fighting the enemy.

Company In the late-Victorian army, this was a small military formation of up to 100 men, and ten companies constituted a battalion. In reality, most companies were around 80 men, or even fewer, depending on circumstances and casualties. It is worth noting that the Manchesters were largely infantry, but each Manchester battalion had one company of mounted infantry. The 2nd Manchesters later had two mounted infantry companies.

Division This is a large military formation which consists of several smaller military formations such as regiments and brigades. Several divisions combined would form a corps, and several corps would form an army. During the South African War, the Manchesters only occasionally referred to division level movements and actions.

Engagement This is a loose term which refers to a fighting action between the combatants. It is not restricted by the size, location, or duration of the action, and is used when referring to both battles and skirmishes.

Flying column This was, in theory, a fast-moving group of British units, ranging in size from as small as a few companies, or as large as a brigade, and was intended to capture or trap the swift Boer commandos. This became a standard strategic formation during the guerrilla phase of the war, although it rarely managed to match the Boers in speed and mobility.

Regiment In the context of the late-Victorian army, a regiment consisted of two battalions. In Britain, each regiment was based in a specific geographic region, such as a town or county. The organisation of the British Army is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2: Off to war.

Skirmish

A skirmish refers to a small and short fighting action, and is often, though not always, an unplanned fight between a small number of combatants.

1. INTRODUCTION

During the early summer of 1899 clouds began to gather with considerable rapidity on the political horizon of South Africa ... the failing of the Bloemfontein Conference brought home to all the fact that the chance of war with the South African Republic had become something more than a vague possibility, and from that date speculation became rife as to whether the battalion would have the good fortune to form part of the expeditionary force which, it was expected, would sooner or later, have to be sent to settle once for all the question as to who was to be the paramount power in South Africa.¹

Approximately 450 000 British and colonial soldiers were involved in the South African War (1899–1902).² Despite the size and importance of this conflict, academic interest in those soldiers' experiences is surprisingly limited. This stands in stark contrast to that of Boer combatants.³ The phenomenon of war is both horrifying and fascinating, yet poorly understood, and thus victim to generalisations and misconceptions. The aim of this study is to explore and analyse the experiences of British soldiers during the war, specifically those from the Manchester Regiment, as a lived experience to further our understanding of the diverse and complicated ways in which mostly ordinary individuals experienced what was then an unusual occurrence for most people. Fransjohan Pretorius, even though he was referring to the Boers, reminded us that this war was an event where individuals spent a considerably long time, for many as long as two years and eight months, in forced close proximity with large groups of people while enduring various forms of psychological and physical discomfort.⁴ On the opposite side of the conflict, roughly the same circumstances applied for many of the British combatants. Stephen Miller, writing about the experiences of British Volunteers during the war, argued that this type of research helps scholars to “better understand contemporary concepts of duty and honor, the role of discipline and leadership, peer pressure and male

¹ 'Records of Service, 63rd and 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, 1758-1910', MR 1/1/2/3. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

² It is also known as the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902; Boer War; Second Anglo-Boer War; or amongst some Afrikaner nationalists as the Second War of Freedom. For the purposes of this study the term “South African War” will be used, since this is the official term that the government of South Africa endorsed in 1996 to make the War a more inclusive heritage. (Bill Nasson. *The War for South Africa [the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902]*. Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2010, 11, 292) In addition, this term gives homage and recognition to research conducted since the 1980s which illuminates how pervasive and far-reaching the effect of the war was on many sectors of South African society during that time, and the major impact it had on the future development of South Africa.

³ See F. Pretorius, *Life on Commando during the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902* (1999). The Afrikaans version, *Kommandolewe tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, was published in 1991.

⁴ Fransjohan Pretorius. *Kommandolewe Tydens Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*. Cape Town & Johannesburg: Human & Rousseau, 1991, 370.

bonding, and the demoralizing effect of fighting a long, drawn-out war without clear objectives and directions.”⁵ This type of study which focuses on combatants’ experiences is a subset of a historical approach that is known as new military history.⁶

This thesis presents the first sustained application of new military history to explore the experiences of British soldiers from a single regiment, specifically those who served in the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the Manchester Regiment. This includes Volunteers, Militia, and reservists from Manchester who fought alongside the 1st and 2nd Battalions.⁷ The lived experiences of the ordinary British soldier during the South African War have not enjoyed much attention in new military history, apart from a handful of cases, and the few existing histories of the Manchester Regiment itself are products of the top-down “drum and trumpet” approach of more traditional military history. The Manchester Regiment is ideal for a case study of the British Army in the South African War more broadly as it had units stationed in South Africa throughout the entirety of the war who were involved in several important engagements, such as the Battle of Elandslaagte and the siege of Ladysmith, not to mention serving during the long guerrilla war phase where the men performed a variety of duties and endured many discomforts. In addition, because the focus is on the Manchester Regiment, it brings a measure of intimacy to their experiences which is lacking from studies which rely on a broader sample base. It also emphasises more strongly how taxing this war was on body, mind, and emotions. The South African War was not only a ‘total’ war for South Africans and the country, but it was also a ‘total’ onslaught of experiences and hardships for the soldiers of the Manchester Regiment.

To reconstruct the Manchesters’ experiences, this thesis follows two rarely used paths. It utilises a largely neglected source in the form of soldiers’ letters published in British newspapers, which to date, despite its easy accessibility, have only been exploited by a handful of historians. Moreover, it is the first large-scale, in-depth, systematic and thematic-chronological approach to the British soldier’s experiences, which has only been attempted on a much smaller scale in a few related studies, as will be discussed in the literature study.

By travelling the lesser-known path, this thesis brings to light several new insights, while reinforcing and supplementing existing theories and conclusions about the British soldier’s experiences in South Africa. It quickly became apparent that the Manchesters’ experiences

⁵ Stephen M. Miller. *Volunteers on the Veld: Britain’s Citizen-Soldiers and the South African War, 1899-1902*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007, 8.

⁶ Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 7; Pretorius, *Kommandolewe Tydens Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, 15.

⁷ Please note that in the text I use superscript when using abbreviations for ‘first’, ‘second’, and so forth. However, in the source footnotes I use the original style as listed in the titles and archival catalogue, and most of these do not use superscript.

depended heavily on where they served, what their rank was, and at what point in the war they found themselves in, which are aspects confirmed in at least one other study.⁸ However, this thesis contends that there is a fourth factor to consider: what the men were doing. It will be seen that their experiences differed substantially from, for example, garrisoning a town versus serving in a ‘flying column’ pursuing the enemy. In addition, the existing literature about the life of the British soldier during the South African War rarely goes into substantial depth about certain experiences, such as death and danger, and reveals a more sophisticated and varied picture of how the soldiers’ thoughts about the war manifested and developed. These various insights, which are too many to list here, will be pointed out and discussed in each chapter.

It is also clear that in a sense the Manchesters were at war with the land itself, which the Boers exploited with great skill, and which dictated much of the wartime experience of the troops, ranging from their perceptions of the land and its people, how it contributed to supply shortages, and influencing the experience of combat. This is a theme which appears in virtually every chapter. Although the impact of the environment and its denizens is recognised in other studies,⁹ this thesis expands significantly on the various potential effects of the South African environment on the experiences of the soldiers. For instance, the weather, particularly rain and the cold, was an aspect of the soldier’s life which is underappreciated in existing histories, and so consequently is the humble blanket which was often the only barrier against rain and cold. Moreover, the poorly developed road system, coupled with rough terrain, made it challenging to bring sufficient supplies to the Manchesters, which in turn led to looting of the countryside, the importance of which is underestimated. Both British and Boer combatants were forced to improvise to a high degree in the field, which sometimes blurred the neat distinction between the professional British army versus the militia-based Boer force.

1.1 BRIEF HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE WAR

The war between Britain and the Boer Republics from 1899 to 1902 was primarily caused by the question of who was to reign supreme in southern Africa. Diplomatic efforts to resolve differences between the South African Republic (ZAR) and Britain ultimately failed, the last such effort occurring at Bloemfontein from 31 May to 5 June 1899.¹⁰ On 8 September 1899, Britain sent 10 000 troops to strengthen its border garrisons. The ZAR saw this as a

⁸ Louis Venter and André Wessels. ‘British Soldiers’ Anglo-Boer War Experiences as Recorded in Their Diaries’. *South African Journal of Cultural History* 36, no. 2 (December 2022): 63–83.

⁹ Fransjohan Pretorius. *Die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902*. Cape Town: Struik Uitgewers (Edms) Ltd, 1998, 40; Edward M. Spiers. *The Victorian Soldier in Africa*. Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2004, 160.

¹⁰ Thomas Pakenham. *The Boer War*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1979, 61–70.

provocation and partially mobilised its burger commandos on 27 September, and its ally, the Orange-Free State (OFS), followed suit on 2 October. On 9 October, the ZAR sent an ultimatum to Britain demanding it remove its troops. Britain rejected the ultimatum and from 11 October 1899 the ZAR and Britain were officially at war.¹¹

The conflict can be divided roughly into three main phases, but some historians prefer four phases.¹² The first phase consisted of set-piece battles lasting until March 1900. Despite several embarrassing defeats, the superior numbers of the British forces eventually broke through the Boer lines. The second phase was an intermediate phase, lasting until late August 1900. It was characterised by indecisiveness and uncertainty in the Boer ranks, but also saw the rise of young, dynamic new commanders who advocated a guerrilla war strategy. By September 1900, the war entered its final phase, a long and exhausting guerrilla war, which also saw widespread use of the controversial concentration camp system, which led to the deaths of thousands of Boer and African civilians. The war concluded with the Peace of Vereeniging, signed on 31 May 1902. The Boer forces, battered and tired, saw no more benefit in prolonging a futile war.¹³

1.2 LITERATURE STUDY

1.2.1 ACADEMIC MILITARY HISTORY

This thesis falls within the broader academic field of ‘new military history’. It is thus important to briefly consider the development of academic military history, especially as it influenced the motivation behind the proposed research. Academic military history,¹⁴ unlike popular military history,¹⁵ has come a long way since the 1960s. Shortly after the Second World War (1939–1945), military history found itself in a difficult position in the broader field of academic history,

¹¹ Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 9–122; Pretorius, *Kommandolewe Tydens Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, 13.

¹² The Boer offensive (October–November 1899); the first British offensive (November 1899–February 1900); the second British offensive (February–June 1900); and the guerrilla phase, ending on 31 May 1902.

¹³ Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 123–438, 461–551, 573; Pretorius, *Kommandolewe Tydens Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, 13–14, 57; S. Attridge. *Nationalism, Imperialism and Identity in Late Victorian Culture: Civil and Military Worlds*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, 3; John Downham. *Red Roses on the Veldt - Lancashire Regiments in the Boer War, 1899-1902*. Lancaster: Carnegie Publishing, 2000, 5–6.

¹⁴ According to Lynn, academic military history is similar to the study of any other field of history. Its aim is to understand history for its own sake. It has the same high standard of academic scholarship and its audience will mostly consist of fellow historians. J.A. Lynn. ‘Breaching the Walls of Academe: The Purposes, Problems, and Prospects of Military History’. *Academic Quest* 21 (2008): 23.

¹⁵ Popular military history is still dominated by operational histories and biographies of commanders. It is aimed at lay readers interested in military history. Jeremy Black. *Rethinking Military History*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2004, 1–3, 26–29.

one possibility being due to increased pacifist attitudes after the Second World War.¹⁶ Furthermore, the situation was compounded by some military historians disparaging their own subject, such as Walter Millis in *Arms and men* (1956), where he states that military history was outdated by the introduction of nuclear weapons, and that previous works of military history had become largely irrelevant.¹⁷

Military historians found themselves in the ‘firing line’, sometimes mistakenly labelled by their peers as warmongers, or falling victim to prevailing academic fashions.¹⁸ Traditionally, military history tended to over-emphasise operational history, or so-called “drum and trumpet” histories, concerned with the narration of military campaigns. It was also heavily devoted to biographies of famous military commanders or the technological impact of weaponry. A good example of the nature of criticism against traditional military history comes from an article by Peter Karsten in 1972, which called for more emphasis on the social-cultural aspects of warfare, rather than on what it could teach future military leaders. Instead of focusing solely on how to fight insurgents, he argued, one must also look at the reasons behind an insurgency.¹⁹ Faced with intensifying criticism for appearing to idolise or placate the war phenomenon, some military historians changed their research emphasis to re-invigorate their subject and to improve the field’s tarnished post-war image.

In the late 1950s several military historians worked on ways to broaden their subject area. Raymond C. Small’s classic work *Crusading Warfare, 1097-1193* (1956) uses social-cultural aspects of the era to explain the strategic and tactical decisions taken during the Crusades.²⁰ This new approach gained momentum in the 1970s, and by the 1980s military historians had significantly broadened their fields of enquiry.²¹ A range of important studies, especially John Keegan’s *The Face of Battle* (1976), returned a measure of respectability to the field of military

¹⁶ Black, *Rethinking Military History*, 1–3, 26–27; Stephen Morillo and Michael F. Pavkovic. *What Is Military History?* Cambridge, UK; Malden, Massachusetts: Polity, 2006, 38–41.

¹⁷ R.F. Weigley. ‘Introduction’. In *New Dimensions in Military History: An Anthology*, edited by R.F. Weigley. San Rafael: Presidio Press, 1975, 5. See also Jeremy Black’s *Rethinking Military History* (2004). Mark Moyer’s article, “The current state of military history” in *The Historical Journal* 50(1), 2007, provides some counterpoints to some of Black’s conclusions.

¹⁸ For information on misunderstandings see Lynn, ‘Breaching the Walls of Academe: The Purposes, Problems, and Prospects of Military History’, 32–33; and for information on negative reactions to the long dominance of military history, see M. Van Creveld, ‘Thoughts on Military History’. *Journal of Contemporary History* 18, no. 4 (October 1983): 552.

¹⁹ Black, *Rethinking Military History*, 1–3, 26–29; P. Karsten. ‘Demilitarizing Military History: Servants of Power or Agents of Understanding?’ *Military Affairs* 36, no. 3 (October 1972): 88–92; Morillo and Pavkovic, *What Is Military History?*, 41.

²⁰ Morillo and Pavkovic, *What Is Military History?*, 40.

²¹ Lynn, ‘Breaching the Walls of Academe: The Purposes, Problems, and Prospects of Military History’, 24–25.

history.²² Terms like “new military history”, “war and society studies” and “face of battle” subsequently became popular.²³ It appears that military history written in the past fifty years had made considerable progress in moving away from “drum and trumpet” or “top-down commander” style histories.²⁴ Traditional approaches to military history have not entirely vanished, though, because these are still popular, even among academics, due to public interest. Nor can one claim that merging military history and other subjects, such as culture and society, suddenly occurred after the Second World War, since there are several examples that proves this notion false, such as the work done by J.F.C Fuller in the early twentieth century.²⁵

The development of military history in South Africa reflected these developments abroad. As a result, local military history began to slowly broaden during the 1950s. The advent of new military history, driven by British historians such as Michael Howard and John Keegan in the 1960s and 1970s, further encouraged diversification. In addition, the evolving nature of the potential threats the South African Defence Force had to face, led to new focus areas, such as irregular warfare.²⁶ An example of this broadening of scope is Theodore James’ 1971 article on gunshot wounds during the South African War.²⁷ More recently one can discern a noticeable increase in new military history topics, such as *Ghostriders of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902): the Role and Contribution of Agterryers*, by Pieter Labuschagne in 1999.²⁸ Suryakanthie Chetty devoted an article in 2005 to the media’s portrayal of gender and racial identities of South Africans involved with “war work” during the Second World War.²⁹ Deon Visser, André Jacobs, and Hennie Smit collaborated on a 2008 article which explores how the demands of the Second World War finally saw the installation of a desperately needed source of fresh water for Saldanha Bay, which had stunted its development as a naval base and civilian settlement for almost two centuries.³⁰ Visser also explores a clash between military

²² John Laband. ‘The British Way of War in South Africa, 1837-1902’. In *Victorians at War: New Perspectives*, edited by Ian F.W. Beckett, 12–22. London: Society for Army Historical Research, 2007, 11.

²³ In reality, it was not all that new, since the change of emphasis in the field took place since the late 1950s.

²⁴ Lynn, ‘Breaching the Walls of Academe: The Purposes, Problems, and Prospects of Military History’, 24.

²⁵ M. Moyer. ‘The Current State of Military History’. *The Historical Journal* 50, no. 1 (2007): 225–40.

²⁶ D. Visser. ‘Military History at the South African Military Academy’. *Historia* 49, no. 2 (November 2004): 129–46.

²⁷ T. James, ‘Gunshot Wounds of the South African War’. *South African Medical Journal* 45, no. 39 (October 1971): 1089–94.

²⁸ Pieter Labuschagne. *Ghostriders of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902): The Role and Contribution of Agterryers*. Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1999.

²⁹ S. Chetty. ‘All the News That’s Fit to Print: The Print Media of the Second World War and Its Portrayal of the Gendered and Racial Identities of the War’s Participants’. *South African Historical Journal* 54, no. 1 (2005): 30–53.

³⁰ D. Visser, A. Jacobs, and H. Smit. ‘Water for Saldanha: War as an Agent of Change’. *Historia* 53, no. 1 (May 2008): 130–61.

and civilian students at the University of Stellenbosch in 1957, which he concluded was mainly caused by cultural differences.³¹ Bill Nasson published *WW I and the People of South Africa* (2014),³² which is a study of the home front and how the war affected civilians. Gerhard Genis wrote an engaging book, *Poetic Bodies and Corpses of War: South African Great War Poetry* (2018),³³ wherein he showcases the poems written by South African soldiers, but also contextualises the various historical forces which influenced these poems, ranging from masculinity, racism, perceptions of empire, and colonialism. Although this is but a small taste of the broad range of new military history topics embraced by South African historians, it does show that the subject has expanded its scope significantly.

New military history thus involves a broad range of topics, especially about the impact of war on society and culture, and vice versa, and has been quite popular in the last few decades.³⁴ More importantly, the war and society approach to military history lends itself remarkably well to the investigation of the experiences of ordinary soldiers during particular conflicts.³⁵ There are several important international works that focus on the experiences of ordinary soldiers which had a significant influence on my own choice of research topic.

An early example of soldiers' experiences is the work done by Bell Irvin Wiley in 1943, who published two volumes on the experiences and perceptions of American Civil War (1861–1865) soldiers. Wiley states, in a nod to Von Ranke and historicism, that the aim of his work is “to present soldier life as it really was”.³⁶ Matters he explores include aspects of both Union and Confederate soldiers' experiences of training, food, clothing, morale, perceptions of the enemy, and various other aspects of the war. Part of Wiley's attempt to present the soldiers' lives is to also explore their perceptions and experiences of battle. Another influential work is *The Face of Battle* (1976) by John Keegan, which focuses on the experiences of ordinary soldiers during the battles of Agincourt in 1415, Waterloo in 1815 and the Somme in 1916, although it did not spend much time on the soldiers' experiences during the overall campaigns that these battles formed part of, hence the title “the face of battle”. Keegan's work was hugely influential due to its easy accessibility combined with its strong revisionist approach which questioned the accuracy of the more traditional “top-down” approach of historical accounts of battles and campaigns that relied too much on the perspectives of commanders, who for

³¹ D. Visser. ‘Civilian-Military Interaction on the Matie Campus: The “Battle of Wilgenhof”, 1957’. *Scientia Militaria - South African Journal of Military Studies* 37, no. 2 (August 2011): 82–106.

³² Bill Nasson. *WW I and the People of South Africa*. Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2014.

³³ Gerhard Genis. *Poetic Bodies and Corpses of War: South African Great War Poetry*. Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2018.

³⁴ Laband, ‘The British Way of War in South Africa, 1837-1902’, 11–12.

³⁵ Black, *Rethinking Military History*, 49-50; Morillo and Pavkovic, *What Is Military History?*, 41, 66.

³⁶ Bell Irvin Wiley. *The Life of Johnny Reb: The Common Soldier of the Confederacy*. Updated edition, E-Book. Indianapolis: Louisiana State University Press, 2008.

understandable reasons, tried to reduce the chaos of battle into neat artificial compartments.³⁷ Of course, no study is perfect and Keegan does show a somewhat Anglo-centredness, neglecting important socio-political insights as explored by a German contemporary, military historian Hans Delbrück, while the section on the Battle of Agincourt is generally regarded as too superficial.³⁸ Still, I agree with Jeremy Black that it is fair to say that *The Face of Battle* has become a benchmark for a genre of research that focuses on the combat experiences of soldiers.

There are of course other influential works on soldiers' experiences. Richard Holme's *Firing Line*, first published in 1985, provides a broad overview of the myriad experiences and socio-cultural aspects related to warfare from the early-modern period right up to the Falklands War of 1982. It includes aspects such as the psychology of combat, the effect of training, sexuality, preconceptions of battle, the experience of battle, and perceptions of the enemy. The disadvantage of this work, though, is its scope that stretches across centuries of warfare, making it prone to rather easy generalisations that overlook the inherent complexities of specific conflicts fought in different time periods. Despite its drawbacks, it is still an immensely useful work to help understand soldiers' behaviours in war.

There are other examples of studies focusing on soldiers' experiences, such as Denis Winter's *Death's Men: Soldiers of the Great War* (1988). Winter's work is focused on the experiences of British soldiers in the First World War and deals with various topics such as trench life, attitudes towards the enemy, and how the soldiers perceived death. Paul Fussell's *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (1989)³⁹ criticises works by other scholars for portraying the Second World War too idealistically. Fussell uses primary sources to reveal the horrors and futility of war, and in the process, the soldier's life and experiences on the front comes to light, although much emphasis is placed on the worst aspects of the soldier's experiences.⁴⁰ J.G. Fuller's *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in British and Dominion Armies 1914-1918* (1990)⁴¹ is concerned with British morale during the First World War and how it was maintained by various institutional, social, and psychological coping

³⁷ Black, *Rethinking Military History*, 35–36.

³⁸ J. Beeler. 'The Face of Battle by John Keegan'. *The American Historical Review* 83, no. 5 (December 1978): 1229–30; J. Mundy. 'The Face of Battle by John Keegan'. *The Journal of Modern History* 49, no. 5 (December 1977): 678–80.

³⁹ Paul Fussell. *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

⁴⁰ T. Bogacz, 'Review – Wartime: Understanding and Behaviour in the Second World War by P. Fussell'. *The Journal of American History* 78, no. 1 (June 1991): 378–79; A. Danchev. 'Review – Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War by P. Fussell'. *The Journal of Military History* 54, no. 2 (April 1990): 243–45.

⁴¹ J.G. Fuller. *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in British and Dominion Armies 1914-1918*. Oxford & New York: Clarendon Press & Oxford University Press, 1990.

mechanisms.⁴² Although by no means an exhaustive list, all of the above are examples of new military histories which explore the various dimensions of soldiers' experiences, which has become a popular new focus of military history in the last few decades.

It is necessary to point out that the rise of "new military history" was undoubtedly connected to the rapidly growing influence of socio-cultural history, which occurred at almost the same time. Scholars tend to categorise their subjects into neat, but seemingly isolated pockets of expertise. This gives the false impression that developments in one field occur without cross-pollination from other subject specialities. L. Hunt argues that just as new military history was gaining momentum in the 1950s and especially in the 1960s, a similar change was occurring in almost all fields of historical enquiry. The Annales and Marxist schools of historical thought had become increasingly influential and stressed the importance of shifting the focus away from purely political figures and institutions. Young Marxist historians introduced this new trend by writing "histories from below", focusing on the past lives of ordinary individuals by emphasising social structures. Their example inspired others, such as the British historian E.P. Thompson, who studied the English working class. The French Annales school was equally influential in encouraging historians to broaden their field. Over time the focus on social structures was increasingly supplemented by studies on cultural influences, so that by the 1980s it had become clear that culture had become a major new branch of inquiry.⁴³ New military history is thus an extension of the socio-cultural approach to historical writing. In fact, some historians, such as Moyar, go so far as to dismiss any military history as merely another socio-cultural history if it does not devote considerable attention to what he regarded as the centrality of military history: "fighting".⁴⁴ This implies that there is a thin, or even non-existent line between the two, but this largely depends on the perspective of the historian.

This thesis, by focusing on the experiences of the Manchesters during the South African War, is thus undoubtedly a new military history. It aims to study the experiences of the soldiers by analysing their own words, as expressed in their letters and diaries. I also disagree with Moyar's argument that military history should only be concerned with combat. This thesis shows that there was more to the South African War than just combat, and that, in fact, combat was proportionally the smallest component of their experience, albeit a hugely influential part.

⁴² G. Parfitt. 'Review: Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies'. *The Review of English Studies* 44, no. 175 (August 1993): 448–49; J.M. Winter. 'Review: Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies'. *The Journal of Modern History* 64, no. 3 (September 1992): 525–32.

⁴³ L. Hunt. 'Introduction: History, Culture, and Text'. In *The New Cultural History: Essays*, edited by L. Hunt. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989, 1–10.

⁴⁴ Moyar, 'The Current State of Military History', 226.

1.2.2 HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR

Historians of the South African War embraced new military history as well. Prior to the 1960s, the scholarship was mostly operational in character, focusing on the campaign, important military leaders, various political aspects surrounding the conflict, and was Eurocentric. In this respect, the historiography of the South African War in the 1950s and 1960s reflected the general situation of academic military history in the Western world. In 1965 this situation started to change with the MA-dissertation of Hendrik J. Botha.⁴⁵ His work heralded a broadening of the subject when he looked at the role of Kgatla warriors who attacked a group of Boers at Derdepoort in November 1899. Since then, various books, theses, dissertations, and articles on the role of Africans during the war have been completed, such as Peter Warwick's *Black People and the South African War, 1899-1902* (1983)⁴⁶ and Bill Nasson's *Abraham Esau's War: A Black South African War in the Cape, 1899-1902* (1991).⁴⁷ This more inclusive approach presaged a new perspective.

From the 1980s onward the socio-cultural approach to military history has gained more momentum and many important social and cultural studies of the South African War have been written.⁴⁸ One such work is a collection of essays in G. Cuthbertson, A. Grundlingh, and M. Suttie (eds), *Writing a Wider War: Rethinking Gender, Race, and Identity in the South African War, 1899-1902* (2002), which argues that the South African War has become a "total war" in the eyes of historians; a war that affected all sectors of society. Topics dealt with covered aspects such as gender, nationalism, the role of Africans, religion, moral beliefs and attitudes, as well as propaganda. Fransjohan Pretorius, in his *Historical Dictionary of the Anglo-Boer War* (2009), rightly states that since the shift to war and society studies in Europe and the United States of America, South African War historiography followed suit to incorporate a diverse range of social and cultural topics related to the war.⁴⁹

Under the broad topic of new military history one can identify a sub-genre that is concerned with the experiences of the combatants, as discussed in the previous section. Where the experiences of the Boer commandos are concerned, Fransjohan Pretorius' *Life on Commando during the Anglo-Boer War* (1999) is the most influential to date.⁵⁰ Pretorius covers a wide

⁴⁵ H.J. Botha. 'Die Moord Op Derdepoort, 25 November 1899. Nie-Blankes in Oorlogsdien'. *Militaria* 1, no. 1 (1969).

⁴⁶ Pretorius, *Kommandolewe Tydens Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, 15–16.

⁴⁷ A comprehensive list of sources on Africans and the war can be found in Fransjohan Pretorius. *Historical Dictionary of the Anglo-Boer War*. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2009, 556–558.

⁴⁸ Gregor Cuthbertson, A.M. Grundlingh, and Mary-Lynn Suttie, eds. *Writing a Wider War: Rethinking Gender, Race, and Identity in the South African War, 1899-1902*. Athens & Cape Town: Ohio University Press & David Philip, 2002, ix.

⁴⁹ Pretorius, *Historical Dictionary of the Anglo-Boer War*, 512–513.

⁵⁰ Originally completed in Afrikaans in 1988 as part of a D. Litt. et Phil. degree.

range of topics related to the material, emotional and spiritual experiences of the Boer burgers. Some of the themes covered include food, weapons and supplies, leisure, religion, discipline, attitudes to women, attitudes to fellow combatants, attitudes to the enemy, and the experiences of battle and death. Pretorius' work is organised thematically, which makes it easier to follow the nature of Life on Commando as the war progressed.⁵¹ Pretorius' work is very similar in its approach to the study of the combatant's experience as Wiley's two 1943 volumes: *The Life of Johnny Reb: the Common Soldier of the Confederacy* and *The life of Billy Yank: the Common Soldier in the Union*. Labuschagne's important *Ghostriders of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902): the Role and Contribution of Agterryers* (1999) has already been mentioned. Other examples include Albert Grundlingh's *Dynamics of Treason. Boer Collaboration in the South African War* (2006);⁵² and A. McLeod's D. Phil. thesis "The Psychological Impact of the Guerrilla War on the Boers during the Anglo-Boer War" (2004).⁵³

The body of available research on the life of the British soldier is more limited, however, which is surprising, since one would expect to find significantly more sources for British combatants. Stephen Miller is likely justified in his contention that most publications claiming a socio-cultural approach to the South African War have basically neglected or altogether ignored the experiences of the British soldier.⁵⁴ John Laband and Edward Spiers agree and are of the opinion that research on British soldiers' experiences in the South African War are largely unexplored.⁵⁵ Significant works on the experiences of the British soldier in the South African War are limited.⁵⁶

One of the few studies that touches briefly on the experiences of British combatants is Byron Farwell's *The Great Anglo-Boer War* (1976), in which the author includes a single chapter which uses accounts from British officers to write about how they perceived the landscape, their reactions to farm-burning, and guerrilla warfare.⁵⁷ John Laffin published

⁵¹ Pretorius, *Kommandolewe Tydens Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, 24.

⁵² Originally completed in 1977 as part of a MA dissertation. Grundlingh, A.M. *Dynamics of Treason. Boer Collaboration in the South African War*. Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2006.

⁵³ A.J. McLeod. 'The Psychological Impact of the Guerrilla War on the Boers during the Anglo-Boer War'. University of Pretoria, 2005.

⁵⁴ Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 8.

⁵⁵ Laband, 'The British Way of War in South Africa, 1837-1902', 12–22; Edward M. Spiers. *The Victorian Soldier in Africa*. Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2004, 1.

⁵⁶ A list of some notable social-cultural studies related to the Victorian army include S. Attridge. *Nationalism, Imperialism and Identity in Late Victorian Culture: Civil and Military Worlds*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003; Gregor Cuthbertson. 'The Nonconformist Conscience and the South African War, 1899-1902'. University of South Africa, 1986; Gwyn Harris-Jenkins. *The Army in Victorian Society*. London: Routledge, 1977; Richard Price. *An Imperial War and the British Working Class: Working-Class Attitudes and Reactions to the Boer War, 1899-1902*. London: Routledge, 1972; and Keith T. Surridge. 'British Civil-Military Relations and the South African War (1899-1902)'. King's College London, 1994. However, none of them touches on the life of the British soldier itself.

⁵⁷ B. Milne. 'Case Studies of the British Soldiers' Experience of the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902'. MA History, University of Pretoria, 2000, 2.

Tommy Atkins. The Story of an English Soldier (1966), which is an overview of the experiences of British soldiers from 1642 to 1945, but there are only a handful of references to their experiences in the South African War.⁵⁸ A few years later a general overview of the life of the British soldier appeared in a chapter entitled “Tommy Atkins in South Africa” by Bill Nasson in Warwick and Spies’ *The South African War. The Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902* (1980).⁵⁹ It includes aspects such as enlistment, journey by sea, panic and cowardice, attitude to officers, drunkenness, looting, relations with Africans, women, attitudes to Boers, diet, service conditions, and music. Nasson states that his sources revealed a recurring theme of soldiers feeling that they were treated “unfairly”.⁶⁰ The following year Byron Farwell’s *For Queen and Country* (1981), a history of the British soldier during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837 to 1901), appeared. Farwell’s work, however, says little about the experiences of the soldiers during the South African War.⁶¹ John M. Brereton produced *The British Soldier. A Social History from 1661 to the Present Day* (1986), which only contains a few references to the South African War, since it is devoted to a much larger overview of British forces.⁶² What all these works have in common is that they only touch briefly on the experiences of British soldiers during the South Africa War, mostly due to limited space and the emphasis on other topics and time-periods.

It is worth noting that in *The Boer War: Direction, Experience and Image* (2000), edited by John Gooche, there are two chapters of note. Keith Jeffery wrote a chapter on Irish soldiers, which is primarily focused on how their experiences in South Africa had a political and social effect in Ireland.⁶³ It is a good example of how military issues were often intertwined with the socio-political culture in the home country. Spiers wrote a chapter on Scottish soldiers, which explored three questions related to the identity of Scottish soldiers and covers their association with imperial power and image, their reputation as excellent soldiers, and whether the war enhanced their “Scottish” identity.⁶⁴ Both chapters are certainly a form of socio-cultural military history which explore important topics related to war’s impact on society, politics, and identity. However, these only provide a partial glimpse into the lived experience of the war.

⁵⁸ John Laffin. *Tommy Atkins. The Story of an English Soldier*. London: Cassel, 1966; Pretorius, *Kommandolewe Tydens Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, 18.

⁵⁹ Bill Nasson. ‘Tommy Atkins in South Africa’. In *The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902*, edited by Peter Warwick and S.B. Spies, 123–38. Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1980.

⁶⁰ Nasson, ‘Tommy Atkins in South Africa’, 123.

⁶¹ Byron Farwell. *For Queen and Country*. London: Allen Lane, 1981; Pretorius, *Kommandolewe Tydens Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, 18–19.

⁶² J.M. Brereton. *The British Soldier: A Social History from 1661 to the Present Day*. London: Bodley Head, 1986; Pretorius, *Kommandolewe Tydens Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, 18.

⁶³ K. Jeffery. ‘The Irish Soldier at War’. In *The Boer War: Direction, Experience and Image*, edited by J. Gooche. London: Frank Cass, 2000, 141–151.

⁶⁴ Edward M. Spiers. ‘The Scottish Soldier at War’. In *The Boer War: Direction, Experience and Image*, edited by J. Gooche. London: Frank Cass, 2000, 152–165.

There are several significant studies by Edward Spiers which focus specifically on the Victorian soldier, although these are not dedicated studies about the experiences of these soldiers during the South African War. Still, these works are important foundations. His research includes *The Late Victorian Army 1868-1902* (1992) and *The Victorian Soldier in Africa* (2004), where one chapter each is devoted to the South African War, and two chapters in *Scottish Soldier and Empire, 1854-1902* (2006).⁶⁵ In his first two publications he emphasises how soldiers adapted to the rigours of modern warfare in a strange environment, which are useful additions to our understanding of the South African War as a lived experience, but still narrow in focus and scope since there is only one chapter for each. In *Scottish Soldier and Empire*, he explains in two chapters how the experiences of Scottish soldiers in South Africa influenced Scottish people's perceptions and reactions back home. The focus of the first chapter is on how Scottish citizens responded to events that affected their regiments, most notably patriotic displays, but also the public response to news of military disasters. The second chapter investigates the public's reaction to the depressing reality of a long guerrilla war and how this contributed to Volunteer enlistment, but also the public's persistent interest in the exploits of its Volunteer Scottish soldiers.

There are some highly-focused studies regarding aspects related to the British army during the South African War, which include a few descriptions and quotes of how ordinary soldiers experienced specific aspects of the war, but their accounts are not the focus of these studies, but used as evidence to support a specific argument. One such study is by Andrew Page, a doctoral thesis completed in 1976 and later published in 1993, entitled *Supply Services of the British Army in the South African War*.⁶⁶ Page's study indirectly illuminates aspects of the soldiers' experiences regarding supplies but was primarily concerned with the provision of supplies by the army's logistical organisation. Another fascinating study is by M.S Stone, completed as a doctoral thesis at the University of London, 'The Victorian Army: Health, Hospitals and Social Conditions as Encountered by British Troops during the South African War, 1899-1902' (1992).⁶⁷ Much like Page's work, it contains glimpses of the British soldier's experiences as it pertained to the overall research question regarding the British army's medical preparations, treatments, and other health measures during the South African War, but is not sustained exploration of these topics from the soldier's perspective.

⁶⁵ Edward M. Spiers. *The Late Victorian Army 1868-1902*. Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1992; Edward M. Spiers. *The Victorian Soldier in Africa*. Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2004; and Edward M. Spiers. *The Scottish Soldier and Empire, 1854-1902*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006.

⁶⁶ Andrew Page. 'Supply Services of the British Army in the South African War, 1899-1902'. University of Oxford, 1976.

⁶⁷ M.S. Stone. 'The Victorian Army: Health, Hospitals and Social Conditions as Encountered by British Troops during the South African War, 1899-1902'. University of London, 1992.

Research focusing specifically on the British soldier's experiences during the South African War had seen limited expansion in recent years.⁶⁸ An article by Johan Hattingh and André Wessels in 1999 focuses on aspects such as the composition of the blockhouse garrisons, how they were supplied, the daily routine, and leisure activities.⁶⁹ There is also an unpublished M.A. dissertation by B. Milne at the University of Pretoria, 'Case Studies of the British Soldiers' Experience of the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902' (2000).⁷⁰ It compares the experiences of six British soldiers based on their diaries and letters. It is roughly similar to Pretorius' approach in *Life on Commando*, and covers various themes such as military experience, training, discipline, food, clothing, equipment, weapons, horses, the environment, disease, recreation, as well as attitudes towards battle, death, the enemy, women, Africans, and relations with comrades. As an MA it is naturally confined in the amount of detail and scope it brings to bear, and as a result is based on the experiences of only six soldiers. It is, however, a useful introductory study that helps illuminate the different possible topics dealt with in British soldiers' letters and diaries.

Stephen Miller's *Volunteers on the Veld* (2007)⁷¹ is probably one of the most important recent works on the experiences of British soldiers. Miller focuses on the experiences of British Volunteers during the conflict. It covers almost the same range of themes as Pretorius' *Life on Commando*, although Miller could not devote as much depth on certain topics, because a significant portion of his work first had to discuss the origins and development of the Volunteer movement in Britain. His discussion of the Volunteers' experiences is mostly thematic, but enclosed by a much stronger chronological framework compared to Pretorius' *Life on Commando*.

There are a few very recent studies about the British soldier's experiences during the war. John Boje's article 'Sexual Relations between British Soldiers and Boer Women: a Methodological Approach' (2016) is mainly concerned with assessing the veracity of the sources, but reveals some information about the sexual experiences of British soldiers and Boer women, such as friendships and even romantic relationships. However, it also hints at sexual abuse, which is unsurprising given the position of power the soldiers enjoyed, while at the same time some Boer women offered sexual favours in exchange for food and other advantages. This article also highlights the extreme difficulty of investigating sexual

⁶⁸ Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 8.

⁶⁹ Johan Hattingh and André Wessels. 'Life in British Blockhouses during the Anglo-Boer War, 1887-1902'. *South African Journal of Cultural History* 13, no. 2 (November 1999): 39–55.

⁷⁰ B. Milne. 'Case Studies of the British Soldiers' Experience of the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902'. MA History, University of Pretoria, 2000.

⁷¹ Stephen M. Miller. *Volunteers on the Veld: Britain's Citizen-Soldiers and the South African War, 1899-1902*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007.

relationships during the war, because both the Boer and British sources tended to avoid this topic for social and cultural reasons. If the sources do mention it, one must be wary, because the authors likely had ulterior motives, such as propaganda, tending to exaggerate or even falsify information.⁷² Most recently an article by Louis Venter and André Wessels in 2022 reveals a variety of topics discussed in the journals of fifteen British soldiers, using a thematic approach, although the amount of detail they devote to each aspect is naturally limited due to the medium of publication.⁷³ They do, however, make the crucial point that British soldiers' experiences were strongly influenced by where they were, what their rank was, and when they were recording their experiences.

An important question at this juncture is whether the experiences of British soldiers are dealt with in more detail in regimental histories and diaries. The example of two such recently published works reveals that they offer only partial insights. Jim Wallace's *Knowing no Fear: the Canadian Scouts in South Africa 1900-1902* (2008)⁷⁴ and John Downham's *Red Roses on the Veldt: Lancashire Regiments in the Boer War* (2000)⁷⁵ are, in essence, operational histories of the respective regiments.⁷⁶ The histories contain snippets of the soldiers' daily lives, but these are interspersed throughout the text. The main aim of regimental histories is to narrate the regiment's campaign history, usually chronologically. This is in keeping with the "drum and trumpet" paradigm of old and this is characteristic for most regimental histories.

Another form of literature regarding the experiences of British soldiers are published personal narratives, such as diaries and memoirs. However, these sources often prove to be problematic. There are scores of published diaries and memoirs concerning the experiences of individual British soldiers in the South African War.⁷⁷ Some examples are John F.C. Fuller's *The Last of the Gentleman's Wars* (1937)⁷⁸ and *Private Tucker's Boer War Diary* (1980).⁷⁹ Published diaries and memoirs, however, suffer from a serious problem: a lack of

⁷² J. Boje. 'Sexual Relations between British Soldiers and Boer Women: A Methodological Approach'. *South African Historical Journal* 68, no. 2 (2016): 195–212.

⁷³ Louis Venter and André Wessels. 'British Soldiers' Anglo-Boer War Experiences as Recorded in Their Diaries'. *South African Journal of Cultural History* 36, no. 2 (December 2022): 63–83.

⁷⁴ Jim Wallace. *Knowing No Fear: The Canadian Scouts in South Africa 1900-1902*. Victoria, British Columbia: Trafford, 2008.

⁷⁵ John Downham. *Red Roses on the Veldt - Lancashire Regiments in the Boer War, 1899-1902*. Lancaster: Carnegie Publishing, 2000.

⁷⁶ Other studies sharing the operational history emphasis include K.W. Mitchinson. *Amateur Soldiers: A History of Oldham's Volunteers and Territorials, 1859-1938*. Oldham: Jade, 1999; and Richard Verdin. *The Cheshire (Earl of Chester's) Yeomanry 1898-1967*. Chester: Cheshire Yeomanry Association, 1971.

⁷⁷ For a more complete list of published personal narratives see Pretorius, *Historical Dictionary of the Anglo-Boer War*, 525–533.

⁷⁸ John F.C. Fuller. *The Last of the Gentleman's Wars: A Subaltern's Journal of the War in South Africa 1899-1902*. London: Faber & Faber, 1937.

⁷⁹ Pamela Todd and David Fordham. *Private Tucker's Boer War Diary: The Transvaal War of 1899, 1900, 1901 & 1902 with the Natal Field Forces*. London: Elm Tree Books, 1980.

thematization and insufficient contextualisation. One has to read the entirety of the narrative in order to find a particular aspect related to soldiers' experiences. More importantly, these memoirs are not corroborated with and compared to other letters and memoirs, thus they recount only personal experiences from a single viewpoint and fail to convey the diversity of the experiences and thoughts of soldiers. This lack of categorisation, analysis, and synthesis of mostly descriptive personal narratives are important motivations for this research and reflects a similar argument made by Pretorius in *Life on Commando*.⁸⁰

In relation to the history of the Manchester Regiment, the few studies available have little to say about the experiences of the soldiers. In addition, most of the literature is aimed at the popular market, and as far as could be ascertained, no academic studies exist. Research regarding the Manchester Regiment that is relevant to the South African War includes G.L. Campbell's *The Manchesters: A History of the Regular, Militia, Special Reserve, Territorial, and New Army Battalions since their Formation* (1916),⁸¹ which contains only a brief history of each battalion. A few years later Harold C. Wylly's *History of the Manchester Regiment (63rd and 96th Foot)* (1925; republished in 2005)⁸² and *A Short History of the Manchester Regiment* (1933)⁸³ appeared, both of which were essentially campaign histories. A few years later another campaign history appeared by Wolmer Whyte, *The Manchester Regiment* (1941).⁸⁴ This was followed by G.A. Sheppard's *The King's Regiment* (1973),⁸⁵ and the more recent book by Patrick J.R. Mileham, *Difficulties be Damned: the King's Regiment – A History of the City Regiment of Manchester and Liverpool* (2000).⁸⁶ Both, however, perpetuate the emphasis on the operational narrative of the Manchester Regiment's campaigns. The latest publication concerning the Manchester Regiment's history, Wylly's *The Manchester Regiment. Volume 2, 1883-1922*, appeared at the end of 2016, and appears to be a repackaged version of his 1925

⁸⁰ Pretorius, *Kommandolewe Tydens Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, 17.

⁸¹ G.L. Campbell. *The Manchesters: A History of the Regular Militia, Special Reserve, Territorial, and New Army Battalions since Their Formation; with a Record of the Officers Now Serving, and the Honours and Casualties of the War of 1914-16*. London: Picture Advertising Co., 1916.

⁸² Harold C. Wylly. *History of the Manchester Regiment (Late the 63rd and 96th Foot)*. Vol. 2. London: Forster Groom & Co. Ltd, 1925.

⁸³ Harold C. Wylly. *A Short History of the Manchester Regiment (Regular Battalions)*. 3rd ed. Aldershot: Gale and Polden, 1933.

⁸⁴ Wolmer Whyte, ed. *The Manchester Regiment*. London and Melbourne: Hutchinson & Co., Ltd., 1941.

⁸⁵ Sheppard, Alan. *The King's Regiment*. Reading: Osprey Publishing, 1973. In 1958, the Manchester Regiment and The King's Regiment (Liverpool) were merged to form the King's Regiment.

⁸⁶ Patrick Mileham. *Difficulties Be Damned: The King's Regiment 8th, 63rd, 96th - a History of the City Regiment of Manchester & Liverpool*. Fleur de Lys Publications, 2000.

work.⁸⁷ Given the numerous re-publications of Wyllly's work, it appears to be the most popular version of the Manchester Regiment's history.

More specialised Manchester Regiment histories were recently produced, such as Robert Bonner's *Volunteer Infantry of Ashton-under-Lyne* (2005)⁸⁸ and *The Manchester Regiment and its Volunteer Service Companies in the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902* (2007).⁸⁹ Bonner's first study is different from other works on the Manchester Regiment in that it includes a section on some of the experiences of the Volunteers, such as recruitment, selection, enthusiasm, motivation, the send-off, donations, train journey, ammunition use, camp life, trekking, perceptions of others, training, barrack's life, prisoners of war, and blockhouse duty. Bonner's study, however, only focuses on a handful of Volunteers from a particular area of Greater Manchester. In addition, these experiences are in a narrative, very descriptive format which is not linked to the broader context of the war itself and the society these soldiers came from.

Based on a study of the literature, the experience of the British soldier is still an area of much neglect and therefore in need of further investigation. Frank Emery and Spiers pointed to a vast repository of easily accessible primary sources. In *The Red Soldier* (first published in 1977)⁹⁰ and *Marching over Africa* (1986),⁹¹ Emery reveals the existence of large numbers of letters by Victorian soldiers published in contemporary newspapers. Spiers followed up on this lead and his research confirms that Victorian soldiers left behind an incredible amount of written evidence in newspapers. Emery and Spiers argue that a significant number of late-Victorian soldiers were literate, despite what some historians may claim, and contributed to an impressive flow of letters to Britain during the war.⁹² The tremendous effort of the British army to ensure that soldiers were able to send and receive mail during the war strongly indicates that a substantial number of soldiers were in fact literate. By the end of the war in 1902, the Army Post Office Corps had delivered 68.9 million letters and newspapers and 1.4 million parcels.⁹³

⁸⁷ There is no additional bibliographical information available about this most recent republication apart from the long-deceased author's name, which leads me to conclude that it is an almost exact reproduction of his original work.

⁸⁸ Robert Bonner. *Volunteer Infantry of Ashton-under-Lyne 1859-1971: Including the Biography of William Thomas Forshaw VC*. Knutsford, Cheshire: Fleur de Lys Publishers, 2005.

⁸⁹ Bonner, Robert. *The Manchester Regiment and Its Volunteer Service Companies in the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902*. Fleur de Lys Publishers, 2007. This book is almost impossible to find and no reviews are available.

⁹⁰ Emery, Frank. *The Red Soldier: Letters from the Zulu War, 1879*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1983.

⁹¹ Emery, Frank. *Marching over Africa: Letters from Victorian Soldiers*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1986.

⁹² Downham, *Red Roses on the Veldt*, 6-7; Pretorius, *Kommandolewe Tydens Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, 19; Spiers, *The Victorian Soldier in Africa*, 2.

⁹³ Spiers, *The Victorian Soldier in Africa*, 6.

It is therefore all the more curious why many modern historians persist in avoiding writing about the experiences of Victorian soldiers, especially where the South African War is concerned. Historians' neglect of the subject may be explained by a misconception that the South African War has little viable written evidence about the experiences of British soldiers. It may also be possible that the First and Second World Wars overshadowed the South African War, resulting in historians missing the significance of the war.⁹⁴

With regard to the South African War historiography, this study expands on historians' existing understanding of the British soldier's experiences. By diving deeply in the experiences of a single regiment, this thesis will strengthen current theories and arguments, while also bringing new insights to a theme which has been largely neglected, despite there being ample sources written from the perspective of British soldiers.

1.3 SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

The main attraction for focusing on the Manchester Regiment was that a collection of personal narratives in the form of letters, a few diaries, and letters published in local newspapers were centralised in two areas: The Manchester City Library and the Manchester Regiment Archive, in the Tameside Local Studies and Archive Centre in Ashton-under-Lyne, Manchester. The National Archives in Kew, Britain, also keeps administrative documents from the War Office which relates to the Manchesters' activities.

Written personal narratives, as identified above, are of great importance to historians interested in reconstructing soldiers' experiences of war, but they do have disadvantages. They are not always accurate due to the vagaries of the subject's memory, the influence of prejudice, omissions, influence of hindsight, or are simply plagued by factual errors.⁹⁵ Personal writings were normally produced for the individuals themselves, as well as for family or friends, and not for the benefit of a broader audience. They are therefore valuable sources of evidence for the opinions, thoughts, and concerns of others.⁹⁶ However, prejudice, omissions and the vagueness of memory that are characteristic for this type of source are often more of an advantage than a drawback for the social-cultural historian, since the main interest is in how people, or soldiers in this case, perceived and experienced their world, as opposed to a factually correct narration of events. Indeed, it is the mistakes, omissions, the way memory is

⁹⁴ Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 6–7.

⁹⁵ Black, *Rethinking Military History*, 46–48.

⁹⁶ John Tosh. *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New*. Revised 3rd ed. London: Longman, 2002, 70–74.

manipulated, and the bias of the writer that provides the most compelling insight into the minds of past individuals.

While the disadvantages of personal narratives may, paradoxically, be at times more of an advantage, one must still be aware of all the factors that may influence the research. For example, many of the physically preserved letters and diaries in the Manchester Regiment Archive are from officers, and their viewpoints did not necessarily reflect those of ordinary soldiers. It was therefore necessary to ‘read against the grain’ in officers’ writings to obtain a picture of ordinary soldiers’ experiences. The writers of diaries and letters sometimes revealed or omitted information that may have been merely incidental to them, but which is invaluable to the historian. Even the tone of the source can reveal more than what the writer originally intended to convey.⁹⁷ In addition, many soldiers would have omitted certain aspects of their experiences in war, especially topics such as sexual behaviour, disciplinary misdemeanours, or the abuse of alcohol. It is thus essential that the researcher critically assess the written evidence constantly regarding the motive, origin, culture, constraints, and any other aspects that might have affected personal narratives. I compared the letters with other forms of evidence, as a form of “triangulation” to overcome some of these limitations, also known as “internal criticism”.⁹⁸

In the Manchester Regiment Archives, I found only three unpublished diaries by Major J.H. Abbot-Anderson, Private W. Emmott, and Captain P. Lupton. These diaries, welcome as they were, had several troubling limitations. Lupton’s diary was not only difficult to read, but was similar to a regimental diary, containing only a few personal insights from the writer.⁹⁹ Emmott’s diary had excellent material in it, especially about the journey by sea, but it was incomplete. It consisted of only four pages, spanning a short period from 20 May 1900 to 8 June 1900.¹⁰⁰ As for Abbot-Anderson’s diary, I found it almost completely illegible and cryptic. He appeared to have used some kind of shorthand style of notes.¹⁰¹ I was thus unable to make use of it effectively.

The only published diary pertaining to the Manchester Regiment that I am aware of is Major A.W. Marden’s and Captain and Adjutant W.P.E. Newbigging’s *Rough Diary of the Doings of*

⁹⁷ Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New*, 100-101; 169–170.

⁹⁸ Robert J. Shafer. *A Guide to Historical Method*. 3rd ed. Homewood, Illinois: Dorsey Press, 1980, 149–170; Tosh, *The pursuit of history*, 90-98.

⁹⁹ P. Lupton, ‘Diary, Captain P. Lupton, Volunteer Company, 2nd Battalion, 1901-1902’, MR 1/3/2/3. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

¹⁰⁰ William Emmott, ‘Diary, Extracts from the Diary of Private William Emmott, Oldham Active Service Section. May to June 1900’, MR 1/3/2/2. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

¹⁰¹ J.H. Abbot-Anderson, ‘Diary, Major J. H. Abbot-Anderson (2nd Battalion), Apr-Jun 1900’, MR 1/3/2/1. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

the 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment during the South African War (1902),¹⁰² which is basically a regimental diary. It is written from the perspective of officers and is a narration of events concerning the regiment itself, other than very general statements pertaining to the troops' health or the condition of their clothing. It is still useful, though, especially for tracking the movements of the 1st Manchester Battalion.

This lack of diaries and memoirs was a disadvantage. When I compared the information I gathered from soldiers' letters, to the information contained in similarly focused studies, such as Miller's *Volunteers on the Veld* and Pretorius' *Life on Commando*, I was struck by an important difference. Both had a far greater number of personal reflections, introspective musings, and other valuable emotional insights. Both studies had access to several good diaries and memoirs from whence this information originated. In contrast, the bulk of my information came from letters, often published letters in local newspapers. In this respect, the letters have a notable disadvantage.

Despite this disadvantage, my research would have been impossible without these soldiers' letters. The Manchester Regiment Archives preserves 49 letters, most of them written by officers.¹⁰³ In addition, as mentioned already, research by Emery and Spiers determined that local contemporary newspapers received and published many letters from soldiers at the front,¹⁰⁴ and the same was true for newspapers in Manchester. As indicated, copies of South African War-era newspapers are still preserved at the Tameside Archive and various other institutions. Newspapers on microfilm I examined include the *Manchester Guardian* at the University of Leeds library, *Manchester Evening News* at the Manchester City Library, *Ashton Reporter*, *Evening Reporter*, *Stalybridge Reporter*, *Ashton Herald*, and the *North Cheshire Herald*, which are preserved at the Tameside Archives.¹⁰⁵

The 49 letters preserved in the Manchester Regiment Archive, even though mainly from officers, contained many interesting details. Their perspective was naturally that of an officer, yet they contained valuable information about the regular soldiers and other matters, such as logistics. These letters were also not published in local papers. As a result, they tended to contain slightly more emotional perspectives and thoughts than the majority of published letters did, which will be discussed shortly. An enormous collection of letters was written by

¹⁰² Both men served in the regiment during the war.

¹⁰³ There are too many letters to list here. The letters are on a wide variety of topics and the majority of letters were written by officers.

¹⁰⁴ Downham, *Red Roses on the Veldt*, 6–7; Pretorius, *Kommandolewe Tydens Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, 19; Spiers, *The Victorian Soldier in Africa*, 2.

¹⁰⁵ Since my visit to Manchester years ago, a vast new digital archive of British newspapers is available, which makes gathering soldiers' letters even easier than it was. The British Library has a large collection of digitised newspapers in its British Newspapers Archive, which also contains relevant material. <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/> [5 September 2023].

Captain Trueman of the 2nd Manchesters: 161 typed pages, stretching from 9 April 1900 to 13 September 1901. This was the closest source I had approaching a diary. His name appears often in this thesis, because he wrote about an enormous number of topics, some of which were not covered in other letters. He also enjoyed great freedom of movement, which enabled him to see more of the country and its people. In addition, he wrote in an engaging manner and had a sharp eye. Therefore, there are sections in this thesis where his descriptions and perspectives feature prominently.

Captain Trueman may have been prolific, but the letters written by soldiers, especially those published in newspapers, were the most important source and subsequently need to be discussed in more detail. According to Spiers,¹⁰⁶ these letters have several advantages. Firstly, it is an important source due to its scale, scope, and diversity. Letters published in newspapers dealt with a variety of topics, came from several fronts of the war, and were written by a diverse range of authors with different opinions. Secondly, these letters originated from major campaigns featuring expeditionary forces with close ties to home. Thirdly, there was a great interest in these letters in local communities. Editors of newspapers often exploited the public's interest in soldiers from 'their' towns or cities, and these letters were also uncensored eye-witness accounts written in a colourful and emotional style, dealing with various interesting and often controversial subjects, such as the scorched-earth policy.¹⁰⁷ Spiers, undoubtedly the leading expert on this matter, could find little to no indication of large-scale, systematic censorship of soldiers' letters.¹⁰⁸ Censorship of letters was also not mentioned in any of the Manchesters' writings I used. Fourthly, many of the letters were written by regular soldiers, making it an important source of information regarding the perceptions and experiences of 'Tommy Atkins', a popular nickname for the British soldier which will be discussed in the next chapter.¹⁰⁹ Lastly, these letters offer various viewpoints about the challenges of colonial campaigning. They described how soldiers experienced their 'exotic' environment, their thoughts regarding the enemy, how they interacted with other British units, and their experience of combat. As will be seen, the letters are often very graphic in expression, portraying feelings of joy, grief, anger and frustration.

There were several reasons why people sent soldiers' letters to the press. Most of the letters were passed on by family or friends to local newspapers. It is uncertain whether they were

¹⁰⁶ Spiers, *The Scottish Soldier and Empire*, 16; Edward M. Spiers. 'Military Correspondence in the Late Nineteenth-Century Press'. *Archives* XXXII, no. 116 (April 2007): 37–39.

¹⁰⁷ Letters sent to family and editors from the front were clearly not censored in any way by the military. In contrast, the reports of media correspondents were censored, as discussed in J. Beaumont. 'The British Press and Censorship during the South African War 1899-1902'. *South African Historical Journal* 41, no. 1 (November 1999): 267–89.

¹⁰⁸ Spiers, 'Military Correspondence in the Late Nineteenth-Century Press', 31.

¹⁰⁹ Nickname referring to the British foot soldier.

instructed to do so by the writers, or whether the recipients sent the letters on their own initiative. A few soldiers, such as Private Alfred Turner, sent letters directly to the local paper so that it would reach as many of his friends as possible, as he explained:

Sir, being an old Ashtonian, I beg of you to allow me to occupy a little corner of your valuable paper. I have been employed at the Workhouse seven years, and having made many friends, and not being able to write to every one, I should like my friends to know of my doings.¹¹⁰

A few sent letters directly to the editor of a newspaper to 'set the record straight'. One Private Evans was apparently so annoyed by the media's lack of attention regarding the Manchesters, that he wrote directly to the editor of the *Manchester Evening News*, explaining:

...you would greatly oblige me by placing in your paper a short report of the Battle of Elands Laagte [sic] ... I think it is only doing justice to the Lancashire people to let them know their county regiment is doing its share ... I have seen in the papers other regiments praised and ours left out.¹¹¹

There were even competitions to encourage the public to send in letters from their loved ones. Such was the case with the *Evening News*, which awarded £1 to Mrs F.G. Miller for the "best letter from a soldier".¹¹² Small local newspapers benefited enormously from these letters, because they had limited budgets and could not afford a war correspondent. They were therefore keen to publish these letters in full, or as excerpts, or even just as summaries since it enabled them to benefit from the public's interest in news of the war and how the soldiers fared.¹¹³

Although these letters were a crucial source of information, one must be aware of several factors that influence their reliability. Only a fraction of the hundreds of thousands of letters sent to Britain during the war survived or were published in newspapers. It therefore only represented the viewpoints of a small section of military personnel. Some letters contain errors about dates, locations, and often exaggerate enemy numbers and casualties. This makes it sometimes difficult to then identify which event a soldier was referring to. Another limitation is that as the war progressed into its guerrilla phase, the public started to lose interest and subsequently the number of letters sent to newspapers declined noticeably. It should also be kept in mind that the letters could have been edited or abridged by editors who decided to shorten or leave out sections of letters to save space, not to mention censoring any occurrences of foul language or other 'unsavoury' topics. In addition, it is likely that many

¹¹⁰ Alfred Turner. 'Letters from the Front: Letter from Private Alfred Turner. Life on a Transport'. *The Stalybridge Reporter*, 12 May 1900, 6.

¹¹¹ J.W. Evans. 'A Manchester Private's Description of Elands Laagte'. *The Manchester Evening News*, 27 November 1899, 4.

¹¹² 'A soldier's tale of the Battle of Elandslaagte', *Reading Mercury, Oxford Gazette, Newbury Herald, and Berks County Paper*, 30 December 1899, 9.

¹¹³ Spiers, 'Military Correspondence in the Late Nineteenth-Century Press', 30-31.

letters were 'self-censored'. In other words, soldiers would either avoid sensitive topics such as sexual relationships or take a neutral stance regarding controversial issues. Furthermore, it is probable that some letters were written by literate friends on behalf of their comrades. In the process, the original thoughts of the illiterate soldiers were lost as the writer interpreted the speaker's thoughts differently or used more acceptable words and syntax in the letter, or had to shorten sentences and paragraphs due to a lack of space on their scarce source of paper.¹¹⁴

Apart from the above disadvantages highlighted by Spiers, there is also the issue of letters reflecting common public perceptions of what it meant to be a British soldier. When one looks carefully at some letters, it soon becomes clear that some soldiers were well acquainted with the Tommy Atkins' image and wrote their letters to fit into this stereotype. This image was propagated in various outlets of popular culture, such as the Music Hall, newspapers, and other literature in the years before the war began, and developed further as the war progressed. 'Tommy Atkins' represented a soldier with a dubious state of cleanliness, but who more than made up for this with his heroism, patriotic fervour, courage, tenacity, and uncomplaining attitude even when close to despair.¹¹⁵ Some letters reflected this Tommy Atkins stereotype and were thus somewhat unreliable, but at the same time it revealed much about their sense of identity and mindset.

Given the number of potential topics,¹¹⁶ and my own personal preferences, I decided to employ a systematic thematic-chronological approach. A purely chronological approach, as opposed to a thematic-chronological approach, tends to restrict a reconstruction of certain experiences as they changed over time. In a thematic-chronological approach, one can deal with a particular theme in its entirety, from start to end, which makes it simpler to illustrate how experiences relating to aspects such as food, leisure, discipline, or homesickness changed or did not change as the war dragged on. It is also excellent at bringing to the forefront certain experiences of the soldiers which often get lost, or are under-appreciated, in a chronological

¹¹⁴ Spiers, *The Scottish Soldier and Empire*, 16–17, 157, 182.

¹¹⁵ Attridge, *Nationalism, Imperialism and Identity in Late Victorian Culture*, 23-24; 49-52; Pretorius, *Die Anglo-Boereoorlog*, 36; Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, 308.

¹¹⁶ Due to the scope of this research and the multitude of themes the primary sources covered, there were inevitably a number of topics I was unable to address. One such aspect I planned to include, but decided against due to how rapidly it turned into a full-fledged research question in its own right, was the matter of discipline. In the National Archives of Kew I found a significant number of documents relating to court-martials performed in the Manchester Regiment, which provided names, dates, the nature of the offences, the verdicts, and the punishments. I quickly realised, though, that to do this topic justice, I needed a substantially more thorough understanding of military law and the implementation of discipline in the British army of the late nineteenth century. Another important aspect I wished to address was a comprehensive discussion about the letter writers themselves and the people they wrote to. Like discipline, though, this turned out to be a topic which swiftly grew into a subject which did not fit comfortably within the parameters of this study, especially because it would have required a significant degree of genealogical research which exceeded my limited resources.

discussion, such as the major importance of blankets in the average soldier's life on the veld. The disadvantage of this approach is the danger of overlap and repetition, since many themes are interconnected, such as access to good water, soap shortages, one set of clothing, lack of hygiene, and illness. In fact, the thematic emphasis can, unintentionally, convey the notion that certain experiences were unconnected and independent of other factors.¹¹⁷ Despite these drawbacks, the thematic-chronological approach brought new insights to the surface, while supplementing our existing understanding of the British soldier's experiences, in particular the Manchesters.

1.4 THE MANCHESTER REGIMENT

Before continuing to how this thesis is structured, it is essential to briefly discuss the history of the 1st and 2nd Manchester Regiment Battalions. Even though this thesis is not concerned with the regiment's campaign history, a summary is useful to help orientate the reader in the chapters to follow. The 1st and 2nd Battalions of the Manchester Regiment, or alternatively the 1st and 2nd Manchesters, normally consisted of regular soldiers, but were reinforced by reservists and auxiliaries (the Volunteers and Militia) as needed. As the war progressed and casualties mounted, Volunteer and Militia units from Manchester were assigned to the two battalions. Since this study is primarily concerned with the experiences of these soldiers, it is necessary to provide a brief background of the Manchester Regiment's battalions in the South African War. The Manchester Regiment came into being in 1881. Its predecessors were the 63rd and 96th Regiments of Foot, the former raised in 1785, and the latter in 1824. These two regiments were then merged in 1881 as part of the Cardwell Reforms to form the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the Manchester Regiment.

1.4.1 THE 1ST BATTALION - THE 'FIGHTING FIRST'

The 1st Manchester battalion, stationed at Gibraltar in 1897, was sent to South Africa on 23 August 1899 to help reinforce the vulnerable British garrison as tensions between the British government and the ZAR increased. This was even before 10 000 additional reinforcements were sent on 8 September. They were led by Lieutenant-Colonel (Lt Col) Curran. They arrived in South Africa on 15 September and disembarked at Durban two days later. They were first stationed in Pietermaritzburg at Fort Napier, but the commander of the Natal force, Lieutenant-General Sir George White, concentrated his troops at Ladysmith. Consequently, the 1st

¹¹⁷ Pretorius, *Kommandolewe Tydens Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, 24.

Battalion left for Ladysmith on 5 October and reached the town on 11 October, which was the day the war began.¹¹⁸

During the set-piece battle phase of the war, the 1st Manchesters spent much of the time besieged in Ladysmith, although they did participate in the notable Battle of Elandslaagte. On 21 October 1899, four 1st Battalion companies C, D, F, and G (341 men) marched out with Major-General French and several other British units to contest the Boer occupation of the railway station at Elandslaagte. The resulting Battle of Elandslaagte was a British victory, although a costly one, where the Manchesters suffered 43 casualties. On 30 October they took part in the Battles of Nicholson's Nek and Modderspruit, ill-fated attacks on Boer positions, after which White decided to remain in Ladysmith and prepare for a siege. The defensive positions at Ladysmith were divided into four sections numbered A to D. On the 31st the Manchesters took up positions in Section C, which was the weakest of the positions and stretched from Range Post to Caesar's Camp. The siege commenced on 2 November 1899 when the Manchesters came under shell fire. Here they stayed until the end of the siege on 28 February 1900. Shelling, sniping, skirmishes, hunger, and boredom characterised life in Ladysmith. However, there was a fierce engagement fought around Caesar's Camp on 6 January 1900, the Battle of Platrand, resulting in 74 Manchester casualties. Privates R. Scott and J. Pitts (wounded) received the Victoria Cross for defending, after all other troops with them were shot down, the left-most sangar at Caesar's Camp for nearly 15 hours.¹¹⁹ It was likely from the engagements at Elandslaagte and Platrand that the 1st Battalion earned its nickname the 'Fighting First'.

After Ladysmith the 1st Battalion spent a considerable time recovering. The men were in a deplorable state, short of clothing and footwear, and many malnourished or suffering from dysentery. The first company of the Volunteer Battalion Manchester Regiment (VBMR) joined the 1st Manchesters on 15 March 1900. The next day the battalion marched to Arcadia, west of Ladysmith, where they spent the next two months recovering and replenishing losses. Reinforcements drawn from the Militia reserve joined them on 11 May. Shortly after they were assigned to the 4th Division, but their duties were light, mainly guarding the route of communication to Durban, and they were stationed near Elandslaagte. In the meantime, General Redvers Buller resumed the offensive, while Bloemfontein and Pretoria were occupied by Lord Frederick Roberts' forces on 13 March and 5 June respectively. For the Boers, this was a period of strategic and tactical transition, as younger commanders, such as

¹¹⁸ Fransjohan Pretorius. *Die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902*. Cape Town: Struik Uitgewers (Edms) Ltd, 1998, 13; Harold C. Wylly. *History of the Manchester Regiment (Late the 63rd and 96th Foot)*. Vol. 2. London: Forster Groom & Co. Ltd, 1925, 3–4.

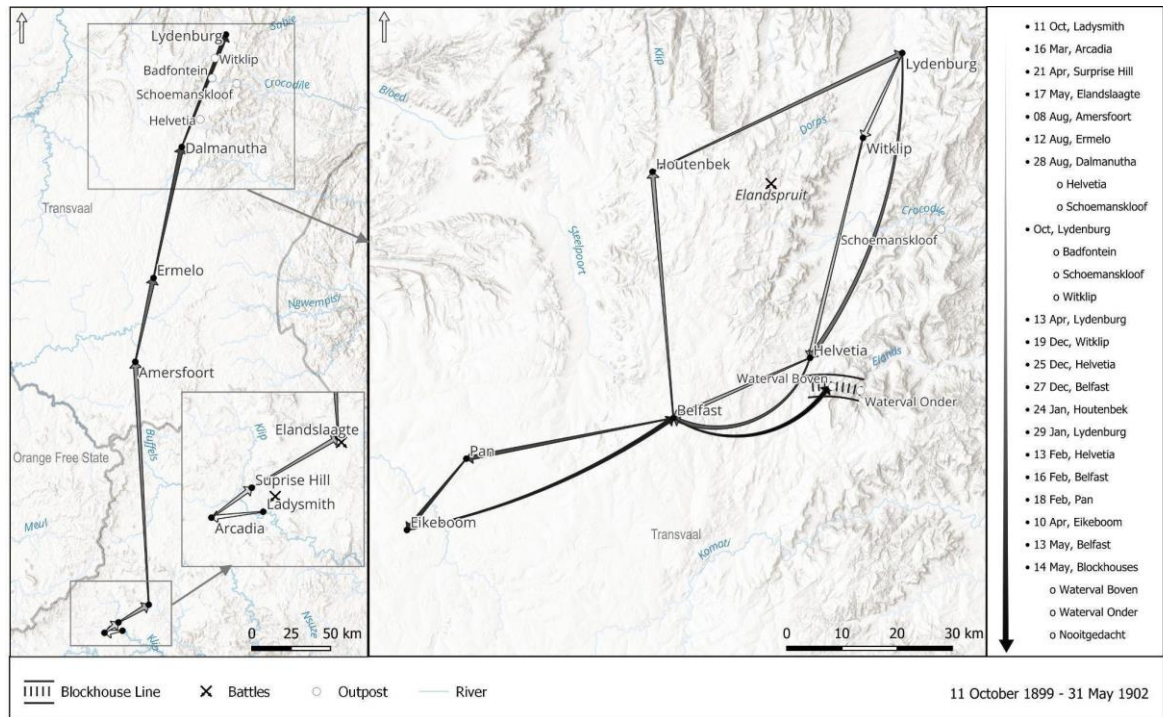
¹¹⁹ Wylly, *History of the Manchester Regiment*, 11–14, 29; Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 272–76.

Louis Botha and Christiaan De Wet, transformed the commandos into a guerrilla army. The 1st Manchesters, however, were far removed from these events until 19 July, when they were called up, as part of the 7th Brigade, to move north against Boer commandos at Graskop in the eastern Transvaal.¹²⁰

When they rejoined Buller's forces at Graskop, they re-entered the war in earnest. Engaging the Boers at Graskop on 22 July 1900, they suffered two casualties. From this point forward the battalion marched and fought while often having its companies dispersed in support of various moving columns. The battalion's Mounted Infantry company was detached to join a reconnaissance force moving in the direction of Amersfoort from 24 July to 7 August, suffering three casualties in the process. The rest of the battalion moved with Buller's forces to help occupy Amersfoort on 8 August, Ermelo on 12 August, crossed the Komati River on 15 August, and reached Van Wyk's Vlei on 21 August. Various skirmishes took place during this advance, although the Manchesters suffered few casualties, losing one man on the 21 August. The next day they formed part of an attack on the first day of the Battle of Bergendal (21–27 August 1900), suffering seven casualties. As Buller pressed the advance on 23 August, they reached Geluk where they halted three days, before marching on to Bergendal Farm on the 26th and 27th. Here Boer resistance was particularly stiff and the Manchesters suffered 25 casualties. On 28 August they reached Dalmanutha, where the battalion finally halted and assumed garrison duty. On 2 September, half the battalion was sent to garrison Helvetia. While performing their garrison duties, fighting did not stop, and on 3 September they suffered four casualties. On 13 September they moved from Helvetia to Schoemanskloof. The other half of the battalion, who were still at Dalmanutha, joined them a few days later on 17 September.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Wylly, *History of the Manchester Regiment*, 16–18; Pretorius, *Die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902*, 24.

¹²¹ Wylly, *History of the Manchester Regiment*, 18–20; 'Records of Service, 63rd and 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, 1758-1910', MR 1/1/2/3. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.



Map 1: The 1st Manchester's main movements during the war.

Source: Mr A.C. Greyling, Lecturer, Department of Geography, UNISA.¹²²

From October 1900 the 1st Manchester were stationary for several months, performing various guard and patrol duties. In October Buller was replaced by General Neville Lyttelton, and the 7th Brigade's headquarters was then at Lydenburg (now named Mashishing). Major-General Kitchener was placed in command of operations from Lydenburg to Schoemanskloof, the latter about 22 miles (36 km) north-east from Helvetia. Their task was to guard the road from Lydenburg to Schoemanskloof, with posts at Witklip, Badfontein, and Schoemanskloof. The men were kept busy with picket and convoy duties, all the while suffering frequent sniping and harassment from Boer forces. The Mounted Infantry, due to its mobility, worked the hardest, and suffered two casualties in November 1900, another in February 1901, and two more men in March. On 13 April 1901, all detachments were called back to Lydenburg. While concentrated at Lydenburg, the battalion performed the same duties as before, with a few additions. They often escorted convoys, but also now assisted in clearing nearby farms, launched raids against purported enemy positions, and responded to rumours of threats, which rarely materialised. There was only one engagement on 3 June 1901 when Boer forces cut the telegraph line and attacked a few pickets, which resulted in one casualty. Otherwise,

¹²² An important point about this map and maps to follow is that they represent only the main movements of the Manchester. In reality, sections of the Manchester were incredibly active at certain times, moving back and forth from one location to the next before returning to their main base of operations.

it appears the campaign dragged on with little to show for it.¹²³ This state of affairs continued until about mid-December 1901.

On 18 December 1901, the 1st Battalion was on the move again. Apart from three companies which remained in Lydenburg, the rest of the battalion joined Colonel Park's flying column. They first reached Witklip, and from there marched to Wemmershoek Farm on the 19th. A small engagement between the Mounted Infantry and Boers took place at Elandspruit that same day. The Boers seemingly retired once the rest of the force arrived, and the column set up camp at Elandspruit for that evening. The next day, 20 December, the Boers, commanded by Muller and Trichardt, launched a determined attack. This turned into a considerable engagement, resulting in 25 casualties, but the enemy eventually withdrew under cover of mist. The column proceeded to Dullstroom, Vlakfontien, and reached Helvetia on 25 December. From there the column marched to Machadodorp (now named eNtokozweni), and then to Belfast (now named eMakhazeni), which it reached on 27 December. Here they stayed a while, participating in combined operations with Park's and Urmston's columns against various Boer commandos. They managed to capture a few prisoners and supplies, but it appears these operations were rather underwhelming, but resulted in a few minor casualties. On 21 January 1902 they received orders to participate in an attack near Paardeplatz. A running battle ensued, in which Captain Menzies, who appeared to be well liked, was mortally wounded. On 24 January the battalion marched out with Park's column to Houtenbek, and the Boers constantly harassed the column. On 29 January they finally reached Lydenburg, but this was but a short reprieve.¹²⁴

The battalion, once more commanded by Colonel Park, headed out on 12 February 1902 to catch some Boers, with a little more success than last time. They reached Helvetia on the 13th, Machadodorp on the 14th, Dalmanutha on the 15th, Belfast on the 16th, and Pan on 18 February. From this point Park cooperated with two other columns, and this operation was deemed satisfactory, and the battalion suffered no casualties while capturing a good amount of enemy personnel and supplies. There were also rumours that the Boer government was somewhere in the area, which resulted in a flurry of exhausting and ultimately fruitless marching and counter-marching. On 21 March 1902, high command finally instilled more structure into the operations of the flying columns. Park, in conjunction with Colonels Wing and Williams, were to conduct a drive on 24 March to pin Boer forces against a line of blockhouses straddling the Natal railway. Park and the Manchesters headed out from Uitkyk and reached Vlaklaagte Station on the 25th. The drive produced negligible results, although

¹²³ Wylly, *History of the Manchester Regiment*, 20–21.

¹²⁴ Wylly, *History of the Manchester Regiment*, 22–24.

the 1st Manchesters had marched an impressive 33.5 miles (54 km) that day. They left Vlaklaagte on 30 March, heading north, passing through New Denmark, Vrischgewaagte, Bethal, Ermelo, Roodepoort, Nooitgedacht, and finally reached Eikeboom on 10 April 1902. From there they were once again to take part in a drive south to the Natal railway, this time with eight different columns under the overall direction of General Bruce Hamilton. This was an impressive operation, utilising taught wires between each wagon, resulting in an almost 50 mile (80 km) long continuous moving wire. The drive began on 12 April and ended on the 14th, in which the battalion marched nearly 55 miles (88 km). The result of this large operation was somewhat underwhelming, though, capturing only 134 Boer prisoners, 5 000 rounds of ammunition, 85 rifles, and a “considerable” number of horses.¹²⁵

Another drive with Park occurred on 16 April 1902, but the war was drawing to a close. This time seven columns drove the Boers from south to north. Park’s and Wing’s columns were tasked with securing the eastern edge of the ‘box’, by moving ahead of the main force and digging trenches, establishing pickets, and setting up wire fences. This operation began on 17 April and the 1st Manchesters reached Wildebeestfontein, where they then spread out into a five mile (8 km) front. The battalion systematically moved up north and reached Belfast on 13 May. This time the battalion lost one man killed. On arrival in Belfast, they were removed from Park’s column to take over the stations and blockhouses at Waterval Boven (now named Emgwenya), Waterval Onder, and Nooitgedacht, which was a welcome rest. The battalion estimated it had marched a staggering 1 300 miles (2092 km) with Park’s column from 18 December 1901 to 13 May 1902. Nothing disturbed their rest once at the blockhouses and the Peace of Vereeniging was signed on 31 May. When the dust settled, it became clear that the 1st Battalion had paid a heavy price, suffering 79 men killed, 160 wounded, 94 dead from disease, and 408 invalidated. This amounted to a total casualty count of 20 officers and 721 other ranks.¹²⁶ The 1st Battalion was stationed at Standerton until 8 March 1903, after which it departed to Singapore.

1.4.2 THE 2ND BATTALION - ‘RUNDLE’S HOUNDS’

The 2nd Manchesters was sent to South Africa only later, on 16 March 1900, and its inclusion in the war should be seen within the context of the severe manpower shortages the British army experienced. According to the foundations laid by the Cardwell Reforms, each regiment had two battalions, one of which was supposed to stay at home in Britain for defence, and the other to serve overseas. In reality, the system was messier. This was even more the case when the South African War demanded significantly more men than anticipated. At the

¹²⁵ Wylly, *History of the Manchester Regiment*, 25–26.

¹²⁶ Wylly, *History of the Manchester Regiment*, 27–29.

outbreak of war on 11 October 1899, the 2nd Battalion was stationed at 'home' in Manchester, and then Lichfield from December 1898. On 8 December 1899, they were sent to Dublin. As the war progressed, it caused significant uncertainties about troop movements as manpower requirements became ever more acute. On 10 January 1900, the 2nd Manchesters were ordered to Egypt, only for this to be cancelled that same evening, instead directing it to Aldershot on 19 January 1900, and then to mobilise for South Africa. It now formed part of the 17th Brigade, 8th Division, South African Field Force, under the overall command of Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Rundle. At mobilisation its strength stood at 25 officers and 685 other ranks. However, an urgent call for reservists went out, since 200 men were either under-age or medically unfit. By the end of January, 375 reservists brought the battalion up to fighting strength. On 16 March 1900 the 2nd Battalion, now at 27 officers and 858 other ranks, shipped out to South Africa, under the command of Lt Col Charles Reay. They reached Cape Town on 6 April, and from there shipped to Port Elizabeth (now named Gqeberha), disembarking on 9 April 1900.¹²⁷ Although late to the war by several months, they would not see the end of it until two years later.

The 2nd Battalion would go into action almost the moment it landed, trying to catch the elusive General de Wet. It left Port Elizabeth on 11 April 1900 as part of the forces earmarked to relieve a beleaguered garrison at Wepener, which was being besieged by De Wet. However, another force under Hart assembled more quickly to lift the siege, but Rundle, who had concentrated his forces at Rosendal, was ordered to move to the north of Wepener to cut off the Boers. The 2nd Battalion left Rosendal with the other regiments on 19 April, stopping at Oorlog's Poort that night, about 12 miles (19 km) from Dewetsdorp, where 2 500 Boers under General Piet de Wet, De Wet's brother, had assembled to contest Rundle's advance. On Wakkerstroom farm, three miles (4.8 km) from Dewetsdorp, the Manchesters, dug into trenches, came under shell fire for about 50 hours, but suffered no casualties. In the end, the Boers evacuated Dewetsdorp on the 24th, moving north toward Thaba 'Nchu. The battalion formed part of the pursuing forces, reaching Thaba 'Nchu on the 27th, Houtnek on 8 May, Senekal on the 25th, and marching to Ficksburg on 4 June as an occupying force, where they remained for some time.¹²⁸

They engaged in various garrisoning duties for a few weeks, before heading out under Rundle again to engage the Boers. At Ficksburg the battalion spent its time strengthening the defences, as well as patrolling the neighbourhood. On 30 June they left Ficksburg for Hammonia. On 3 July they received a hundred Militia reservists as reinforcements. On the

¹²⁷ Wyllly, *History of the Manchester Regiment*, 42–44.

¹²⁸ Wyllly, *History of the Manchester Regiment*, 44–45.

24th they went back on the offensive when Rundle launched an attack on Boer positions in the area. The Boers withdrew on the 26th to Fouriesburg, however, and the Manchesters were once again in pursuit. They reached Fouriesburg on the 30th, but the Boers were already gone. On 2 August they reached Naauwpoort Nek and entered Reitz on the 14th. By this point the battalion was ragged, short on food, clothes, and boots. In fact, some men's feet were so torn that they had to be sent to Harrismith to recuperate. The poor condition of the troops under Rundle's command at this point was so extreme that it became the subject of a debate in the House of Commons.¹²⁹

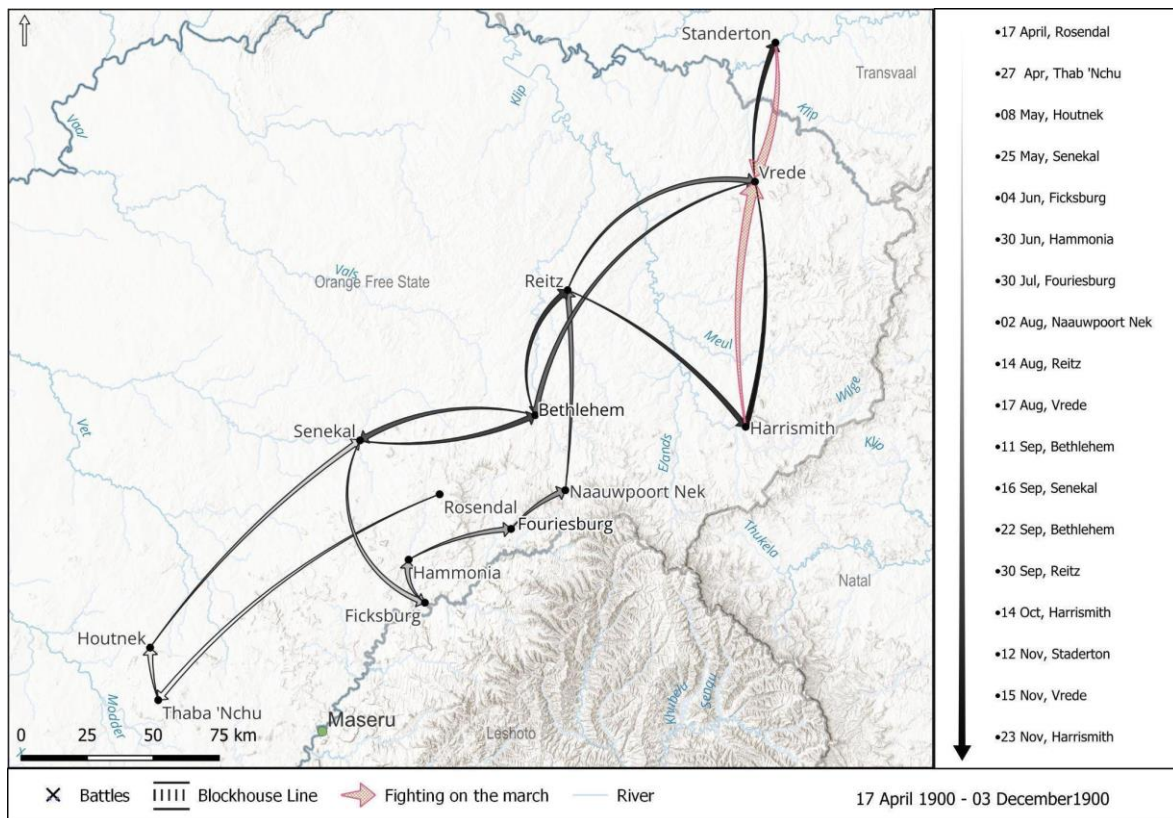
Given the extent of their earlier privations, the battalion was allowed a necessary rest at Reitz, albeit short before they were back on the road. It is likely that the battalion's nickname as 'Rundle's Hounds' was adopted around this time. The 17th Brigade, and thus by extension the 2nd Battalion, spent several weeks in the area. They mainly marched after the enemy and re-occupied towns, since the Boers simply went back to a town the moment the British had left it. As a result, they marched to Vrede on 17 August 1900, then to Bethlehem on 11 September, circled back to Senekal on 15 September, only to find it re-occupied by the Boers. The Manchesters took no part in evicting the Boers from the town, being assigned to guard the artillery instead. On the way to Ventersburg, they took part in an operation on 17 September against Boer forces at Bronkhartsfontein, in which the battalion tried but failed to cut off the enemy. Two days later they returned to Senekal, where they were reinforced by 180 Militia reserves. They arrived at Bethlehem again on 22 September, and returned to Reitz on the 30th. There was some skirmishing, but no casualties. They rested about a fortnight before marching to Harrismith, arriving on 14 October. The Mounted Infantry company, though, stayed behind with the Imperial Yeomanry. It seems the battalion managed to stay for a few days, since their next operation occurred on 3 November 1900 when they escorted a convoy from Harrismith to Vrede.¹³⁰ This convoy assignment, however, heralded a period of deadly fighting.

Up until this point the 2nd Manchesters, although suffering from tough marching, did not take casualties from enemy action, but November 1900 was a deadly month. On the 3rd they headed out from Harrismith to escort a convoy to Vrede, part of a small force under the command of Major-General Boyes. They were almost immediately attacked from the front and the flank, and Private Hall, a mounted infantryman, was severely wounded. Boer attacks resumed on the 7th and the 8th. As the 2nd Manchesters tried to clear a hill on the right flank of the convoy, Second-Lieutenant Woodhouse was severely wounded, and died the next

¹²⁹ Wyllly, *History of the Manchester Regiment*, 46–47.

¹³⁰ Wyllly, *History of the Manchester Regiment*, 47–48.

morning. They managed to reach Vrede on 9 November and Standerton on the 12th, but the march was heavily contested. They left Standerton for Vrede again on 15 November, and faced a strong Boer attack the next day on the left flank, where F Company held the line, exposed in open terrain. They subsequently suffered five casualties, of which two were fatal. The Boer attacks petered out thereafter, and the battalion reached Vrede and returned to Harrismith on 23 November 1900.¹³¹



Map 2: The 2nd Manchester's main movements from 17 April–3 December 1900.
Source: Mr A.C. Greyling, Lecturer, Department of Geography, UNISA.

After this short, but intense period of fighting on the march, the battalion resumed garrisoning and other duties. They left Harrismith on 3 December 1900, travelling via Reitz, as part of a column tasked to retake Senekal from the Boers. They reached it on the 15th with no resistance from the Boers. They stayed four days, before heading out to Winburg, which they reached on 22 December, and returned to Senekal on 1 January 1901. They left three companies at Senekal as a garrison, while the rest marched out again as part of a larger force on the 4th, which proved to be another costly venture.¹³²

¹³¹ Wylly, *History of the Manchester Regiment*, 47–48.

¹³² Wylly, *History of the Manchester Regiment*, 48.

The Boers chose once again to contest the march, and the Manchesters suffered casualties. The column had reached Reitpan on 6 January 1901, where the Boers launched a strong attack on the rear-guard, which was defended by four companies of the Manchesters, and 50 men from Bethune's Horse. The A Company at the rear was particularly exposed. The Manchesters suffered four casualties, one fatal, as they rescued A Company from its predicament. The Boers continually harassed the marching British force, resulting in another casualty at Vlakplaats on 21 January. The column finally reached Eland's River Bridge on the 23rd. At this point the Battalion had 473 men fit for immediate duty, while 149 were deemed unfit to march. There were also 181 men in hospital, while 252 men were away as detachments for various types of duties. The theoretical strength of the Battalion was thus 1 055, although less than half of that force was immediately available.¹³³

The battalion marched out again shortly after, reaching Bethlehem on 28 January 1901, where it remained as a garrison. The Mounted Infantry proceeded on with the rest of the 17th Brigade to Ficksburg, since these mounted troops were useful in pursuing the Boers. Lt Col Reay was placed in overall command of Bethlehem's garrison. He kept the men busy mopping up enemy forces in the countryside, and stripping it of supplies such as grain. These activities were generally not dangerous, although Captain Noble received a head injury from a Boer rifle-butt. There were numerous rumours of an imminent attack on the town, but this never transpired. They stayed a long time in Bethlehem, and were in fact in a state of semi-siege, completely cut-off from supplies and communication, but they had ample food supplies. When Lt Gen. Rundle arrived on 24 April, the men were ecstatic, because with him came the mail; they had been without news from home for almost three months by then.¹³⁴ However, Rundle's arrival also heralded a new phase of marching in pursuit of the elusive Boers.

Four companies of the Manchesters under Reay headed out with Rundle on a wet and muddy 29 April 1901, to join Campbell's column in the Brandwater Basin, while three companies remained behind in Bethlehem under Major Vizard. The column marched to Fouriesburg via Retief's Nek, reaching the former on 2 May. The march was opposed, but they suffered no casualties. On the way they managed to seize large supplies of grain at Snyman's Hoek. The men then spent nearly ten days clearing the countryside around Heynsburg, Commando Nek, Brindisi, and Bamboosberg. They returned to Fouriesburg on 15 May, but were back on the road the next day to Theron's Mill. There they faced significant opposition, but again no casualties. They went on to Brindisi Poort, but the terrain was so rough that on 23 May they had to send most of the heavy wagons with their tents and much of their kit back to Bethlehem

¹³³ Wyllly, *History of the Manchester Regiment*, 48–49.

¹³⁴ Wyllly, *History of the Manchester Regiment*, 50–51.

with the 16th Brigade. They subsequently spent the next three weeks bivouacking. On 1 June 1901 they headed to Golden Gate, reaching it on the 5th, despite constant enemy harassment. The roads were atrocious, and two Manchester companies were tasked with constant road repairs, while wagons were moved by hand over broken terrain. On one day they barely made three miles progress. During this ordeal they were often under enemy fire, but on 8 June they finally arrived in Harrismith, where they were refitted from 10 to 12 June. The battalion's stores and kit which they brought to South Africa was held up at Bloemfontein since they had landed on 9 April 1900, but they finally gained access to it at Harrismith when they refitted.¹³⁵

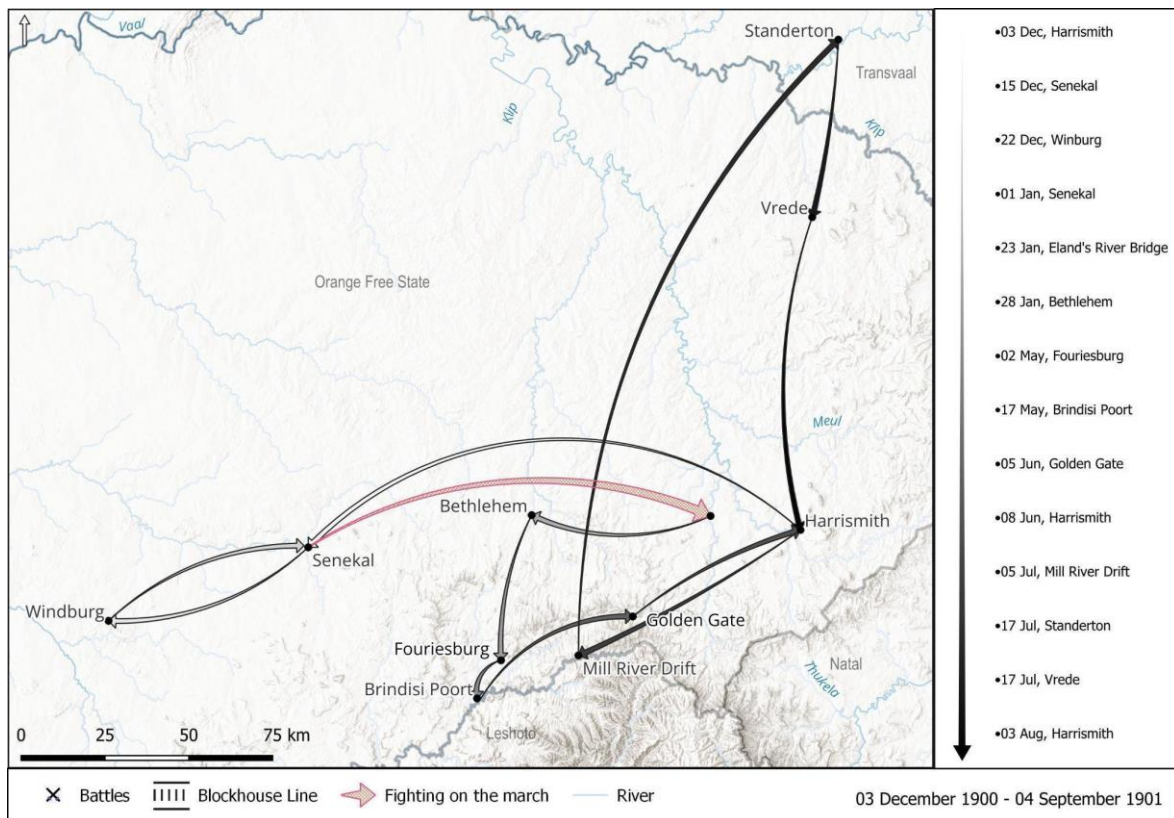
At Harrismith they spent a few days on escort duties and clearing the countryside, but soon after they joined another large drive. They exchanged their wagons for mules on 4 July 1901 and joined General Elliot's command which was tasked to conduct a large sweep with several other columns. The 2nd Manchesters was part of a small column, commanded by Reay, east of the Wilge River and marched towards Mill River Drift on the 5th, where they dispersed a force of 50 Boers. They reached Standerton on 17 July, having travelled via Brakspruit, Venterspruit, and Robert's Drift over the Vaal River. They left on the 19th with the 16th and 17th Brigades, reaching Vrede on the 24 July. Here they suffered a slight embarrassment when a party of 40 Boers snuck close to C Company's picket line during a heavy fog, capturing four men, who were released a few days after, minus their weapons, ammunition, and clothes. From there they marched to Strydplaats on 26 June and the next day to Witkopjes where they captured a large number of livestock. However, three more Manchesters were captured that day, including the Quartermaster, Captain Stewart-Wynne, whose wagon got stuck on the flank. As was Boer custom, these men were released a few days later, minus their kit. Reay's column rejoined the 17th Brigade just south of Harrismith on 3 August 1901. They deemed the drive a success in terms of the large number of livestock captured.¹³⁶

The 2nd Manchesters took over the defence of Harrismith on 5 August 1901. The Manchesters were often sent out into the surrounding countryside to clear it of enemy combatants and supplies. At this time they formed a second Mounted Infantry company, since mobility was essential when pursuing the Boer forces. This rest at Harrismith was short, though, because on 4 September the Manchesters headed out once again to escort a convoy to Bethlehem, which they reached on the 7th. They headed back to Harrismith and reached it on 12 September without incident, despite numerous sightings of the enemy. The column was held in readiness due to numerous reports of an intended Boer invasion of Natal, but nothing materialised. They left again for Bethlehem on 23 September, where they collected a large

¹³⁵ Wyllly, *History of the Manchester Regiment*, 51–52.

¹³⁶ Wyllly, *History of the Manchester Regiment*, 52–53.

number of civilians who were ordered to abandon the town, no doubt to deny General De Wet their support. On the way back to Harrismith on 29 September, the Boers attacked the rear-guard of the Imperial Yeomanry, and three Yeoman were left behind in a kraal without their horses. A party of Manchesters from H Company successfully extricated these men while under heavy fire, suffering no casualties. The next day 70 Boers again attacked the rear-guard, and two Manchesters were wounded, one fatally.¹³⁷

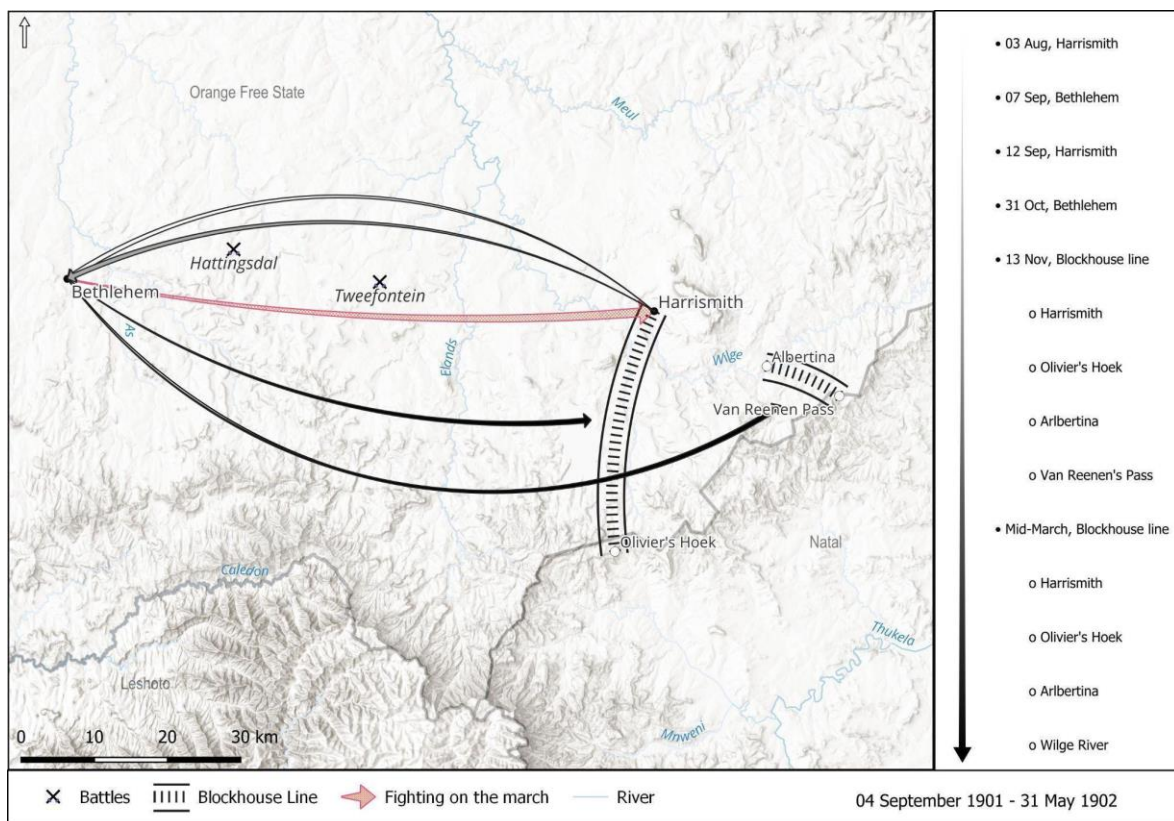


Map 3: The 2nd Manchesters' main movements from 3 December 1900–4 September 1901.
Source: Mr A.C. Greyling, Lecturer, Department of Geography, UNISA.

The convoy duties continued for a considerable time due to the strong enemy presence. Thus, on 5 October 1901 they escorted supplies to the columns of Colonels Broadwood and De Lisle, and this was one example of many similar convoy missions. On the 13th at Austin's Drift a Manchester was wounded, and on the 16th another man was taken prisoner close to Harrismith. On 31 October the Manchesters went again to Bethlehem, this time to escort the remaining civilians out of the town. On the return journey they were attacked near Hathingsdal on 6 November. There was sniping and harassment, but a determined attack was launched on the rear-guard. It appears the Boers managed to charge one of the holding lines

¹³⁷ Wyllly, *History of the Manchester Regiment*, 54.

successfully, resulting in considerable Manchester casualties, 17 in all, three of which were fatal, and three wounded, while the rest were taken prisoner. The Boers released the prisoners several days later in Basutoland (Lesotho). The constant skirmishing continued, with the Manchesters being fired upon in the advance guard on 9 November near Tweefontein, with two officers having their horses shot from under them, while another man was seriously wounded.¹³⁸ On 12 November, near Langberg, the column confronted 400 Boers who offered determined resistance. In the ensuing fighting, 20 men under Captain Noble were surrounded on three sides by about 70 Boers. Casualties occurred, although not as many as the situation suggested, but Captain Noble was mortally wounded, and three other men incapacitated. A few kilometres later another man was wounded.¹³⁹ This last event concluded the 2nd Manchesters' extensive marching operations.



Map 4: The 2nd Manchesters' main movements from 4 September 1901–31 May 1902.
Source: Mr A.C. Greyling, Lecturer, Department of Geography, UNISA.

The 2nd Battalion began blockhouse duty from mid-November 1901, at first guarding the lines from Harrismith to Olivier's Hoek, and from Albertina to Van Reenen's Pass. They remained

¹³⁸ Wylly, *History of the Manchester Regiment*, 54–55.
¹³⁹ Wylly, *History of the Manchester Regiment*, 55.

on blockhouse duty until the war's end. The men settled in for a relatively quiet time, although one man was killed on 9 December while on sentry duty. These blockhouses were strengthened from 16 to 36 in the first two months of 1902, and the Manchesters formed the bulwark against which a large 'drive' was launched up from Van Reenen's Pass in February 1902, resulting in 750 Boers captured and 10 wounded. In middle March the line was slightly altered, the men being moved from Van Reenen's Pass, and the line then extending from the Wilge River to Olivier's Hoek, known as Section A2. Headquarters moved into a new fort at Bughtie. By the end of April the Battalion stood at 848 men, of whom 87 were in hospital, five were in prison, and 86 served as Mounted Infantry. The war, though, was drawing to a close. On 20 May 1902 the Volunteers vacated their blockhouses and headed home to Britain. On 1 June the men received word that the war was finally over. The Battalion was evacuated incrementally in groups of a hundred men, and on 27 August 1902 the last 436 men left Durban for Southampton.

1.5 OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS AND THEMES

For some Manchesters', their wartime experience began while still in Manchester, although one can argue it really only began once they departed by steamship to South Africa. Chapter 2: Off to war provides essential background about the men and the society they came from. These men, most of whom were reservists, Militia, or Volunteers, were treated by family and friends to send-off celebrations and ceremonies. These send-offs are explored in detail and there were two types: private and public send-offs, which are discussed in turn. They show, however, that these men were valued by not only family and friends, but also a significant proportion of their respective communities. After leaving the Ashton Barracks for good, bound by train to one of the ports, the Manchesters' 'adventure' began in earnest, and this is where they begin to write about their experiences. The journey by ship is explored through their eyes, and although unpleasant at times, it was probably the easiest part of this war.

After their nearly three-week journey by sea, they had reached South Africa. This is the next chapter of their experience, Chapter 3: In a strange land. The Manchesters' perceptions of and experiences of the landscape, the animals, and the people are the focus of this chapter. What emerged was an unexpected dichotomy in how the men perceived this strange land they came to fight in. It was beautiful, but also treacherous and uncomfortable. The animals were interesting, but also an occasional source of food and a trophy for the officers to hunt. The people were friendly, interesting, and even the enemy could be admired at times. However, some people, especially the Africans, were looked down on, while the Boer enemy was often regarded as cowardly and cunning. This chapter demonstrates the Manchesters were essentially at war with the land too sometimes. The impact of the environment and the actions

of its inhabitants, particularly the enemy, will be a recurring feature throughout this thesis, underpinning many of their experiences.

Supplying a large army in South Africa was extremely challenging, and the Manchesters did not have an easy time of it, and this is the subject of Chapter 4. The South African campaign posed a number of challenges to supporting a large army, ranging from its limited infrastructure to its terrain. As a result, the Manchesters suffered frequent shortages, especially food and clothing. Their perceptions, experiences, and responses regarding logistics will be the subject of this chapter. An important aspect which will emerge from this investigation was how important looting was to keeping the Manchesters properly fed.

Supplies, or often the lack thereof, was not the Manchesters' only challenge. They had to also endure the war itself, which challenged many of the expectations of the men. It was mostly unglamorous, monotonous, and long. Actual fighting did not occur that often. The fifth chapter is concerned with the various duties the Manchesters had to do, how it affected their experiences and perceptions of the war, and what they did to distract themselves from this drudgery. Of particular note is how often the men wrote to complain and describe the ordeal of marching, the lack of hygiene, and not getting enough sleep. These three aspects are somewhat neglected in other works which touch on the experiences of British soldiers.

Eventually, though, the enemy made his presence felt and combat ensued, much to the delight of some, and the dismay of others. Although the Boer was not the only danger to stalk the veld, Chapter 6: Death and danger, looks at the most anticipated feature of this war: combat. Fighting was what most Victorians expected a war to be about. As a result, the Manchesters wrote in considerable detail about their combat experiences, even though it was proportionally the smallest part of their wartime experience. Their perceptions of combat varied considerably and many did not conform to the stereotypical ideas about how the British soldier ought to fight. The Boers, though, did not fight like they were 'supposed to' either, so some Manchesters were rather frustrated, especially at how well the Boers used the terrain as cover. Worse was the fact that the men, even though combat was relatively uncommon, had to stay alert, because the enemy could strike suddenly. Feeling anxious about danger was undoubtedly a constant emotion. However, the Boers were not their only problem. Disease, especially typhoid, was arguably a more dangerous enemy, though one which they could not really fight effectively under the circumstances, especially because of the difficulty of finding good sources of water.

The seventh and final chapter, "Concluding the war", begins with a brief account of how the men, especially the Volunteers, were welcomed home, while the regulars stayed in South Africa until they were shipped off to their next posting. It then collates and highlights the main

contributions from each chapter, and ends with a discussion of what an in-depth, systematic and thematic investigation of a single regiment contributes to the field of new military history and the experiences of British soldiers during the South African War.

2. OFF TO WAR

The British army, soldiers' background, send-offs, and the journey to South Africa

Notwithstanding the early hour, there was a big crowd of people to welcome the men at the station. The police were rushed, and the platforms were filled with excited men and women. The friends of the Ashton section turned up in full force, and gifts of pies, sandwiches, and fruit were positively showered upon the newly made "Tommies" ... There was a good deal of shaking of hands and shouting of "good-byes", and the crowd was engaged in singing "Soldiers of the Queen" when the special train moved out of the station at 4 20. A great cheer went up from the assembled people, and was answered by the volunteers.¹

The Mancunian send-offs are an introduction to the world the Manchesters came from. The Manchesters had become a part of their community, thanks to Cardwell's Localisation Act (1872), which forged a stronger bond between the Manchester Regiment, its associated auxiliaries, and its surrounding recruitment territory. Their city and its neighbouring boroughs were part of a large, industrialised, and technologically advanced empire. However, this was a socially stratified society, grouped into three classes: the upper, middle, and workers classes. Most of the regiment's regular soldiers came from the working class, particularly unskilled labourers. The auxiliaries, especially the Volunteers, were a mix from the lower middle-class and worker's class. The officers were generally from the well-to-do upper and higher middle-classes. There were also several important cultural forces that had become more pronounced in the years prior to the South African War. The most relevant of these were the growing popularity of militarism, nationalism, imperialism, and Social-Darwinism. Closely linked to these forces was the popularisation of the 'Tommy Atkins' stereotype in the 1890s. Although these forces did not dominate all of the population to the same extent, their influence are discernable in the newspaper descriptions of the various send-offs, as well as in the letters and diaries written by the Manchesters, as will be seen in the following chapters.

¹ 'Troops for the Front: Departure of Four Transports', *The Manchester Guardian*, 15 February 1900, 6.

The first notable experience for the men of the Manchester Regiment was to be sent off to war by family, friends, and their fellow Mancunians. After that their 'adventure' began as they journeyed to South Africa via steamship. It should first be noted that in the case of the Manchesters' send-offs,² all of the accounts used here, except one, were written by journalists or by the people who organised the event. The main purpose of discussing the send-offs is that this was the first stage of many Manchesters' experience of the war, and it was pleasant, even exciting at times, though also with a hint of sadness as they said their goodbyes to friends and family. In addition, the nature of these send-offs reveals much about the society the men came from, which enables a better understanding of their perceptions and responses when they campaigned in South Africa. This is why the thesis begins with the send-offs. Moreover, by approaching this topic through a systematic thematic approach, several hitherto unknown or only briefly mentioned features of the send-off experience are revealed in more detail. The more in-depth systematic approach is also used for the Manchesters' voyage to South Africa, and is the beginning point of their letters and how they experienced this first phase of the campaign, which was a generally pleasant start for most of the men.

The send-off is not commonly included in most historical works, but there are a few exceptions. Edward Spiers touched on send-off ceremonies for Scottish Volunteers³ in a few paragraphs in his *The Scottish Soldier and Empire* (2006). His aim was to show that for the Scottish public and politicians, "no aspect of a citizen soldier's service was regarded with greater affection than the act of volunteering itself, particularly in the wake of Magersfontein".⁴ Stephen Miller devoted several paragraphs to send-offs in *Volunteers on the Veld* (2007), although he did not categorise and detail the send-offs to the same extent as this chapter does. Miller did, however, utilise the send-offs effectively as evidence for the strong influence of nationalism and militarism in Victorian society by the end of the nineteenth century. He also devoted considerably more attention to the socio-economic forces which motivated Volunteers to enlist, which this chapter does not attempt due to the Manchesters' silence on this matter in both the Volunteers' and regulars'⁵ correspondence. Miller concluded that "there were a variety of economic and social factors influencing one's [a Volunteer's] course of action, the most

² I use the term 'Manchesters' to refer to the men in the Manchester Regiment.

³ With regard to spelling, I am following the conventions used by Stephen Miller and Edward Spiers, combined with the spelling employed in the primary sources. The following military units and terms: Regular Army, Volunteers, Militia, and Reserve are used as proper nouns. However, it appears that the 'regular' infantry, or the regulars, is not considered a proper noun. Neither is 'reservist'. Different sources, both primary and secondary, used different conventions, so the above is by no means an official answer for when to use the upper case or not. For the sake of consistency, though, I will follow Spiers' and Miller's preference.

⁴ Spiers, *The Scottish Soldier and Empire*, 191.

⁵ This is the term used for the professional soldier.

widespread reason ... Was the need for psychological fulfilment found in the expression of patriotism”.⁶

As mentioned earlier, none of the Manchesters themselves, except one, provided an account of what they felt and thought about the send-offs. Denis Winter, in *Death's Men: Soldiers of the Great War* (1979, re-published in 2014), mostly struggled to find the soldiers' thoughts about their send-offs from home, and he speculated that they did not write about it much, because their “minds had already left England but as yet without anything known or specific to focus on. It was a time of emptiness, anxiety, waiting, like new boys going to big school for the first day”.⁷ Winter made a good point and it is possible that some Manchesters felt the same in the days after their send-offs. However, the circumstances and general atmosphere during the First World War was significantly different from the South African War. As a result, it can only be guessed what emotional impact the send-offs had on the Manchesters. In addition, since this study largely relies on letters, the soldiers chose not to write about an event where the recipients were most likely themselves present at.

The send-offs, especially for Volunteers, is not unexplored territory, but this chapter involves a significantly more substantial, in-depth investigation of send-off ceremonies, which reinforces much of what Miller, Spiers and others discussed, and expands significantly upon it. Miller only briefly discussed the Volunteers' send-offs as evidence of wide scale patriotism and support for Britain's citizen-soldiers.⁸ Spiers likewise focused on only a few send-offs of Scottish soldiers to emphasise the public's support for both regulars and Volunteers units.⁹ This thesis goes much further. It reveals that enthusiastic send-offs persisted almost right up to the end of the war. In addition, by embarking on a deeper study of these ceremonies, this chapter reveals that there were two types of send-offs: private and public send-offs. Each had broadly similar characteristics, but also notable variations, such as the motivations of the organisers, varying degrees of patriotism, crowd sizes, crowd behaviours, and how the soldiers catered to the expectations of the crowd.

The journey to South Africa by steamship is the second part of this chapter. It represents another crucial element of the soldier's experience when going to war. For most except maybe a few of the older officers and men in their late thirties and forties, this would also be their first war. Even though some of the regulars had been on ship voyages before, some still chose to write about it. They probably did this, because most people back home would not have experienced such a long voyage and would thus find it an interesting read. As for the

⁶ Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 76.

⁷ D. Winter. *Death's Men: Soldiers of the Great War*. London: Penguin Books, 2014, 71.

⁸ Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 73-75.

⁹ Spiers, *The Scottish Soldier and Empire*. 160, 191.

Volunteers who followed later, besides also being the start of their adventure, Stephen Miller notes that for many of them this was the first time they left the shores of Britain, and thus this journey would have been a novelty worth writing about.¹⁰ The same applied to the Manchester Volunteers.

The journey by ship is touched on to one degree or another in several relevant secondary sources.¹¹ Bill Nasson emphasised how terrible shipboard conditions were in one paragraph, and devoted another paragraph to the nationalist and Social-Darwinist indoctrination the soldiers endured in lectures presented by their officers.¹² The Manchester experience, though, did not match this overly negative perspective. This chapter presents a more detailed, systematic discussion, similar to Miller's. Miller's coverage of the topic was extensive and insightful, exposing a complex range of experiences and thoughts regarding the journey, most of them positive.¹³ This chapter shows that the Manchester Volunteers' experience did not differ significantly from the regulars in this regard. Moreover, this chapter adds a few new smaller details, such as the level of alcohol consumption while on board, and a more in-depth discussion of burials at sea and the effect it had on the men.

2.1 THE BRITISH ARMY BY THE END OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The British Regular Army of 1899 was greatly influenced by the Cardwell Reforms during the early 1870s. Cardwell was the Secretary for War from 1868 to 1874 and implemented several reforms to improve the efficiency and capabilities of the Regular Army. It should be noted that additional minor reforms were introduced by his successors in the following decades, but Cardwell's reforms formed the basis of the late nineteenth century Regular Army.

Cardwell's most notable efforts involved the reorganisation of the War Office and subordinating all administrative officers, including the Field-Marshal Commander-in-Chief, to the Secretary of State. Another important feature was introducing short service enlistment¹⁴ which greatly expanded the army reserve, numbering 80 000 by 1899. It was also hoped this would attract 'better' quality recruits, but this was not realised, due to society's long standing mistrust of the army, the low esteem in which an army career was held, and uncompetitive

¹⁰ Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 78.

¹¹ Louis Venter and André Wessels. 'British Soldiers' Anglo-Boer War Experiences as Recorded in Their Diaries'. *South African Journal of Cultural History* 36, no. 2 (December 2022): 66–68.

¹² Nasson, 'Tommy Atkins in South Africa', 124.

¹³ Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 88–95.

¹⁴ This was a period of 12 years, and by the 1890s this entailed five years active service, and then seven years as a reservist.

wages which made it an unattractive prospect.¹⁵ Cardwell abolished the antiquated purchasing of officers' commissions, although this did not lead to a dramatic change in the social composition of the officer corps, which remained largely elitist. He also anchored the Regular Army regiments to specific territorial districts, linking them to existing local auxiliary forces, such as the Militia. These reforms simplified the administrative burden of the army considerably and, more importantly, saved the government money. In addition, it allowed the army to perform relatively well in its numerous small colonial wars, while building up a sizeable reserve at home.¹⁶

The reforms were not without flaws, however. The near three decades of continuous small wars took a considerable toll, and the system struggled to maintain equal strength between overseas units and home defence units, not to mention persistent recruitment challenges. It thus lacked the capacity to quickly form large expeditionary forces, had insufficient experience in using large-scale military formations, and had no mobilisation plans to fight a major war. These deficiencies became painfully apparent during the unexpectedly long and difficult war in South Africa.¹⁷

When discussing the send-offs from Manchester, it quickly becomes apparent that many of these soldiers were reservists. These men were the first available reinforcements sent out to the 1st Manchester Battalion in South Africa, and even included reservists from the 2nd Manchester Battalion which at that point was not yet bound for South Africa. This does not explain, though, how auxiliary units such as the Volunteers were sent out as periodic reinforcements to the two line¹⁸ battalions in the field.

To explain the integration of the Manchester Regiment's line battalions with the auxiliaries such as the Volunteers, it is necessary to turn to Cardwell's Localisation Act (1872). The auxiliaries included the Militia, Yeomanry (mounted infantry) and Volunteers (either as mounted infantry or foot infantry).¹⁹ Britain was divided up into 66 territorial districts, each with a brigade depot. Within each district would reside two line battalions, two Militia infantry battalions, and a variable number of Volunteer units. The Manchester Regiment was thus part of one such territorial district. One of the line battalions would serve overseas, while the other remained at home. This explains why the 1st Battalion was stationed in Gibraltar just before

¹⁵ Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, 2, 11, 22; Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 21.

¹⁶ Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, 18, 24.

¹⁷ Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, 24.

¹⁸ Also referred to as a regular battalion. In either case, it was a battalion of professional soldiers whose fighting strength could be reinforced in times of emergency by men drawn from the Reserve and the Militia.

¹⁹ Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 24–27.

the war broke out. Each line battalion would also keep two companies²⁰ at the depot as a training base for new recruits and to manage the reservists. It was envisioned that localisation would encourage more men from the Militia to join the Regular Army.²¹ It should be noted that after the Cardwell Reforms, the Militia lost much of its individual character and were no longer designated as individual battalions, and was more or less absorbed by the Regular Army. Stephen Miller described them as “Tommy Atkins on the weekend”.²² As for the Volunteers, they would be required to serve under the line battalions’ lieutenant-colonels once a year during brigade instruction, would receive a small allowance, with the idea that all this would foster greater cooperation between the different elements and boost their morale. The Volunteers were primarily regarded as a home defence force in the event of an invasion, but after the shock of ‘Black Week’ in December 1899, discussed later, the army was pressured by the public and politicians to allow Volunteers to fight in South Africa.

The line battalions were thus reinforced by the Militia and Volunteers during the South African War due to unexpected losses and a surprisingly effective and determined enemy. This is why a discussion of the Manchester Regiment in South Africa includes the auxiliaries, since they served as reinforcements in the case of the Militia, and as active-service companies in the case of the Volunteers. They operated under the Manchester Regiment command, and as will be discussed later in this thesis, the Manchesters did not seem to treat them differently from the enlisted men. In essence, they were integrated into the regular Manchester battalions during the war, although the Volunteers did operate in their own company, under their own officers.²³

2.2 THE SOLDIERS’ BACKGROUND

It is not the aim of this research to delve deeply into the origins and social characteristics of the Manchester Regiment soldiers. However, it is important to highlight the general nature and composition of the Regular Army’s recruits, as well as briefly discuss the Volunteers before investigating their send-off to war. In addition, a small sample of Manchester soldiers, both regulars and Volunteers, will be provided to give a rough idea of their socio-economic background. It will be seen that the social composition and origins of the Manchester recruits

²⁰ A ‘company’ was a smaller military unit of theoretically 80 to 100 men. A battalion contained ten companies. During the campaign in South Africa, a company’s manpower could vary significantly based on casualties and the frequency of reinforcements.

²¹ Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, 19.

²² Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 25.

²³ For a detailed discussion of the Volunteers in the British army, see Stephen Miller’s *Volunteers on the Veld: Britain’s Citizen-Soldiers and the South African War, 1899–1902* (2007).

in the Regular Army, Militia, and Volunteers, did not differ from the general recruitment trends evident in the rest of the country for this period.

In general, most men who enlisted in the Regular Army during the last quarter of the nineteenth century were from the ranks of the unemployed and unskilled labourers. The statistics are not always clear, though. It was estimated by some recruiters that roughly 70-80 percent of new recruits in the 1890s were unemployed, but this figure is impossible to confirm. As late as 1909 the Army Medical Corps reported that almost 90 percent of potential recruits inspected were unemployed, although its own records were certainly not perfect. Despite this uncertainty, it seems evident that the army relied heavily on men drawn from casual and unskilled labour, many of whom enlisted when out of work. The prospect of regular pay and meals was an attractive draw for desperate men. However, this was not the only motivation. Some men enlisted on a whim, either to travel, or to escape some dull occupation, or even just to join family or friends who enlisted. A small number of men, usually from more privileged backgrounds, or men who suffered some personal or professional setback, enlisted with the intent to obtain an officer's commission. Others were drawn by the promise of adventure and glory, many of whom, some estimates as high as 40 percent in the 1890s, had served in the Militia prior to enlistment. Lastly, there were soldiers' families, where sons, brothers, or orphans of soldiers enlisted as a form of family tradition.²⁴

The Volunteers' participation in the South African War was an unintended outcome. The British government suddenly needed more manpower, reeling from the shock of three resounding defeats by the Boers at Stormberg, Magersfontein, and Colenso on 10, 11, and 15 December respectively, which the press dubbed 'Black Week'. The government, under pressure from the public and prominent politicians alike, subsequently gave permission for the Volunteers to serve in South Africa. When the war ended in 1902, approximately 100 000 men from the Militia, Volunteers, and the Yeomanry had served in South Africa. Of this number, about 20 000 were drawn from the Volunteers, 45 000 from the Militia, while 75 000 militiamen transferred directly into the Regular Army. The City of London Imperial Volunteers was the only Volunteer regiment to serve in the war.²⁵ The other Volunteers, as was the case for the Manchester Regiment, served in Volunteer Service Companies. The 1st and 2nd Manchesters each had one such Volunteer Company.

Miller notes that some contemporaries exaggerated the high proportion of middle-class members who enlisted, but there is little doubt that the social composition of the Volunteers was noticeably broader than that of the Regular Army. In general, most Volunteers tended to

²⁴ Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, 129–30.

²⁵ Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 55–57.

be in their early twenties, only just started with a profession, and were unmarried. Of course, some men were older and had long-established careers and families. Miller found that the men who volunteered encompassed a variety of occupations and personalities, such as financially independent gentlemen, old soldiers, sailors, clerks, mechanics, farmers, artists, auctioneers, bricklayers, bankers, and chemists. However, Miller also observes that the recruitment registers reveal that the urban-based Volunteers drew a significantly higher proportion of recruits from the lower middle-class, artisans, and labourers.²⁶

The main reason for enlisting was patriotic in nature. Indeed, most of the Volunteers were employed, so enlisting for the meagre wage and a frequent meal were certainly not the main attractions. Indeed, shortly after 'Black Week', volunteers were flooding recruitment centres to enlist. As with the Regular Army recruits, there were also other reasons why men volunteered. Miller determined that some enlisted due to family or societal pressure, others wanted to escape family troubles, while some believed that volunteering for overseas service would be the start of a new life.²⁷

As for the Manchesters, the little information available about the Regular Army recruits²⁸ shows that they came from various backgrounds, and most originated from the lower end of the social scale. Some men first followed another profession before enlisting, as was the case for Private George Bumby of the 1st Battalion who used to work as a stableman.²⁹ Others, however, started out as professional soldiers, such as Private M. Little of the 1st Battalion, who enlisted when he was 17 years old and was 21 when sent to South Africa.³⁰

The following information is from Captain Marden's³¹ G Company, 1st Manchesters, totalling 107 men, providing background about the men who served in this company.³² This number represented all the men who served in G Company up to a certain point. The strength of the company would have changed constantly as some men became casualties, were discharged, or invalided. They would then be replaced by new men from the Reserves, Militia, and new regular recruits. Marden began this nominal roll in 1899, but it is unclear until what date he kept it updated, but it was still worked on until some point in 1900. It gives many interesting details ranging from age, height, religion, and date of enlistments. Most men, 56 percent, were 18 when they enlisted and 21 percent were 19 years old at enlistment. There were however,

²⁶ Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 59–68.

²⁷ Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 68–70.

²⁸ As clarification, these were the enlisted, professional soldiers.

²⁹ George Bumby. 'An Ashtonian at the Front: Not Satisfied with the Food'. *The Stalybridge Reporter*, 2 December 1899, 6.

³⁰ M. Little. 'An Ashtonian at Elandsplaagte: Sad Death of Poor Old Ned Dewhurst'. *The Stalybridge Reporter*, 2 December 1899, 8.

³¹ Not Marsden, as incorrectly stated in the Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre collection.

³² See Appendix 1 for the entire list of men in G Company.

two young enlisters, at ages 14 and 15. Most of the men, roughly 76 percent, were between 5'4" and 5'6" (162.6 and 167.6 cm) in height. Unsurprisingly, most men, 76 percent, were Church of England members, but 24 percent were Roman Catholic. As for their socio-economic background, the majority, at 39 percent, were "labourers". The other listed professions, such as collier, gardener, hawker, guard, warehouseman, driver, piecer, and similar, can also be classed as unskilled labour, representing an additional 21 percent, bringing the unskilled labour proportion to 60 percent. More skilled workers' trades, such as brickmakers, carpenters, and hatters, represented 24 percent of recruits. Various miscellaneous professions were listed, some rather interesting, such as a photographer, clerk, and a vocalist.³³

It should be noted that most reservists, having returned to civilian life after their short active service period of five years, had some form of employment when the war started, while the Volunteers were also all employed when they joined up. Private E. Parr of the 2nd Battalion was a tailor at Brownson's Limited before being called up for service.³⁴ Other examples include Private Frank Davies of the 2nd Battalion, who worked as a fireman for Messrs. James Higinbotham and Sons' Hatworks,³⁵ and Private Alfred Turner, a mounted infantryman of the 2nd Battalion, had worked as a night nurse for almost seven years.³⁶ Then there were the Manchester Volunteers, who as civilians practised all manner of professions before their offer of service was accepted, such as Private William Hulme of the 3rd Volunteer Battalion Manchester Regiment (VBMR), who was a weaver.³⁷

There were also numerous married men, such as Private George Littler of the 5th VBMR, who was sent to South Africa on 17 June 1901, where he succumbed to dysentery on 22 November 1901 at Winburg in the Free State.³⁸ Major Anderson, F Company of the 2nd Battalion, recorded the marital status of his regular company. In his nominal roll of 109 recorded recruits, 48 were married (roughly 44 percent).³⁹ Again, one sample is far from conclusive, but it should be safe

³³ 'Nominal Roll, Squad Roll of "G" Coy., 1st Battalion (Captain Marsden's)', 1899. MR 1/8/3. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

³⁴ E. Parr. 'En Route for the War: A Hyde Man's Experience on a Transport'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 23 December 1899, 6.

³⁵ 'Presentations to Another Hyde Reservist', *The Stalybridge Reporter*, 20 January 1900, 8.

³⁶ 'Ashton-under-Lyne, Workhouse: Send-off to Private Turner', *The Ashton Reporter*, 10 March 1900, 5.

³⁷ 'Send-off at Wellington Mills Ashton', *The Ashton Herald*, 10 February 1900, 2.

³⁸ 'Death of an Ashton Soldier in South Africa', *The Stalybridge Reporter*, 11 January 1902, 3. For the sake of convenience, I will use the term Free State, but historically it was called the Orange Free State until Lord Roberts formally annexed it to the British Empire and renamed it the Orange River Colony on 24 May 1900.

³⁹ 'Nominal Roll, Squad Roll of "F" Coy., 2nd Battalion (Major Anderson's)', March 1900. MR 1/8/4. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

to assume that a significant number of Manchesters were married and had children when they went to fight in South Africa.

The citizens of Wigan printed a celebratory brochure in May 1901 for the newly returned 1st VBMR section of Wigan. It contains valuable information about 12 Wigan Volunteers who were sent to fight in South Africa, providing historians with a case study of the social composition of the Volunteers in a specific community. A small sample of the listed men is included here. The Wigan officer was Lieutenant Henry Clayton Darlington, born in 1877. He joined the VBMR in 1897 and attained the rank of temporary lieutenant shortly before reaching South Africa on 28 March 1900. No prior occupation is listed, implying this was a man of independent means. Sergeant George Grenville Jobson was 28 years old in 1901. He joined the VBMR in 1891 and was promoted to sergeant the following year. When he was younger he attended a private school at Tranmere, and was a commercial traveller for a draper in Liverpool, although he lived in Wigan, where he conducted most of his business. Corporal Martin Rowan was born in 1877 and grew up in Wigan. He was educated at St. Joseph's Roman Catholic School and then worked as a shop assistant for a leather merchant in Wigan. He joined the VBMR at the age of 17 in 1895 and was promoted to corporal in 1898. Lance-Corporal Francis Munro was born in 1875, educated at St. Mary's Catholic School. He was a bricklayer, and joined the VBMR in 1897, and was promoted in 1898. He was killed at Geluk on 26 August 1900 while fighting with the 1st Manchesters as they pushed into the Transvaal under the command of General Buller. Private William Henry Christie, also born in 1877, was raised in Wigan by his grandparents. He went to school at Ince Central Schools, and worked as a fireman for the London & North-Western Railway Co. He joined the VBMR in 1897. Private Priest was born in 1879 and went to St. James' School. He first worked as a labourer, and then became a drawer⁴⁰ at the Worsley Mesnes Colliery. He joined the Volunteers in 1898.⁴¹ This small Wigan sample supports Miller's finding that the social composition of the urban-based Volunteers was mostly from the lower middle-class and worker's class.

2.3 NATIONALISM, IMPERIALISM, MILITARISM, AND SOCIAL-DARWINISM IN LATE-VICTORIAN BRITAIN

Before looking at the send-offs, it is important to briefly contextualise the influence and role of nationalism,⁴² imperialism, militarism, and Social-Darwinism in late-nineteenth century Britain.

⁴⁰ A drawer was a person, usually a young man or teenager, who pushed tubs of coal at a coal mine.

⁴¹ 'History, The Return from Camp, a Record of the South African War Commemorating the Return of the 1st Volunteer Battalion Manchester Regiment and the 4th LRV to Wigan, 1899-1900', MR 1/3/1/27, Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

⁴² Jingoism is a term used often by both contemporaries and later historians to refer to a particularly enthusiastic and aggressive, pro-war form of nationalism.

Based on the descriptions of the various send-offs to follow, there was an unmistakable display of these four cultural forces in the crowds, but it was also present at more private events with family, friends, and colleagues. On those occasions where reservists and Volunteers marched through the streets to the train station, journalists often alluded to nationalist sentiments, using terms such as “patriotic spirit”.⁴³ Some journalists used terms such as “to uphold the honour of their country”.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the content and tone of speeches during send-offs betrayed elements of Social-Darwinism. In addition, the people’s choice of songs and the public’s eagerness to see the departing men in their uniforms, usually headed by a marching band, suggests that militarism certainly attracted large sections of the British public. As a last point, it is important to appreciate that these cultural forces were closely intertwined with one another.

Historians have done extensive research on the role and extent of nationalism, imperialism, militarism, and Social-Darwinism in the late-Victorian era, and how it affected the military and society. For example, Edward Spiers in *The Late Victorian Army 1868-1902* (1992), Steve Attridge in *Nationalism, Imperialism and Identity in Late Victorian Culture* (2003), and Bill Nasson in *The War for South Africa* (2010) have done extensive research into these aspects. They and others argue convincingly that the four cultural forces listed above were significant factors in late-Victorian thinking and influenced large numbers of the British population through a variety of mediums, ranging from school textbooks, the press, fiction, religion, theatre, art, and the music hall. Moreover, these forces played a role in all the social classes, not just the upper and middle-classes. Despite Richard Price’s arguments to the contrary in *An Imperial War and the British Working Class* (1972), there is little reason to believe that the working class was resistant or oblivious to these influences. Still, Victorian society was not homogenous. As a result, there were degrees of nationalism, imperialism, militarism, and Social-Darwinism. Some Victorians even rejected many of the ideas that sprang forth from these cultural forces. Another important point to bear in mind, made by Spiers and Nasson, was that despite an improvement in the image of the British soldier, it did not lead to a dramatic rise in Regular Army enlistments. Victorian society had a peculiarly contradictory view of its soldiers, even as late as the 1890s. They admired them, from a proper distance, and took great pride in their victories. At the same time, though, few desired an army career for themselves or their children due to various reasons, such as low pay and uncomfortable service conditions. With that said, though, it is difficult to argue that these cultural forces did

⁴³ ‘Departure of Reservists from Ashton’, *The Ashton Reporter*, 25 November 1899, 3.

⁴⁴ ‘Departure of the Reservists: Exciting and Enthusiastic Scenes’, *The Ashton Reporter*, 2 December 1899, 7.

not have an influential impact on the viewpoints and attitudes of many late-Victorians, across all class lines.⁴⁵

There is one cultural phenomenon worth discussing in more detail, which was strongly linked to militarism. This was the extraordinary popularity in the 1890s of the stereotypical image of ‘Tommy Atkins’: the common British soldier. It is important to discuss this aspect, because it is used frequently in journalism of the time, and there are hints and outright references to ‘Tommy’ in the sources produced by the Manchesters. When describing the Manchester reservists going to the Ashton Barracks in November 1899 to receive their kit, one journalist wrote about the “the good-natured soldiers [the barrack’s staff] whose task it is to convert Mr. Smith or Mr. Brown into Private Tommy Atkins again”.⁴⁶

‘Tommy Atkins’ was a largely negative stereotype for decades, but enjoyed a surge in popularity after Rudyard Kipling published *Soldiers Three* in 1890 and *Barrack Room Ballads* in 1892. Kipling’s work transformed ‘Tommy’ into a very human, complex character with both strengths and weaknesses, consequently creating a relatable figure which delighted the public imagination in an age where interest in the military had grown.⁴⁷ Steve Attridge explained the popular connotations of the term well, arguing that it was:

...a popular myth of the common soldier; although his protean energies sometimes hint at subversion, these are simply the rough edges of a character whose moral being and physical strength are finally the property of the crown when there is a crisis ... the components of the myth, Tommy’s heroism and patriotic fervour, his sentimentality and simple Christian faith, were the product of an idealized vision. The name ‘Tommy Atkins’ itself crystallises certain associations: English working class, an easy familiarity, perhaps streetwise, down-to-earth, but by linking these associations to the profession of a dutiful soldier, the name ‘Tommy Atkins’ is harnessed to a notion of ‘national character’. ‘Tommy Atkins is the metaphor for a culture of working-class patriotism, encouraging a response of admiration and identification.⁴⁸

It should be noted, though, that as the war progressed, ‘Tommy Atkins’ evolved beyond the Regular Army soldier. Elizabeth Rawlinson-Mills argued in ‘Soldiers of the Queen: Reading Newspaper Fiction of the South African War (1899–1902)’ that the line between ‘Tommy Atkins’ and other British army units and ranks began to blur.⁴⁹ In the case of the Manchesters,

⁴⁵ Attridge, *Nationalism, Imperialism and Identity in Late Victorian Culture*, 5–6, 47–50, 65; Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, 180–203; Nasson, ‘Tommy Atkins in South Africa’, 123–24; Susie L. Steinbach. *Understanding the Victorians: Politics, Culture and Society in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. London: Routledge, 2017, 69–71; Mira Matikkala. *Empire and Imperial Ambition: Liberty, Englishness and Anti-Imperialism in Late-Victorian Britain*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2011, 1–5, 204–7; Elizabeth Rawlinson-Mills. ‘Soldiers of the Queen: Reading Newspaper Fiction of the South African War (1899-1902)’. *Journal of Victorian Culture* 23, no. 3 (2018): 381–85; Nasson, *The War for South Africa [the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902]*, 258–65.

⁴⁶ ‘A Visit to the Ashton Barracks’, *The Ashton Reporter*, 25 November 1899, 3.

⁴⁷ Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, 200–201.

⁴⁸ Attridge, *Nationalism, Imperialism and Identity in Late Victorian Culture*, 49–50.

⁴⁹ Rawlinson-Mills, ‘Soldiers of the Queen’, 400–404.

for example, some Volunteers referred to themselves as ‘Tommy’, as did the newspapers. A journalist reporting on the departure of the Manchester Volunteers on 15 February 1900 wrote of “newly made ‘Tommy’s”.⁵⁰ Rudyard Kipling’s ‘Tommy Atkins’ was most certainly not a Volunteer, but ‘Tommy’ had become such a popular national image that other groups, such as the Volunteers, adopted it into their self-perception as citizen-soldiers.

2.4 THE 1ST BATTALION SEND-OFF FROM GIBRALTAR

Before the war even started, the send-off for the departing 1st Manchesters to South Africa was enthusiastic. The 1st Battalion was stationed at Gibraltar before shipping out on 24 August 1899,⁵¹ and was seen off at the quay by a crowd of local British civilians and officers. A military band was organised which played popular songs, such as “Auld Lang Syne”, while the crowd cheered the troops as they boarded the Union Castle steamship, S.S. *Goth*. The cheering continued as the ship left the harbour. Sailors aboard the guardship *Devastation* lined the deck as the ship passed and gave three loud cheers. The 1st Battalion reached Cape Town on 15 September, after a journey of 22 days.⁵² The Manchesters did not share their thoughts about this send-off, although one can assume that they must have experienced a mix of emotions during the event, ranging from excitement, joy, appreciation, to maybe even apprehension.

2.5 PRIVATE SEND-OFFS FROM MANCHESTER

Sending off the troops from Manchester and its environs was considerably more intricate than what the 1st Manchesters at Gibraltar experienced. In addition, there were different types of send-off ceremonies. Many soldiers enjoyed a private send-off from family, friends, or co-workers. Sometimes a soldier attended several such private events. There was also a public send-off if a large body of troops marched from the barracks to the train station, which could draw considerable crowds. Some soldiers experienced only one of these types of send-offs, while others would have experienced both private and public send-offs.

Numerous private send-offs were organised by family, friends, and colleagues, but only a few reports of these found their way to the local papers. However, these events must have been

⁵⁰ ‘Departure of the Volunteers from Ashton’, *The Ashton Herald*, 17 February 1900, 10.

⁵¹ Wylly, *History of the Manchester Regiment*, 3. It should be noted that the departing 1st Manchesters preceded the British government’s fateful decision on 9 September to reinforce Natal with 10 000 troops, which ultimately led to the ZAR’s 9 October ultimatum and the outbreak of war on the 11th.

⁵² ‘Records of Service, 63rd and 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, 1758-1910’, MR 1/1/2/3. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre; Arthur W. Marden and William P.E. Newbigging. *Rough Diary of the Doings of the 1st Battn. Manchester Regt. During the South African War, 1899 to 1902*. Manchester and London: John Heywood, 1902, 4.

common, as alluded to in a newspaper article on 17 February 1900, which described the public send-off of the Volunteers on 15 February as the “sequel to days of feting and ‘send-offs’”.⁵³ It is uncertain if journalists were invited, or if participants sent a description to the local paper afterwards. Whatever the case, most of the published descriptions appeared in 1900. For 1901 there was only one account of a Manchester man’s send-off, but local papers published descriptions of events held for men from other regiments, such as Privates Wood and Collins of the Yeomanry⁵⁴ and 25 volunteers of the Lancashire Royal Engineers.⁵⁵ The topic was thus still of some interest to the public, even though reports of Manchester send-offs were now rare. By 1902, the local papers had stopped almost completely publishing accounts of private send-offs. The reason for this is unclear, but it was unlikely due to a complete cessation of such events. It is more likely that send-offs still occurred, but the public may have lost interest by then. However, there is one published account of a private send-off in 1902. This was a rather unique affair, discussed in detail later, but it reinforces the suspicion that the reading public was no longer interested in typical send-offs.

One of the first descriptions of a private event was published on 27 January 1900, the first of several for 1900, and rather typical for the genre. This event was in the form of a ‘free and easy’, which was the contemporary term used for an evening of dancing and music making. The send-off was for Mr Wilkinson, a reservist of the 2nd Battalion destined to reinforce the 1st Battalion in Natal. Wilkinson and his friends gathered at the Brunswick Hotel, where they first enjoyed dinner, after which some went dancing upstairs, while others assembled in the parlour for a concert, where participants sang along to music. A speech followed in which Wilkinson was given presents in the form of a silver-mounted pipe, a tobacco pouch and tobacco, and writing materials. They then gathered to sing patriotic songs, followed by toasts, often to the Queen, the army and navy, and the wives and families of the reservists. The evening was ended by singing “Auld Lang Syne”.⁵⁶ There were thus unmistakable elements of patriotism involved, in-between the entertainment and well wishes.

On 11 February 1900, a more expensive send-off was hosted by Private Harry Riley’s parents in Ashton. Riley was one of the Volunteers to be sent to South Africa on 15 February. Riley’s father owned the Caledonia Hotel in Warrington Street, where he organised a knife and fork tea for 40 guests. Afterwards the evening was enlivened by music making and singing, mostly military songs. As was the norm for send-offs, Riley received presents, although in this case there were a significant number of them and some of noticeable expense. As the son of a

⁵³ ‘Departure of the Volunteers from Ashton’, 10.

⁵⁴ ‘Cheshire Men for the Front’, *The Manchester Guardian*, 19 February 1901, 4.

⁵⁵ ‘Lancashire Engineers’, *The Manchester Evening News*, 4 March 1901, 4.

⁵⁶ ‘A Tame Valley Man for the Front’, *The Ashton Herald*, 27 January 1900, 8.

hotel owner, Riley appears to have been from a relatively wealthy background. From his employers he received a pair of field glasses, while individual members from his family and friends gave him cigars, cigarettes, tobacco, a sleeping cap, a silver-mounted pipe and matchbox, a gold mounted fountain pen and filler, handkerchiefs, woollen goods, a writing case, and a telescope from his father.⁵⁷ This particular example, apart from the military songs, appears to have been an event which focused more on saying farewell to the departing soldier, and was somewhat less concerned with overly patriotic expressions.

As noted, for 1902 there is only one published report of a private send-off, but it is somewhat different from the norm. What sets it apart is that it is the only account of a send-off organised by the Manchester Regiment's Volunteer officers. It is also an extremely lengthy and detailed article. On Wednesday evening, 12 March 1902, Colonel Eaton and other officers of the 3rd VBMR organised a send-off for 24 Volunteers of all ranks. The venue was the Pitt and Nelson Hotel and hosted 60 people for dinner. Most of the guests were officers, but it also included a few prominent politicians. After the dinner, a range of toasts and speeches followed. Colonel Eaton opened with a toast to the king's health. This was followed by a toast from Mr Wilkinson, his affiliations unknown. He praised the navy, the crown prince, and of course the army. He was most effusive about the Volunteers and their positive service record:

as to the volunteers, he thought the work they had done in South Africa ... spoke for itself ... he was sure there was no man there who would not at a critical point do his share proudly and well in defence of his country.⁵⁸

Colonel Eaton then responded with more praise about the 3rd VBMR and other political matters. The whole event reads like a self-congratulatory ceremony for the officers and politicians, rather than the men who would leave for South Africa. The last toast was by Mayor Powell, stating "the volunteers were going to South Africa not merely to assist in obtaining supremacy for His Majesty's forces ... but they would also be assisting to bring about the inestimable blessings of our institutions and constitutional government".⁵⁹ This is a good example of the Social-Darwinist views prevalent in British society and politics. It is unclear, though, to what extent this pseudo-scientific worldview played a role in motivating individual Volunteers to enlist. In conclusion, Captain Eaton,⁶⁰ who was to lead the 24 men to the front, gave a short thanks. After this, the participants were entertained by a musical programme.

There are several such published private events, and even though the above descriptions are only a sample, one can already discern a rough 'formula' for such events. The components of

⁵⁷ 'Farewell Party at Ashton', *The Ashton Herald*, 17 February 1900, 2.

⁵⁸ 'Ashton Volunteers for South Africa', *The Stalybridge Reporter*, 15 March 1902, 6.

⁵⁹ 'Ashton Volunteers for South Africa', 6.

⁶⁰ This is not a mistake - there was also a Colonel Eaton, mentioned earlier. It is not known whether they were related.

a typical send-off included the identity and motivations of the organisers, the participants, the venue, refreshments, entertainment, gifts, speeches, and various patriotic or sentimental expressions such as cheering or songs. With that said, it is worth delving deeper into some of these components, beginning with the identity and motivations of the organisers of such events.

As is evident from the examples described earlier, there were different types of groups who organised send-offs, usually to say farewell. The number of people present varied, of course. A soldier's friends and family wished to say their farewells, and this was common and experienced by many others, such as with Corporal Richard Williams, a reservist of the 1st Battalion. On 20 January 1900, a party of "about 60 friends and relatives were present, amongst these being a few of his workmates from the firm of Sir Joseph Whitworth, gun manufacturers, Manchester. The evening was spent in refreshments and harmony".⁶¹ Colleagues also wanted to say farewell, as was the case for Volunteer Private J. Smith on 9 February 1900. Mr Milne, the secretary of Messrs. Whitaker Ltd's spinning department, told Smith that "the little comforts which his workmates had kindly provided for him, would, he hoped, prove of great service to him when in Africa, and would remind him of Hurst and his fellow workmen".⁶² The send-off held for Private Frank Davies was similarly organised by colleagues and their desire to "make him a little presentation as a token of good will and esteem".⁶³ These events did not appear to have a strong nationalist tone, and were clearly intended to just say farewell.

Some organisers, often work colleagues, desired to express their patriotic gratitude to a man willing to sacrifice his time and maybe even his life for the Queen and country. During Volunteer Private Hibbert's send-off on 17 February 1901, at the 'taking in' room of the warehouse of Messrs. W. M. Christie and Sons Ltd, his colleagues had a "strong desire to do something to show their appreciation, not only for his many excellent qualities as a workmate, but also of his patriotism in offering himself for the front".⁶⁴ This was not an isolated case, as revealed in the send-off held for Private Alfred Turner, the night nurse whose colleagues organised an event of about 50 people who wanted to "show their appreciation of his service, and of the ready manner in which he had obeyed his country's call".⁶⁵ Such was also the case for Private William Hulme, whose colleagues at a weaving shop at Wellington Mills wanted to show their appreciation for his loyalty and self-sacrifice.⁶⁶

⁶¹ 'Send-off to an Ashton Reservist', *The Ashton Reporter*, 27 January 1900, 5.

⁶² 'Presentation to a Volunteer at Hurst', *The Ashton Reporter*, 17 February 1900, 5.

⁶³ 'Presentations to Another Hyde Reservist', 8.

⁶⁴ "'Send-off' for a Local Volunteer", *The Gorton Reporter*, 23 February 1901, 8.

⁶⁵ 'Ashton-under-Lyne, Workhouse: Send-off to Private Turner', 5.

⁶⁶ 'Send-off at Wellington Mills Ashton', 2.

A send-off could be held almost anywhere if it could accommodate a significant group of people. The venue chosen largely reflected the material means of the organisers. However, almost any venue could be used for singing songs, a popular activity at many send-offs. In addition, the type of venue also determined what kind of refreshments and entertainment occurred. A send-off could be held at a venue well-suited to such an endeavour, such as the Brunswick Hotel, which was able to provide dinner and rooms for dancing and music, or the Caledonia Hotel, where a knife-and-fork tea was enlivened by music and singing. At other times, a send-off was held at the meeting place of a club or society, such as the Tall Hat Picnic Party where they held a smoking concert, singing along to various songs.⁶⁷ Similarly, Corporal Williams was entertained at the Perseverance Working Men's Club, where they sang and enjoyed simple refreshments.⁶⁸ Alternatively, a send-off could be held at the workplace. At the Manchester Union Workhouse a send-off was held for Private Turner, which involved patriotic songs, speeches, and a gifts ceremony.⁶⁹ Some employers even had a lodge, which was useful when Private Smith's colleagues at Messrs Whittakers Ltd's spinning department organised a simple gifts ceremony with speeches.⁷⁰

It is worth looking into the songs sung at these events, since it gives an indication of the prevailing mood. While the main aim of a send-off was undoubtedly to say farewell, the number of mentions of patriotic and military songs also point to a nationalistic spirit. With that said, a popular song sung at the end of both public and private send-offs was the famous "Auld Lang Syne".⁷¹ Composed by Robert Burns at the end of the eighteenth century, it became the English-speaking world's premier song of parting.⁷² It was thus a natural choice to close a send-off ceremony. The national anthem was also sometimes sung at the end, especially if an event already had a prominent nationalistic tone to it, as one can see with the send-off held for Private Turner by his colleagues at the Manchester Union Workhouse.⁷³

The best description of the obviously entertaining aspect behind singing comes from the account describing Volunteer Private Hibbert's experience at the Tall Hat Picnic Party on 16 February 1901. It lists a variety of songs sang such as "The Monarch of the Wood", "A Soldier and a Man", "Three Women to Every Man", "John Bull", "The Village Blacksmith", "The Stars", "Break the News to Mother", "Eileen Allannah", "Glorious Beer", "Lucy Green", "The Anchor's Weighed", "The Young Brigade", "The Admiral's Broom", "Many a Time", "Fiona",

⁶⁷ *The Ashton Herald*. 'A Droylsden Volunteer's Send-Off'. 23 February 1901, 7.

⁶⁸ 'Send-off to an Ashton Reservist', 5.

⁶⁹ 'Ashton-under-Lyne, Workhouse: Send-off to Private Turner', 5.

⁷⁰ 'Presentation to a Volunteer at Hurst', 5.

⁷¹ 'A Tame Valley Man for the Front', 8.

⁷² G. Ross Roy. 'Auld Lang Syne'. In *Selected Essays on Robert Burns* by G. Ross Roy, 77–83.

University of South Carolina: Scholar Commons, 2018, 77–83.

⁷³ 'Ashton-under-Lyne, Workhouse: Send-off to Private Turner', 5.

“Let Us Cherish”, and “Home Sweet Home”.⁷⁴ This event featured a collection of songs with myriad themes, not only patriotic or militaristic. “The Village Blacksmith”, for instance, was an ‘improving ballad’, wherein the life of the blacksmith was held up as an example to aspire to.⁷⁵ However, songs like “The Admiral’s Broom” were more patriotic in tone, as it celebrated a mythic incident from a naval engagement between the victorious English admiral Robert Blake and Dutch admiral Maarten Harpertszoon van Tromp during the English Civil War (1642-1651).⁷⁶ The variety of songs sung at this particular event suggest a strong entertainment aspect which is confirmed by other accounts too,⁷⁷ and it would thus be inaccurate to claim that songs were sung just to say farewell or to celebrate militarism or patriotism.

Still, several accounts of other send-offs do mention how patriotic songs were the main fare, as was the case for Volunteer Private Wilkinson and his friends on 23 January 1900,⁷⁸ and at the event Private Turner’s colleagues organised.⁷⁹ These songs contained entertainment value too, but they do suggest an atmosphere of patriotism. The sources rarely mention specific patriotic songs, usually only the fact that they were sung. However, they sometimes mention “Soldiers of the Queen”.⁸⁰ There are no reliable sources about this song and its place within late nineteenth century nationalism. “Soldiers of the Queen” was composed by Leslie Stuart in 1898⁸¹ and when he passed away in 1928 it was considered his most famous composition.⁸² One public online source based on extracts from a regimental diary and newspaper extracts claims that it was first popularised at the London Alhambra by Australian soldiers of The Royal New South Wales Lancers a few months before the South African War. Apparently, the men began singing the song during a theatre show, and consequently propelled the song into the public’s imagination.⁸³ Given the song’s popularity at Manchester send-offs, it is worth quoting the first stanza and refrain in full:

Britons once did loyally declaim,
About the way we ruled the waves,
Every Briton’s song was just the same,
When singing of her soldier-braves.
All the world had heard it--
Wondered why we sang,
And some have learned the reason why--

⁷⁴ ‘A Droylsden Volunteer’s Send-Off’, 7.

⁷⁵ Derek B. Scott. *The Singing Bourgeois: Songs of the Victorian Drawing Room and Parlour*. 2nd Edition; E-Book. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001.

⁷⁶ [Sheet Music] The Admiral’s Broom’, Australian War Memorial, 7 June 2021, [//www.awm.gov.au/collection/C212392](http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C212392).

⁷⁷ ‘Send-off to an Ashton Reservist’, 5.

⁷⁸ ‘A Tame Valley Man for the Front’, 8.

⁷⁹ ‘Ashton-under-Lyne, Workhouse: Send-off to Private Turner’, 5.

⁸⁰ ‘Send-off to an Ashton Reservist’, 5.

⁸¹ Leslie. Stuart. *The soldiers of the Queen*. Voice and piano. Whaley, Royce, 2021. http://archive.org/details/CSM_001981.

⁸² ‘Obituary: Leslie Stuart’. *The Musical Times* 69, no. 1023 (1 May 1928): 462.

⁸³ ‘Soldiers of the Queen’, 11 June 2021, http://www.lancers.org.au/site/Soldiers_of_the_Queen.php.

But we're not forgetting it,
And we're not letting it
Fade away and gradually die,
Fade away and gradually die.
So when we say that England's master
Remember who has made her so
It's the soldiers of the Queen, my lads
Who've been, my lads, who've seen, my lads
In the fight for the Empire's glory lads
When we've had to show them what we mean:
And when we say we've always won
And when they ask us how it's done
We'll proudly point to every one
Of the Empire's lancers [soldiers]⁸⁴ of the Queen.⁸⁵

Singing was undoubtedly entertaining and common during send-offs, but the gifts presented to the soldiers usually had a more practical purpose besides serving as an expression of affection. Virtually all the published accounts of private send-offs mention gifts, which indicates that this was an essential component of a 'proper' send-off. The types of gifts varied, ranging from several types of small luxuries, clothing articles, and equipment. The most common type of gift was tobacco-related items, also known as a 'smoking kit' or 'smoking outfit'. Of these, the silver-mounted smoking pipe was extremely popular, and was normally supplemented by a quantity of tobacco. Sometimes, the tobacco was presented in a useful tobacco pouch.⁸⁶ A somewhat rarer type of tobacco gift came in the form of cigars.⁸⁷ Even rarer were cigarettes.⁸⁸

It is unsurprising that 'smoking outfits' were popular gifts since smoking was a common luxury by the end of the nineteenth century. In 1870, Britons spent only £3.5 million on tobacco products, but by 1914 this amount had increased to a tremendous £42 million. As working-class wages increased, more people were able to afford regular luxuries such as tobacco.⁸⁹ The rapid rise of tobacco consumption during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, especially cut tobacco for pipe smoke and cigars, was reflected in the rest of Europe as well.⁹⁰ In fact, even the Boers were extremely fond of smoking.⁹¹ Nevertheless, as important as tobacco was as a form of parting gift, it was not the only item presented.

Clothing was another popular gift and potentially very useful. Volunteer Private Hibbert received two flannel undervests, two pairs of woollen socks, a woollen sleeping cap, and a

⁸⁴ There are slightly different lyrics. I believe "soldiers" is closer to the original.

⁸⁵ 'Soldiers of the Queen'.

⁸⁶ 'A Tame Valley Man for the Front', 8; 'A Droylsden Volunteer's Send-Off', 7; 'Presentation to a Volunteer at Hurst', 5; 'Presentations to Another Hyde Reservist', 8.

⁸⁷ 'Ashton-under-Lyne, Workhouse: Send-off to Private Turner', 5.

⁸⁸ 'Farewell Party at Ashton', 2.

⁸⁹ Steinbach, *Understanding the Victorians*, 159.

⁹⁰ Jordan Goodman. *Tobacco in History: The Cultures of Dependence*. London and New York: Routledge, 1993, 89.

⁹¹ Pretorius, *Kommandolewe Tydens Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, 75–76.

muffler (a scarf).⁹² Corporal Williams was given a silk muffler and two pairs of singlets.⁹³ Some of these items, even though the recipients did not realise it at the time, would be a welcome additional layer of warmth against surprisingly cold South African nights.

Some men received money as a gift, which in one case was a significant sum. Not all the sources give an amount, as was the case for Privates Turner and Davies,⁹⁴ but Volunteer Private Walter Hibbert received a sum of £4 from the mill hands at his work on 17 February 1901, which today has a purchasing power of roughly £500.⁹⁵ This was undoubtedly useful during the campaign in South Africa, because it will be seen in Chapter 4: Supplies that having money to spend could help supplement the often poor diet the Manchesters endured, particularly when they were on the march or far from army supply lines.

Another popular and useful gift was writing materials. Private Wilkinson received said gift, and Private Hibbert received stationery.⁹⁶ As mentioned earlier, Private Riley was given an expensive gold-plated pen at his send-off. Unlike today, writing materials were highly valued, and during the war several Manchesters either apologised for writing in pencil on poor paper, or complained about a lack of decent writing materials. Reservist Private E. Parr wrote from Chievelay Camp on 27 December 1899 to his friend Mr James Walsh, secretary of the Hyde National League Club. Parr, unable to join the 1st Manchesters besieged in Ladysmith, served as a stretcher bearer with General Buller's 3rd Division, 6th Brigade. Parr informed Walsh that he "cannot get any ink for the pen, so you will have to excuse the pencil".⁹⁷ Volunteer Private Walter Hawkins, writing from Dewdrop Camp in Natal on 18 March 1900 to his friend Band-sergeant Holt of the Ashton Volunteers, asked Holt to tell 'Potter' to

...excuse me not writing to him and Tom Hill as promised. All my notepaper is in my kit-bag at Ladysmith ... so you see notepaper is scarce, as I had to go across to one of my old chums in the Rifle Brigade to borrow this.⁹⁸

At this point it is necessary to note the importance of more than a century of industrialisation and rapid technological progress which affected all levels of British society and culture. This helps explain how communities, even poorer ones, were able to send their men off with various useful and valuable articles. The process of industrialisation already began decades before the earliest 'starting date' for the Victorian period, yet it took time for its material benefits to

⁹² "Send-off" for a Local Volunteer', 8.

⁹³ 'Send-off to an Ashton Reservist', 5.

⁹⁴ 'Ashton-under-Lyne, Workhouse: Send-off to Private Turner', 5; 'Presentations to Another Hyde Reservist', 8.

⁹⁵ "Send-off" for a Local Volunteer', 8.

⁹⁶ 'A Tame Valley Man for the Front', 8; "Send-off" for a Local Volunteer', 8.

⁹⁷ E. Parr. 'A Hyde Man's Experience: The Occupation of a Stretcher Bearer'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 27 January 1900, 5.

⁹⁸ Walter Hawkins. 'Letter from an Ashton Volunteer at the Front'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 21 April 1900, 6.

reach the majority. As such, the material differences in the quality of life between the upper, middle and working class were still easily noticeable in the 1820s. The working class especially led an unenviable life. Yet, as industrial techniques and technology improved, a greater number of items, usually restricted to the enjoyment of the elites, became more affordable and accessible over time. By the 1850s the middle-class had grown significantly and enjoyed a quality of life almost comparable to the upper class. The working class eventually also benefited from industrial developments, not to mention various social and political reforms. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the working class finally enjoyed more leisure time and disposable income, which enabled many to participate in the consumer culture hitherto restricted to the other two classes. The historian Steinbach used the example of the piano to illustrate this gradual change. An item that used to be the prerogative of the elite eventually found its way into many middle-class homes by the middle of the century thanks to improvements in manufacture. By the end of the century mass production had even brought the piano into reach of many working-class families.⁹⁹

Although the lot of the working class was significantly improved by the end of the nineteenth century, the notion of different levels of social classes was still widespread in late Victorian society, and clearly evident in the types of gifts departing soldiers received. The idea of class extended to the army, where officers and privates formed their own separate classes. Despite the Cardwell Reforms in the early 1870s, which abolished commissions, the army continued to recruit its officers from men with 'acceptable' social status and more importantly, adequate private income to supplement the meagre army salaries.¹⁰⁰

This social distinction is often implied in the sources, but one source openly stated it. In January 1900, the Curator of Hurst wrote a letter to the editor of *The Ashton Reporter* and other newspapers. In it, he requested the public to send him specific articles or money so that he and his helpers could furnish suitable send-off gifts for the reservists and Volunteers. He clearly referred to class when he stated how "I beg to put forward a scheme which will give every class an opportunity of doing something..."¹⁰¹ and that this would ensure that the gifts were representative of Manchester's community. As gifts for the officers, he requested that six 'gentlemen' furnish a box of cigars each, and that twelve gentlemen each procure a pipe and a tobacco pouch. As for the privates, he requested that a thousand 'working men' donate an ounce of thick twist of tobacco each, or three penny stamps so that he could buy the tobacco in their name. He did not neglect the women and requested that 500 'ladies' knit a pair of

⁹⁹ Steinbach, *Understanding the Victorians*, 6–10.

¹⁰⁰ Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, 18.

¹⁰¹ W.A. Parry. "Send-off" Gifts for the Manchester Reservists'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 13 January 1900, 5.

socks each, or at least buy the wool so that their maids could knit a pair. Finally, he even asked the children to do their part. He hoped that a thousand children would each donate six sheets of note paper, six envelopes, and a piece of blotting paper.

2.6 EQUIPPING FOR WAR

In the days prior to departure and sometimes in-between all the private send-offs, the reservists and Volunteers reported to the Ashton Barracks. The barracks preferred the men to report in singly or in small groups in the days leading up to their departure. Before they were given their 'equipment', items such as the rifle and water bottle they would use in the field while on duty and in combat, and their 'kit' which was various clothing, hygiene items, and other miscellaneous items, they were subjected to a thorough bath with generous amounts of soap and hot water. This sometimes occurred under a sergeant's supervision, since merely washing one's feet and face was considered insufficient by Quartermaster Connery. Apparently, the more experienced reservists with a few years of service needed little supervision since they had adopted the habit of a weekly bath once they returned to civilian life.¹⁰² This last point suggests that some men did not value personal hygiene highly, which is an aspect that would resurface during the campaign in South Africa.

Once clean, it was time to collect their equipment and kit. The sergeant at the clothing store estimated a man's size and tossed him his clothes. In a matter of minutes, a man had received all his kit. This was not the end of the matter, though. The reservist was instructed to spread his great coat on the floor with his kit arranged on it, and to kneel beside it. Behind him stood Quartermaster Connery with a list in hand and he began ticking off the items: a pair of sturdy brown leather Blucher boots, field service cap, Kersey frock (tunic), great coat, haversack, pair of tweed trousers, kit bag, pair of braces, cloth brush, shaving brush, comb, fork and spoon, tin of grease, hold-all, jersey, table knife, razor, two flannel shirts, two pairs worsted¹⁰³ socks, sponge, mess tin, towel, and one piece of soap. Next was his equipment, which a second man tossed onto the great coat as the Quartermaster listed the items: two brace straps, water bottle, water bottle strap and pouch, two coat straps, canteen straps, frog (a bayonet carrier), sling, belt, and valise. A third man then handed the reservist a Lee-Metford rifle, bayonet, oil bottle, and a pull-through to clean the barrel. In total there were about fifty items which the man then bundled into his great coat to organise more neatly later.¹⁰⁴ According to the official army rules, the total amount of equipment a soldier carried weighed 61.7½ lbs (28 kg), and

¹⁰² 'A Visit to the Ashton Barracks', 3.

¹⁰³ 'Worsted' refers to a high-quality type of yarn made from wool.

¹⁰⁴ 'A Visit to the Ashton Barracks', 3.

the valise weighed 11.8½ lbs (5 kg).¹⁰⁵ Of course, the actual equipment received as described above differed slightly from what was prescribed by the army, but it is evident that a soldier received a significant number of items to fight in South Africa.

This remarkable amount of equipment and kit described above is not explored in much detail by other studies which include the experiences of the Victorian soldiers. Fransjohan Pretorius made brief mention of the most common items worn and carried by the average British soldier.¹⁰⁶ Andrew Page included a list of equipment carried by the infantrymen in September 1900.¹⁰⁷ It is evident that the Manchesters carried a potentially significant amount of material with them. This did not even include the ammunition and rations they would have to carry when on the march or in combat. Of course, as is discussed in Chapter 4: Supplies, they did use wagons to transport non-essential items when moving, but certain items like the great coat, the water bottle, their weapon, the ammunition, the tools to clean the rifle, the bayonet, a few days' rations, and possibly other items, had to be carried. The Manchesters did not comment on their equipment and kit, and also did not complain about the weight they carried with them. It seems they accepted this as just another fact of war, and thus not special enough to write about.

The impact of this weight must have caused some discomfort when carried long distances over an extended period. This can be inferred to some degree from Denis Winter's discussion about the weight the British soldiers in the First World War carried. Winter emphasised that the weight of equipment carried by these soldiers was roughly equivalent to what soldiers from earlier conflicts carried. A Napoleonic-era soldier carried a pack weighing roughly 60 lb (27,2 kg) and the British pack in the Crimean War was about 64 lb (29 kg). In the First World War, a British soldier carried approximately 55 lb (25 kg). According to Winter, the weight of this pack made many soldiers' first long march to the trenches an exhausting experience.¹⁰⁸

As for the Manchesters in South Africa, they had to carry and march with a weight of roughly 28 kg, excluding ammunition and rations. This figure certainly also varied by a few kilograms either way once certain items were removed and others added. Nevertheless, they still had to

¹⁰⁵ 'Nominal Roll, Squad Roll of "F" Coy., 2nd Battalion (Major Anderson's)'.

¹⁰⁶ Pretorius, *Die Anglo-Boereoorlog*, 36.

¹⁰⁷ Page, 'Supply Services of the British Army in the South African War, 1899-1902', 365 – on his person: helmet, serge frock, pair trousers, flannel shirt, flannel belt, pair socks, pair boots, pair braces, identity card, field dressing, knife and lanyard, sea kit cap, rifle and sling, bayonet and scabbard, braces, waist belt and frog, two pouches, 100 ammunition, haversack, water bottle and strap, mess tin and strap, fork and spoon, great coat and strap, blanket.

Rolled in a waterproof sheet: jersey, pair socks, housewife (sewing kit), tin grease, blanket, flannel shirt, pair canvas shoes, towel and soap.

In the kit bag: serge or drill frock, pair socks, small book, clothes brush, field service cap, pair serge or drill trousers, flannel belt, razor and brush, pair boots and laces.

¹⁰⁸ Winter, *Death's Men*, 77–78.

carry a significant amount of weight, anything between 20–30 kg, over long distances and for extended periods of time. This will be explored further in Chapter 5: Life on campaign.

As soon as a man reported at the barracks, he would stay there until the day of departure. In March 1901, for instance, Volunteers were at the Ashton Barracks for nearly three weeks before the date of departure was finalised. However, two days before departure they were granted a full evening's leave to say their farewells to friends and family.¹⁰⁹ The sources do not paint a full picture of what they did while at barracks. One source, though, mentions how a group of Volunteers were put through a physical training course during the three weeks at barracks.¹¹⁰ One can assume that other forms of training, such as bayonet drill and firing drills occurred. This is confirmed in Miller's study of the Volunteers' experience, where he mentioned a range of barracks activities. He recounted the experiences of one soldier, who wrote how their days were strictly organised from 06:30 to 22:00, starting with morning parade and ending with lights out. In-between they had drill, rifle and horse instruction, and fatigues such as cleaning and cooking. There were also a few breaks, and this particular soldier did not find the day overly taxing, just busy.¹¹¹ The Manchesters themselves did not furnish details about the nature of their activities while waiting in barracks. Miller, even though he had a few good examples, noted that few soldiers wrote about their barracks life and training. He speculated that they were still in contact with family and friends while at barracks, and thus they had no reason to write about it.¹¹² There is no reason to think that the Manchester reservists and Volunteers were any different.

2.7 PUBLIC SEND-OFFS

On numerous occasions, even for relatively small numbers of departing troops, an enthusiastic crowd gathered to see them off. Many of these events took place in the first few months of the war, no doubt due to the army's urgent need to replace the unexpectedly high losses from battle and disease. In the case of the 1st Battalion, they were engaged in the Battle of Elandsplaagte on 21 October 1899 and suffered about thirteen percent casualties.¹¹³ The number of civilians present in the streets was not always mentioned, but from the context it could be anything between a few dozen, a few hundred, or even in the thousands. Smaller locales also sent off their men in some style, such as the people of Droylsden on the evening

¹⁰⁹ 'Departure of Local Volunteers', *The Ashton Herald*, 23 March 1901, 5.

¹¹⁰ 'Volunteers for the Front: Departure of the Ashton Contingent', *The Ashton Herald*, 30 March 1901, 12.

¹¹¹ Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 83.

¹¹² Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 83.

¹¹³ Marden and Newbigging, *Rough Diary of the Doings of the 1st Battn. Manchester Regt.*, 16–17; Wylly, *History of the Manchester Regiment*, 8.

of 13 March 1900, when a handful of men from the 3rd VBMR proceeded down Market Street to the station for Ashton Barracks.¹¹⁴

One of the earliest accounts of a public send-off was published on 25 November 1899, describing how an unspecified number of reservists had left the Ashton Barracks earlier that week. A subset of that group departed from Manchester for the Ashton Barracks via Exchange Station at 14:00. Cheering them on to the station was a crowd of men, women, and children who wished them well and expressed patriotic sentiments. The Manchester crowd made their way to Ashton, joining the already significant number of Ashton locals who started congregating from about 14:00 at the junction of Warrington and Stamford streets. At 18:00 the marching reservists made their appearance from the barracks, headed by a band. On this occasion, the reservists did not wear their uniforms, which was apparently a source of disappointment for the crowd. As discussed earlier, military parades with colourfully dressed soldiers had become popular spectacles in the late-Victorian period. Nevertheless, people were still so excited that they completely broke through the police cordon to mingle with the departing soldiers. Many insisted on carrying the soldiers' equipment and kit. One woman even managed to wrest away a rifle and strutted about with it, much to the crowd's delight. Some women, evidently close family, or significant others, referred to as "sweethearts" in the sources, hung on to the men as they marched, hugging their waists, or trying to kiss their cheeks. It was with some difficulty that the reservists finally made it through to the station. As they embarked, the crowd continued cheering and followed the departing train as far as the platform allowed.¹¹⁵ The Manchester soldiers did not write about their feelings during these send-offs, but it would be surprising if they were not pleased by the enthusiasm of the crowd, and even appreciative of the show of support. The enthusiasm of the crowd in support of their local soldiers is very similar to the description Edward Spiers' included in *The Scottish Soldier and Empire* (2006) when whole battalions of Scottish regiments, such as the 1st Gordon Highlanders marched off to war from Edinburgh.¹¹⁶

The above description is typical for a public send-off, but as is always the case, there were some differences. In general, a public event usually involved a body of men going off to war, during which they presented themselves in a variety of ways. The crowd, its mood, and behaviour were another feature which characterised the send-off. These were the most prominent features, but on occasion something unique occurred. Since there was no public event possible without the departing soldiers, one should start there.

¹¹⁴ 'Send-off of Reservists from Droylsden', *The Ashton Herald*, 17 March 1900, 7.

¹¹⁵ 'Departure of Reservists from Ashton', 3.

¹¹⁶ Spiers, *The Scottish Soldier and Empire*, 160.

It is worth noting the main routes followed by the marching soldiers, usually from the regimental depot and headquarters at the Ashton-under-Lyne Barracks on Mossley Road (the sources refer to it as Ashton Barracks).¹¹⁷ The main point of departure from Ashton to the port cities, or to Aldershot for further training before being sent on, was from Park Parade Station (closed in 1956).¹¹⁸ Charlestown Station, also in Ashton, was used once in March 1901.¹¹⁹ When the troops marched from the barracks, they normally went down Mossley Road before turning into Stamford Street.

The Ashton Barracks was not the only point of departure for the front. There was also a procession of reservists from Hulme Barracks on 30 November 1899, down Chester Road to the Deansgate Station.¹²⁰ The structure still stands today and is in Princess Street, Manchester.¹²¹ This barracks used to billet cavalry, but by the time of the outbreak of hostilities was used by members of the 2nd Battalion before being sent on deployment.¹²² Even though these reservists were assigned to the 2nd Battalion, which was officially stationed in Dublin at the time, they were sent to the 1st Battalion as reinforcements.

The number of soldiers involved in these public processions varied considerably, from between three to over 100, and anything in-between.¹²³ A few sources do not provide exact numbers. Yet, most of the sources provide substantial detail on how the soldiers looked and acted, which often varied. As will be seen later, the number of troops involved did not seem to affect the enthusiasm of the public to a large degree. On 30 November 1899, a group of 180 reservists marched to their station. They were preceded by a band playing the marching song called “Come under my Plaidy” and led by Captain Vaughan. Unlike the example provided earlier, this time the soldiers were in uniform, although wearing the old red serge jacket, but they did wear the new khaki helmet. Only the officers sported the full new khaki uniform. To complement the spectacle, a unit of about 20 mounted Duke of Lancaster’s Own Yeomanry

¹¹⁷ ‘Ladysmith Barracks’, 11 August 2021,

<https://www.tameside.gov.uk/MuseumsandGalleries/Ladysmith-Barracks>. Today it is known as the Ladysmith Barracks, in honour of the 1st Battalion’s experiences during the siege of Ladysmith.

¹¹⁸ ‘Departure of Troops from Ashton’, *The Stalybridge Reporter*, 27 January 1900, 7; ‘Departure of the Volunteers from Ashton’, 10; ‘Off to the Front: Departure from Ashton of the Sixth Battalion Manchester Regiment’, *The Stalybridge Reporter*, 11 January 1902, 3; ‘Departure of Ashton Volunteers for the Front: Enthusiastic “Send-Off”’, *The Stalybridge Reporter*, 22 March 1902, 6.

¹¹⁹ ‘Departure of the Ashton Volunteers for the Front: Enthusiastic Scenes’, *The Gorton Reporter*, 30 March 1901, 3.

¹²⁰ ‘Departure of the Reservists: Exciting and Enthusiastic Scenes’, 7.

¹²¹ ‘HULME BARRACKS, Non Civil Parish - 1247392 | Historic England’, 25 August 2021, <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1247392>.

¹²² Robert Bonner. ‘Hulme Cavalry Barracks, Manchester’. *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 91, no. 367 (2013): 220.

¹²³ ‘Departure of Manchester Volunteers’, *The Manchester Guardian*, 10 February 1900, 11; ‘Send-off of Reservists from Droylsden’, 7; ‘Local Reinforcements, Departure of the 5th Manchester Reservists’, *The Manchester Evening News*, 11 February 1901, 2.

Cavalry escorted them.¹²⁴ The combination of the old scarlet jacket and new khaki helmet was emulated on other occasions too.¹²⁵ The use of a band was quite common in most cases, and other songs played included “Auld Lang Syne”, “Scenes that are Brightest”, “Maritana”¹²⁶ and later new ones such as “Kimberley” and “Ladysmith”.¹²⁷ It must have been an exciting spectacle, and a sight which had become popular during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, as the rise of militarism was accompanied by a concurrent rise in military parades.

Sometimes there was no band, no marching, and the profusion of differing heights and sizes of the soldiers made for a less satisfying spectacle, at least for some. Still, it did not dim the enthusiasm of the crowd significantly. On 23 January 1900, 120 reservists of the 2nd Battalion went off to war, via Aldershot for some additional training and where they would meet up with their comrades shipping in from Dublin. They were conveyed from Ashton Barracks in wagonettes and cabs, and had no accompanying marching band, but they were in full dress uniform, and “some of the men coolly sat and smoked on top of the cabs”,¹²⁸ fitting in almost to the very image of nonplussed ‘Tommy Atkins’. Although this procession lacked spectacle, they were met at Park Parade Station by “a large crowd to give the men—truly a very mixed lot in stature and height—a hearty send-off. Amongst the crowd were wives and children, and many were moved to tears in bidding the soldiers goodbye”.¹²⁹ The journalist did not mention a patriotic atmosphere, and it appears the crowd’s chief aim was to wish the men well, and for family and friends to say their final goodbyes.

The weather sometimes spoiled the presentation. On 15 February 1900, 116 Volunteers headed out in the early morning at 04:00 in snowy weather. As a result, there was no band, the men had to be conveyed in wagonettes instead of marching, and their khaki uniforms were concealed beneath their great coats.¹³⁰ Poor weather also befell 90 volunteers on the night of 21 March 1902, but at least they had a band and could still march through the rain, albeit in their ‘unflattering’ great coats.¹³¹ Although not stated explicitly in the sources, it appears that the soldiers wanted to look impressive. Hence the attempts to appear in uniform and using a marching band. Again, one can detect the underlying influence of militarism in late-Victorian society, and the men’s desire to impress the crowd with their martial appearance.

¹²⁴ ‘Departure of the Reservists: Exciting and Enthusiastic Scenes’, 7.

¹²⁵ ‘Departure of Manchester Volunteers’, 11.

¹²⁶ ‘Departure of Ashton Volunteers for the Front: Enthusiastic “Send-Off”’, 6.

¹²⁷ ‘Volunteers for the Front: Departure of the Ashton Contingent’, 12.

¹²⁸ ‘Departure of Troops from Ashton’, 7.

¹²⁹ ‘Departure of Troops from Ashton’, 7.

¹³⁰ ‘Departure of the Volunteers from Ashton’, 10.

¹³¹ ‘Departure of Ashton Volunteers for the Front: Enthusiastic “Send-Off”’, 6.

The crowd was an essential component of the public send-off, but the sources are normally vague when it came to exact crowd numbers. The crowd size appears to have fluctuated significantly from event to event. The crowd on 30 November 1899, seeing off 180 reservists, was estimated to be in the tens of thousands.¹³² Conversely, the details for the crowd seeing off 120 reservists on 23 January 1900 was vague, noting only that “there was a large crowd”.¹³³ The number of departing troops seemed to have little bearing on the crowd turnout, since 29 Volunteers apparently drew a large crowd on 9 February 1900, although this journalist was similarly vague, stating that

...despite the early hour and the extreme cold, a large crowd surrounded the entrance to the Drill Hall ... the volunteers, headed by the band of the Militia, then set out on the march ... dense crowds accompanied them, and various points on the route were packed with people.¹³⁴

An early hour and poor weather also did not affect crowd turnout significantly, as alluded to above already. Several thousand people turned up at 04:00 on 15 February 1900, in dismally snowy weather to see off 116 Volunteers. The journalist, writing in engaging and colourful prose, reported that:

The “early birds” on the lookout at Park Parade Station totalled few short, probably, of a couple of thousand, and despite the falling snow and the meteorological inclemency, there was a good sprinkling—a considerable proportion in fact—of the fair sex. When those who had been a-bed left their downy pillows, the outlook was far from reassuring. Many of the onlookers had solved the problem of how to get up in time by abstaining from going to bed. Not a few had burnt the midnight oil in a festive manner. The gay and giddy whirl of the ball room had kept many of them until the wee small hours; and yet the crowd revealed little trace of weary vigil or dissipating enjoyment. Everybody, on the contrary, appeared to be very wide-awake, and in defiance of the bleakness and chilliness of the morning sang the ‘Soldiers of the Queen’ and other patriotic airs.¹³⁵

The colourful description above does not only evoke the nationalist feelings of the crowd, but also suggests a holiday atmosphere. It is worth noting that 15 February 1900 was a Thursday and if many people, as claimed, spent the previous night awake in revelry, then it appears likely that many used the departure of Volunteers as a justification to celebrate and enjoy themselves. It must have been a welcome break from their usual routines. Moreover, it implies that there was likely more than just patriotic fervour behind the attendance of these send-offs. In a similar vein, Bill Nasson, writing about the raucous celebrations in Britain when Mafeking was relieved on 17 May 1900, argued that this was not necessarily firm proof that jingoism was the dominant reason behind these types of events. It could have been the public’s way of showing its joy that the town was finally relieved and the men therein saved. Some may have

¹³² ‘Departure of the Reservists: Exciting and Enthusiastic Scenes’, 7.

¹³³ ‘Departure of Troops from Ashton’, 7.

¹³⁴ ‘Departure of Manchester Volunteers’, 11.

¹³⁵ ‘Departure of the Volunteers from Ashton’, 10.

simply used it as a pretext for engaging in revelry.¹³⁶ It would be fair to assume the same logic applies to the Manchesters' send-offs.

More than a year after the war began, crowds still turned up to send off soldiers, since a large crowd had gathered at Charlestown Station in Ashton on 23 March 1901 to cheer a departing group of 111 Volunteers.¹³⁷ However, on Monday 6 January 1902, a group of Volunteers from the 6th VBMR marched off to war. Even though they were preceded by the customary bugle band to announce their presence, there was no mention of cheering crowds. Instead, "the station master, Mr. Warner, had made ample provision, and the men were entrained with celerity and despatch".¹³⁸ This is inconclusive though, since on 21 March 1902 a crowd of about a thousand turned up, in pouring rain no less, to see off about 90 Volunteers. The journalist claimed that:

...local interest and enthusiasm were as pronounced as ever in connection with the departure on Friday night of the 3rd Active Service Section ... the night was wet and dreary ... but people's spirits and inclinations were sufficiently waterproof to resist the elements, and consequently the wretched weather made very little difference to the magnitude of the crowds which gathered along the route from the Barracks to the station.¹³⁹

It appears, thus, that troop departures still drew considerable crowds even late into the war, and that possibly the same combination of local interest and support for 'their' soldiers, patriotism, and military spectacle were at work.

The demeanour of the crowd, whether large or small, was a memorable experience for the departing soldiers. The crowds were usually enthusiastic. So much so, that they sometimes proved difficult to control. The large crowd on 30 November 1899 which saw off 180 reservists, as mentioned earlier, was cheering wildly and was so energetic that it completely overwhelmed the police cordon and mingled with the reservists. The march was brought to a complete halt, while Captain Vaughan fought his way through the crowd to get back to his men. A unit of about 20 mounted Duke of Lancaster's Own Yeomanry Cavalry, who accompanied the march, drew their sabres and forced their way into the crowd to make a path for the beleaguered reservists.¹⁴⁰ The crowd attempted the same on 15 February 1900, but this time the police were ready for the crowd's rush and managed to hold them at bay.¹⁴¹ Even as late as 21 March 1902, a rowdy crowd tested the police thoroughly. So much so that they

¹³⁶ Nasson, *The War for South Africa [the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902]*, 261.

¹³⁷ 'Departure of the Ashton Volunteers for the Front: Enthusiastic Scenes', 3.

¹³⁸ 'Off to the Front: Departure from Ashton of the Sixth Battalion Manchester Regiment', 3.

¹³⁹ 'Departure of Ashton Volunteers for the Front: Enthusiastic "Send-Off"', 6.

¹⁴⁰ 'Departure of the Reservists: Exciting and Enthusiastic Scenes', 7.

¹⁴¹ 'Departure of the Volunteers from Ashton', 10.

broke the door to the station off its frame. The police, however, held it in place with their backs and the crowd was thwarted.¹⁴²

Loud cheering was almost universal, a constant roar of approval, patriotic slogans, and well wishes. There was one exception to this in February 1901, as 40 Volunteers made their way to Victoria Station in Manchester. At the station there was a considerable crowd, although its enthusiasm was apparently muted, as it could only elicit a rather feeble cheer as the train pulled away. The journalist stated confidently that this was another obvious sign that “war fever” was dying down.¹⁴³ However, subsequent send-off reports proved this statement premature, as the aforementioned send-off of 111 Volunteers on 23 March 1901 drew a large crowd: “the final parting came on Saturday morning, and with it came a demonstration of enthusiasm quite equal to that when the first batch of volunteers departed for South Africa over twelve months ago”.¹⁴⁴ It is clear, though, that the number of similar descriptions and the general consistency between local papers regarding the send-offs do suggest that most were lively affairs.

The crowd would, when allowed, follow the soldiers into the train station. On one occasion on 15 February 1900, the crowd was tightly controlled by police, but:

...when the men had entrained, their friends closed around the doors, and offered parting gifts. Pies, sandwiches, and fruit were positively showered upon the newly made ‘Tommies’, with bewildering liberality. Sacred moments were, of course, devoted to confidential leave-takings; but apart from this there was a good deal of open communication between the crowd and the soldiers. Now and again shots were exchanged in friendly banter.¹⁴⁵

The crowd followed the train as far as the platform extended, cheering all the while until the train vanished from sight. There was one unique occasion where a series of fog-signals, placed by the station’s platelayers on the tracks, exploded in a volley as the train moved away.¹⁴⁶ Fog-signals were small coin-sized explosives which were placed on the tracks to warn conductors to slow down the train during hazardous conditions.

Within the crowd were family and friends who wished to say their final and often emotional farewells. Tearful goodbyes and loving hugs were common. One journalist painted a picture of “many pathetic scenes and incidents, mothers deeply affected, sisters and brothers loth to part, and sweethearts eager, as it were, to stave off the inevitable as long as they could”.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² ‘Ashton Active Service Volunteer: An Enthusiastic Send-off, Stirring Scenes’, *The Ashton Herald*, 22 March 1902, 5.

¹⁴³ ‘Local Reinforcements, Departure of the 5th Manchester Reservists’, 2.

¹⁴⁴ ‘Departure of the Ashton Volunteers for the Front: Enthusiastic Scenes’, 3.

¹⁴⁵ ‘Departure of the Volunteers from Ashton’, 10.

¹⁴⁶ ‘Volunteers for the Front: Departure of the Ashton Contingent’, 12.

¹⁴⁷ ‘Departure of the Ashton Volunteers for the Front: Enthusiastic Scenes’, 3.

Wives and significant others were not shy to kiss their men goodbye.¹⁴⁸ It is easy to forget, amid the scenes of the excited crowd, that these men were departing their loved ones and would not see them again for a long time. Even grimmer was the fact that some of these men would never return. Even though the Manchesters did not mention it, it is almost certain that these public send-offs contained a measure of melancholy for many of them.

On rare occasions, a public send-off did not follow the typical formula. Such an event occurred on the evening of 13 March 1900 in Droylsden. Only three Volunteers were involved: Privates Thomas Gough, John Gough, and Michael Rearden, who were from the 3rd VBMR. This public send-off was organised by the Workpeople's Patriotic Fund. It put up flags on Market Street and organised the Droylsden Brass Band to lead the 'march' of the three soldiers to the station, followed by a crowd of locals. The procession went down Market Street and stopped briefly at the Educational Institute. Here the men were taken inside to be presented gifts from various public figures and organisations in the form of one pound of tobacco, a pipe, a case of cigarettes, and a small box of cigars. A rather unique gift was from the local chemist, who furnished each a package with a bottle of balsam of linseed, two bottles of febricula (for chills, colds, and fevers), three boxes of powder for tender feet, tablets of soap, a box of headache powders, a box of antibilious pills, and various other minor items. There was a brief speech by the secretary of the Patriotic Committee, Mr Lord, who apologised for not properly sending off the Droylsden reservists, but he explained that the Patriotic Committee had not existed yet. He commented how the other Droylsden men had thus far given a "good account of themselves"¹⁴⁹, but whether these three would see action or not, their willingness to go into harm's way was appreciated, and everyone wished them a safe return. After the speech, the three men, accompanied by Mr Lord, were taken to the station in an open carriage. Following them was a wagonette with friends and family waving Union Jacks. The band led them and played patriotic marches. At the station, the crowd sang and cheered until the men's train finally departed. As was common, these men first stopped at the Ashton Barracks to be equipped and would only leave for the front a few days later. Patriotism and a strong feeling of local pride appear to be the main drivers behind this send-off.

These public send-offs were not just confined to Manchester and its neighbouring boroughs. The men enjoyed a hearty send-off from the port city they left from. Private Turner experienced such a send-off from Southampton on 16 March 1900. A band played "Soldiers of the Queen" and "The Goodbye at the Door". A large crowd cheered them off, waving handkerchiefs. The cheering was audible until he lost sight of the harbour.¹⁵⁰ The exact date is unclear, but in mid-

¹⁴⁸ 'Departure of the Volunteers from Ashton', 10.

¹⁴⁹ 'Send-off of Reservists from Droylsden', 7.

¹⁵⁰ Turner, 'Letters from the Front: Letter from Private Alfred Turner. Life on a Transport', 6.

1901 a Volunteer, who can only be identified by his number, wrote to his employer in Manchester. He reported that when they left from Liverpool in the S.S. *Monroe*, they were first treated to a solid breakfast of meat and ham sandwiches, with generous amounts of bread, scones, and butter. After that the Liverpool Volunteers' Band played songs, such as "Should Auld Acquaintance be Forgot" and "God Save the King", while a crowd cheered and sang as they boarded the ship and as it left the harbour. "I can say this—I never shall, as long as I live, forget the sight".¹⁵¹ This is one of the few sources where the thoughts of the soldier regarding a send-off were expressed, and even though it is a short line, it suggests a strong combination of emotions in Private 7148 as he experienced Liverpool's spirited send-off.

2.8 THE VOYAGE TO SOUTH AFRICA

After the excitement and fanfare of an enthusiastic send-off, soldiers bound for South Africa faced a voyage of approximately three weeks. The journey for the Manchesters normally began at Southampton, Liverpool, or Queenstown. The steamships sailed through the Bay of Biscay, stopped briefly at Teneriffe or Las Palmas to restock coal supplies and water, and then continued to South Africa.¹⁵² The refuelling process could take between one to eight hours, depending on the availability of labour and how busy the port was.¹⁵³ The common soldiers were not allowed to leave the ship, but were able to buy cheap fruit and tobacco from the locals who swarmed around the ship in small boats. The officers, however, could step ashore. Many of the soldiers thought the island of Teneriffe a particularly beautiful place, especially after a week or longer at sea.¹⁵⁴ Apart from this brief stop, the rest of the journey was on open water. This section aims to explore various aspects of a soldier's life while on board these often-cramped transports.

The earliest account of a journey by ship published in a local newspaper painted a miserable picture. Private E. Parr, a reservist bound for Natal in November 1899, found himself ill for much of the journey, most likely due to seasickness. From his perspective, the food was awful, such as tea without milk, bread without butter for breakfast, and corn beef and tea for dinner, with maybe two potatoes if lucky. There was a dry canteen on board to buy extras, but Parr

¹⁵¹ Private 7148, 'Another Local Man at the Seat of War', *The North Cheshire Herald*, 6 July 1901, 7.

¹⁵² Alfred Turner. 'Letters from the Front: Letter from Private Alfred Turner. Life on a Transport'. *The Stalybridge Reporter*, 12 May 1900, 6; A Hodkinson, 'Interesting Letter from the Seat of War', *The Ashton Reporter*, 2 June 1900, 6.

¹⁵³ Harry Riley. 'With the Ashton Volunteers: The Voyage to South Africa. Letter from Private H. Riley'. *The Stalybridge Reporter*, 7 April 1900, 6; Hodkinson, 'Interesting Letter from the Seat of War', 6.

¹⁵⁴ Harry Newton. 'The War. The Ashton Volunteers in Natal. Letter to the Sergeants' Mess', *The Ashton Reporter*, 21 April 1900, 6; Makin, 'Letters from South Africa', *The Ashton Reporter*, 14 April 1900, 6.

found it criminally expensive, calling it a “d___ [sic] fraud”¹⁵⁵, refusing for instance to pay 1s. 4d. for a pound of butter. As for sleep, he had little, mostly due to the heat and smell generated by nearly 600 men sharing the same space. He estimated the total number of soldiers on board to be around 2 000. Parr reported that daily physical drills occurred at 08:00, 10:00, and 15:00. There was also church on Sunday, which appeared to have been compulsory. Apart from these drills and Sunday church services, there was not much else to do on board. Thus, the men amused themselves. Parr enjoyed going up on deck at nightfall for the free and easy, where they made music and danced.¹⁵⁶ Other soldiers, however, did not share Parr’s negative tone when writing about their own journeys. Parr’s perspective was probably influenced by feeling ill for a large part of the journey.

Life on board a transport ship was extremely uncomfortable in poor weather. The Bay of Biscay was notoriously rough, a fact that the sailors sometimes shared beforehand with the troops on board.¹⁵⁷ Private Alfred Turner wrote to the editor of the *Ashton Reporter* how on

March 19th.—When I awoke I found the sea awfully rough. Of course we are now in the bay proper [Bay of Biscay], the waves are flying over the decks, and some of the men are in a pitiable state of seasickness ... one man fell down the hatchway today and severely hurt himself. Although she is a very big ship she’s rolling horribly.¹⁵⁸

Lieutenant Howe, Captain Heywood, and Sergeant Newton, all of the 3rd VBMR and on the transport S.S. *Greek* in February 1900, wrote that the weather in the Bay of Biscay was so bad that they were two days overdue for Teneriffe. The men were battened down for roughly two days, almost all of them seasick apart from a handful of men, and even writing was difficult. The only benefit, though, was that the bad weather delayed the onset of training drills.¹⁵⁹ Corporal Williams, on the troopship S.S. *Bavarian* with the rest of the 2nd Battalion, wrote on 21 March 1900 to his sister and brother in Stalybridge that the men were so miserable due to the rough seas in the Bay of Biscay, that they were issued a drachm of rum each, which was virtually the only time they were allowed access to strong drink on this ship.¹⁶⁰

With so many men aboard, it was inevitable that accidents occurred. Private Parr wrote that one of his fellow Mancunians nearly drowned when he tried to climb down the ropes at Southampton to have a “night out” before the ship departed.¹⁶¹ Fun and games could also

¹⁵⁵ Note how the newspaper blanked out what some would have considered an offensive word to print, in this case ‘damn’.

¹⁵⁶ Parr, ‘En Route for the War: A Hyde Man’s Experience on a Transport’, 6.

¹⁵⁷ John Smith. ‘Letter from Sergeant Smith’. *The Stalybridge Reporter*, 2 June 1900, 6.

¹⁵⁸ Alfred Turner. ‘Letter from Private Alfred Turner: Life on a Transport’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 12 May 1900, 6.

¹⁵⁹ E.S. Howe, Harry Newton, and B.C.P. Heywood. ‘Local Volunteers at Sea. Experiences on Board the Greek: Letters from Ashton and Manchester Men’. *The Ashton Herald*, 10 March 1900, 12; Howe. ‘Letter from Captain Howe to Colonel Eaton’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 10 March 1900, 5.

¹⁶⁰ R. Williams. ‘Letters from Stalybridge Men at the War’. *The Stalybridge Reporter*, 21 April 1900, 8.

¹⁶¹ E. Parr. ‘The Discomforts of a Transport’. *The Manchester Evening News*, 22 December 1899, 3.

result in injury. During a ceremony held for crossing the equator, one man cracked his scalp after tumbling from a mast when he tried to escape the playful attentions of “Father Neptune” and his helpers, who were tumbling bystanders into a large bath.¹⁶² The most harrowing experience, though, was undoubtedly that of Private James Clarke on the S.S. *Orotava* on 29 June 1900. He wrote about the event to his sister on the day it occurred. Their ship struck another ship by accident and it sank within minutes. The ship did not sink, though, but was taking on water. However, it made it safely back to port, but Clarke was badly shaken, adding that “I never was so near the jaws of death in my life ... Great God! I never want to see anything like it again. Let me die on a battlefield before being sent to a watery grave”.¹⁶³ A few days later they were back under way. For the most part, though, incidents like these were the exception.

Illness was more common than accidents. Sea sickness was, unsurprisingly, widespread. It was always worse in rough seas, as Private Turner, with the 2nd Manchesters on the S.S. *Bavarian*, reported on 20 March 1900: “we had a dreadful night last night. I don’t think there were 500 men out of 2 500 free from sickness, and believe me, I pity them, because I know what it is”.¹⁶⁴ Lieutenant Howe estimated that nearly half of the men of the 3rd VBMR were down with seasickness during the first few days of the journey through the Bay of Biscay, while Sergeant Newton, on the same trip, reckoned almost all the men were suffering, apart from the officers. Captain Heywood, also on the same ship, reported everyone sick, except for himself and two subalterns.¹⁶⁵

There were more serious illnesses, though, which were sometimes fatal. This was many men’s first exposure to the death of comrades and thus left a lasting impression. Two men died of pneumonia on the S.S. *Bavarian*, as recorded in the records of service for the 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment for 16 March 1900.¹⁶⁶ Some 2nd Manchesters were emotionally affected by the subsequent burial at sea and found it an unpleasant occasion, the “only low point” of the journey, as Private Jack Hardman confessed.¹⁶⁷ Private Turner was clearly upset when one of his comrades, Private Cooper, died after only two days of illness on 24 March 1900, apparently from a heart condition. The burial itself was highly ceremonial. The body was carried by six of his old comrades, draped in the Union Jack. Last respects were intoned by

¹⁶² Newton, ‘The War. The Ashton Volunteers in Natal. Letter to the Sergeants’ Mess’, 6.

¹⁶³ James Clarke. ‘Letter from a Soldier: In a Collision at Sea’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 21 July 1900, 6.

¹⁶⁴ Turner, ‘Letter from Private Alfred Turner: Life on a Transport’, 6.

¹⁶⁵ Howe, Newton, and Heywood, ‘Local Volunteers at Sea. Experiences on Board the Greek: Letters from Ashton and Manchester Men’, 12.

¹⁶⁶ ‘Records of Service: 96th Regt and 2nd Btn Manchester Regiment, 1824-1914’, MR 1/1/2/6. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

¹⁶⁷ Jack Hardman. ‘With the 2nd Manchesters at the Battle of Dewetsdorp’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 9 June 1900, 9.

one of the officers, and the troops stood at attention in uniform. A bugle played as the corpse was slid into the ocean. He found the splash the body made when entering the water to be quite “sickening”.¹⁶⁸ After this tragic event, the men played music and did their best to appear cheerful and unaffected, but Turner was unconvinced by their demeanour. Privates Riley and Makin, and Sergeant Newton, 3rd VBMR, travelling together on the S.S. *Greek* in February 1900, also experienced a burial at sea. The deceased soldier, a Northampton, had also passed away from a heart condition. Sergeant Harry Newton, writing on 19 March 1900 from Arcadia Camp, close to Ladysmith, to the Sergeants’ Mess, remarked rather callously, maybe in an attempt to mask his true feelings, how “a corporal of the Northampton, one named Dove, had managed to die, and the unpleasant task was, of course, to bury him”.¹⁶⁹ In contrast, Private Makin, when he landed at Cape Town quickly posted a letter to his parents, wherein he stated that “as long as I live I shall never forget the burying at sea. I don’t want to see another”.¹⁷⁰ As on Turner’s voyage, a concert was held afterwards and Private Harry Riley theorised that its purpose was to “cheer up” the members of the Northampton.¹⁷¹

Miller touched briefly on deaths at sea, also noting how it was often the low point of a journey, but he did not share the Volunteers’ voices regarding this depressing matter. Much like the Manchester experience, he found that most deaths on ships were caused by either pneumonia, heart disease, or unidentified fevers. There were apparently also a few drownings, and one lethal assault with a knife.¹⁷² Miller did not mention if the Volunteers also organised concerts to help dispel the sad mood after a burial.

Apart from Private Parr’s account of the terrible fare on board ship, which was likely filtered through the nausea of his seasickness, many Manchesters appear to have been content, even pleased, by the quantity and quality of the food available. This is, much like Miller’s discussion of the topic,¹⁷³ in stark contrast to the decidedly negative portrayal of the shipboard fare found in Nasson’s discussion of the British experience during their long ocean voyage.¹⁷⁴ Private Makin even wrote that he was getting “as fat as a pig”.¹⁷⁵ Others thought that the food was

¹⁶⁸ Turner, ‘Letter from Private Alfred Turner: Life on a Transport’, 6.

¹⁶⁹ Newton, ‘The War. The Ashton Volunteers in Natal. Letter to the Sergeants’ Mess’, 6.

¹⁷⁰ Makin, ‘Letters from South Africa’, 6.

¹⁷¹ Riley, ‘With the Ashton Volunteers: The Voyage to South Africa. Letter from Private H. Riley’, 6.

¹⁷² Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 93.

¹⁷³ Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 91.

¹⁷⁴ Nasson, ‘Tommy Atkins in South Africa’, 124.

¹⁷⁵ Makin, ‘Letters from South Africa’, 6.

more than adequate, sometimes even excellent.¹⁷⁶ Sergeant Newton declared the food “fit for any prince to eat”.¹⁷⁷

Private Turner provided a detailed, but neutral description of ship fare. On a Sunday they had butter, tea, and ship’s biscuits for breakfast; for dinner they had cold corned beef, potatoes, and plum pudding; and for tea they had the same as breakfast. On a Monday they had bread, jam, and cocoa for breakfast; for dinner they had fresh boiled beef, soup, and potatoes; and for tea the same as breakfast. On a Tuesday they had bread, butter, and tea for breakfast; salt-pork, pea soup and potatoes for dinner; and for tea they had bread, cheese, and tea. The diet described above was then alternated continuously.¹⁷⁸ Admittedly, this fare does not sound too exciting, although it was not terrible either.

It appears soldiers were able to buy food and other items on board some ships to supplement their diets, but as noted, this was at steep prices. Private Parr reported lemonade selling at 2d., Eno’s fruit salts at 2s., and butter at a cost of 1s. 4d. a pound. He stated that those without much cash had a hard time of it.¹⁷⁹ No other source mentions a canteen, though, or possibly the writers did not think it worth mentioning. The quantity and quality of food also undoubtedly differed from ship to ship.

Access to alcohol, however, tended to be less favourable, at least from the perspective of the troops. There were strict limitations on alcohol on some ships, and Corporal Williams of the 2nd Battalion described the lack of beer as a “great drawback.”¹⁸⁰ Private Turner was more fortunate and reported that they got a pint of beer every second day and a drachm of rum every third night. They could buy an additional pint of beer on every other day.¹⁸¹ Lieutenant Howe of the Volunteers thought it a good policy that the men were only allowed one bottle of ale or other alcoholic beverages a day. He believed that controlling the level of alcohol consumption would help the men become fit for duty by the time they reached Cape Town.¹⁸² It appears that access to alcohol depended on the ship they were on and the decisions of their commanding officers. Still, it is evident that access to liquor was strictly controlled.

¹⁷⁶ Williams, ‘Letters from Stalybridge Men at the War’, 8; Hodkinson, ‘Interesting Letter from the Seat of War’, 6; Samuel Lees. ‘Letter from the Front’. *The North Cheshire Herald*, 7 July 1900, 5; R. Martin. ‘Letter from the Front’. *The Gorton Reporter*, 29 June 1901, 6.

¹⁷⁷ Howe, Newton, and Heywood, ‘Local Volunteers at Sea. Experiences on Board the Greek: Letters from Ashton and Manchester Men’, 12.

¹⁷⁸ Turner, ‘Letters from the Front: Letter from Private Alfred Turner. Life on a Transport’, 6.

¹⁷⁹ Parr, ‘En Route for the War: A Hyde Man’s Experience on a Transport’, 6.

¹⁸⁰ Williams, ‘Letters from Stalybridge Men at the War’, 8.

¹⁸¹ Turner, ‘Letters from the Front: Letter from Private Alfred Turner. Life on a Transport’, 6.

¹⁸² Howe, Newton, and Heywood, ‘Local Volunteers at Sea. Experiences on Board the Greek: Letters from Ashton and Manchester Men’, 12.

Some Manchesters appeared to have had a significant amount of leisure time and rather uneventful journeys¹⁸³, while others had more structured and demanding days. Private Martin of the 3rd VBMR stated he had a voyage of “23 days of idleness”.¹⁸⁴ However, an excessive amount of free time left some men plenty of time to dwell on those they left behind. Private Clarke admitted that “it’s a bit lonely sometimes on the mighty deep, when you are thinking of the happy moments of the past, of loved ones thousands of miles away”.¹⁸⁵ Conversely, Lieutenant Howe, once the weather permitted, worked his troops hard, starting with reveille at 06:00, guard at 07:00, breakfast at 08:00, fire drill at 10:30, dinner at 12:30, drill at regular intervals during the course of the day, tea at 17:00, last opportunity to post mail at 21:00, and lights out at 21:30.¹⁸⁶ This schedule, however, still seemed to allow for a few hours of leisure time and there were many ways in which the Manchesters could occupy themselves.

Some forms of leisure were simple affairs. One could stare out to sea, which was especially amusing for those who delighted in animal life. The men saw flying fish, sharks, whales, and dolphins.¹⁸⁷ Private Turner wrote, in a tone which clearly indicated that he was trying to describe a sea voyage to people who had never been on one, that “an attraction to those who have not been at sea before is the porpoises jumping out of the sea; they will follow a boat for miles”.¹⁸⁸ Sergeant Newton was impressed by the sight of an animal which resembled a jellyfish. Newton wrote admiringly that

...on one or two days we also caught sight of a fish named the nautilus. This is a shellfish which throws out pretty sails as it goes along the crests of the waves for all the world like a miniature frigate. It has also got the name of the Portuguese man-of-war.¹⁸⁹

Concerts and musical events featured prominently and were either structured or informal affairs. These events revealed a surprising amount of talent sometimes.¹⁹⁰ Private Turner, for instance, was delighted to hear some good voices in the evening concert he attended on 25 March 1900. This concert also included clog dancing and recitations, the latter presented by both privates and officers.¹⁹¹ There were also more informal affairs when the soldiers came together on deck for a “free and easy” during the evenings, which entailed singing, music, and even dancing.¹⁹² There were also days on which informal “sing-songs” were held.¹⁹³

¹⁸³ Newton, ‘The War.The Ashton Volunteers in Natal. Letter to the Sergeants’ Mess’, 6.

¹⁸⁴ Martin, ‘Letter from the Front’, 6.

¹⁸⁵ Clarke, ‘Letter from a Soldier: In a Collision at Sea’, 6.

¹⁸⁶ Howe, ‘Letter from Captain Howe to Colonel Eaton’, 5.

¹⁸⁷ Makin, ‘Letters from South Africa’, 6; Howe, Newton, and Heywood, ‘Local Volunteers at Sea. Experiences on Board the Greek: Letters from Ashton and Manchester Men’, 12.

¹⁸⁸ Turner, ‘Letter from Private Alfred Turner: Life on a Transport’, 6.

¹⁸⁹ Newton, ‘The War.The Ashton Volunteers in Natal. Letter to the Sergeants’ Mess’, 6.

¹⁹⁰ Newton, 6; Makin, ‘Letters from South Africa’, 6.

¹⁹¹ Turner, ‘Letters from the Front: Letter from Private Alfred Turner. Life on a Transport’, 6.

¹⁹² Parr, ‘En Route for the War: A Hyde Man’s Experience on a Transport’, 6.

¹⁹³ Howe, ‘Letter from Captain Howe to Colonel Eaton’, 5.

Sometimes not much organising was needed. Private Clarke reported a merry mood among the soldiers once they reached the tropics, with the men bursting spontaneously into song.¹⁹⁴

Crossing the equator was a time for revelry and ritual, and marked an important achievement for members of the group. Not many people in the late nineteenth century could claim that they had crossed the equator. Writing about events on 27 February 1900, Privates Riley and Makin, and Sergeant Newton described how the soldiers were initiated when they crossed the equator, which they called “Pancake Tuesday”. One of the officers dressed up as “Father Neptune” taking the role of the ancient Roman god of the seas. He then ordered the sailors to grab the soldiers closest to a large canvas bath that was erected for the occasion. The victims were lathered and then shaved with a wooden razor, after which they were tumbled into the bath. Many tried to hide in the rigging, but the sailors flushed them down with a hose pipe. Everyone was thoroughly wet and afterwards the day was occupied with sports such as tug of war, obstacle races and boxing. There was also an unusual sport called “mops”. One man was carried by another on his shoulders. The rider was armed with a mop daubed in either soot or flour, which were used as lances.¹⁹⁵ This type of event was clearly a boost to morale but was also an excuse to clean up soldiers who had spent weeks together in close confines with only a few opportunities to wash thoroughly. Miller also described this unique ritual, with some minor deviations from the Manchester experience, such as men being forced to swallow cold soup. In Miller’s sources, the Volunteers called it “crossing the line”. Miller’s research showed that this was a centuries old ritual practised by British sailors to initiate men who crossed the equator for the first time.¹⁹⁶

Richard Holmes provides an additional, more primal explanation for such rituals. He argues that soldiers, past and present, were members of a clearly defined group. Some psychologists, such as Arnold van Gennep, theorised that when a group experienced change, transition, or crisis, they would often respond with a ritual, which would then restore the group’s sense of balance, or help it deal with stress. Holmes explains that “inherently armies are deeply ritualistic organisations, and some of their ritual is devoted to the marking of important events in the individual’s service”.¹⁹⁷ Crossing the equator for the first time was considered an important achievement among both the sailors and the soldiers. It surely also helped develop stronger bonds between the men involved.

¹⁹⁴ Clarke, ‘Letter from a Soldier: In a Collision at Sea’, 6.

¹⁹⁵ Riley, ‘With the Ashton Volunteers: The Voyage to South Africa. Letter from Private H. Riley’, 6; Newton, ‘The War. The Ashton Volunteers in Natal. Letter to the Sergeants’ Mess’, 6.

¹⁹⁶ Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 90.

¹⁹⁷ Richard Holmes. *Firing Line*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987, 28.

With over hundreds or more men on a ship, conditions were obviously cramped and unhygienic. Private Parr, whose account served as an example earlier on, stated that where he slept, in the aft of the ship, there were 600 other men and that the smell was bad enough to keep one awake. This ship had close to 2 000 men on board.¹⁹⁸ Lance-Corporal Hodgkinson also did not appreciate the overcrowded conditions, although he was glad that the ship was at least clean.¹⁹⁹ Sergeant Newton, on a ship with about 800 men onboard, was also lodged in the aft, and he found this location unfortunate. Almost 200 men were crammed together, resulting in a “cruel stink”.²⁰⁰ To make matters worse, there was the near constant smell of engine oil combined with the noise of the propeller. In these crowded conditions, sleeping accommodation consisted primarily of hammocks.²⁰¹ The officers saw things differently, undoubtedly lodged in more comfortable quarters. Captain Howe, one of Sergeant Newton’s superiors in the 3rd VBMR, thought the aft position the best spot for the men, since it was furthest away from the swell of the water that often spilled over the bow.²⁰² Despite these unpleasant conditions as detailed by the Manchesters, it does not appear that it ruined the entire journey experience. Most merely reported it as if it was an unavoidable fact of life.

There were of course opportunities to bathe and wash clothes, but soldiers had to hurry, because if they went to the washhouse too late, they had to deal with a long queue. Private Turner, a reservist and a veteran of ocean voyages, knew he had to hurry, so he swiftly made his way to the washhouse the moment the bugle sounded at 06:30.²⁰³ Private Riley wrote that they had at least one day devoted to washing their clothes, an activity which made them sweat in the hot weather.²⁰⁴ Private Makin, evidently from a more privileged background, lamented the absence of a washerwoman, but noted that he “will manfully do without for the time being.”²⁰⁵ It is doubtful, though, if everyone had a chance to wash, or even wished to avail themselves of the facilities. One clothes washing day in a three week journey was likely not sufficient.

Training and other duties occurred on board ship if weather permitted. Captain Heywood and Lieutenant Howe, as soon as the terrible weather they had in the first week subsided,

¹⁹⁸ Parr, ‘En Route for the War: A Hyde Man’s Experience on a Transport’, 6.

¹⁹⁹ Hodgkinson, ‘Interesting Letter from the Seat of War’, 6.

²⁰⁰ Howe, Newton, and Heywood, ‘Local Volunteers at Sea. Experiences on Board the Greek: Letters from Ashton and Manchester Men’, 12.

²⁰¹ Clarke, ‘Letter from a Soldier: In a Collision at Sea’, 6.

²⁰² Howe, Newton, and Heywood, ‘Local Volunteers at Sea. Experiences on Board the Greek: Letters from Ashton and Manchester Men’, 12.

²⁰³ Turner, ‘Letter from Private Alfred Turner: Life on a Transport’, 6.

²⁰⁴ Riley, ‘With the Ashton Volunteers: The Voyage to South Africa. Letter from Private H. Riley’, 6.

²⁰⁵ Makin, ‘Letters from South Africa’, 6.

immediately ordered parades, physical drills, shooting practice, and church services.²⁰⁶ On 16 March 1900 the writer of the regimental records of service for the 2nd Battalion noted that the soldiers on board the S.S. *Bavarian* were engaged in floating target practice and physical drill. They also had firing exercises, a lecture on how to do outpost and field duties, and trained in first aid.²⁰⁷ Private Parr noted that there were physical drills at 8 a.m., 10 a.m. and 3 p.m.²⁰⁸ There were also fire drills, but for Private Turner, these drills left him feeling more anxious than ever before, because it made him realise how incredibly vulnerable they were if a serious fire occurred.²⁰⁹ Lastly, church services seemed to have been part of a soldier's duty, since the sources implied that attendance was compulsory. Howe described the church service as a 30-minute affair where one of the senior subalterns read a suitable passage and then the men sung a few hymns.²¹⁰ None of the Manchesters mentioned any lectures about the racial inferiority of the Boers, which was an aspect Nasson emphasised in his chapter about the British soldiers' experiences.²¹¹ This does not mean, though, that it did not occur, but if it did, the Manchesters did not deem it interesting enough to write about.

2.9 CONCLUSION

Send-offs for soldiers bound to the South African War is not an unexplored aspect of history, but a deeper, more systematic approach to the topic based on the Manchester Regiment provides additional details and insights, while strengthening existing findings. There were two types of send-offs: a private limited event and a public event. The latter type has been focused on by several historians, but the private event seemed to have escaped notice. Private events were organised by a variety of groups, ranging from family to work colleagues. They were primarily aimed at saying farewell, although a few also had patriotic undertones, depending on who arranged it. These events were often merry affairs, featuring music, singing, and dancing. In fact, singing was a popular form of entertainment, and did not only feature patriotic or militaristic songs, but other songs too. Speeches were inevitable. Most were heartfelt farewells, but many also contained patriotic elements, and usually praised the soldier for doing his duty and defending the nation. All of these private events involved gifts, ranging from simple articles such as clothing articles, almost always some form of tobacco product, to more expensive items such as a gold-plated pen. The Manchesters did not write about these events,

²⁰⁶ Howe, Newton, and Heywood, 'Local Volunteers at Sea. Experiences on Board the Greek: Letters from Ashton and Manchester Men', 12; Howe, 'Letter from Captain Howe to Colonel Eaton', 5.

²⁰⁷ 'Records of Service: 2nd Btn Manchester Regiment', 84.

²⁰⁸ Parr, 'En Route for the War: A Hyde Man's Experience on a Transport', 6.

²⁰⁹ Turner, 'Letters from the Front: Letter from Private Alfred Turner. Life on a Transport', 6.

²¹⁰ Howe, Newton, and Heywood, 'Local Volunteers at Sea. Experiences on Board the Greek: Letters from Ashton and Manchester Men', 12.

²¹¹ Nasson, 'Tommy Atkins in South Africa', 124.

but it is not hard to imagine that for most these private send-offs were memorable and emotional occasions.

Public send-offs both supplement and reveal additional insights when approached more systematically. Before the public send-off, though, the soldiers received their equipment and kit, which featured over 50 items, which is not an aspect explored in much detail in other histories. On the day of their departure, various sized crowds, sometimes in the thousands, lined the streets to the station, or a smaller crowd waited at the station. They were normally very spirited and excited. There was usually some cheering, and some even sang patriotic songs. There were also several incidents where the crowds had to be controlled by a police force, and not always successfully. When possible, the departing men looked smart in their uniforms and were accompanied by a marching band, which delighted the Mancunians in an era of enhanced militarism. A small detail which is not emphasised in other studies, is that foul weather did not inhibit the crowds much. Another important point is that these public send-offs occurred throughout the war, even as late as March 1902. In addition, although patriotism certainly played a role in motivating the crowds, some descriptions also hint that the send-offs were a convenient excuse to engage in merrymaking. Another aspect somewhat overlooked is that these send-offs included highly emotional farewells from loved ones, and thus between all the excitement, sad scenes were playing out. Again, the Manchesters wrote almost nothing about how they felt, still, it must have been highly memorable, exciting, gratifying, and sometimes even depressing.

As memorable as the send-offs undoubtedly were, the long voyage to South Africa was the beginning of the Manchesters' 'adventure' and is often covered in some detail by other historians. Like Miller's more systematic study of the Volunteers' experiences at sea, this chapter shows that the journey was mostly similar for both regulars and auxiliaries. A soldier's experience was largely dependent on the ship he found himself on. One soldier, at the least, seemed to have had a poor experience where food was concerned, but many others reported contentment, if not outright pleasure. Apart from a few accidents, illnesses, seasickness, rough weather, and training, the experience of the soldiers on their journey appears to have been uneventful and largely pleasant, albeit three weeks or more in very cramped and smelly confines. On most ships the passengers amused themselves with concerts and games. The Manchesters also read, played cards, or simply stared out to sea, and if lucky, observed various oceanic creatures, such as cavorting dolphins. For some, there was even a special ritual when they crossed the equator. Only rarely does one encounter a soldier who complained about boredom, although this is by no means proof that boredom was not a prominent feature of this experience, but they chose not to write about it. For many the journey

to South Africa was memorable and did not appear to elicit many negative comments. Indeed, this was arguably the easiest part of the war.

3. IN A STRANGE LAND

The landscape, weather, animals, and people

Away over the Basuto mountains there are a few faint streaks of light in the sky, and then the blood-red sun swings up and the day dawns like the ripening of apples. With the dawn the advance guard breaks up like a swarm of ants when the precocious schoolboy heaves a stone among them. Away they go, dotting the yellow veldt, skirting kopjes, and searching dongas; at any moment liable to be swept into eternity by the spiteful bullet of the sniper.¹

One of the reasons the South African War was such a challenging campaign for the British Army and its soldiers was the nature of the land and its people. The land itself was unlike Britain's largely domesticated and increasingly urbanised environment. As for the people, South Africa was far more multicultural than Britain, and offered a mix of familiar English-speaking whites and other European nationalities, and then the 'exotic' Africans, who were mostly dismissed as 'primitive' and largely inconsequential. The most important people from the perspective of the Manchesters, though, were the enemy. And they were indeed strange people, who were frustratingly difficult to fight. The Manchesters' perceptions of South Africa and its people are important, because this underpinned virtually every aspect of their wartime experiences. This chapter's broad aim is to explore how the men perceived and experienced the country they fought in by using the thematic, systematic approach. This chapter reveals that the Manchesters had a dichotomous perspective about the land, animals, and the people. They often felt both an attraction and a dislike for the country and its denizens, and their perspective was usually shaped by the actions of the people they interacted with, including the enemy.

The chapter is divided into two broad themes: the land and the people. The land is then subdivided into the landscape which includes the natural and urban terrain; followed by the weather which is an aspect little explored in the secondary sources; and finally, the animals where the existence of pets is a small but notable contribution to historians' existing knowledge of the British soldiers' experience. The people section has four subdivisions: white civilians including various nationalities, although the Boer civilians did enjoy most of the Manchesters' attention; the Boer combatants, who drew the bulk of the soldiers' comments; followed by their

¹ W.M. Anderson. 'The Day's March: Through Dust and Toil and Hunger after de Wet'. *Daily Mail*, 1 May 1901.

perspectives of Africans, which is also quite extensive; and lastly there is a focused section on women, who although a relatively rare sight for the Manchesters due to their frontline duties and regular movements, certainly drew some attention, especially from the loquacious and extremely social Captain Trueman of the 2nd Manchesters.

3.1 LANDSCAPE

The Manchesters often commented on the landscape, most notably the cities and towns they encountered, since most of them were from an urban environment. Even though they came from a highly developed urban landscape, their views about South Africa's smaller urban enclaves were mostly positive. Their favourable perceptions of South Africa's cities and towns might have been strongly influenced by the fact that it was not the busy, highly developed and industrialised urban settings they were used to. It is also possible that some Manchesters were influenced by romanticised notions about the rural countryside. Susan Steinbach explained that there was an influential school of thought in Victorian society which "rejected urbanity and industrialization as false and ugly and began to identify the 'true' Britain as rural, characterised by pastures and fields, folk music, and half-timbered pubs".² Nasson observed the same phenomenon at work in pro-Boer or anti-war sentiments in Britain, where the Boers of the Free State were admired for their rustic, wholesome lifestyle, much like the English yeoman. As a result, Bloemfontein was favourably portrayed for its "verdant charm".³

The Manchesters, whether inspired by romanticised notions of rural life or purely aesthetic taste, regarded South Africa's larger urban areas such as Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, and Bloemfontein with favour. Volunteer Private Emmott arrived on 4 June 1900 at Port Elizabeth, and described that "it is a very nice-looking town, the streets are well laid out, and there are some fine buildings. It also seems to be very clean".⁴ Likewise, Private Turner thought Bloemfontein a "beautiful place",⁵ with numerous large buildings. For some, Cape Town was as close to heaven on earth as could be. Private Mannion, writing on 10 February 1900 from Simonstown, focused more on the socio-economic characteristics, and thought that Cape Town was "a very rich place; everyone well off, and no poor people; 20s. a day in the pit; £5 a week for anything nearly; board and lodgings 25s. a week. Have been offered a job several times".⁶ It seems Mannion, a reservist, was tasked with guarding prisoners in Simonstown, since the 1st Battalion was still besieged in Ladysmith. Nevertheless, his extended stay close

² Steinbach, *Understanding the Victorians*, 32.

³ Nasson, *The War for South Africa [the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902]*, 277.

⁴ William Emmott. 'Diary, Extracts from the Diary of Private William Emmott, Oldham Active Service Section. May to June 1900', MR 1/3/2/2. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

⁵ Alfred Turner. 'Letter from Alfred Turner'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 23 June 1900, 6.

⁶ T. Mannion. 'Interesting Impression of Cape Town'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 24 March 1900, 6.

to Cape Town convinced him that he would not return home to England after the war, except to marry.

The smaller towns⁷ were described in similarly glowing terms. Volunteer Private Andrew thought Ermelo was a “beautiful town”.⁸ Lieutenant Pierce expressed fondness for Hammonia, describing it as a pretty town with numerous trees and the Basotho hills as a backdrop.⁹ Captain Trueman thought Dewetsdorp a “very pretty place, and [we] saw all the ‘Vrows’ [sic] and their daughters sitting outside the houses, without any expression on their faces”.¹⁰ It seems the cold reception did not affect Trueman’s appreciation of the town’s charms. Private Scott, in the eastern Transvaal, thought the little town of Kruger’s Post “a very nice little village”.¹¹

⁷ It is worth pointing out that the term “village” is not commonly used in South Africa, even though a place such as Hammonia would have been considered a village in England. However, contemporaries, just like modern South Africans still do today, did not often use the word “village” to describe these small settlements. It appears most Manchesters quickly adopted the local terminology.

⁸ F.W. Andrew. ‘Letters from the Front: The Manchester Volunteers at the Front’. *The Manchester Evening News*, 10 October 1900, 5.

⁹ W.K. Pierce. ‘Letter, Lieutenant W K Pierce, Ficksburg, Describing the March from Senekal; Setting up Camp; Recent Skirmishes. 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment’, 13 June 1900. MR 1/16/5/7. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

¹⁰ Charles Hamilton Trueman. ‘Correspondence, Bound Volume of Transcripts of Letters and Diary Entries from Captain Charles Hamilton Trueman, 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, Describing His Time and Service in South Africa during the South African (Boer) War. The Volume Also Contains Photocopied Newscuttings Relating to John Francis William Fitzgerald to Whom the Volume Belonged and Who Later Willed It to the Depositor. A Newscutting Relating to the Death of a Pte Lionel Parminter Is Pasted onto the End Papers, 1900-1901’, MR 4/16/75. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre, 13.

¹¹ W. Scott. ‘Letters from the Front’. *The Gorton Reporter*, 19 January 1901, 3.



Photo 1: Harrismith, where the 2nd Manchesters spent a significant amount of time during the course of the war. Note the rows of white tents a few hundred metres outside the town, where the rank-and-file would have slept.

Source: 'Photograph Album, 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, Harrismith, Liddles Farm, 1901-1902', MR 3/23/69. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

Miller found that the Volunteers he studied had mostly negative opinions about South African towns, such as Kroonstad being described as a “foul and ill-smelling place”.¹² It is uncertain why this would be, except that Miller’s sources covered different locations and more importantly, the Manchester sources were unusually positive while Miller’s sources were unusually negative. This was a huge war with roughly 450 000 British and colonial soldiers, and differences of opinion should not be surprising, although it is a strange coincidence to have two collections of sources that are so opposite. The fact that Miller’s sources were all Volunteers is not an entirely persuasive explanation, since the Manchester sources also included Volunteers, and they were positive about the towns. It is possible that since most Manchesters’ originated from a large urban area, they were more appreciative of the rustic appearance of South African towns, and were maybe influenced to a stronger degree by the Victorian admiration of the rural countryside.

¹² Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 136.

The natural landscape was also commented on, usually in positive terms or even awe, especially the hills and mountains. Britain certainly had its fair share of picturesque terrain, but South Africa was a new, exotic locale. Since Table Mountain is such an iconic natural feature of South Africa's landscape, it is fitting to begin there. It did not disappoint, and Volunteer Sergeant Newton was delighted that Table Mountain in Cape Town lived up to its name, and he confirmed to his readers that it was indeed "as flat as a billiard table".¹³ The hills and mountains of South Africa, especially the Drakensberg, were an impressive sight. Private Parr, on his way to the Tugela front by train, marvelled at the impressive hilltop scenery, and explained how "the trains goes [sic] up hills you would think impossible".¹⁴ Volunteer Corporal Lees, when he made his way through Natal to the 1st Manchesters in March 1900, thought that "South Africa is a splendid country for scenery".¹⁵ Volunteer Private Chadderton was awestruck by the size of the hills in Natal, particularly around the site of the Battle of Spioenkop,¹⁶ which the 1st Battalion was allowed to visit as 'tourists' a few weeks after their trials at Ladysmith, noting "there are some of the biggest hills around here that I have ever seen".¹⁷

The picturesque hills and mountains, though, were also an obstacle to overcome, and a boon to the enemy. Walter Hunt, when he saw Spioenkop and Vaalkrans, wrote "it is a miracle how those brave fellows [Buller's forces] got on the top. We little knew when we heard Buller's guns in Ladysmith that he had such obstacles to climb".¹⁸ Private Turner, travelling with the 2nd Manchesters from Port Elizabeth to the Free State by train in April 1900, thought the landscape "beautiful", but at the same time, "the hills make the place look treacherous".¹⁹ He was uncomfortably reminded of how the terrain gave the Boers tactical advantages. This was, in fact, a hostile landscape in both mind and reality, and is evident in the Manchesters' writings. This links to Elizabeth Rawlinson-Mills argument that during the South African War, a symbiotic association existed between the enemy and the terrain in the minds of both the British soldiers and the public back home.²⁰

¹³ Harry Newton. 'The War: The Ashton Volunteers in Natal. Letter to the Sergeants' Mess'. *The Stalybridge Reporter*, 21 April 1900, 6.

¹⁴ E. Parr. 'A Hyde Man's Experience: The Occupation of a Stretcher Bearer'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 27 January 1900, 5.

¹⁵ Samuel Lees. 'Letter from Corporal Lees, of Ashton'. *The Stalybridge Reporter*, 28 April 1900, 6.

¹⁶ Some secondary and contemporary British sources spell this as two words, but I use the Afrikaans spelling, which is more correct.

¹⁷ George Chadderton. 'An Ashton Volunteer's Letter to the Ashton P.S.A. Society'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 23 June 1900, 6.

¹⁸ Walter Hunt. 'Letter from a Hooley Hill Lad in South Africa'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 23 June 1900, 6.

¹⁹ Alfred Turner. 'Another Letter from Private A. Turner'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 19 May 1900, 6.

²⁰ Elizabeth Rawlinson-Mills. "'That Far-off Southern Tomb": Visions and Versions of South Africa in British Newspaper Poetry of the 1899-1902 South African War'. In *Crossing Borders in Victorian Travel: Spaces, Nations and Empires*, edited by Barbara Franchi and Elvan Mutlu, 106–31. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018, 117–20.

The Free State's landscape provoked mixed feelings in Captain Trueman of the 2nd Battalion, who spent much of the war in that theatre. Trueman, on the train in April 1900 on the way to the front, stopped at a place he called Sand Flats, which he thought an "awfully pretty place" and where he saw an exceptionally beautiful sunset.²¹ However, he largely disliked the Free State, with its "interminable veldt and kopjes, the only difference being that the kopjes are more numerous in some places than others".²² In July 1900, though, Trueman saw a hill at Willow Farm, near Hammonia, which he approved of: "There is a huge kopje [hill] overlooking the farm, which is one of the best I have seen, as it has quite a lot of trees about it and a row of Eucalyptus trees which are ripping [fantastic]".²³

The Manchesters adopted various Afrikaans/Dutch words for both the landscape and the people, such as *kopje* (a hill), *donga* (a dry gully formed by water erosion) and *kloof* (a sheer-sided narrow valley, a gorge in English), and more derogatory terms for Africans, which will be explored later. Elizabeth Rawlinson-Mills observed that British soldiers' and poets often used Afrikaans/Dutch words in their writings about the landscape. Rawlinson-Mills speculated that these foreign words were an effective literary device to emphasise the strangeness, or alienness, of the landscape the soldiers campaigned in.²⁴

The 1st Battalion, who operated largely in the eastern Transvaal when the war began to enter its guerrilla phase, continued to enjoy the landscape, as it was arguably as varied and picturesque as Natal. Private Gregory, with Buller's forces as they marched up from Natal in the eastern Transvaal, was impressed with the economic potential of the land around Zandspruit. He thought the land there much better than Natal, because it had sufficient water and the soil seemed ideal for farming.²⁵ Private Andrew thoroughly appreciated the mountainous terrain and forested valleys as they marched to Helvetia in September 1900. Roughly 32 km from Lydenburg Andrew saw "a beautiful valley close by which reminds one of the glens of the Isle of Man, and there are plenty of strange flowers about".²⁶ There is a clear hint of homesickness in Andrew's observation, while he also recognises the exoticness of the landscape. Miller, in relation to the Volunteers, found similar comparisons to Britain in his sources, although he theorised this was a psychological method to reduce concerns and to justify their actions back home, as he argues "familiarity reinforced imperial connection. One

²¹ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 4.

²² Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 30.

²³ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 34.

²⁴ Rawlinson-Mills, "'That Far-off Southern Tomb': Visions and Versions of South Africa in British Newspaper Poetry of the 1899-1902 South African War', 126.

²⁵ W.F. Gregory. 'The South African War. Interesting Letter from a Romiley Gentleman'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 1 September 1900, 5.

²⁶ F.W. Andrew. 'Letters from the Front: With the Manchester Volunteers. An Interesting Diary'. *The Manchester Evening News*, 14 November 1900, 5.

was not fighting a war on foreign soil but was temporarily transported back to the British Isles”.²⁷ The Manchesters’ statements do not fit easily into this theory, though, because they did not use the landscape to justify their reasons for fighting, and apart from the partial comparison to the Isle of Man, did not draw direct comparisons of the South African landscape to Britain.

Although many men had positive perceptions of the landscape, certain factors, such as the stresses of war, homesickness, and frustration at a seemingly unending conflict, could poison their perceptions. Sergeant Hall, who was trapped in the siege of Ladysmith, did not mince words when he wrote to his wife in March 1900 that South Africa “is an awful place”²⁸ and he would not choose to settle there. Given the trials he endured at Ladysmith, his negative view is understandable. Captain Paton, thoroughly tired and frustrated of the war, wrote to a comrade on 13 September 1900, from Dalmanutha, that “I am heartily sick of this beastly country”.²⁹

The Manchesters, in general, were mostly positive about the landscape, especially the small towns and the hills and mountains, despite the advantages it gave to the enemy. Some, though, found the Free State monotonous, while others began to tire of South Africa as the war continued. With regard to the weather, though, the Manchesters were almost universally negative about it.

3.2 WEATHER

The South African weather generated a substantial amount of commentary. On reflection, this is not surprising, since the weather had an enormous impact on the Manchesters’ physical and emotional comfort. Since both battalions spent a large proportion of the war on the frontlines, either fighting the Boers, pursuing them, or guarding strategic positions, the men were often exposed to the elements. The weather was thus more than just small talk to them, but a frequent source of real misery and discomfort, which will be seen again in subsequent chapters. There is one point of caution, though: the Manchesters wrote very little about good weather, possibly because it made for uninteresting reading. The weather, unpleasant though it was on numerous occasions, was probably more often unremarkable and even enjoyable

²⁷ Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 134–35.

²⁸ Tom Hall. ‘Letters from Ladysmith’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 7 April 1900, 6.

²⁹ Donald Paton. ‘Letter, Captain Paton, Dalmanutha, Describing the Move of Headquarters and 5 Companies to Helvetia; the Officers’ Occupation of the Station Master’s House; the Prospect of Being Sent to Garrison Ladysmith; Recent Fighting – Relatively Small Losses since the Beginning of the Year; Battle on 27 August; Battalion’s Lack of Popularity with Brigadier General Kitchener; Forthcoming March to Machadadorp and Schoemans Kloof. 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment’, 13 September 1900. MR 1/16/5/16. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

sometimes. Still, Volunteer Private Walter Hawkins stated it well when he wrote to his parents from Surprise Hill, Natal, on 27 April 1900: “the weather (never failing subject) is very hot through the day, but gets exceedingly cold at night”.³⁰

Weather phenomena such as dust storms, thunderstorms, heavy rain, and the occasional hail storm made life more unpleasant for soldiers operating in the field, especially when no cover was available. For all the discomfort these events caused, a few men did marvel at nature’s workings. The sight of a thunderstorm building up and then unleashing its fury could be an impressive sight. Sergeant Hobson, writing on 23 September 1901 from Lydenburg, was “very glad to say the rainy season has commenced here and there is some [sic] splendid storms”.³¹ However, in the same breath he reminded his reader that the lightning was frightening and dangerous, and claimed that it had already killed several men in the hills. In addition, even though he looked forward to the rainy summer season, he knew that with the rain and heat would come unhygienic conditions conducive to the spread of diseases. Thus, even for one who could see the beauty in these weather phenomena, the danger and discomfort they posed were acknowledged. This confirms Rawlinson-Mills’ finding that some soldiers and the British public equated South Africa’s geography and climate with disease, as seen in poems published in the press during the war.³²

For some, a strange and unpleasant phenomenon was dust storms. Private Andrew of the 1st VBMR recounts how a “fearful dust storm”³³ in August 1900, somewhere between Graskop and Machadodorp (now eNtokozweni), reduced their day’s march to a crawl of only five or six miles. The 2nd Manchesters endured a day-long dust storm near the Mill River, north of Harrismith in August 1900, which covered everything outside and inside the tents with a thick layer of dust.³⁴ These were relatively uncommon, though.

Heavy rains were another source of discomfort and decidedly more common. Both battalions served in the wetter, eastern third of South Africa, which was a summer rainfall region, most often taking the form of a thunderstorm in the late afternoon or evening, but there were occasions where rain fell more or less continuously for much of the day, or even over several days. Private Andrew did not enjoy it. Near the Crocodile River valley in October 1900, they were caught by a thunderstorm at night, followed by heavy rains the next day. It might have

³⁰ Walter Hawkins. ‘Letter from a Dukinfield Soldier’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 2 June 1900, 8.

³¹ Williams Hobson. ‘Personal Papers, 7113 Sergeant William Hobson, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters [to His Brother] about the Boer War (with Transcripts), Service Programs, 1901-1988’, MR 3/17/104. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

³² Rawlinson-Mills, “‘That Far-off Southern Tomb’: Visions and Versions of South Africa in British Newspaper Poetry of the 1899-1902 South African War’, 106–11.

³³ Andrew, ‘Letters from the Front: The Manchester Volunteers at the Front’, 5.

³⁴ Charles Reay. ‘The Second Manchesters in South Africa: Hard Work and Long Marches’. *Manchester Evening Chronicle*, 3 December 1900.

been more bearable if the officers did not insist on the troops assembling for “stand-to” just before dawn. As a result, they stood at attention for nearly half-an-hour in pouring cold rain.³⁵ For Private Gregory, 25 July 1900 was a “most miserable, raw, bleak day”³⁶ as rain and heavy mist assailed them. Marching in the rain was equally dismal, as the 2nd Battalion experienced in late August 1900 as they crossed the Klip River, which incidentally made the crossing difficult, if not outright hazardous, and added hours to their march.³⁷ Not only that, but heavy rains could cause damage to fortifications and camps. On 3 October 1900, a thunderstorm, followed by heavy rain from morning to night, flooded the 1st Battalion’s shelters. It is not clear where exactly, though, since the men were stationed in sections at Witklip, Badfontein, and Schoemanskloof. A few months later another bout of heavy rain on 20 and 21 December 1900 caused parts of a fort the 1st Battalion was working on to collapse. Again, the location is not stipulated, but they were stationed at several points on the road between Lydenburg and Schoemanskloof.³⁸

If heavy rain was not unpleasant enough, thunderstorms could be a frightening experience as a massive amount of water fell in a short time and was often accompanied by lightning. While on outpost duty in Natal in December 1899, Private Parr was caught in the open in a thunderstorm, where it “poured down in torrents, thundered and lightened [sic] terribly”.³⁹ Lance-Corporal Hodkinson, 2nd Battalion, reported a thunderstorm so fierce that it washed the men out of their trenches at Hansens Hoek in April 1900.⁴⁰ The officers were not immune to these storms. Captain Trueman found himself in “a dickens of a thunderstorm”⁴¹ on 17 April 1900, near Rosendale. Due to the reduction of visibility, he got lost, roaming the veld in the dark and rain for nearly six hours with his horse exhausted, before finding the 2nd Battalion camp.

Sometimes there were hailstorms, which was an exceptional experience for men unused to it. Private Fisher was caught near Ladysmith in

...a terrible hail storm ... the worst I have seen ... [the hail] killed a lot of cattle ... the cavalry horses broke loose and ran in all directions ... it was not snow, but great big lumps of ice, five and six ounces in weight each ... I am telling you the truth”.⁴²

In fact, he insisted several times in his letter that he was not exaggerating, because he knew his audience in England would have difficulty imagining a hailstorm of that magnitude. While

³⁵ Andrew, ‘Letters from the Front: With the Manchester Volunteers. An Interesting Diary’, 5.

³⁶ Gregory, ‘The South African War. Interesting Letter from a Romiley Gentleman’, 5.

³⁷ Reay, ‘The Second Manchesters in South Africa: Hard Work and Long Marches’.

³⁸ ‘Records of Service, 63rd and 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, 1758-1910’, MR 1/1/2/3. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

³⁹ Parr, ‘A Hyde Man’s Experience: The Occupation of a Stretcher Bearer’, 5.

⁴⁰ A. Hodkinson. ‘Interesting Letter from the Seat of War’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 2 June 1900, 6.

⁴¹ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 6.

⁴² Jack Fisher. ‘With the Ladysmith Relief Column’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 21 April 1900, 6.

marching to Tweefontein in November 1900, the 1st Battalion was hit again. Captain Lupton, a Volunteers officer, reported hailstones the size of pigeon eggs, and sometimes larger. It caused the horses to stampede, and one can easily imagine the chaos as men chased after them while being pelted by the hail and icy rain in the dark. Lupton claimed that they had never experienced hail of this severity before.⁴³

The extreme, unpredictable, and contradictory nature of the weather was another aspect the soldiers commented on. Private Little succinctly summed up campaigning in Natal in November 1899 as “it is hot, then it is raining in torrents”.⁴⁴ To make matters worse, Little reported that most in the 1st Battalion only had one set of clothing. Private Parr, writing from Natal about his experiences in December 1899, thought the heat “horrible”. Most of them developed a tan as “brown as berries” on their arms, necks, and faces.⁴⁵ Private Barron, a 1st Battalion reservist temporarily attached with the Natal Field Force trying to relieve Ladysmith, wrote to his friends on 7 February 1900 that “it is no joke digging trenches all day at 115 [46°C] in the shade, and then sleep in them at night - and there is a dew falls [sic] at night that would kill a camel”.⁴⁶ Private Andrew found the temperature extremes particularly irksome. Marching in the rolling country near Lake Chrissie in the eastern Transvaal during August 1900, he considered some evenings to be as cold as the coldest days in the depths of English winter. Their blankets would frost over and the water in their bottles turned to ice. The fact that they marched without their tents made the cold sting even more. In contrast, if the day proved windless, it could be as warm as a summer’s day. A few weeks later they were close to Belfast, one of South Africa’s coldest regions, and again the contrast of icy cold and windy evenings, juxtaposed with “boiling hot” afternoons, indicated great discomfort.⁴⁷ Barely a month later, he described “fearful heat during the day, and the biting cold at night”⁴⁸ near Dalmanutha.

It was the cold, though, that proved exceptionally challenging, and even a source of occasional puzzlement. Captain Trueman, writing in May 1900 near Thaba ‘Nchu, was under the impression that “the further North you went the colder it got, and another funny thing is, it is warmer on the top of a hill than on the plain”.⁴⁹ Most soldiers, though, did not waste their time on thoughts about how and why the cold came, and just tried their best to endure it, often with little to no cover. Writing on 7 June 1901 at Lydenburg, Sergeant Hobson described how the

⁴³ P. Lupton. ‘Diary, Captain P. Lupton, Volunteer Company, 2nd Battalion, 1901-1902’, MR 1/3/2/3, Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

⁴⁴ M. Little. ‘An Ashtonian at Elands Laagte: Sad Death of Poor Old Ned Dewhurst’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 2 December 1899, 5.

⁴⁵ Parr, ‘A Hyde Man’s Experience: The Occupation of a Stretcher Bearer’, 5.

⁴⁶ William Barron. ‘Letter from a Dukinfield Soldier in Natal: Still Living and like to Remain So’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 10 March 1900, 6.

⁴⁷ Andrew, ‘Letters from the Front: The Manchester Volunteers at the Front’, 5.

⁴⁸ Andrew, ‘Letters from the Front: With the Manchester Volunteers. An Interesting Diary’, 5.

⁴⁹ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 18.

nights turned very cold and frosty, with heavy hoarfrost almost an inch thick, and ice covering any exposed water. The rising of the sun was then gladly welcomed.⁵⁰ Private Gregory spent a miserable evening on piquet duty on 22 July 1900 near Zandspruit, with no blankets and a “keen, raw wind”⁵¹ interspersed with freezing sleet. The fact that the men often had to sleep in the open, as Private Brown did, with little cover besides sharing one blanket with several other men, with rain to add further insult to injury,⁵² certainly added to their miseries. For some, the cold was detestable, such as Captain Paton at Dalmanutha in September 1900, “hating the cold at nights up here”.⁵³ Writing on 13 June 1900, Lieutenant Pierce complained that the cold evenings made outpost duties extremely unpleasant.⁵⁴ Junior officers in the field with their men were thus not spared the cold. Sometimes even the senior officers, such as Lieutenant-Colonel (Lt Col) Charles Reay, commanding the 2nd Battalion, suffered the cold. Writing to a friend on 11 July 1900 from Hammonia, Reay mentioned the cold nights and how unpleasant it made standing to arms early in the morning.⁵⁵

To better appreciate how the weather extremes impacted the soldiers, the following table drawn from the 1st Battalion’s staff diary covered a few weeks of spring/summer weather events recorded from the end of October 1899 to January 1900, in and around Ladysmith. This is a complete list from the diary, so these events must have stood out enough to warrant mention. There were undoubtedly many more hot and rainy days in the period, but these were not considered remarkable enough to record:

⁵⁰ Hobson, ‘Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother’.

⁵¹ Gregory, ‘The South African War. Interesting Letter from a Romiley Gentleman’, 5.

⁵² W. Brown. ‘Serving with the Field Forces’. *The Gorton Reporter*, 30 November 1901, 5.

⁵³ Paton, ‘Letter from Dalmanutha’, 13 September 1900, 6.

⁵⁴ Pierce, ‘Letter Describing the March from Senekal’, 13 June 1900, 4.

⁵⁵ Charles Reay. ‘Letter, Lieutenant Colonel Reay, Hammonia, Describing Recent Boer Attacks; Officer’s Postings; the Cold Weather. 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment’, 11 July 1900. MR 1/16/5/10. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

DATE	WEATHER EVENT
25 Oct 1899	Heavy rain during the evening, drenching the troops.
3 Nov 1899	Very hot.
4 Nov 1899	“Very heavy thunderstorm” during the evening.
9 Nov 1899	“Very hot and clear”.
10 Nov 1899	Heavy rain and hailstorm.
16 Nov 1899	Countryside becoming dry very quickly.
21 Nov 1899	Very hot, “97°F [36°C] in the shade”.
9 Jan 1900	Heavy rain for a few days; “camp is in a fearful wet state”.
27 Jan 1900	“Tremendous storm” that blew away several tents and caused “considerable damage”.

Table 1: A sample of weather events recorded by the 1st Battalion’s staff diary while in Ladysmith.
Source: ‘Boer War: Imposition and Administration of Martial Law: Ladysmith Staff Diary during Siege’, 28 February 1900, WO 32/8136, The National Archives, Kew.

The weather was clearly challenging for the Manchesters, especially because they had to spend numerous days in it without much shelter, if any. The rain was unwelcome, while the cold was even worse. The men also found the temperature extremes, especially in winter, uncomfortable; hot during the day and cold at night. The country’s animals, at least, did not bother them as much, and were sometimes a welcome distraction, or a meal.

3.3 ANIMALS

Some soldiers were keen observers of the local wildlife. The rich birdlife proved a welcome distraction for some. Private Andrew, marching near Lake Chrissie in August 1900, paid special attention to the birds and their sounds. He found them “peculiar” and because he was unfamiliar with the local names for the birds, he gave his own names based on the noises they made, such as “cat” bird and “bullet” bird.⁵⁶ Hares were a common sight, and sometimes found themselves caught in the wake of a marching column, a few unlucky ones becoming dinner after a sharp chase by a few of the more alert and agile soldiers.⁵⁷ In May 1900, Captain Trueman observed an abundance of hares and sand grouse, but they were not allowed to shoot them close to camp. Larger fauna, though, were a rare sight in the eastern Free State, except around Reddersburg, where Trueman saw some buck. In September 1900 he also saw

⁵⁶ Andrew, ‘Letters from the Front: With the Manchester Volunteers. An Interesting Diary’, 5.

⁵⁷ Andrew, ‘Letters from the Front: The Manchester Volunteers at the Front’, 5.

a few Gemsbok and Blesbok, two types of relatively large antelope. At this point, though, no hunting, not even when they were far enough outside of camp, was permitted. He speculated that some Boers preserved these antelope on their farms.⁵⁸ Trueman's disappointment at the paucity of game had a simple and tragic explanation. By the time the war broke out in 1899, most large fauna was already decimated by hunting.⁵⁹ Still, a few soldiers enjoyed glimpses of the wildlife, even if it was only small animals or birds, while others like Trueman observed the wildlife too, but with an eye to hunting, which he was unable to do at that point due to circumstances and regulations.

Eventually, the officers in the renamed Free State were allowed to hunt again. Captain Trueman reported on 4 March 1901, near Ficksburg, how two of his colleagues, Thornycroft and Barrington, went out for a two-day hunting trip. The catch, though, was rather disappointing. They only got one Klipspringer (a small type of antelope), two snakes (one a dreaded Puffadder - a common venomous species), and one partridge. They blamed the poor catch on a large celebration held by the "natives", which supposedly scared the buck away.⁶⁰ More likely there was not much game to begin with, but the Africans were a convenient scapegoat. There are several photos (see below) where soldiers posed with their trophies, such as a photo of two 2nd Battalion officers, Captain Hastings and Lieutenant Foord, posing with their rifles and five geese. Another photo shows Lieutenant Ellershaw posing with a buck. The officers were clearly enthusiastic hunters, and were likely influenced beforehand by numerous traveller's accounts of the south African interior, whose authors included vivid accounts of their hunting expeditions. Moreover, the archaic notion of hunting being the preserve of the upper classes, and thus the officers, was still present in Victorian Britain.⁶¹ Even though the Game Act of 1831 made it legal for any person to hunt if they had a game certificate, landowners made sure to restrict tenants' rights to hunting, since preserving game and fish not only enhanced the landowner's reputation, but leasing out hunting grounds was becoming a lucrative venture. D.J.V. Jones shows that poaching was prevalent throughout the nineteenth century and that there was a clear link between periods of unemployment and a rise in poaching activities. This implies that a game certificate was beyond the reach of the majority of the population.⁶² This might explain why the Manchesters' sources did not mention

⁵⁸ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 18, 67.

⁵⁹ William Beinart. 'Empire, Hunting and Ecological Change in Southern and Central Africa'. *Past & Present* 128 (August 1990): 166.

⁶⁰ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 123.

⁶¹ Beinart, 'Empire, Hunting and Ecological Change in Southern and Central Africa', 163–65.

⁶² D.J.V. Jones, 'The Poacher: A Study in Victorian Crime and Protest'. *The Historical Journal* 22, no. 4 (December 1979): 825–60.

hunting activities by ordinary privates and NCOs, except catching a stray rabbit on the march. In addition, they had far less free time and lacked the mobility the officers enjoyed.



Photo 2: Captain Hastings and Lieutenant Foord with five geese.

Source: 'Photograph Album, 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, Harrismith, Liddles Farm, 1901-1902', MR 3/23/69. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.



Photo 3: Lieutenant Ellershaw with his buck trophy.

Source: 'Photograph Album, 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, Harrismith, Liddles Farm, 1901-1902', MR 3/23/69. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

Insects could prove a major inconvenience, source of misery, and disgust. Bugler Coffey, writing from near Ladysmith on 5 April 1900, had his own personal war with the flies. He ended his letter to his mother with "no more at present from your soldier son, who is busy all day killing ____ [sic] flies, that let on his face in dozens".⁶³ Writing in March 1902, from Brugspruit in the Transvaal, Sergeant Hobson complained about swarms of flies biting the men as soon as they tried to sleep after a gruelling day of marching somewhere between the Wilge River and Renosterkop. The insect bites created bumps on their arms and faces.⁶⁴ Little else is mentioned in the sources about insects, but they were a near constant irritant, as indicated in other secondary sources dealing with British soldiers.⁶⁵

Besides the wildlife and insects, more familiar domesticated animals also drew attention. These animals, especially their suffering, was noted, although more peculiar, domesticated animals, unknown in Britain, also drew comment. Volunteer Private Andrew, part of a convoy escort to Helvetia on 18 September 1900, wrote that "we found the road littered with dead horses and bullocks (a dead mule is a rarity)".⁶⁶ Dead horses, cattle, and other creatures

⁶³ Wilfred Coffey. 'Letters from the Front: Letter from Bugler Coffey'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 12 May 1900, 6.

⁶⁴ Hobson, 'Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother'.

⁶⁵ Venter and Wessels, 'British Soldiers' Anglo-Boer War Experiences as Recorded in Their Diaries', 70-71.

⁶⁶ Andrew, 'Letters from the Front: With the Manchester Volunteers. An Interesting Diary', 5.

littering the roads was a common sight.⁶⁷ However, the sight of dead horses was sometimes a source of distress, such as Corporal Lees using the term “awful”.⁶⁸ Lees was not unique in this regard. Some Victorians viewed horses in increasingly sentimental terms, in part caused by literary works such as Anna Sewel’s *Black Beauty: the Autobiography of a Horse* (1877). Sandra Swart found that the sight of dead horses affected many British troops on an emotional level.⁶⁹ The Manchesters’ perspectives when confronted with horses killed on the battlefield will be discussed in Chapter 6: Danger and Death.

The sight of living horses was not always better, but some were rehabilitated. Private Turner, a mounted infantryman of the 2nd Battalion, thought the horses they received in April 1900 to be “poor, half-starved looking things”.⁷⁰ Captain Trueman reported that it was common for the Mounted Infantry to just turn a horse loose when it was in bad shape. However, he added that soldiers would then sometimes come across these abandoned horses in the veld, which they rehabilitated with a little care and affection, such as his horse “Proggs”, the first such animal his groom found wandering the wild.⁷¹ Some of these rescued horses earned admiration and respect. Trueman’s groom “picked up a ripper [sic] which have got loose from somewhere... I call him ‘Robin’, he is by far the best horse I have had”.⁷² It is worth noting that only a few Manchesters would have ridden horses, such as the Mounted Infantry and the officers.

Overall, horses and mules suffered dreadful losses during the South African War. It was estimated that the British lost 326 073 horses and 51 399 mules, which was 66.88 percent and 35.37 percent respectively of the total number of animals purchased. The losses were probably much higher, since these totals only covered horses bought by government money, not animals seized locally. Sandra Swart found that “this is widely regarded as proportionally the most devastating waste of horseflesh in military history up until that time”.⁷³ Swart explained that horses were highly sensitive and vulnerable creatures. A wide variety of factors could debilitate or even kill them, ranging from something as simple as a sudden change in their routine, eating unfamiliar fodder or simply not enough feed, exposure to temperature extremes, new pathogens, and new plants. Most horses were imported, and therein lay the problem. In such a new environment, all of the above factors played a role. This does not even account for the hard use these animals were put through by their riders, many of whom were

⁶⁷ Harry Riley. ‘Another Letter from an Ashton Volunteer at the Front’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 28 April 1900, 6; Lees ‘Letter from Corporal Lees, of Ashton’, 6.

⁶⁸ Lees, ‘Letter from Corporal Lees, of Ashton’, 6.

⁶⁹ Sandra Swart. *Riding High: Horses, Humans and History in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2010, 122.

⁷⁰ Turner, ‘Another Letter from Private A. Turner,’ 6.

⁷¹ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 51.

⁷² Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 66.

⁷³ Swart, *Riding High: Horses, Humans and History in South Africa*, 104.

inexperienced or simply did not have the time to properly acclimatise them due to the demands of war.⁷⁴



Photo 4: A Manchester posing with a cat.
Source: 'Photograph Album, South Africa, Local View; Scenes in Camp; Informal Groups; on the March', c. 1900, MR 1/23/21, Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

Although the written sources are silent about pets, some of the soldiers did keep them. A photo (below), taken somewhere in 1900, shows three men sitting, smoking, and relaxing. By their feet lounges a mangy, but happy looking dog. Another photo (below) from roughly the same period shows two men standing, with a white and black dog 'greeting' one of them with its outstretched paw. From the same album is a photo (above) showing a smiling soldier holding a cat. While posing for a photo (not included; details too small) taken sometime in 1900 in front of a blockhouse, one man of the 2nd Battalion sitting on the ground can be seen holding a cat.⁷⁵ Soldiers keeping pets was not a unique phenomenon, and it occurred in almost every major modern conflict. Richard Holmes stated, with some exaggeration about man's alleged callousness to killing other humans, that "the affection lavished on animals by fighting men who would kill an enemy soldier with little compunction testifies not only to a deeply-rooted need to give love, but also to a compelling desire to receive it".⁷⁶ It is likely that there were

⁷⁴ Swart, *Riding High: Horses, Humans and History in South Africa*, 103, 109, 118.

⁷⁵ 'Photograph Album, 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, South Africa', c. 1900, MR 1/23/24, Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

⁷⁶ Holmes, *Firing Line*, 107.

several Manchesters keeping pets, but for some reason, most of them chose not to write about it. It is also likely that their constant operational manoeuvres made it difficult to keep pets for long. Nevertheless, photographic evidence confirms their presence.



Photo 6: Manchesters relaxing with a dog.
Source: 'Photograph Album, South Africa, Local View; Scenes in Camp; Informal Groups; on the March', c. 1900, MR 1/23/20, Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.



Photo 5: Manchesters greeted by a dog.
Source: 'Photograph Album, South Africa, Local View; Scenes in Camp; Informal Groups; on the March', c. 1900, MR 1/23/21, Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

Animals were generally a welcome sight, albeit for different reasons. Sometimes the sight of suffering oxen, horses, and mules, proved upsetting. However, some Manchesters kept pets, which were undoubtedly an important source of emotional support. People, on the other hand, were significantly more complicated to deal with, and the Manchesters had both positive and negative perceptions when it came to the people living in South Africa.

3.4 WHITE CIVILIANS

The Manchesters had different perspectives about white civilians and this depended on where they encountered them, and whether they were English, Afrikaans, or from some other nationality. Sergeant Newton was pleased about the enthusiastic reception they received from the locals in Cape Town. He was, however, perplexed about their "craze" for the soldiers' cap and collar badges, for which they offered prices ranging from 2s. 6d. to as high as 7s. 6d.⁷⁷ Private Turner appreciated how several local women at Port Elizabeth handed out various little luxuries to the soldiers, such as cigarettes and apples, as they waited to depart by train in April 1900. The women even organised a water bag for each carriage, which they hung on the side of the train where it would be coolest during the journey. As the train left the station, a crowd

⁷⁷ Harry Newton. 'The War. The Ashton Volunteers in Natal. Letter to the Sergeants' Mess'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 21 April 1900, 6.

of people, from different nationalities, most likely refugees displaced from Johannesburg when the war began, cheered them on with “shoot well! Give it them! [sic]”⁷⁸

Some soldiers received friendly treatment from whites living on isolated farms in what was technically enemy territory. Captain Trueman and his friend Thornycroft, in April 1901 in the Free State, “called at a farm, where the Frenchman lives who makes the rings out of money [presumably finger rings], and had some coffee, by far the best I have tasted out here, awfully good; we played the piano and came away with some rings”.⁷⁹ Trueman was, it seemed, an asset to the 2nd Battalion’s efforts to establish friendly relationships in the countryside, thanks to his musical talents. Shortly after the Frenchman, he was ‘sent’ to another farm “close to Worringham where I had to go and play the piano and sing. The 2 women were rather nice, Bogers [Boers] of course, and were called Fourie”.⁸⁰ In this instance, it appears that it was not a simple matter of classifying all civilians in the now ‘occupied’ Boer republics as hostile, even those who were Boers. Trueman, at least, recognised and appreciated ‘friendly’ civilians in occupied territory, regardless of nationality.

A few interactions, though, were less friendly. Some soldiers were resentful of the way they were treated by the townsfolk during the siege of Ladysmith. Private Bumby, writing to his mother, assured her he was safe, but “all the people in the town were not doing as they should have done, for we were treated like dogs with them”.⁸¹ There were several reasons why the civilians may have taken out their frustrations on the soldiers. For one, they blamed Britain for allowing Ladysmith to be encircled in the first place. In addition, they were critical of how passive the defence was. They wanted the garrison to conduct a more aggressive defence, such as launching regular raids and destroying Boer guns.⁸² Moreover, the civilians also suffered reduced rations and like the ‘Tommies’, most were unable to afford buying extra food at exorbitant prices.⁸³ Hungry and frustrated, the Ladysmith civilians had short tempers and, however irrationally, blamed the soldiers and may have even regarded the soldiers as competitors for scarce resources. The Manchesters also reported frosty relations with local white farmers. Captain Tilland, writing from Badfontein on 20 January 1901, described their neighbour, Mr Jan de Beer, as “rather stand-offish at present. Perhaps the fact of our living in his farm may have something to do with it!”⁸⁴ The Manchesters’ perception of white civilians

⁷⁸ Turner, ‘Another Letter from Private A. Turner’, 6.

⁷⁹ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 130.

⁸⁰ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 130.

⁸¹ George Bumby. ‘Letters from Ladysmith’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 7 April 1900, 6.

⁸² Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 268–69.

⁸³ J.H. Breytenbach. *Geskiedenis van Die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog 1899-1902: II Die Eerste Britse Offensief*. Vol. 2. Pretoria: Die Staatsdrukker, 1971, 455.

⁸⁴ Tilland. ‘Letter, Captain Tilland, Badfontein, to Colonel Hardcastle, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Describing Recent Fighting; Boer Peace Delegate’s Visit; Conditions in Camp’, 20 January 1901. MR1/16/7. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

clearly depended on circumstances and their relations could quickly sour when the demands of war encroached on civil liberties.

A few Manchesters also wrote about the Boer non-combatants, mostly women and children, whose men were away on commando. These perceptions were a mix of negative and positive sentiments. It appeared that they struggled to make up their minds. I could not, however, find a clear link which suggested that their viewpoints were heavily influenced by how long the war had been going on. In July 1901, Captain Trueman expressed annoyance at the large number of Boer civilians in Standerton and explained that “the troops are only allowed to buy foodstuffs from the canteen, in order that the stinking Dutch may buy from the shops - ‘ROT’”.⁸⁵ Trueman was a complex individual, though. Just earlier I described his positive opinion of two Boer women he visited on their farm, yet here he revealed a distinct dislike for Boers because they were using up resources he believed the troops should have. He clearly had different perspectives depending on the circumstances. Trueman, while out “commandeering” in May 1900, came upon an abandoned Boer farmhouse and called it a “rotten place”, and wondered why they did not build better houses. Yet, this same Trueman, while chasing after Boers sometime in late July 1901 near Harrismith, came across “the best farm I have seen out here ... The hall was painted and rooms nicely carpeted and papered.”⁸⁶ In addition, Boer women did not always receive Trueman’s admiration, especially if they were unattractive. In May 1901, while burning farms near Ficksburg, Trueman and his men were alerted by local Africans that a group of women were hiding in the “kloofs” (small canyons). One of the women, who had to be physically compelled to come with them, “wasn’t very beautiful nor had she a fairy-like figure”.⁸⁷ He was, in fact, making fun of her. Private Turner, while complaining about the lack of soap to wash with on 9 May 1900, off-handedly commented how “Dutch women do not or will not understand what soap is; perhaps they want us to look like some of themselves - dirty”.⁸⁸ He continued by expressing his dismay at how deceitful the children were, just like their fathers, but at least they were well-mannered. Turner, after complaining about the soap, grudgingly admitted that Boer homes were, on the whole, clean and well-furnished.

⁸⁵ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 152.

⁸⁶ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 155.

⁸⁷ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 140.

⁸⁸ Turner, ‘Letter from Alfred Turner’, 6.

3.5 THE BOER COMBATANTS

Opinions about the Boer combatants varied from outright disdain to admiration. The Manchesters wrote significantly more about the Boer combatant than they did of other people. Since this was a war, the enemy would naturally attract far more attention, not to mention that family and friends in Britain would have been more interested in depictions of the enemy. It should be noted that when the Manchesters wrote down their perceptions of the enemy, most made no overt references to Social-Darwinist and racist thinking. However, this did not mean that Victorian ideas about Social-Darwinism and race did not influence their viewpoints. For instance, the Boers were often portrayed as primitives and savages, little different from the Africans around them. Some commentators went so far as to claim that Boer warfare, and thus their supposed cowardice and ‘atrocities’, were the inevitable consequence of ‘going native’. Others had more positive views of the Boers, elevating their supposed rustic lifestyles to a virtue.⁸⁹ On the surface, though, the Manchesters judged the Boers based on what they saw, or heard from other soldiers, about the enemy’s actions and behaviours. Most notably, the men did not appreciate and understand the Boer way of war. It differed sharply from their own perceptions about how wars ought to be fought, and only a few admired the effectiveness of Boer tactics. Yet, their interpretations of Boer behaviour were very likely influenced in some way, even if subconsciously, by the prevailing attitudes of their own culture.

It appears that some Manchesters distinguished between Free State and Transvaal Boers, with the former regarded in a more positive light. There is only one source mentioning this, though, but it was likely a topic of conversation among more of the men and certainly represented an interesting perspective. It is also one of the only sources where one can clearly discern evidence of Social-Darwinist thinking. Private Molineux wrote that “the Free State Boers are far superior to the Transvaalers [sic]. If the Transvaal had soldiers like the Free State ... the war would have been carried on in a more civilised manner”.⁹⁰ This statement was in response to the surrender of General Cronjé, implying that he thought the Free Staters would see ‘sense’ sooner than the Transvalers, and were thus more ‘civilised’. Ironically, history would show that it was the Free Staters who showed the greater determination to fight on, inspired by the implacable will of their President, Marthinus Steyn, and the famous master of guerrilla tactics, General Christiaan De Wet.⁹¹

⁸⁹ C.E. Anderson. ‘Red Coats and Black Shields: Race and Masculinity in British Representations of the Anglo-Zulu War’. *Critical Survey* 20, no. 3 (2008): 6–9; K.O. Morgan. ‘The Boer War and the Media (1899-1902)’. *Twentieth Century British History* 13, no. 1 (2002): 5; Nasson, *The War for South Africa [the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902]*, 264–85.

⁹⁰ John Molineux. ‘Letter from a Dukinfield Man at Dewdorp’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 28 April 1900, 8.

⁹¹ Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 120; Pretorius, *Die Anglo-Boereoorlog*, 26.

The Manchesters were quick to judge the enemy if there were alleged atrocities, such as abusing the white flag for tactical gain. There was considerable confusion during the Battle of Elandslaagte on 21 October 1899, and some Boers launched an attack at about the same time others were signalling their surrender with white flags. It was most likely an accident. However, Private Evans thought the Boers were the “biggest cowards on the face of the earth”.⁹² Captain Paton thought the same, explaining that “when they [the Boers] saw the cold steel at their chests they threw down their rifles, and as soon as our fellows ceased they picked up their rifles and fired at them from behind. I don’t fancy our fellows will give much quarter next time”.⁹³ One officer claimed that

...a man came with a flag of truce in one hand while he fired left and right with his revolver in the other; while others kept on firing at us till within 15 yards [13.7 m], and then surrendered. Can one wonder if Tommy shoots them, surrender or no?⁹⁴

This implied that some Manchesters shot or bayoneted Boers who attempted to surrender at Elandslaagte, which could have occurred given the circumstances and the fact that the men were in an intensely emotional state at the time. Paton was particularly angered by the stories which claimed that Adjutant Newbigging was wounded as he accepted the surrender of a Boer prisoner whom he had just saved from being bayoneted by British troops.⁹⁵ Paton did not witness any of these events, since he was wounded before the final charge. However, the officers clearly talked among each other in hospital, and even though he did not witness Newbigging’s wounding, nor the white flag incident, he was almost more enraged by it than those who witnessed it first-hand. For a generation raised on martial values which included an emphasis on chivalry and courage,⁹⁶ the perceived abuse of the white flag reinforced perceptions of the Boers as a ‘treacherous’ and ‘cowardly’ enemy.

Other alleged Boer atrocities further fuelled the men’s anger. The Battle of Elandslaagte, since it was the first serious contact between the Manchesters and the Boers, elicited considerable negative comment. Captain Paton wrote to his mother that

...you can’t imagine what brutes the Boers are. They are absolute savages. Some of them were using elephant rifles with explosive bullets, some were using expanding bullets like our Dum Dum, which we gave up as we considered them (the Boers) a civilised nation.⁹⁷ (The controversy surrounding the use of explosive bullets will be discussed later).

⁹² J.W. Evans. ‘A Manchester Private’s Description of Elands Laagte’. *The Manchester Evening News*, 27 November 1899, 4.

⁹³ *The Manchester Guardian*. ‘Letter from an Officer of the First Manchester’. 14 December 1899, 3.

⁹⁴ *The Wrexham Advertiser*. ‘The Fight at Elandslaagte: An inside View’. 25 November 1899, 7.

⁹⁵ Donald Paton. ‘Letter, From Captain Donald Paton, Officer’s Hospital, Wynberg, Concerning Officer Casualties; Major Melville’s Return to England; the Aftermath of the Battle at Elandslaagte. 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, 14-29 November 1899’, MR 1/16/5/3. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

⁹⁶ Edward M. Spiers. ‘War’. In *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Culture*, edited by Francis O’ Gorman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 92–93.

⁹⁷ ‘Letter from an Officer of the First Manchester’, 3.

He also claimed that a party of officers and 20 men were captured close to Elandslaagte while recovering the wounded and dead, and labelled the Boers “absolute devils”⁹⁸ for this ‘dishonourable’ act. Another officer felt the same way, writing that “the burying party under Vizard went out yesterday [23 October] ... they have not been heard of, so I expect they are prisoners ... that just shows what the Boers’ code of honour is”.⁹⁹ Private Hardicre claimed that “they (the Boers) are a cruel lot. One of the Boers was shot, and I gave him a drink of water, and when I turned he shot at me, and I turned around and stabbed him to death”.¹⁰⁰ Hardicre’s account, if not exaggerated, is especially striking due to its ugly depiction of how brutal the war could be, and the extreme reactions it unlocked in soldiers who believed their enemy had behaved in an unacceptable manner.

The Boer method of warfare, which differed sharply from British thinking, further contributed to negative assessments. Private Sim, writing about his experiences up to the relief of Ladysmith, was unimpressed with the Boers’ sense of ‘fair play’. He wrote that the Manchesters could not move, otherwise

...we were fired upon by the cowards—they are nothing else, for they won’t come out and fight a fair battle with us. We have to drive them out of holes and from behind rocks ... while we are attempting to climb up [hills] they keep firing at and killing us like dogs, and when we reach the top they turn around and run away.¹⁰¹

Private Molineux believed that “had the Boers had any courage at all Ladysmith would have been lost”.¹⁰² He sarcastically condemned their so-called bravery so admired by some people in England, and urged his readers to disregard such sentiments. He mocked the Boers as masters of the art of retreating. However, Molineux was not at Ladysmith during the siege and was recounting what he had heard. It does show, though, that hearsay alone was enough to colour men’s perceptions of the enemy. Private Nelson, writing from Natal in December 1899, wrote that “they [the Boers] don’t come out and fight, but are hidden from us in the rocks”.¹⁰³ The skill with which the Boers used the terrain not only added to their reputation as ‘cowards’, but also cemented the idea that they were ‘cunning’.

The ‘cunning’ tactics of the Boers were thus commented on, sometimes with a hint of admiration. During a march from Graskop to Schoemanskloof in the eastern Transvaal in August 1900, the 1st Battalion experienced almost daily skirmishing. During one of the encounters, Private Hawkins and his company were met with a hail of bullets as they crossed

⁹⁸ ‘Letter from an Officer of the First Manchester’, 3.

⁹⁹ ‘The Fight at Elandslaagte: An inside View’, 7.

¹⁰⁰ Hardicre, ‘Sidelights on the War: From the Soldier’s Point of View’, *The Manchester Weekly Times*, 24 November 1899.

¹⁰¹ R. Sim. ‘Letter from a Dukinfield Man at the Front’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 5 May 1900, 6.

¹⁰² Molineux, ‘Letter from a Dukinfield Man at Dewdorp’, 8.

¹⁰³ Nelson. ‘To the Editor of the Reporter’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 27 January 1900, 6.

a ridge. Afterwards, they noticed whitewashed anthills, and he marvelled at the “cunning”¹⁰⁴ of the Boers in using these as distance markers to enhance the accuracy of fire. Private Fisher also betrayed a hint of admiration when he wrote “they are so cunning. They leave no men, or empty cases, in their trenches and they all fire through loop holes on the top of the hills”.¹⁰⁵ Captain Trueman described his frustration, but also a bit of admiration, about the message from General De Wet on 17 October 1900. De Wet threatened he would attack Reitz the next morning, and that the British better get the women and children out. This message sent the Manchesters into a frenzy of activity, frantically digging trenches and placing the garrison on high alert from 04:00 until the end of the day. Yet, no attack came, and Trueman wondered why “this impudent message was sent”.¹⁰⁶ He then speculated that De Wet probably created this clever distraction to allow his commandos to pass the town unmolested while the garrison prepared a defence.

However, there were occasions where Boer courage and their art of war was perceived positively, and even understood. Captain Melville, wounded at Elandslaagte and sent home to Britain, informed a reporter at Southampton that “it was nonsense to state that the Boers were cowards for not coming out into the open. That was part of their tactics. They fought and retreated, to fight again”.¹⁰⁷ Captain Trueman was impressed by the “skill and alacrity”¹⁰⁸ with which a convoy of Boers escaped a British ambush in September 1900, near Bethlehem. On 24 December 1900, the 2nd Battalion was hard pressed near Reitpan, and Lieutenant Richardson wrote that the Boers “were bolder and more daring than we had ever found them to be before”.¹⁰⁹

It is notable that these positive perceptions of the Boers originated from the officers, who were probably better educated and trained to appreciate the logic and effectiveness behind Boer tactics. Even though Spiers did not point this out, his examples of positive perceptions of the enemy also came primarily from officers.¹¹⁰ This is a phenomenon which Nasson observed, and explained that just like their home society, British officers reflected a host of different backgrounds and viewpoints. Some officers admired the Boers’ fighting skills and their behaviour in the field, maybe due to a perception that the Boers, coming from a rural background, did not suffer the same limitations and vices which afflicted British soldiers

¹⁰⁴ Walter Hawkins. ‘Letters from the Front’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 3 November 1900, 5.

¹⁰⁵ Jack Fisher. ‘Letters from the Front’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 24 March 1900, 6.

¹⁰⁶ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 81.

¹⁰⁷ ‘The Transvaal War: Arrival of Wounded at Southampton’, *The Hampshire Advertiser County Newspaper*, 27 December 1899, 3.

¹⁰⁸ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 70.

¹⁰⁹ Charles Reay. ‘Manchester Soldiers at the Front: What the 2nd Battalion Has Been Doing’. *Manchester Evening Chronicle*, 23 March 1901.

¹¹⁰ Spiers, *The Victorian Soldier in Africa*, 173.

recruited from the cities, with all its supposed corrosive social elements.¹¹¹ The Manchester officers, though, did not offer any theories as to why the Boers were such skilled fighters.

Boer trenches and field fortifications were undeniably a great source of interest, if not outright admiration. Writing in March 1900, Volunteer Sergeant Newton could not help but stare in wonder at the Boer positions which stymied Buller for so long on the Tugela River, with its “cunning trenches cut in among a young forest”.¹¹² He expressed tremendous sympathy for Buller after seeing the terrain and Boer fortifications. Private Fisher, a 1st Battalion reservist serving temporarily as a stretcher bearer with Buller’s forces as they tried to relieve his regiment in Ladysmith, was similarly impressed by the Boer trenches at Colenso. He guessed that they spent months digging them, and was convinced that British artillery would not have breached it. He was amazed that they had even made homes for themselves in the trenches, with furniture and other luxuries, and even a baby cradle.¹¹³ On 6 April 1900, the NCOs and privates of the 1st Battalion took a great interest in the Boer trenches and fortifications at Vaalkrans.¹¹⁴ Private Turner, with the 2nd Battalion, thought that taking Bloemfontein must have been a difficult task, on account of the well-made trenches and rifle pits.¹¹⁵

When the Manchesters had an opportunity to speak with the Boers, their perceptions were far more mixed and even empathetic. Richard Holmes found that negative views about the enemy often broke down when soldiers encountered one another outside of combat.¹¹⁶ Writing about the same phenomenon during the First World War, Denis Winter argued that “when opposing armies are placed close to each other during long periods of relative inactivity, then communication is bound to take place which forces men to perceive that the enemy are human beings like themselves”.¹¹⁷ This can be clearly observed with Private Fisher, a reservist of the 1st Battalion who was temporarily attached to Buller’s forces in Natal. Shortly after the Battle of Spioenkop on 23 and 24 January 1900, Fisher wrote about the interactions he had while collecting the wounded during a ceasefire. Some of the Boers greeted them in a friendly manner as they arrived at the slaughter atop the hill. Other Boers were less generous, and laughed and jeered at them as they collected the wounded. In fact, one man could not resist bragging about Boer victories and even commented about the political situation in Ireland. However, others were friendlier, even sympathetic at what had occurred and expressed their

¹¹¹ Nasson, *The War for South Africa [the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902]*, 282.

¹¹² Newton, “The War. The Ashton Volunteers in Natal. Letter to the Sergeants’ Mess,” 6.

¹¹³ Fisher, ‘With the Ladysmith Relief Column’, 6.

¹¹⁴ ‘Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3’.

¹¹⁵ Turner, ‘Letter from Alfred Turner,’ 6. Of course, there was no fight for Bloemfontein, but Turner did not know that at the time of writing.

¹¹⁶ Holmes, *Firing Line*, 368.

¹¹⁷ Winter, *Death’s Men*, 217.

condolences about the dead and wounded. Fisher summed it up perfectly: “of course, some Boers are very nice to speak to, some are not”.¹¹⁸

The Manchesters, on occasion and when circumstances allowed, treated Boer wounded with a great deal of humanity. In December 1900, the 2nd Battalion captured a Boer who was shot in the head. They rushed him to one of the doctors, who operated, but the man expired from his wound a few hours later.¹¹⁹ The 2nd Battalion picked up another Boer fighter with a serious head wound, only 18 years old, in February 1901. Even though his prospect for survival was low, they took him to the surgeons anyway.¹²⁰ It was probably difficult for the average soldier to maintain outright hostility or indifference once face-to-face with an injured enemy who clearly posed no threat anymore and was in obvious pain. What makes these two examples even more remarkable is that the Manchesters, despite believing these men almost as good as dead, still made an effort to try and save them. This aspect of the British soldier's experience is rarely mentioned in the secondary sources. The reasons are uncertain, but I believe that a focused thematic approach as used in this study helps to bring these easily missed experiences to the forefront.

It also appears that the Manchester officers had relatively cordial relations with the Boer officers after only a few months at war. One incident occurred during the siege of Ladysmith. Members of the 1st Battalion were fired upon by pom-poms on 7 January 1900 while collecting the dead after the Battle of Platrand the previous day. However, after the officers arranged a meeting with their Boer counterparts under a flag of truce, the latter apologised and allowed the Manchesters to collect the dead in peace.¹²¹ Even after a hard-fought battle such as at Platrand, opposing forces could make compassionate gestures. Arranging temporary ceasefires to collect the dead and wounded was quite common.¹²²

A curious series of incidents occurred in July 1901, when a few Boer commanders willingly handed over their women and children to the Manchesters. On 7 July 1901, Captain (Adjutant) Newbigging of the 1st Battalion, went out under a white flag to Potloodspruit to meet up with a column of Boer women and children. Kommandant Moll, with about 30 men, met him before the families arrived, and expressed his hope that the war would be over soon, and then rode off, leaving the women and children with Newbigging. A few days later, on 17 July, Kommandants Joubert and Moll sent in another group of women for safekeeping to

¹¹⁸ Fisher, 'Letters from the Front', 6.

¹¹⁹ Reay, 'Manchester Soldiers at the Front: What the 2nd Battalion Has Been Doing'.

¹²⁰ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 108.

¹²¹ 'History, Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith Reprinted from the Records of Service', 1900. MR 1/3/1/2. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre, 7.

¹²² Pretorius, *Kommandolewe Tydens Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, 166.

Lydenburg, and again on 27 July.¹²³ The Boers' decision at this date seems bizarre, because many were aware of the high death rates in the camps by then, although some commandos were of course more isolated. Moreover, there was little indication that the Boers were fully up to date about the most current conditions in the infamous concentration camps which claimed approximately 28 000 lives, most of them children. In fact, conditions in the camps only started improving from November 1901. In addition, the Boers were willing and able to care for women and children roaming or hiding in the countryside, although it was far from easy.¹²⁴

During the guerrilla phase of the war, the Boers and Manchesters continued their cordial relationship, especially when arranging for the return of British prisoners and wounded. It should be noted that by this point in the war, the Boers had few resources to keep prisoners for an extended time, and caring for their own wounded was challenging enough. On 28 July 1901, the Boers requested an ambulance to collect Captain Wynne, who was wounded and captured a few days earlier during a skirmish. They also returned Corporal Fletcher, who was taken captive.¹²⁵ In August 1901, the 2nd Battalion received back three wounded men, and gifted the Boer messenger with two tins of tobacco and half-a-bottle of whisky. This would have been a generous and welcome gift for a Boer fighter. These items were highly valued and hard to come by for the Boers at this stage of the war.¹²⁶ Shortly after this incident, Captain Trueman wrote that "the Bogers [sic] we met during our last 'trek' were very sporting and rather good fellows".¹²⁷ The 2nd Manchester officers had clearly cultivated good relations with the local commandos and even started to like them, although it is not certain whether the rank-and-file shared this attitude. Still, it also had a pragmatic element to it, because a friendly, open demeanour likely incentivised the Boers to return their prisoners more swiftly, especially the wounded ones, which could save their lives.

The Boers were sometimes also a source of amusement. Some men made fun of their appearance, such as Sergeant Hobson, who called them the "long whiskered ones".¹²⁸ On 17 February 1901, near Ficksburg, Captain Trueman and his Mounted Infantry "bagged 2 Bogers, one being very indignant, thinking we should have sent a wire to say we were

¹²³ 'Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3'.

¹²⁴ Pretorius, *Die Anglo-Boereoorlog*, 56–64; Pretorius, *Kommandolewe Tydens Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, 328–33. There may have been local factors at work I am unaware of, but the focus of this study prevents a more thorough exploration of this curious event, but may prove a future avenue of research.

¹²⁵ 'Records of Service: 96th Regt and 2nd Btn Manchester Regiment, 1824-1914', MR 1/1/2/6. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

¹²⁶ Pretorius, *Kommandolewe Tydens Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, 76, 247.

¹²⁷ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 157.

¹²⁸ Hobson, 'Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother'.

coming”.¹²⁹ Although it cannot be entirely dismissed, these examples do not appear to show a strong racist element.

In contrast to humour, some soldiers expressed pity for the Boers, under certain circumstances. On 22 September 1900, Captain Trueman was part of an ambush on a Boer convoy of wagons, and as the British cannons opened fire, he “really felt quite sorry for the Boers when it began. It did so burst up the show”.¹³⁰ On 9 July 1901, Sergeant Hobson observed a group of captured Boers, mostly older men and boys. He wondered how the “poor devils”¹³¹ coped with the cold nights, as there was often frost on the ground every morning on the open veld. Evidently, these Boers had little material comforts, such as tents or blankets, by the time they surrendered and Hobson well knew how terrible the cold could be. What is more, even though the war had been raging for almost 21 months by then, Hobson was still able to feel pity for men whose refusal to surrender had prolonged the war far longer than it should have.

As much as some men pitied the enemy, it did not suppress darker emotions. Anger and frustration at the Boers were emotions that were never far from the surface, but depended on the situation. One would assume that as the war dragged on into its frustratingly long guerrilla phase, the Manchesters’ opinions of the Boers would deteriorate, as argued by Edward Spiers in *The Victorian Soldier in Africa*.¹³² However, I did not find a persuasive connection showing a similar development among the Manchesters. Instead, their perceptions continued to fluctuate, depending on specific Boer actions, such as evidence or rumours of the Boers using explosive bullets.

Allegations of the Boers using explosive bullets persisted throughout the war and infuriated soldiers, because these bullets caused terrible wounds and was regarded as a ‘crime’, as per the 1899 First European Peace Conference at the Hague, which prohibited its use in ‘civilised’ war between European opponents. So-called ‘savage’ peoples, though, were valid targets. Both sides regularly claimed the other used explosive bullets, likely for propaganda purposes. Most claims were impossible to prove or were wildly exaggerated. However, these bullets were undoubtedly used by individuals on both sides, although the extent was likely not as widespread as the media and rumours asserted.¹³³ Therefore, one cannot summarily dismiss all accounts of soldiers finding or witnessing the use of explosive bullets by the enemy. Captain Trueman wrote about an incident on 11 July 1900, where Boers under a flag of truce handed

¹²⁹ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 110.

¹³⁰ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 71.

¹³¹ Hobson, ‘Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother’.

¹³² Spiers, *The Victorian Soldier in Africa*, 171.

¹³³ Nasson, *The War for South Africa [the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902]*, 268–70.

over two packets of split nose ammunition, ostensibly as a peace offering. Trueman, though, was not thrilled by the gesture, and said “if I had been them I should have chosen not split nose ammunition, this shows what they fire at us”.¹³⁴ The same Sergeant Hobson who so pitied the Boers in the previous paragraph, expressed anger at them in August 1901, when he heard rumours about three men from another regiment falling victim to explosive bullets, which “made an awful mess of the poor beggars”.¹³⁵ He felt the Boers ought to be paid back in kind. In September 1900, Trueman, evidently feeling frustrated, thought that they treated the Boers with too much leniency and wished they could “burn, shoot, and hang a bit”.¹³⁶ Yet, as discussed earlier, nearly a year later, Trueman described the Boers in very positive terms after a prisoner exchange. It was not necessarily the duration of the war that was the primary motivator, but also specific circumstances and a man’s particular mood at the time which influenced perceptions of the enemy.

3.6 AFRICANS

There is little doubt that encountering Africans was an exotic experience for many Manchesters. Captain Trueman wrote an interesting account of their time in Basutoland at Thlotsi, where there was a small convalescent outpost. A few days prior to their arrival, they were joined by a band of armed Basotho scouts and refugees led by Jonathan, whom Trueman thought was the ruler of Basutoland. In fact, Jonathan was the son of one of Moshoeshoe’s two eldest sons, Molapo, and Jonathan was involved in the succession struggle to become the Paramount Chief of the Basotho, but he never advanced beyond being the chief of the Leribe, in the northern part of Basotholand.¹³⁷ Jonathan hoped to round up some stray cattle in the wake of the British column as it marched through and plundered Boer territory. He thus offered their services as scouts and led the British column around Boer positions to the safety of Basotholand, so they could rest and resupply. Jonathan was described as “a fat little chap, dressed in blue breeches with gold lace and a blue patrol jacket and wore a short sword”.¹³⁸ The British resident in Basutoland had forbidden Jonathan to allow the Boers to enter his territory, although it is doubtful he would have done so anyway, since the Boers were traditional enemies.¹³⁹ He was clearly a man of importance, and as a result, it seems the officers wanted to impress him, because they encouraged him to fire the pom-pom and Maxim gun. In addition, on the way to Thlotsi, the soldiers had various interactions with the Basotho,

¹³⁴ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 45.

¹³⁵ Hobson, ‘Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother’.

¹³⁶ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 66–67.

¹³⁷ Scott Rosenberg. ‘Who Determines a Chief? Motsoene Molapo and Succession Disputes in Lesotho, 1867–1940’. *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 55, no. 2 (2022): 259–80.

¹³⁸ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 120.

¹³⁹ Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 439.

who greeted them enthusiastically. They purchased some provisions, including African beer from some of the women they passed.¹⁴⁰ Overall, Trueman appeared to have enjoyed the novelty of the experience.

The Manchesters' perceptions of Africans, however, often contained racist elements. In fact, they picked up on the prevailing racial attitudes in South Africa very quickly. No doubt the pervasiveness of racist ideas and Social-Darwinism that began to gain increasing prominence in the 1840s and 1850s due to the misapplication of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution to social theory,¹⁴¹ enabled them to embrace the colonial attitudes swiftly and without question. These ideas were widely distributed throughout Victorian society, even extending into advertising, which depicted Africans in various degrading and racist manners, stripping them of humanity.¹⁴² One of these racist attitudes was that certain types of labour were suitable only for Africans. In December 1900, a fatigue party belonging to the 1st Manchesters formally complained to their platoon commander about the heavy manual labour they were doing, and considered it more suitable for a "gang of n----- [my omission: see footnote]".¹⁴³ Some soldiers also picked up on the colonial view that Africans were miscreants. Captain Trueman, while himself ironically out to "commandeer" supplies, came upon an abandoned Boer house and he immediately assumed it was "looted by K----".¹⁴⁴ The Manchesters also adopted the local racist terms, most notably the offensive and derogatory "k----" term. Volunteer Private Emmott wrote on 5 June 1900 how his ship "embarked 100 K---- for Durban".¹⁴⁵ Volunteer Sergeant Newton picked up the term after only a couple of weeks in South Africa, since he used it when describing how one African fell overboard and drowned when they were in Durban's harbour.¹⁴⁶ Even the officers used the term, such as Captain Paton who justified occupying the station master's house instead of the train station, since he did not fancy sharing living quarters "among a lot of k---- prisoners".¹⁴⁷ These are but only a few examples of many.¹⁴⁸

It also appears that the lives of Africans were not valued highly. On occasion, African bystanders became casualties. Private Turner, of the 2nd Battalion, saw an African killed by

¹⁴⁰ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 121.

¹⁴¹ John Darwin. *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain*. London: Penguin Books, 2013, 275–79.

¹⁴² Anandi Ramamurthy. *Imperial Persuaders: Images of Africa and Asia in British Advertising*. Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2003, 214; Darwin, *Unfinished Empire*, 275–79.

¹⁴³ Peter Warwick. *Black People and the South African War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, 131. Please note that I chose to blank out the racist slurs used by the soldiers. These terms are highly offensive to modern South Africans.

¹⁴⁴ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 18.

¹⁴⁵ Emmott, 'Diary Extracts', 3.

¹⁴⁶ Harry Newton. 'The War. The Ashton Volunteers in Natal. Letter to the Sergeants' Mess'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 21 April 1900, 6.

¹⁴⁷ Paton, 'Letter from Dalmanutha', 13 September 1900, 1.

¹⁴⁸ Hawkins, 'Letter from a Dukinfield Soldier,' 8; Brown, 'Serving with the Field Forces,' 5.

Boer shelling of their camp near Bloemfontein in May 1900. The tone of his letter implied a certain callousness, or matter-of-factness, which could be explained by soldiers becoming accustomed to the brutality of war, but there was also a hint of infantilization about the victim's seeming 'childishness' while singing: "Only one n---- killed. He was about 30 yards [27,4 m] from me, singing at the time, and it blew his leg off."¹⁴⁹

Others had dismissive views of Africans and treated them with contempt even. Captain Tilland, writing in January 1901 from Badfontein, described, in unflattering language, a delegation of four old African women. Of course, he was trying to amuse his readers, but the language he used revealed unmistakable racist sentiments. The women he described were from a delegation sent to complain about their cattle being stolen, presumably by British soldiers. The tone of his letter indicated that this complaint was met with little sympathy. The old women were mockingly called "high-born dames". The appearance of one of the old women attracted specific attention. She was described as a "fine old hag" of nearly 80 years and he was amused by her "fit of jumps" when he tried to take a photo of her. She was eventually calmed down by their guide and persuaded to pose for a photo. They learned from the guide she was a witch-doctor, which was viewed as sufficient reason to chase them off, and she and her companions were "put on side accordingly".¹⁵⁰ The writer included a crude sketch of the old woman, with an exaggerated lower lip. It appears it was easy to dismiss Africans with contemptuous ease, especially if the soldiers thought their behaviour conformed to the idea that Africans were primitive and superstitious.

¹⁴⁹ Turner, 'Letter from Alfred Turner,' 6.

¹⁵⁰ Tilland, 'Letter from Badfontein to Colonel Hardcastle', 20 January 1901, 3.



Figure 1: Captain Tilland's sketch of an old African woman.

Source: Tilland. 'Letter, Captain Tilland, Badfontein, to Colonel Hardcastle, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Describing Recent Fighting; Boer Peace Delegate's Visit; Conditions in Camp', 20 January 1901. MR1/16/7. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre, 3.

Many soldiers, easily bored and easily amused, found Africans a source of entertainment, but again tinged by racist undertones. Private Emmott described how the arrival of 100 African Army Service Corps labourers livened up the dreary ship journey to Durban considerably. A member of the Royal Irish Regiment managed to drag 16 of them into a parody of a military company, dressing them in mismatched articles of uniform, and drilling them several hours a day. This of course elicited laughter and cheers from onlookers and Emmott believed the Africans enjoyed these antics as much as the soldiers did. He thought them "wonderful figures"¹⁵¹ and sarcastically commented that they would instil terror in the hearts of the Boers. According to Volunteer Private Hawkins, the soldiers often tried to imitate the local African languages, which elicited laughter and jests from their comrades.¹⁵²

Africans were not, however, passive 'objects'. It appears that some Africans capitalised on the soldiers' fascination with their culture, and their boredom, organising a form of tourist spectacle which even modern visitors to South Africa would recognise. These performances drew attention, since sometime in 1900, soldiers took two photos¹⁵³ (one below) of war dances featuring men dressed in traditional garb and wielding shields, spears, and clubs. The

¹⁵¹ Emmott, 'Diary Extracts', 3.

¹⁵² Hawkins, 'Letter from a Dukinfield Soldier,' 8.

¹⁵³ 'Photograph Album, South Africa, Local View; Scenes in Camp; Informal Groups; on the March', c. 1900. MR 1/23/21. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

Manchesters' fascination and boredom could thus be turned into potential monetary gain, but the sources do not allow an assessment of how successful African efforts were.



Photo 7: Africans performing a war dance for the Manchesters.

Source: 'Photograph Album, South Africa, Local View; Scenes in Camp; Informal Groups; on the March', c. 1900. MR 1/23/21. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

Whatever the views of the Manchesters were about the racial qualities of Africans, they were more than happy to use their help. The most common form of assistance was as drivers. Volunteer Private Emmott, who either spoke directly to African servicemen, or heard it from another party, wrote how the Army Service Corps employed Africans to drive transport wagons and do other duties for £4.10.0 per month, including rations.¹⁵⁴ Volunteer Private Hawkins described these drivers in action to his parents, claiming that "it would do you good to see a string of transports, each being drawn by 16 bullocks, driven by two K----- boys, who have whips about 20 ft long, and they know how to use them, too".¹⁵⁵ Another form of assistance was when Africans helped capture Boers. On 18 April 1901, a group of local men handed over ten Boer prisoners. Four more prisoners were obtained this way on 27 April, and another four from chief Michael in Waterval Valley on 9 June, who were caught trying to steal the chief's cattle. On 1 August chief Michael brought in 15 more Boer fighters, and 25 women and children. There were also some more novel forms of aid, such as a check payment of £7 sent to the 1st Battalion as a gift from Chief N'dunge, to thank them for the defence of Ladysmith. There is also no doubt that the Manchesters benefited from the activities of African scouts who knew the terrain, since such men are mentioned on numerous occasions. However, accidents

¹⁵⁴ Emmott, 'Diary Extracts', 3.

¹⁵⁵ Hawkins, 'Letter from a Dukinfield Soldier', 8.

did occur when nervous sentries shot at these scouts in the dark when they did not give the required passwords in time. One such event occurred on 15 April 1901, after a day's fighting with Boer forces near Witklip, which left the 1st Battalion in a state of high alert and anxiety. Nervous sentries shot and killed two friendly scouts that night.¹⁵⁶

Even though they benefited from African assistance, the Manchesters were still called on to maintain the power structure when their allies became too 'unruly' for colonial sensitivities. Thus, on the evening of 27 April 1901, a party of 20 Manchesters led by Lieutenant Dunlop broke up a "disturbance in the camp by k-----"¹⁵⁷ by disarming the troublemakers, arresting seven men, and confiscating 160 cattle. It is not clear what the exact nature of this disturbance was, but it might have been an altercation over the distribution of the cattle, which the Manchesters then removed from the equation.

Despite their racist views, there were rare moments where the troops viewed Africans as fellow human beings. There is a photo, unfortunately very faded but with a legible caption, explaining how members of the 2nd Manchester Mounted Infantry buried several Africans executed by the Boers.¹⁵⁸ The Boers shot any African they suspected of working for the British as scouts or spies. The Manchesters could have just continued on their way, but instead stopped to bury the dead. This feeling of sympathy, if not horror at the murder of Africans, was a sentiment shared by other regiments. In Spiers' work on Scottish soldiers and Volunteers, he found evidence that the killing of African scouts did not sit well with them either.¹⁵⁹

3.7 WOMEN

The Manchesters' interactions and perceptions of women during the war deserves further elaboration. Thus far, their encounters with women have only been mentioned occasionally, as part of the themes focusing on their experiences with white civilians and Africans. This section endeavours to better distinguish and discuss those encounters where women were the main reason for the soldier's attention and might have involved more than just a passing glance or a short comment. With that said, it is important to note that due to the Manchesters being one of the frontline regiments, it spent most of its time operating in the field, chasing the Boers, guarding convoys, and garrisoning isolated positions. They thus had limited opportunities to engage with women. Nevertheless, some of them still managed to encounter

¹⁵⁶ 'Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3'.

¹⁵⁷ 'Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3'.

¹⁵⁸ 'Photograph Album, 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, South Africa', c. 1900, MR 1/23/24, Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

¹⁵⁹ Spiers, *The Scottish Soldier and Empire*, 194–95.

women and even interact with them. This was especially true for the officers, whose greater freedom of movement brought them into towns more often.

As for sexual encounters, soldiers would not have written home about that, and if they did so to close friends only, and they certainly would have prohibited them from sharing those letters. There is little doubt, though, that soldiers had sex, since the official rate of hospital admissions for the war listed 24 775 cases of venereal disease. However, as M.S. Stone rightly cautioned, these statistics were imperfect due to various reasons, such as incorrect diagnostics and social stigma. Stone gave an excellent discussion of venereal disease and its major causes during the war. Of most relevance to the Manchesters was Stone's findings that sex workers operated in and around major urban settlements, which limited the Manchesters' access to these services, given their many frontline forays. Another avenue, though, was desperate Boer women out in the countryside or in small towns who would barter sexual favours for special treatment or supplies. This was likely far more common than assumed, despite racist propaganda and some soldiers' claims that Boer women were dirty and unattractive. The same applied to African women, who were largely motivated to barter sex for similar reasons. Rape certainly occurred as well, although records are extremely unreliable and limited regarding its scope.¹⁶⁰

Encountering women in a social or informal setting was much higher in or close to towns, if the soldier had the opportunity to move relatively freely. Officers were particularly fortunate in this regard. Captain Trueman and his fellow officers had the pleasure of encountering a number of ladies in Harrismith in August 1900. They were attending a concert at one of the hotels, and "there were very few Tommies present, as only those quartered in the town were allowed to come, but the place was crammed with officers and civilians. The ladies wore evening kit, the men didn't, of course the officers couldn't..."¹⁶¹ When they were close to Harrismith again in October of that year, Trueman and one of his colleagues made use of their greater freedom to visit an old English lady who had lived in the area for 45 years. She was from Sittingbourne and they found her company "very pleasant". While at Worryingham in March 1901, Trueman and his comrades once more had the good fortune to engage socially with women at the hotel. They had a dance which lasted until midnight, and there were fifteen couples.¹⁶² Not all dances were equally enjoyable, though, since the ladies were not always

¹⁶⁰ M.S. Stone. 'The Victorian Army: Health, Hospitals and Social Conditions as Encountered by British Troops during the South African War, 1899-1902'. University of London, 1992, 173–74, 211–31. While at the British National Archive in Kew, I requested the War Office venereal disease statistics for the war, with the hope that its rate of incidence among the Manchesters was recorded, but the collection could not be found, despite being listed on the catalogue. The details and scope of the Manchesters' liaisons thus remain a mystery.

¹⁶¹ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 52.

¹⁶² Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 84, 124.

present in great numbers. In Ficksburg in April 1901, Trueman reported that “yesterday, Friday, was a dance, awful rot, 11 ladies and about 50 men”.¹⁶³ Several months later, in September, he was tasked with retrieving the regiment’s band instruments in Port Elizabeth. Thus he boarded the *Pembroke Castle* at Durban, where he managed to coax two shy nurses to join him and another officer for dinner.¹⁶⁴ Rank did indeed have privileges when it came to meeting and socialising with women, but the sources were largely silent about the rank-and-file experiences, implying they had far fewer opportunities, and if they did have encounters, the nature of some of these interactions were certainly not suitable topics for their audience back home.



Photo 8: A group of Manchesters posing with two lady visitors. Their identity and the context behind the photo are unknown. But the soldiers, presumably officers, look pleased.

Source: ‘Photograph Album, South Africa, Local View; Scenes in Camp; Informal Groups; on the March’, c. 1900. MR 1/23/20. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

Encounters with Boer women were understandably more complicated, depending on the circumstances. Trueman, who visited many farms and towns, liked to portray himself as a charmer, who could melt even the icy hearts of Boer women. Thus, while out chasing some Boers near Harrismith in August 1901, he and his men came across a well-to-do Boer farm. Naturally, the two young Boer women on the farm were not happy to see them. Trueman’s words best described the scene: “there were two girls there who were very short with us, but I exercised my wiles upon them and they soon altered. I was just going to sing ‘When Other

¹⁶³ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 136.

¹⁶⁴ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 130, 160.

Lips and Other Eyes' to them, when we had to go - awful nuisance!"¹⁶⁵ Earlier that year in May, though, no amount of charm could dissuade a Boer woman from cursing her captors as they marched her and others into Fouriesburg for eventual internment. Her antagonism was understandable. Trueman related how "one woman called Bar Campbell [another officer] some most awful names, and continued in this strain whenever she was approached".¹⁶⁶ Trueman is virtually the only Manchester who frequently described encounters with women, which was probably helped by his personality and freedom of movement, not to mention the copious amount of letters he wrote.

Despite prevailing notions of their 'racial superiority', it did not prevent the men interacting with African women. The appearance of African women was a source of interest, as shown by a photo (see below) taken some time in 1900, of a group of five women in traditional garb and hairstyles. While travelling to a resting station in Basutoland in February 1901, Captain Trueman and his 2nd Battalion comrades encountered numerous Basotho women bearing goods to the market, such as traditional beer and fruit, which they eagerly purchased. Trueman was rather perturbed by one of the women, whom he described, in what I interpret as a sarcastic tone, as a "fair maiden". She was so pleased by his patronage that she kept "patting me on the back, not gentle pats, but huge lusty thumps".¹⁶⁷ Trueman further stated that one of the men, a certain Barrington, was so enthralled by the plump bare arm of one of the women, that he started poking it until she ran away, laughing. There was a hint of playful flirting in Trueman's description. It is not difficult to imagine that several Manchesters would have tried to initiate intimate encounters with African women. When compared to other British units, such as the Scottish regiments, Spiers found that a few official sources described the Scots' fondness for African women. In fact, officials deemed it necessary to institute patrols to separate a garrison at Stellenbosch from the 'friendly' African ladies who frequented the area. The authorities believed that if British troops were caught in the company of these women, they would lose face in Dutch/Afrikaner circles.¹⁶⁸ There is no reason to believe that the Manchesters would have acted differently.

¹⁶⁵ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 155.

¹⁶⁶ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 144.

¹⁶⁷ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 121.

¹⁶⁸ Spiers, *The Scottish Soldier and Empire*, 194.



Photo 9: Five African women in traditional garb, photographed by the Manchesters.

Source: 'Photograph Album, South Africa, Local View; Scenes in Camp; Informal Groups; on the March', c. 1900. MR 1/23/21. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

3.8 CONCLUSION

South Africa was, undeniably, a strange land and an adventure for most Manchesters, albeit not always a pleasant one. Yet, there were a few familiar sights such as friendly, mostly English-speaking white civilians in many towns, and even a few in the countryside. The other trappings of colonialism, such as trains and newly built structures, would also have been familiar. Still, it was the unfamiliar which caught the men's attention. Their perspectives, explored via a thematic approach, reinforce and supplement our present understanding of the British soldiers' experiences, but also brings to light themes which are not covered to a significant extent elsewhere.

The landscape, although mostly strange and wild, drew a largely positive response, even though the rough nature of the terrain contributed to a long and difficult war. It was thus ironic that the hills and mountains of Natal and the eastern Transvaal, where the 1st Manchesters spent most of their campaign, received almost universally favourable reviews. The 2nd Manchesters, operating in the eastern Free State, were much quieter. Indeed, Captain Trueman was the most vocal and he was unimpressed, even though he travelled in some of the most picturesque mountainous terrain on the modern border between the Free State province and Lesotho. As for South African towns, the men were almost universally positive. This is in striking contrast to Miller's findings on the Volunteers, where the majority of his sources tended to perceive the towns as unattractive spaces. Although there can be no

certainty, it was possible that the Manchesters, most of whom came from the highly developed and urbanised environment of Manchester and its surrounding settlements, appreciated the rustic-looking towns. They may even have been more strongly influenced by one of the prominent cultural forces in the late-Victorian era which romanticised the rural countryside. Whatever the explanation may be, it does show that it is difficult to make broad generalisations about British soldiers' perspectives regarding the physical landscape, particularly due to the massive scope of the conflict which played out across almost the entire country with its different environments. It is thus more than likely that where a regiment served, combined with the aesthetic preferences of individuals, had a significant influence on how they viewed the landscape and its towns. A few Manchesters did display a negative view of their environment as they grew tired of the war, although there were few examples of this. I am therefore hesitant to conclude that increasing war weariness was a major factor in how they perceived the landscape, although it certainly cannot be ruled out as a major factor for other regiments.

The Manchesters' perceptions of the weather reveal new details and insights about how influential the weather was. Studies about British soldiers' experiences say very little about the major role that weather played in the lives of the soldiers, apart from extremely brief mentions of the cold, heat, or rain.¹⁶⁹ Even with regard to the Boer experience of war, Pretorius devotes only a few sentences to how a lack of proper clothing and tents made winters hard for the commandos, and exposed them to the rain.¹⁷⁰ Yet, I found that the Manchesters wrote extensively about the weather, and it was clearly a major part of their wartime experience, and a mostly unpleasant one. Due to almost persistent supply problems, as will be discussed in the next chapter, the men were often without tents and blankets. With very little to shelter them from the weather, it is little wonder that they commented so frequently about the virtually inescapable effects of poor weather.

The Manchesters saw both known and unknown animals in South Africa, but only a few wrote about it. By the time the war started, much of South Africa's large wildlife was severely depleted, but some Manchesters did take note of the smaller animals, such as birds, while hares were valued as a welcome addition to the cooking pot. It was the officers, though, who commented the most about the wildlife, or the lack thereof, not because they were particularly interested in admiring nature's creations, but because they wanted to hunt. Officers, being largely from the upper class, still clung to the centuries old convention that hunting was the honoured privilege of their social station. It seems however the Manchester officers did not have much luck, beyond shooting smaller fauna. As for more familiar animals, such as horses

¹⁶⁹ Pretorius, *Die Anglo-Boereoorlog*, 40; Venter and Wessels, 'British Soldiers' Anglo-Boer War Experiences as Recorded in Their Diaries', 75.

¹⁷⁰ Pretorius, *Kommandolewe Tydens Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, 91, 101–2.

and mules, some Manchesters emphasised their suffering. Trueman was clearly fond of his horses, especially the ones his groom managed to find wandering in the veld and subsequently rehabilitated. This type of relationship with animals touched on an aspect that is almost completely absent from most extant sources about the British soldiers' experience: pets. The Manchesters, except for Trueman and his horses, did not write about pets and their presence can only be seen in photographs. Why they did not write about their pets is a mystery, but as argued in studies about soldiers from other modern conflicts, pets were an important source of emotional support, enabling some Manchesters to express love and receive love in a way which did not invite judgement or condemnation.

When it came to the various peoples of South Africa, the Manchesters had a wide variety of perspectives and attitudes, ranging from positive, mixed, to negative. Often, one Manchester would express all three tones at different occasions, or even at the same time in a series of contradictory statements. This was most often the case when they wrote about white civilians and the Boer combatants. With regard to Africans, their attitudes aligned with the era's prevailing racist attitudes, although the very 'alienness' of African culture also provoked intense curiosity. On a few occasions, the Manchesters recognised Africans as human beings, although it occurred only after finding African scouts or workers executed by the Boers.

Most of the Manchester comments, though, focused on the Boer enemy, arguably the most intriguing subject for both the soldiers and their audience back home. In the case of the Manchesters, the main reason for a negative perspective was their inability to understand the logic behind the Boer way of war. As a result, they thought the enemy were cowards and fought unfairly. War weariness certainly contributed to a growing negative perception of the Boers among some men, but I do not believe it was as influential, or as straightforward a factor, as some studies have suggested. Arguably, a more important factor which influenced Manchester opinions was the action taken by the Boers. Enemy atrocities provoked a negative reaction, but when they showed compassion or conducted themselves in some other amenable manner, attitudes switched to the positive. In some Manchesters, this worked almost like a pendulum, their perceptions swinging back and forth. What was most striking, though, and an aspect almost completely absent from secondary sources, was the extraordinary lengths some Manchesters took to save seriously wounded Boer enemies whose chances of survival were extremely low, for no discernible benefit to themselves, other than trying to save another human being.

4. SUPPLIES

“Some days we have plenty, some none”

Biscuit and water is the midday feast on the march, the regular sacrament to the war god. But the Manchester man does not complain; he is on quarter rations now. When he gets back to the great manufacturing city it will be full rations. And then the Manchester man looks down into his canteen and its dirty, muddy water. Who knows but what he, too, may fall a victim this very day to the spiteful Mauser.¹

The words of Private Fisher, a 1st Battalion reservist who wrote about conditions in Buller’s relief force, sums up the situation best: “some days we have plenty, some none”.² Supplies, or the lack thereof, was an important part of the Manchesters’ experiences during the war. Water, food, alcohol, tobacco, clothing, boots, tents, blankets, and other items such as candles, fuel, and even luxury items such as chocolate, all contributed to making life on campaign either uncomfortable, bearable, or pleasant. Despite the important role played by supplies in the average British soldier’s experience of war, this topic is rarely looked at in depth by historians. In contrast, this study approaches this topic in a thematic-chronological, extensive, and systematic manner. As a result, it reveals several new insights by looking at how the Manchesters experienced and responded to various supply challenges. The most important finding is that due to nearly persistent dissatisfaction with the amount of and quality of the food, that the Manchesters turned to looting the countryside, even before it became more ‘acceptable’ to do so from roughly mid-1900.

The British soldier and supplies are not a completely unknown topic in histories of the South African War. It is sometimes mentioned in passing, or as part of a quote, but it is seldom looked at in considerable detail. It is usually interwoven in a broader discussion of the campaign. In Pakenham’s *The Boer War*, incidents of hunger were mentioned on occasion, such as when Lord Roberts’ troops lived on emergency rations called “meat paste” in May 1900, because the Boers disrupted the supply lines by blowing up railways and bridges.³ In Downham’s *Red Roses on the Veldt*, one of the Lancashire Regiment soldiers, in a section about the Battle of

¹ W.M. Anderson. ‘The Day’s March: Through Dust and Toil and Hunger after de Wet’. *Daily Mail*, 1 May 1901.

² Jack Fisher. ‘Letters from the Front’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 24 March 1900, 6.

³ Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 422.

Modder River, wrote after the battle that tobacco was nowhere to be found, and begged his reader to send him some.⁴ Downham touched in a similarly summary manner on other supply topics such as water, food, and clothing.⁵

The supplies experience is not much more detailed in those studies specifically concerned with the British soldier. Nasson briefly pointed out that widespread looting was linked to inadequate supplies, and provided a few details about the poor food supply and the soldiers' access to alcohol.⁶ Venter and Wessels also touched briefly on the poor food which encouraged looting and a short mention of alcohol.⁷ Miller alluded to supply shortages and inadequate food while discussing the Volunteers' declining morale during the guerrilla phase.⁸ It is noticeable that clothing and boots are barely covered in the existing literature. In summary, historians are aware of the role of various supplies, especially the shortages, but these discussions are not very detailed.

This chapter will cover several Manchester experiences related to supplies. Before delving directly into the Manchesters' experiences, it is necessary to take a broader view of the supply operations of the British Army during the war, which was an enormous and complex undertaking. The scorched-earth policy will also be briefly contextualised, since it impacted the way the Manchesters supplemented supplies, particularly food. Once these contexts are set, the Manchester experience is explored thematically. The main themes include water, food, fuel, tobacco, alcohol, clothing and boots, blankets, tents, writing equipment, and a few miscellaneous items. This arrangement can quickly become more complicated, though, once one considers how the nature of military operations at that time, such as garrisoning, sweeps, escort duty, and other operations affected the situation. It is evident that the activities the men were engaged in, and where they were, influenced to a large extent their supply situation. It is also worth noting that there were many other methods the men used to obtain supplies, especially when the official channels were inadequate, which ranged from gifts from home, buying necessary items, or outright looting. In fact, without widespread looting, which started long before the scorched-earth policy had become official, it is almost certain that the Manchesters would have suffered significantly worse than they did with regard to food supplies.

⁴ Downham, *Red Roses on the Veldt*, 46.

⁵ Downham, *Red Roses on the Veldt*, 66, 181–82.

⁶ Nasson, 'Tommy Atkins in South Africa', 130, 134–35.

⁷ Venter and Wessels, 'British Soldiers' Anglo-Boer War Experiences as Recorded in Their Diaries', 79–81.

⁸ Miller, *Volunteers on the Veldt*, 140.

4.1 SUPPLYING THE TROOPS THROUGH OFFICIAL CHANNELS: METHODS AND CHALLENGES

There is a significant study by Andrew Page on the British army's overall logistics effort during the South African War, but it is not concerned with the soldiers' experiences. Yet, it is a useful source to expand on and contextualise the Manchesters' experiences. Completed in 1976 as a doctoral thesis at the University of Oxford, Page's "Supply services of the British army in the South African War, 1899-1902" included information about, among others, food and clothing supplies. It detailed the different types of food the army supplied, and even information about the ration scale used. Page argued that despite the army's insistence that its provisions were adequate and that there were merely temporary shortages due to tactical circumstances, the rations were almost certainly nutritionally inadequate.⁹

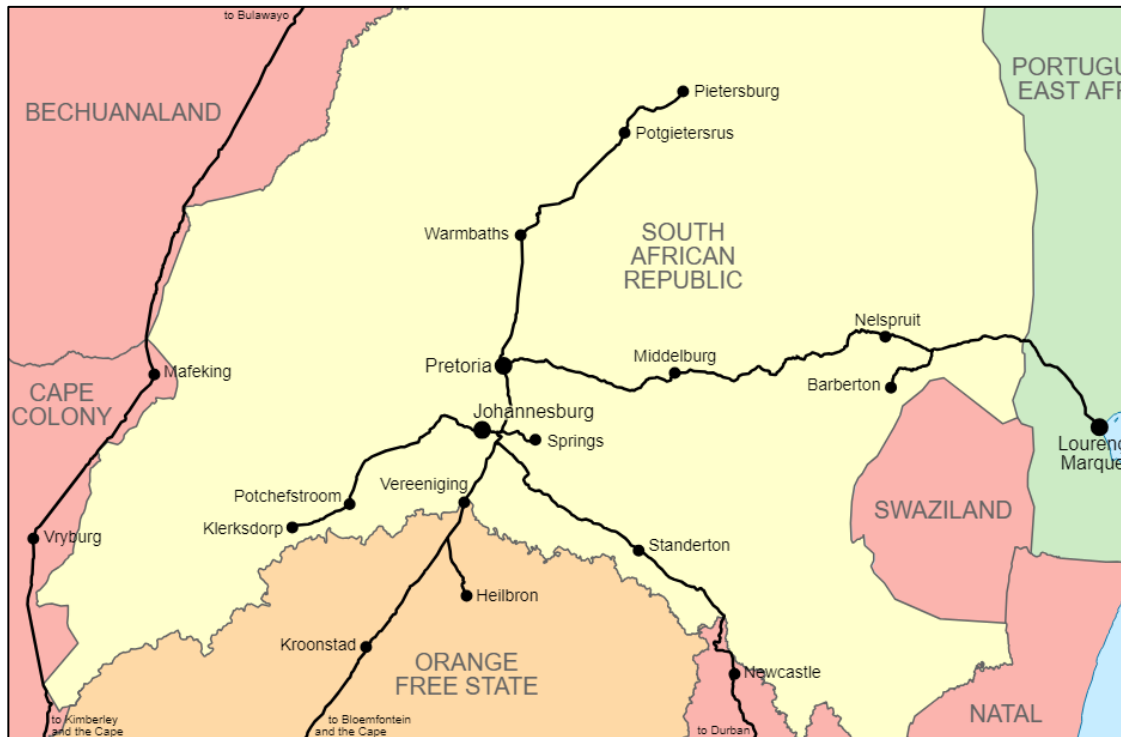
The British Army had limited options when supplying its soldiers in South Africa, and before taking a closer look at the Manchesters' experiences, a brief context of how the troops were supplied is useful. The study by Page forms the basis of this contextual summary. According to the British army's own calculations, they needed ten tons (10.16 metric tons) of supplies a day for every 1 000 troops, thus about 10.16 kg per man per day. Before looking at the logistical efforts, though, it is worth highlighting the combination of supply challenges the British army faced in this war, without including Boer raids on communication lines. First was the size of the army. Most military operations before South Africa were relatively small colonial wars. For instance, Lord Kitchener's campaign in the Sudan from 1896 to 1898 started with about 9 000 soldiers and by 1898 had grown to roughly 25 800. Further complicating matters was the extent of the operational area, which stretched across most of what would become modern South Africa. The war was also a considerable distance from the main supply base in the United Kingdom. Lastly, the duration of the war was unexpected.¹⁰

South Africa did have a railway system, though, and this would be Britain's first war where railways played an essential role. The South African railway was by far the cheapest and most efficient supply artery. However, the country only had limited rail connections (see map below), almost everything was single track, the locomotives were small and slow, and there was a shortage of sufficient rolling stock (trucks). Even so, Page argued that without the railways, limited as they were, the British would not have been able to field the large forces they did. For example, Lord Roberts' 40 000 strong force which marched on Bloemfontein from the Orange River (Gariiep River) from 11 February to 13 March 1900, a distance of 170 miles

⁹ Andrew Page. 'Supply Services of the British Army in the South African War, 1899-1902'. University of Oxford, 1976, 287–89.

¹⁰ Page, 'Supply Services of the British Army in the South African War, 1899-1902', ii, 101.

(274 km), would have been an impossible undertaking without the railway, even though Roberts left the railway to surprise and surround General Cronjé on 18 February at Paardeberg. Even with the aid of the railway, Roberts' troops ended their journey at Bloemfontein short on rations and various other essential supplies, such as clothes.¹¹



Map 5: The rail lines in the Boer republics in 1899.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Transvaal_railway_map_1899.svg, [Accessed 30 October 2023]

As important as the railways were, its reach was limited. Most of the country was inaccessible. The bulk of supplies thus had to be transported over land along dirt roads and tracks, or cross-country, using oxen-drawn carts and mules. Mules, although faster, pulled less and worse, and had to carry their feed with them. Oxen, on the other hand, pulled far heavier weights, although much slower, but they could graze along the way. Most ox wagons were 16 span vehicles capable of carrying 6 000 lbs (2721.55 kg) at 16 miles a day. Mule wagons were 10 span vehicles carrying 3 500 lbs (1587.6 kg) at 20 miles a day. These numbers were for mostly ideal conditions, which South Africa was not. The terrain was rough and the majority of the few roads were, at best, dirt tracks which turned into mud after heavy rain. However, the British

¹¹ Page, 'Supply Services of the British Army in the South African War, 1899-1902', 84–85, 119.

army was no stranger to operating in difficult terrain with poor roads. The difference in South Africa, though, was the significantly larger scale of the war. Another problem was that swiftly marching troops quickly outpaced the supply columns, while the attrition rate of the oxen and mules was extremely high. When Roberts marched from Bloemfontein to Pretoria, even in conjunction with the railway, they lost a third of their oxen due to overloading the wagons and inadequate feed.¹²

The few Manchester descriptions of logistical matters largely support Page's study of the army's supply efforts. Private Fisher, a reservist attached to Buller's stretcher bearers in the months leading up to the relief of Ladysmith, clearly understood the importance of the railway. He wrote that "I will be glad when we do get into Ladysmith. We can then get grub and other things up by rail better".¹³ Some soldiers commented on the overland transport arrangements, such as Private Hawkins, who described how supplies were brought in by a string of transports, each drawn by 16 bullocks.¹⁴ To illustrate the difficulties the supply wagons sometimes faced, this description by Trueman, written on 22 August 1900 near Reitz, provides a compelling picture. They were escorting a supply convoy to Harrismith because their division was desperately low on provisions. They hardly managed half-a-mile on the first day, though, due to the difficulty of crossing a troublesome "drift", a local term for a river crossing. Trueman stated that it took nearly nine hours for 40 wagons to cross.¹⁵ Getting supplies to the soldiers who served on the front in difficult terrain was thus an arduous and inconsistent process.

It is worth noting that the soldiers placed various items, such as cloaks, blankets, and other bulky or heavy items on the supply wagons before they set out to march.¹⁶ The disadvantage of this, though, was that the supply column often lagged far behind the troops. Private Hawkins, a volunteer, wrote in March 1900 how they were short of clothing, tobacco, and other small luxuries while at Dewdrop Camp in Natal, because their kit was left behind at Ladysmith. This was clearly a cause for upset, since he used the words "deceived" and "mess" as he described the situation.¹⁷ It appears that in this case, the wagons were delayed due to clerical

¹² Page, 'Supply Services of the British Army in the South African War, 1899-1902', 120–22, 154, 158, 163.

¹³ Fisher, 'Letters from the Front', 6.

¹⁴ Walter Hawkins. 'Letter from a Dukinfield Soldier'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 2 June 1900, 8.

¹⁵ Charles Hamilton Trueman. 'Correspondence, Bound Volume of Transcripts of Letters and Diary Entries from Captain Charles Hamilton Trueman, 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, Describing His Time and Service in South Africa during the South African (Boer) War. The Volume Also Contains Photocopied Newscuttings Relating to John Francis William Fitzgerald to Whom the Volume Belonged and Who Later Willed It to the Depositor. A Newscutting Relating to the Death of a Pte Lionel Parminter Is Pasted onto the End Papers, 1900-1901', MR 4/16/75. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre, 55.

¹⁶ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 39.

¹⁷ Walter Hawkins. 'Letter from an Ashton Volunteer at the Front'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 21 April 1900, 6.

error. In November 1900, Private Scott mentioned that the transport was unable to keep up with the attack on Amersfoort, which meant they spent a cold night without blankets.¹⁸ Another factor which prevented the supply columns from reaching the troops was enemy fire. Writing on 20 April 1900, Private Mills of the 2nd Manchesters mentioned how they went into action near Dewetsdorp without breakfast, because their supply carts were four miles away and could not get closer due to enemy shelling.¹⁹ Throughout this chapter, more examples of wagons lagging in the rear will be found.

The lower levels of the command chain, such as the regimental command, sometimes organised a more coherent and focused resupply when the situation demanded it. The 2nd Battalion, operating in the Free State, experienced severe supply problems during the winter of 1900 with regards to blankets, great coats, and tents. It appears that a mix of bureaucratic mismanagement and the speed at which the battalion advanced caused many men to go without essential winter equipment. Lt Col Reay decided to procure the necessary kit in Ficksburg by sending their quartermaster to purchase the items, which was subsequently delivered on 10 July 1900.²⁰

The experience of the 2nd Manchesters above, where they were forced to take matters into their own hands, was in fact due to the mismanagement of Lords Kitchener and Roberts. The Manchesters were partially reverting to the older War Office supply system as developed by General Buller before the war. This was a highly flexible, decentralised system which allowed individual regiments a measure of control over their own supply transport. Each regiment was allocated seven wagons. This was the so-called “first line”, also known as regimental transport. In total, there were four “lines”, and they were independent of one another. The second line was a dedicated supply column for brigade and divisional sizes. The third was for an army to corps size, and the fourth was mostly dedicated to maintaining the garrisons along the line of communication, although it could be diverted if necessary, much like a reserve. Kitchener and Roberts did not understand their own army’s supply system. They thought it was inefficient and because they only ever commanded small forces in colonial campaigns, they were used to centralising the transport under their own control. Thus, Kitchener ‘reorganised’ the transport on 15 January 1900, turning it into a highly centralised, cumbersome, and inflexible system which swiftly broke down into chaos.²¹ Despite Kitchener threatening commanders in

¹⁸ W. Scott. ‘Letters from the Front’. *The Gorton Reporter*, 19 January 1901, 3.

¹⁹ A. Mills. ‘Letter from A. Mills’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 26 May 1900, 6.

²⁰ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 41–43.

²¹ It is worth noting that other historians, such as Pakenham, had an equally negative assessment of Kitchener’s changes. Moreover, contemporaries were dubious, if not apprehensive, about these changes. General French, for example, made sure to ignore Kitchener and managed to keep his own transport column out of reach of Kitchener. Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 312, 318.

June 1900 to not revert to the old regimental transport, many ignored him and ‘confiscated’ wagons for their own use.²²

Another factor affecting supplies was, quite simply, who got to it first and who was higher up the chain of command. Captain Trueman, with the 2nd Manchesters in the 8th Division, writing about events in May 1900 near Senekal and Hammonia, grumbled about how the Army Staff commandeered most things, while the cavalry, on account of their superior mobility, usually took the rest.²³ It appears his comment referred to supplies brought up through the official army transport channels, and to supplies taken opportunistically from the countryside.

4.2 SUPPLIES AS GIFTS

Another source of supplies, albeit much smaller in scale and more infrequent, was in the form of gifts, either from public donations or from friends and family. Some men started receiving gifts even before reaching South Africa. While on board the transport *Octavia*, Volunteer Private Clarke received numerous gifts, courtesy of Reverend A. Parry, who was an active gift organiser in the community of St. John’s in Hurst. Clarke received half a pound of tobacco and cigarettes, a jersey, three handkerchiefs, two pairs of socks, two belts, two pipes, two mufflers, woollen drawers, a knife, and a tam-o’-shanter (a Scottish woollen cap, usually with a pompon in the centre).²⁴ Private Hakwins received a pair of socks in April 1900 while at Surprise Hill in Natal. These presents, from a public collection, were distributed to the men by the luck of the draw. Others had received gifts of tobacco, shirts, or tam-o’-shanters.²⁵ Private Smith also mentioned the gifts they received while at Surprise Hill, listing shirts, socks, caps, mufflers, tobacco, and cigarettes. In fact, Smith told his parents to stop sending him items from home, since they were well supplied thanks to all these gifts.²⁶ Lt Col Reay wrote a letter to Reverend Parry on 13 May 1900, to thank him for the gifts he collected in Ashton and Manchester for the men, which even included telescopes.²⁷ Captain Trueman, in an entry on 28 September 1900, received a Sam Browne belt from one of his friends he corresponded with.²⁸ Private Barron, 1st Battalion, asked his friend to “thank the lads for me for the presents”.²⁹ Supplies mailed from home, usually small luxuries, were thus an important supplement for the men.

²² Page, ‘Supply Services of the British Army in the South African War, 1899-1902’, 135–39, 142, 156–58.

²³ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 30.

²⁴ James Clarke. ‘Letter from a Soldier: In a Collision at Sea’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 21 July 1900, 6.

²⁵ Hawkins, ‘Letter from a Dukinfield Soldier’, 8.

²⁶ Orlando Smith. ‘Letter from an Ashton Volunteer’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 23 June 1900, 6.

²⁷ Charles Reay. ‘Letter from Colonel Reay’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 16 June 1900, 6.

²⁸ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 78.

²⁹ William Barron. ‘Letter from Private Wm. Barron’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 23 June 1900, 6.

On occasion, it appears that even the army gifted the men extra supplies for fulfilling certain conditions. However, this could also cause ill-feeling among those who did not qualify. A 1st Battalion reservist, who wrote anonymously to the *Manchester Evening News*, complained bitterly about how Lord Roberts had promised all men who had served six months in the field without being admitted to hospital, a gift of an extra shirt and two pairs of socks. Evidently, this was a way to motivate the soldiers to stay out of the hospital unless it was necessary. However, the writer viewed this as inherently unfair, asking “why a man who has been wounded or fallen sick should be debarred from receiving the above [shirt and two pairs socks] I fail to see, as they are just as much in need of them as our lucky comrades”.³⁰ The writer, who himself fell ill at Dewdrop Camp in April 1900, but who had served ten months in South Africa since then, did not qualify for the gift, while other men, who had been in South Africa only six months and were fortunate enough not to fall ill or wounded, qualified for the gift.

4.3 WATER

Water was a necessity, but it was sometimes hard to come by in South Africa, and was often of poor quality. During the siege of Ladysmith, water was rationed. Private Ollerenshaw wrote that they were allowed only a pint of water a day, and some days none at all.³¹ The water situation was not much better once the siege ended. Volunteer Private Hawkins, while at Dewdrop Camp in Natal in March 1900, complained how they had to walk almost two miles to the river to collect muddy water which was only drinkable once filtered through cloth. He most ardently wished for a beer during these trips.³² Volunteer Corporal Lees, at Dewdrop Camp during the same period, confirmed Hawkins’ account of the water, stating that “the water here is very bad. If I were at home I would not wash myself in it, but we have to drink it out of the river”.³³ Volunteer Private Riley who had joined the battered 1st Battalion in Natal, wrote on 16 March 1900 that “we cannot get anything to drink except water, which is not so very good”.³⁴ Lance-Corporal Hodgkinson, 2nd Battalion, experienced the scarcity of water soon after they arrived in South Africa in April 1900, walking almost a mile to the nearest source of water to fill his bottle, before they began their march into the Free State from Reddersberg.³⁵ During a period of hard marching, Private Turner wrote that they stopped about five miles from Bloemfontein to camp, but the nearest source of water was three miles away.³⁶ The 2nd

³⁰ ‘A Manchester Reservist’s Grievance’, *The Manchester Evening News*, 16 January 1901, 5.

³¹ Ollerenshaw, ‘Interesting Letter from the Front’, *The Ashton Reporter*, 9 June 1900, 6.

³² Hawkins, ‘Letter from an Ashton Volunteer at the Front’, 6.

³³ Samuel Lees. ‘Letter from Corporal Lees, of Ashton’. *The Stalybridge Reporter*, 28 April 1900, 6.

³⁴ Harry Riley. ‘Another Letter from an Ashton Volunteer at the Front’, *The Ashton Reporter*, 28 April 1900, 6.

³⁵ A. Hodgkinson. ‘Interesting Letter from the Seat of War’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 2 June 1900, 6.

³⁶ Alfred Turner. ‘Letter from Alfred Turner’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 23 June 1900, 6.

Battalion, while on the hunt for De Wet in April 1901, had to suffer muddy water for the most part.³⁷

Due to the medical advances made in the nineteenth century, the army was aware of several methods to make drinking water safer, suggesting that “bad water can be made fit to drink by boiling, or by putting alum or wood ashes into it. Stir up well, and then allow it to settle”.³⁸ Boiling the water was in fact the safest method, but the other two options could help remove various pollutants, especially when filtered through a cloth. However, it was less effective in killing harmful bacteria. There is no way to know whether the men followed this advice. Page found an account by Surgeon-General Jameson, presented to the Elgin Commission in 1904, wherein Jameson claimed that the troops often lacked fuel to boil water, and moreover, many of them disliked drinking boiled water.³⁹ Safe drinking water, however, was of utmost importance, since contaminated water was the main cause of typhoid.

Sources of water, particularly good quality ones, were thus so precious that commanders stationed troops to guard them, as was the case for Captain Trueman and his men, who were tasked with guarding the water source at Hammonia from 2 to 11 June 1900.⁴⁰ Sergeant Hobson, 1st Battalion, also spent time guarding a water source, a *spruit*, a local term for a spring or small stream, three miles from their camp near Lydenburg, on Christmas Day, no less. This did allow him the luxury of a quick wash, though, which he thought was a fine gift.⁴¹

Obtaining water while on the march could be challenging, though not impossible. Most men, as alluded to earlier, would fill their bottles before they set out on a march. In the end, it depended on the terrain they were moving through, and there would surely have been opportunities to refill water bottles when crossing or passing a stream. Indeed, as W.M. Anderson, a correspondent for the *Daily Mail* wrote regarding the pursuit of De Wet by Lieutenant-General (Lt Gen.) Rundle’s 8th Division, the thirsty men crossed at least one stream on one of the days of marching in April 1901. However, the correspondent, with a hint of

³⁷ W.M. Anderson. ‘The Day’s March: Through Dust and Toil and Hunger after de Wet’. *Daily Mail*, 1 May 1901.

³⁸ ‘Nominal Roll, Squad Roll of “G” Coy., 1st Battalion (Captain Marsden’s)’, 1899. MR 1/8/3. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

³⁹ Page, ‘Supply Services of the British Army in the South African War, 1899-1902’, 296, 356. The Elgin Commission, named after its chairperson, Lord Elgin, was a Royal Commission created after the South African War to investigate the shortcomings of the War Office and the army. Although somewhat toothless, it revealed that there were numerous problems.

⁴⁰ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 33.

⁴¹ Williams Hobson. ‘Personal Papers, 7113 Sergeant William Hobson, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters [to His Brother] about the Boer War (with Transcripts), Service Programs, 1901-1988’, MR 3/17/104. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

venom, wrote that the officers in charge did not think it necessary to allow the soldiers to slake their thirst after almost six hours without water, and hurried the men along.⁴²

During a long firefight, the men developed a tremendous thirst and replenishing water was a potentially deadly endeavour. Captain Trueman and his company were ordered to hold a walled cemetery during an encounter with the Boers near Senekal in September 1900. They were pinned by enemy fire, in the open with no shade and under a hot sun, from approximately 10:00 to 17:00. At some point during this encounter, one man, called Pearson, volunteered to fetch water, crossing an open stretch of about 500 yards (457 metres) under fire, but returned unhurt. At a later point the men were ordered to get “watered”. When it was Trueman’s turn, he and his group did so, under fire, and then returned, again under fire, after they had drunk their fill. It was worth it, though, as Trueman wrote “by George! the [sic] water was good”.⁴³ Some Boers also risked their lives to slake their thirst during combat.⁴⁴

4.4 FOOD

There were various opinions about the quantity and quality of the food. Unlike the Boer experience of the war, as illustrated by Fransjohan Pretorius' *Life on Commando* (1999), the Manchester experience regarding food did not deteriorate as the war went on. Instead, it was a mix of good, average, and bad from start to finish. Where they were and what they were doing were the main factors which determined food quantity and quality. Private Bumby, a regular with the 1st Battalion, wrote to his parents as early as 28 October 1899, that “I shall not care how soon this war is over, as we do not get a proper meal, and, to tell you the truth, we get nothing but dry bread and coffee - and we are lucky to get that”.⁴⁵ The war, at this point, was only 17 days old and they were not that far from the railway line.⁴⁶ The situation improved several months later. Private Hakwins described the food they received at Surprise Hill in April 1900 as plain, but good, and “if I get nothing worse I won’t grumble”.⁴⁷ This was after the siege of Ladysmith concluded on 28 February 1900, and the 1st Manchesters would spend several months rebuilding their strength in Natal. In contrast, at roughly the same time, Lance-Corporal Hodkinson, 2nd Battalion, was scathing in his letter written on 1 May 1900. Writing about the very beginning of his experiences in South Africa, he wrote “we should get better food in any

⁴² Anderson, ‘The Day’s March: Through Dust and Toil and Hunger after de Wet’.

⁴³ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 64–65.

⁴⁴ Pretorius, *Kommandolewe Tydens Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, 255–56.

⁴⁵ George Bumby. ‘An Ashtonian at the Front: Not Satisfied with the Food’. *The Stalybridge Reporter*, 2 December 1899, 6.

⁴⁶ There was a temporary supply shortage when the war began. Authorities had placed the order for the necessary supplies too late. When General Buller arrived in Natal on 31 October 1899, he was furious that there were only two and a half months of supplies for all forces in South Africa. Page, ‘Supply Services of the British Army in the South African War, 1899-1902’, 266–267.

⁴⁷ Hawkins, ‘Letter from a Dukinfield Soldier’, 8.

prison in England than we get here”.⁴⁸ The 2nd Battalion, it should be noted, disembarked at Port Elizabeth on 11 April. He elaborated by explaining that since leaving Port Elizabeth they had not received a single full ration of bread and were issued only a full ration of biscuits every two days or so. At this point they were not far from the rail line. However, conditions worsened considerably once they marched deeper into the interior, receiving half rations, and sometimes even quarter rations, which was only one biscuit a day. He reminded his readers that they were marching almost 10 to 12 hours a day, with heavy kit. “I will say no more ... but hope to be home again soon, or I shall be starved to death if the Boers don’t shoot me”.⁴⁹ Colour-Sergeant Bailey, in a letter published by the end of July 1901, wrote that while stationed at Van Reenen’s Pass, the 2nd Manchesters’ food was exceptionally good given that they were on active service.⁵⁰ He did not, however, provide details about whether the food came from official army stores or was from looted farms. Still, it probably helped that they were not constantly on the move at this point. Sergeant Hobson, 1st Battalion, commented to his brother in a letter dated 5 November 1901 from Lydenburg, that “the health of the company is very good. It is surprising what the troops can go through seeing what food they get”.⁵¹ They were mostly on garrison duty then and thus relatively stationary, and only sometimes ventured out on quick forays into the surrounding countryside.

At this point in the discussion, it is worth noting that negative views about the food were common, but do not necessarily paint the full picture. The quality and quantity of the food varied considerably, especially when the soldiers acquired it outside the normal army supply chain, and also depended on where they were and what they were doing. The sources are partly to blame for suggesting that war in South Africa was a hungry affair. It is important to remember that the men chose what they wrote about, and grumbling about the food, or lack thereof, was a good way to deal with their frustration, but was also far more interesting to write about than days where the food situation was largely normal. In addition, their readers would have also found these descriptions of their suffering interesting or concerning. Either way, the author of the letter chose what he wrote about, and as Spiers argued, soldiers wrote for a reason.⁵² In this case, it seems it was for both emotional and informative effect, especially to make family and friends aware of the inadequate food situation, as the soldiers perceived it, while garnering some sympathy. During this process, it is easy to imagine that some accounts were exaggerated for effect. With that said, there is no denying that the food, especially from

⁴⁸ Hodkinson, ‘Interesting Letter from the Seat of War’, 6.

⁴⁹ Hodkinson, 6.

⁵⁰ Charles Reay. ‘Manchesters at the Front: Doings of the 2nd Battalion’. *Manchester Evening Chronicle*, 29 July 1901.

⁵¹ Hobson, ‘Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother’.

⁵² Spiers, ‘Military Correspondence in the Late Nineteenth-Century Press’, 29–30.

official army channels, was largely insufficient, as will be discussed below. Negative views of the food were not restricted to just the Manchesters, but various other studies point to an overwhelmingly negative view of army rations.⁵³

Before moving on, it is important to explain what the British army considered a suitable daily ration, and whether it was sufficient. The minimum daily ration for a soldier consisted of 1 lb (454 g) biscuit or 1 ¼ lb (567 g) bread; 1 lb meat to be increased whenever possible; a small amount of tea, coffee, sugar, salt, and pepper; 1 oz (28.34 g) of compressed vegetables or ½ lb (227 g) fresh vegetables; 4 oz (113.4 g) of jam; occasional allocation of lime juice; and an occasional issue of rum. The senior officers were convinced well after the war was over that this ration was sufficient. The soldiers, however, disagreed strongly during and after the war. Medical experiments conducted in 1909 determined conclusively that this ration was inadequate for active service where soldiers were expected to march, fight, and do other hard physical work. The soldiers used in the experiment rapidly lost weight and girth while marching long distances. It was determined that the ration was too low in fat and sugar. As a result, the army increased the calorific value of the daily ration by 25 percent in 1913.⁵⁴ Thus, even if the full rations reached the troops, the nutritional value of the ration was clearly inadequate.

Given the deficiencies of the rations, it is unsurprising that items such as the army's biscuit or tinned bully beef elicited almost universal negative feelings. On 17 April 1900 in Edenvale, Captain Trueman commented sarcastically that the bully beef was "quite chewable so the mincing machine doesn't come in".⁵⁵ In a letter dated 9 May 1900, he gleefully exclaimed that he had not eaten bully beef for days, on account of the rich pickings in the countryside.⁵⁶ Sergeant Hobson, 1st Battalion, referred to the army biscuit ration as a "dog biscuit". Even so, he was so famished after a 20-mile march, that he consumed 24 of these "dog biscuits" with a pint of tea.⁵⁷ These biscuits were apparently incredibly hard, so much so that some soldiers broke their teeth on it. Thus, Hobson combining it with tea as described above, was one way to soften it up. The biscuit's main advantage, like tinned bully beef, was that it lasted long on campaign and even when broken by rough handling, it could be mixed with other food. Apparently, when crushed, it made an acceptable main ingredient for porridge.⁵⁸ Practical

⁵³ Nasson, 'Tommy Atkins in South Africa', 134–35; Venter and Wessels, 'British Soldiers' Anglo-Boer War Experiences as Recorded in Their Diaries', 79–80.

⁵⁴ Page, 'Supply Services of the British Army in the South African War, 1899-1902', 287–289.

⁵⁵ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 5.

⁵⁶ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 20.

⁵⁷ Hobson, 'Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother'.

⁵⁸ Anthony Clayton. *Battlefield Rations: The Food Given to the British Soldier for Marching and Fighting 1900-2011*. Havertown: Helion and Company, 2013, 14–15; Venter and Wessels, 'British Soldiers' Anglo-Boer War Experiences as Recorded in Their Diaries', 81.

though these two items were in providing some form of sustenance while out in the field, it did not inspire much enthusiasm.

Being under siege by the enemy obviously made food scarce. The food situation during the siege of Ladysmith, described here from the perspective of the 1st Manchesters' Records of Service, helps contextualise a prolonged period of hunger and even near starvation, especially during the last weeks of the siege. On 5 November 1899, there was approximately a month's supply of food in Ladysmith, and the next day the army took possession of all the supplies held by traders. However, food was already being rationed from December, because the 1st Manchesters went out on 15 December 1899 with a group of 75 Indian labourers to dig for potatoes on Bester's Farm, which ultimately proved unsuccessful. On 2 January 1900, they sent out patrols to look for mealies [local term for maize], potatoes, and other foodstuffs, but again found nothing. The patrols also visited the nearby African kraal, based on a rumour they were hiding corn and mealies, but this proved false. They even visited Bester's Farm again, but like the month before, there were no potatoes. The food situation was getting desperate. On 29 January 1900, the troops' rations were further reduced, and they began slaughtering cavalry horses deemed unfit for duty. On 3 February, they boiled down the excess carcasses to make a form of Bovril which the men called Chevril. The men received a full ration of bread on 22 February, in anticipation of being relieved soon. However, they were back to half rations on the 27th, or possibly the 28th.⁵⁹ Even after the relief, it took time for supplies to reach the hungry soldiers.

The following are some accounts of what the 1st Battalion had to endure during the siege. There are a few inconsistencies in what they ate, and what counted as reduced rations. Nevertheless, it is clear they did not get enough food to eat in the last weeks of the siege. Private Kershaw, after being relieved from Ladysmith, wrote to his mother that it was wonderful to finally have bread again after six weeks. He mentioned that at one point they were reduced to only a quarter pound of biscuits a day.⁶⁰ Private Bates wrote that they lived on mules, horses, and donkeys for nearly a month.⁶¹ Private Sim reported that they were short on rations for two months, and were reduced to four ounces of bread, a pint of imitation tea, and half a pound of horse meat for dinner. Sim lost three stone in weight (19kg).⁶² Private Ollerenshaw also mentioned receiving only half a pound of horseflesh a day, with a couple of biscuits.⁶³ According to Corporal Bramwell, in a letter to his wife written on 18 January 1900, they ran out of sugar the previous week, and were reduced to eating a porridge made from ground

⁵⁹ 'Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3'.

⁶⁰ Ernest Kershaw. 'After the Siege of Ladysmith'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 12 May 1900, 6.

⁶¹ W. Bates. 'Letter from an Ashton Soldier'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 7 April 1900, 5.

⁶² R. Sim. 'Letter from a Dukinfield Man at the Front'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 5 May 1900, 6.

⁶³ Ollerenshaw, 'Interesting Letter from the Front', 6.

Indian corn, better known today as flint corn, a variant of mealies. His words summed up the situation well: “I have not got your xmas [sic] present yet but I hope it is something to eat as we are all dreadfully hungry”.⁶⁴ Sergeant Hall, writing to his wife on 3 March 1900, described a diet of Indian mealie porridge and biscuits for the last two or three weeks of the siege, which left him feeling weak. He even had trouble walking.⁶⁵ In the opinion of Private Barratt, their diet of a few ounces of Indian mealie bread and horseflesh in the last few weeks left the men vulnerable to enteric fever and dysentery, which decimated the ranks.⁶⁶ The words written by Private Howard to his wife on 3 March 1900 left a particularly vivid image:

I never knew what starvation was till the siege and we ran out of food. Half rations we lived on for three months. They gave us porridge, and it was nothing but pure Indian corn, as we found whole ones that had missed the machine. The bread was made of the same stuff, and four men to a pound of it. For about seven weeks before we were relieved we lived on horse beef, and it stunk. They made sausage meat of it, cut it up very fine, and the smell would knock you down. Dear wife, all that's left of me is skin and bone; you would not know me, as weak as a cat.⁶⁷

Volunteer Private Smith arrived shortly after the relief and wrote on 15 March 1900 that he saw men so weakened by weeks of hunger that they could scarcely walk, needing walking sticks as aids.⁶⁸

It was possible to buy food during the siege, but at high prices.⁶⁹ An auctioneer's certificate for 21 February 1900 listed the following prices: 14 lbs (6.4 kg) of oatmeal for £2 19s 6d, one tin of condensed milk for 10s, 1 lb (454 g) of beef fat for 11s, 1 lb tin of coffee for 17s, 2 lb tin (907 g) tongue for £1 6s, one suckling pig for £1 17s, a dozen eggs for £2 8s, a fowl for 18s 6d, four small cucumbers for 15s 6d, one green mealie for 3s 8d, small plate of grapes for £1 5s, small plate of apples for 12s 6d, plate of tomatoes for 18s, one vegetable marrow for £1 8s, plate of eschalots for 11s, plate of potatoes for 19s, three small bunches of carrots for 9s, a glass of jelly for 18s, 1 lb bottle of jam for £1 11s, and 1 lb tin marmalade for £1 1s.⁷⁰ Private

⁶⁴ T. Bramwell. 'Letter, Corporal T Bramwell, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Caesar's Camp, Ladysmith to His Wife, Describing Conditions during the Siege', 18 January 1900. MR 1/17/29. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

⁶⁵ Tom Hall. 'Letters from Ladysmith'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 7 April 1900, 6.

⁶⁶ Sam Barratt. 'Interesting Letter from a Chapel Soldier at Ladysmith: Wounded in the Legs'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 14 April 1900, 6.

⁶⁷ Percy Howard. 'Letters from the Front', *The Ashton Reporter*, 14 April 1900, 6.

⁶⁸ Orlando Smith. 'Letter from Another Ashton Volunteer'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 21 April 1900, 6.

⁶⁹ For those unfamiliar with pre-decimal British currency: £sd is pounds, shillings, and pence. £1 equalled 20s; 1s equalled 12d. There was thus 240d in £1. It is impossible to calculate the true modern value of £1 in 1899. Keep in mind that the value of goods and services, such as bread, had changed significantly since then. Nevertheless, an estimate based on inflation suggests that £1 in 1899 is roughly worth £155 today. <https://iamkate.com/data/uk-inflation/> [accessed 3 November 2023]. A better indication is to look at what the average living costs were. According to a contemporary study by Seebohm Rowntree, a working class adult in 1899 needed to spend an average of 3s 3d a week for a nutritionally sufficient diet, which was, rounded up, 6d a day. <https://www.victorianweb.org/history/work/nelson1.html> [accessed 3 November 2023].

⁷⁰ Joe Dyson. 'List, Food Prices during the Siege of Ladysmith', 1900, Manchester Regiment, MR 3/27/2/112, Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

Fisher, a reservist of the 1st Battalion attached to Buller's relief force, wrote that when they finally relieved Ladysmith, the price for a 1 lb tin of jam was 10s 6d, and a tin of Swiss milk (condensed milk) the same.⁷¹

It is evident that when the soldiers were on the move, the quantity and quality of food was variable and uncertain. This came across most strongly in the accounts left by the 2nd Manchesters. Captain Trueman wrote on 17 April 1900 that while they were, briefly, in camp at Port Elizabeth on 11 April, there was scarcely any food. Private Hardman, in a letter dated 9 May 1900, wrote that they were mostly on half-rations.⁷² In contrast, Private Mills who wrote to his mother on 20 April 1900, thought that his fellow 2nd Manchesters were exaggerating the tales of suffering. He stated that while it was true that they received only tinned meat and biscuits while on the march, when they stopped at a rest camp, they received butter, jam, bread, and fresh meat, "and that makes up for it".⁷³ It is entirely possible that although there certainly were food shortages while marching long distances, that the men writing home tended to exaggerate to an extent, since it made their letters more interesting. There might have also been the natural human inclination to forget about those times when food was sufficient and only focus on the few occasions of want. With that said, Mills was the only one to have a positive view about the food in those first months of marching.

The 2nd Manchesters' reports of short rations continued for several more months. It was mentioned in the 2nd Battalion's staff diary for 9 August 1900, that the battalion had been operating on reduced rations for weeks due to a scarcity of supplies.⁷⁴ Lieutenant Colonel Reay wrote on 2 September 1900, that after they escorted a convoy from Vrede to Standerton, the men received a particularly good meal. In fact, the men were so moved by this meal that they commented, in the presence of the officers no less, that if they received such a meal each day, they would happily escort any number of convoys for the rest of the war.⁷⁵ One can deduce from this that their normal fare while conducting escort duties was less than adequate. Private Caun wrote from Harrismith to his uncle on 24 November 1900, describing how they received a biscuit and a half, and one handful of flour a day while marching 18 to 20 miles a

⁷¹ Jack Fisher. 'With the Ladysmith Relief Column'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 21 April 1900, 6.

⁷² Jack Hardman. 'With the 2nd Manchesters at the Battle of Dewetsdorp'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 9 June 1900, 6.

⁷³ Mills, 'Letter from A. Mills', 6.

⁷⁴ 'Records of Service: 96th Regt and 2nd Btn Manchester Regiment, 1824-1914', MR 1/1/2/6. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

⁷⁵ Charles Reay. 'Letter, Lieutenant Colonel Reay, Klip River, Transvaal, to Colonel Gwatkin, Describing the Movement of a Convoy from Vrede to Standerton; Improved Supplies and Conditions at Standerton; the Proposed March towards Reitz. 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment', 2 September 1900. MR 1/16/5/13. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

day, commenting: “It is not enough to feed a mouse on”.⁷⁶ While again in pursuit of De Wet in April 1901, a year later, the 2nd Battalion was on quarter rations at one point. It thus appears that the daily fare did not change substantially from what they had at the beginning of the campaign when in pursuit of the Boers. For lunch, it was biscuits and water, and for dinner, the men cooked a pound of flour.⁷⁷ The supply wagons were clearly unable to keep pace.

The 1st Battalion, which had, understandably, suffered short rations during the siege of Ladysmith, also found that constant marching made for almost equally poor eating. Volunteer Private Andrew reported that during August 1900 they marched on three-quarters rations, which was four biscuits, a chunk of bully beef, and some jam. This was soon after reduced to half-rations, even though they were resting for a few days, which consisted of two and a half biscuits, a chunk of bully beef, and a spoon of jam a day. Andrew was fortunate that he was able to supplement these meagre rations with mealie (maize) meal, which he bought from local Africans. He made this into a porridge, as was the local custom, which he found “very satisfying”.⁷⁸ Writing on 5 November 1901 from Lydenburg, Sergeant Hobson described how they received only a crust of bread and a drink of water after a particularly hard march.⁷⁹ The 1st Battalion’s Records of Service entry for 15 March 1902, minced no words in stating that that day’s march of 11 ½ miles, from the Wilge River Valley to Zuikerboschkop, was a trying one, where they not only contended with difficult terrain and heat, but were also on ¾ rations.⁸⁰ There is thus little doubt that rations were poor throughout the war when the men were marching long distances.

At a point though some commanders learned to drive herds of livestock with them during their marches. Although it is unclear when they began this practice, Captain Trueman mentioned it in a letter dated 18 July 1901, near Standerton. They took sheep with them on the march, unless they formed part of a “mobile” column, which referred to the supposedly ‘fast’ moving columns taking part in drives to corner Boer commandos against the lines of blockhouses.⁸¹ The Boers were usually still faster. What is clear, though, is that taking herds of livestock along on a march was a later development, and was only possible if they were not in a hurry. In addition, herds of livestock were not available in the first months of the war, since large scale

⁷⁶ W. Caun. ‘Letters from the Front: A Manchester Soldier’s Experience’. *The Manchester Evening News*, 27 December 1900, 4.

⁷⁷ Anderson, ‘The Day’s March: Through Dust and Toil and Hunger after de Wet’.

⁷⁸ F.W. Andrew. ‘Letters from the Front: The Manchester Volunteers at the Front’. *The Manchester Evening News*, 10 October 1900, 5.

⁷⁹ Hobson, ‘Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother’.

⁸⁰ ‘Records of Service, 63rd and 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, 1758-1910’, MR 1/1/2/3. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

⁸¹ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 151.

organised looting of livestock was not yet encouraged. This probably only occurred much later once the scorched-earth policy was 'officially' introduced by Kitchener in March 1901.⁸²

On the other hand, when the men were relatively stationary, such as when performing garrisoning duties, or simply resting a few days after hard marching, the food supply was often more reliable and varied. Private Parr, a reservist of the 1st Battalion, serving as a stretcher bearer with Buller's forces, was happy with the food they received at Chieveley Camp. On Christmas 1899 they had bread and cheese for breakfast, and corned beef for dinner. The men expected some pudding or chocolate based on camp rumours, but that did not materialise. Parr, however, was not upset, making allowance for the fact that they were so close to the front. He added that they also enjoyed a meat-heavy diet, on account of a large number of sheep and cattle captured from the Boers, and he thought "on board ship the food was a fool to this here" and that "our food, considering where we are, is magnificent".⁸³ When the 2nd Battalion arrived at Ficksburg in the first week of June 1900 to commence guarding duties, they were greeted with bread and flour, instead of biscuits.⁸⁴ It is striking, though, how low the men's expectations were if bread instead of biscuits cheered them up. For Captain Paton, the fortnight the 1st Battalion spent in and around Helvetia and Dalmanutha was a welcome reprieve. Writing on 13 September 1900, he reported that they lived well due to the large number of Boer pigs, sheep, and cattle they confiscated. They even had milk cows, and he managed to lure some hens to lay eggs. "We have been living on the fat of the land" he exclaimed.⁸⁵ He was somewhat distraught when he heard they had received orders to march to Schoemanskloof, but he worried unnecessarily, because the 'good life' continued. Volunteer Private Andrew wrote on 9 October 1900 from Schoemanskloof that they lived comfortably while performing guard and outpost duties, because they sent out armed parties almost every day to bring in sheep, pigs, and vegetables.⁸⁶ Sergeant Hobson wrote on 7 June 1901 near Lydenburg that he and his friend had a "grand spread"⁸⁷ after receiving a fowl as a gift. It is highly apparent, though, that the more positive assessments of their food situation were linked to supplementing it with food taken from the surrounding countryside. Just being stationary

⁸² Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 493.

⁸³ E. Parr. 'A Hyde Man's Experience: The Occupation of a Stretcher Bearer'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 27 January 1900, 5.

⁸⁴ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 33.

⁸⁵ Donald Paton. 'Letter, Captain Paton, Dalmanutha, Describing the Move of Headquarters and 5 Companies to Helvetia; the Officers' Occupation of the Station Master's House; the Prospect of Being Sent to Garrison Ladysmith; Recent Fighting – Relatively Small Losses since the Beginning of the Year; Battle on 27 August; Battalion's Lack of Popularity with Brigadier General Kitchener; Forthcoming March to Machadadorp and Schoemans Kloof. 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment', 13 September 1900. MR 1/16/5/16. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre, 6–7.

⁸⁶ F.W. Andrew. 'Letters from the Front: With the Manchester Volunteers. An Interesting Diary'. *The Manchester Evening News*, 14 November 1900, 5.

⁸⁷ Hobson, 'Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother'.

alone did not guarantee sufficient army rations. The link between inadequate army rations and looting will be discussed later.

Being relatively stationary helped, but as mentioned above, it did not guarantee a consistent supply of good food, even more so when there was fighting nearby, or if the terrain was exceptionally rough, or the position was isolated. Private Fisher, a 1st Battalion reservist, painted a sorry picture for the troops involved in the efforts to relieve Ladysmith in December 1899. During the fighting in Natal under Buller, he received barely half-a-pound of biscuits a day, and had “never seen bread and butter out here at all, only once—24th December it was, and that was only dry bread and tea”.⁸⁸ When stationed in areas with difficult terrain, when a supply column did finally manage to reach the troops, it evoked delight. Captain Trueman and his Company were thrilled when they received a ration of 36 tins of marmalade while they were on outpost duty near Thaba ‘Nchu in May 1900. It did not last long, though, and Trueman soon wished for more.⁸⁹

Roughly a month later, writing on 2 July 1900, Trueman described the food he had while holding various positions around Hammonia in June 1900, explaining what an important difference it made when they were close to a town or farms. Of course, he had more money than the average soldier, so he and his fellow officers benefited the most from proximity to towns and farms. He is quoted here in full for effect:

Of course we generally have to drink our drinks without milk, as the latter is not a very common article and is very dear when it is met with. Meat generally very tough without vegetables or bread but with biscuits (very like a dog biscuit) forms the food when not near a town or a farm - ripping, isn't it? We had some beef to-day [sic] so tough you couldn't even cut it, we dismissed it with thanks and eat a Machonichie Ration, of which we fortunately have several tins. Of course when it rains much you can't keep the fires alight and then its ripping, you eat what you can. But when you are near a town and can purchase tin goods, jam, butter, milk, bread and potatoes, carrots and onions and above all can get animal's fat, you live like a prince, having suet puddings, chapaties [chapati] and beef puddings.⁹⁰

Captain Chittenden, writing a month later from Hammonia, mentioned that overall their food was adequate, but one day they ran out of biscuits, an army staple, as well as flour. They eventually also ran out of tinned meat, but the supply of fresh meat proved sufficient.⁹¹ It should be mentioned that organised looting was not yet condoned at this point, which might explain their weak food situation, combined with delayed supply columns. However, even when systematic looting was in place, it did not always ensure a more varied diet. Sergeant Hobson

⁸⁸ Fisher, 'Letters from the Front', 6.

⁸⁹ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 10,18.

⁹⁰ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 42.

⁹¹ G. Chittenden. 'Letter, Captain G Chittenden, Hammonia, Describing Sickness in the Battalion, Improved Conditions in Camp, Boer Movements, Shortage of Provisions. 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment', 14 July 1900. MR 1/16/5/11. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

started to tire of the monotonous diet while at Lydenburg. Writing on 9 July 1901, he reported that the bread was too sour, and that he felt unwell. It appears the bulk of his diet consisted of bread then. He only started feeling better once a canteen⁹² was opened where he could supplement his diet.⁹³

As mentioned earlier, it was difficult to supply troops with food and water during an engagement with the enemy, and for obvious reasons, soldiers had little opportunity to eat while under fire. Private Fisher, who was attached to the 5th Brigade fighting in Natal to relieve Ladysmith, wrote that during one eight day engagement with the Boers, he lived on only ½ lb (227 g) biscuits a day.⁹⁴ In a letter written on 6 September 1900, near Senekal, Captain Trueman explained how they had no food since their dinner the night before, on account of a firefight with the Boers for most of the day. When they were able to get back to the safety of camp, there was nothing to eat except the biscuits they had in their pockets. However, they had little appetite since they were dehydrated. They only had a proper meal much later when the Boers had left the area. The same thing occurred again on 17 September 1900, when a force of Boers blocked a convoy near Bethlehem, and they had nothing to eat while the fighting lasted for most of the day.⁹⁵

Living off the land, which some Manchesters outright called “looting”, was an option which many resorted to, especially due to the inconsistent supply lines. Looting or plunder was by no means unique to this war. It is as old as war itself and there were numerous examples of British soldiers looting in the Napoleonic Wars and in both world wars. Richard Holmes emphasised the financial incentive behind looting,⁹⁶ which was likely also present in the South African War to some degree, but it is not a main feature in the Manchesters’ letters. For them, looting was most often about food.

⁹² These canteens originally began as the Field Force Canteen in Natal, organised by Colonel Morgan. His aim was to sell food and other small luxuries to the soldiers at the lowest price possible to supplement their meagre diet. Once Buller’s and Roberts’ armies had connected their respective fronts in the Transvaal, these canteens spread across the country. They generated a significant profit, which was used for various charities, such as £14 000 distributed to the widows of those men who died in Natal. Page, ‘Supply Services of the British Army in the South African War, 1899-1902’, 290.

⁹³ Hobson, ‘Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother’.

⁹⁴ Fisher, ‘Letters from the Front’, 6.

⁹⁵ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 64–65, 72.

⁹⁶ Holmes, *Firing Line*, 353–355,



Photo 10: This photo is titled “Searching for Loot”, and dates from c.1901, when looting had become an accepted part of the overall British strategy, and provided a welcome supplement for poor rations.

Source: ‘Photograph Album, 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, Harrismith, Liddles Farm, 1901-1902’, MR 3/23/69. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

Looting was risky though, sometimes due to enemy action. Volunteer Private Andrew, referring to events in September 1900, wrote how a party of soldiers were ambushed by 50 Boers just as they had “collected” some poultry, pigs, and a young calf. The men managed to escape, but without their loot.⁹⁷ Trueman, leading the Mounted Infantry in February 1901 near Hammonia, encountered entrenched Boers while out foraging for wheat, and they swiftly withdrew, almost suffering a serious casualty as one man fell off his horse.⁹⁸

There was also danger from the Manchesters’ own officers, especially in the first 11 months of the war until September 1900. Volunteer Private Andrew, who evidently took great delight in writing about these “foraging” trips, which he also plainly referred to as “looting”, reported to his readers in October 1900 how two men narrowly escaped the Boers, only to be caught and punished by their officers for leaving camp without permission.⁹⁹ It is notable that they were punished for leaving the camp, not for looting. According to the Army Act of 1881, “plunder” was severely punished when a soldier was on active duty. Under *S-6 - Offences punishable more severely on active service than at other times*, the Act stated that a soldier was to be

⁹⁷ Andrew, ‘Letters from the Front: With the Manchester Volunteers. An Interesting Diary’, 5.

⁹⁸ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 111.

⁹⁹ Andrew, ‘Letters from the Front: With the Manchester Volunteers. An Interesting Diary’, 5.

punished if he “leaves his commanding officer to go in search of plunder” or “breaks into any house or other place in search of plunder”. The penalty was death or a lesser punishment. A letter written on 2 September 1900 by Lt Col Reay painted a stark picture of what could happen to those caught looting. Two men in the 2nd Battalion were caught looting a farm and were subsequently sentenced to death, but it was commuted to 10 years penal servitude. However, in the same letter, Reay explained that Lord Roberts had ordered all sentences related to looting to be put on hold, “pending further instructions.”¹⁰⁰ As the war transitioned into its guerrilla phase, and Lord Roberts was systematically implementing harsher retaliations against Boer civilians and property, he evidently grew far less concerned about looting. Although not stated outright, Reay implied that the two men found guilty of looting had escaped punishment. However, this incident appeared to be an exceptional case, because based on the letters from soldiers, looting was commonplace almost from the beginning and openly admitted to.

A letter written by Private Barron on 7 February 1900 from Estcourt, was without doubt the most brazen account of looting I found among the published letters. In addition, it occurred in Natal, which was technically ‘friendly territory’. Private Barron, a 1st Manchester reservist temporarily attached to Buller’s relief force in Natal, with three other soldiers, became hungry while on picket duty during the night on 2 February. They left their posts and headed to a nearby farm to ask for a drink, and the farmer gave them each a ginger ale. However, they spotted a plump turkey, which they bayoneted and placed in a bag. The commotion drew the farmer out, but the soldiers ignored his outraged demands to stop. They also acquired potatoes and cabbages. The next day the farmer came to the camp to demand 18s from them, but they told him “all was fair in love and war, and that he was lucky that we didn’t take him”.¹⁰¹ The farmer left, defeated. Barron mused that he would go pay the farmer another visit soon. It is remarkable that Barron was not court-martialed, because the soldiers received newspapers from home, and even though the 1st Manchesters were trapped in Ladysmith until 28 February 1900, they eventually received all their mail, including newspapers from home. Barron had confessed to looting in a public medium. Yet, he was not charged, since two more of his letters appeared in the *Ashton Reporter* on 5 May and 23 June 1900. This suggests that the Manchesters’ officers did not zealously pursue cases of looting, even maybe turning a blind eye given the frequent problems there were with adequate food supplies.

With food from the official supply channels often of poor quantity, quality, or delivered late or not at all, it was inevitable that the 2nd Manchesters resorted to looting soon after they

¹⁰⁰ Reay, ‘Letter from Klip River to Colonel Gwatkin’, 2 September 1900.

¹⁰¹ William Barron. ‘Letter from a Dukinfield Soldier in Natal: Still Living and Like to Remain So’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 10 March 1900, 6.

disembarked. In addition, it appears that some officers organised these expeditions. Captain Trueman's "foraging" expeditions in May 1900 were so fruitful that he "commandeered" a Cape cart¹⁰² to help him transport the food. Since he needed a cart, it suggests he was possibly collecting for his Company, not just for himself. The 2nd Manchesters had only arrived in South Africa on 11 April, yet Trueman was already out scouring the countryside for food a month later.¹⁰³ While Trueman and his men were on outpost duty near Thaba 'Nchu in early May 1900, they ate unusually well, since they "commandeer or rather buy, milk, bread, and butter"¹⁰⁴ from nearby farms. They were not always successful though, since on one such trip, they were looking for bread, milk, butter, and vegetables, but all they could find were onions.¹⁰⁵ It appears that the looting Trueman and his men engaged in was, in theory, restricted to unoccupied farms. He specifically mentioned this in one of his letters from May 1900, where he explained how they took what they wanted at abandoned farms but paid for commandeered supplies with "chits" at occupied farms.¹⁰⁶ Trueman provided details about the "chits" payment in a letter dated 24 April 1900, wherein he stated that "so we commandeer from the country side [sic], giving chits for what we take, and the inhabitants are paid after by the government".¹⁰⁷ It is doubtful whether these chits were ever paid back in full after the war. Since the supply situation did not improve significantly, the looting continued. Trueman, in a letter dated 2 July 1900 from Hammonia, stated that "I am sorry to say that our English mess stores have run out, so we now rely on the produce of the country..."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² A local two-wheeled carriage for up to four passengers, drawn by two horses. It often had some form of canopy to protect the occupants.

¹⁰³ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 20.

¹⁰⁴ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 10.

¹⁰⁵ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 16.

¹⁰⁶ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 20.

¹⁰⁷ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 13.

¹⁰⁸ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 41.



Photo 11: A 2nd Manchester Cape cart. I do not think this one belonged to Captain Trueman, but it gives a good indication how this cart looked and how much it could carry. The horses were named Castor and Pollux, and the African driver was called Hans.

Source: 'Photograph Album, 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, Harrismith, Liddles Farm, 1901-1902', MR 3/23/69, Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

The 1st Manchesters also engaged in looting to supplement their rations once they had recovered by mid-1900 and entered the eastern Transvaal. Private Gregory, in an entry dated 27 July 1900, found their situation in the Transvaal much more to his liking. Even though their official rations consisted of bully beef and biscuits, they were able to supplement it through looting:

...however, we make the best of it, and make it pan out by a little game we could not play in Natal. That is we visit the farms in the district, and commandeer whatever suits our fancy: pigs, sheep, fowls, geese..."¹⁰⁹

It is worth noting that after the relief of Ladysmith, when the 1st Battalion were recovering in Natal, it appears they were not allowed to loot farms, which explains Gregory's comment about the Transvaal being a different "game". Gregory did, however, state that they did not loot Africans and instead paid them when they got anything from them, although it is unclear if it was with the dubious "chits". This was probably an exception, and sentiments like this would have certainly fallen away once the scorched-earth policy began in earnest in 1901. Volunteer Private Andrew, writing from Schoemanskloof on 9 October 1900, mentioned how "armed parties go out nearly every day and bring back sheep, pigs, vegetables, and fuel; so that

¹⁰⁹ W.F. Gregory. 'The South African War. Interesting Letter from a Romiley Gentleman'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 1 September 1900, 5.

occasionally we do get a decent meal - in fact we are very comfortable here".¹¹⁰ Given the level of organisation this statement implies, it is clear the officers were involved here too. Again, one can see how Lord Roberts' increasingly harsh measures to bring the Boers to heel were eagerly adopted by the 1st Manchesters, since it was such a useful way to supplement their poor rations.

Looting became more intense as the scorched-earth policy came into full force. Trueman made the notable comment that the looting was getting better. He wrote on 10 February 1901, from Ficksburg, that

...we have milk, peaches, grapes, apples, and I get some honey. We have much better sport than at the beginning of the war, as we loot all Boger farms if they have no one in them and we replenish our stock of crockery, chickens, eggs, etc.¹¹¹

In a letter dated 13 April 1901 written in Ficksburg, Trueman, in a matter of fact tone, wrote "we went out about 12 miles to some farms to get grain and to collect families; we started at 7:30 a.m. and didn't get back till 9:30 p.m. - a pretty long day".¹¹² This was the first time he mentioned them taking the families from their farms. Trueman and his Mounted Infantry participated in numerous more such "foraging" expeditions as the months marched by, specifically looking for grain.¹¹³ As the war progressed, though, the pickings on farms became slim, unless the men entered an area which had not been visited by any British force before. This was the case in August 1901 at Wittenbergen, near Harrismith, when Trueman observed that: "you got a nice lot of loot from the farms, as no one had been there before".¹¹⁴

Buying supplies such as food was a much less controversial option if one could afford it. Captain Trueman, writing about the last week of April 1900 in Dewetsdorp, reported that a loaf of bread was sold for 5s, and eggs, butter, and milk were equally expensive. Candles could not be bought at any price.¹¹⁵ It is worth reminding that the approximate cost for a week's worth of sufficient food in 1899 Britain was estimated at 3s 3d, so 5s for a loaf of bread was exorbitant. Trueman, and others, when they received word sometime in mid-May 1900 that they would leave Thaba 'Nchu, bought as many provisions as they could, paying 2s a piece for small tins of jam.¹¹⁶ It is unclear whether these provisions were for their own personal use, or for the rest of the Company. Private Turner, a mounted infantryman serving on another section of the front, but not far away from Trueman, could also buy supplies. However, he found the prices for food expensive, and the quality suspect. In a letter dated 9 May 1900, he

¹¹⁰ Andrew, 'Letters from the Front: With the Manchester Volunteers. An Interesting Diary', 5.

¹¹¹ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 108–9.

¹¹² Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 134.

¹¹³ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 129, 134–35.

¹¹⁴ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 154.

¹¹⁵ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 14.

¹¹⁶ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 21.

wrote that bread cost 3s a loaf, but it was hard and tasted stale. Sugar was sold at 1s 6p.¹¹⁷ It is unclear whether these items were sold at a canteen, or if he was referring to civilian vendors in the area. Sergeant Hobson, in a letter dated 9 July 1901 from Lydenburg, was thrilled when a dry canteen was established. He explained to his brother that:

I was getting rather off with the grub, as the bread is sometimes rather sour, so it does not go down any better for it, but I am doing better now as they have opened a coffee shop as the soldiers call the dry canteen. I have been having a good time with Quaker Oats and tinned fish for breakfast and supper and I feel a great deal better for the change of diet as it gets very monotonous with the same day after day and no chance to buy anything.¹¹⁸

As for how the men obtained money, it appears that those men who had the means, such as Captain Trueman, would obtain money from banks in towns by cashing cheques.¹¹⁹ For most men, though, their army pay was the main source of cash. Sergeant Hobson, in a letter dated 19 July 1901, stated that since they landed in South Africa, they had only received pay twice. In his case, this meant that he had been paid a total of only £2 10s.¹²⁰

Sometimes arrangements were made with local civilians to bake bread and sell other foodstuffs. Captain Trueman, while on outpost duty at a place he called Hant Nek on 9 May 1900, described how they came to an agreement with a local farmer's wife, an English woman who had married a Dutch man called Saltzman. They discovered her farm while out foraging, but instead of giving her chits or simply taking what they needed, they came to an arrangement with her. No doubt this was due to her nationality. She agreed to sell them milk and butter at 2s/lb (454 g). She also baked them bread, but they needed to provide the flour. Lastly, she made them mealie porridge¹²¹ for breakfast. Trueman found it "awfully good".¹²² Captain Chittenden wrote on 14 July 1900 that they bought food from women in Hammonia, but at a fixed price because they thought the women charged too much, which of course proved unpopular with the traders.¹²³ It appears that this type of arrangement was quite common, because Trueman mentioned how they would generally buy bread from locals at 3d a loaf when they (the Manchesters) provided the flour, or paid 1s to 1s 6d per loaf if not. At times, though, this type of arrangement turned sour due to suspicions of theft. Trueman wrote on 6 September 1900 that they came to an arrangement with a local woman to bake them bread

¹¹⁷ Turner, 'Letter from Alfred Turner', 6.

¹¹⁸ Hobson, 'Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother'.

¹¹⁹ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 79.

¹²⁰ Hobson, 'Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother'.

¹²¹ The South African classic still eaten today is a mix of cooked mealie meal and milk, sweetened with sugar.

¹²² Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 19.

¹²³ Chittenden, 'Letter from Hammonia', 14 July 1900.

and they gave her 30 lbs (13.6 kg) of flour. When he went over to fetch the bread, she only gave him three loaves. He immediately suspected she stole the rest of the flour and demanded it back. She returned 20 lbs (9.1 kg), but he suspected she was still holding out about 1 to 2 lbs, so he left without paying.¹²⁴

On occasion, non-combatants had little choice about 'selling' certain items, and even less say about the prices. Trueman, in a letter written on 3 October 1900 near Reitz, described how they went off on a foraging expedition to a farm three miles from their camp. They rounded up 11 fowl, two geese, and a duck. All the while the woman living at the farm protested vehemently. They paid her 2s 6d per goose, 2s for the duck, and 1s per fowl. She thought this was too low, but they gave her little choice and claimed it was the current market rate.¹²⁵ In the end, there was nothing she could do and they rode off. Given the widespread looting occurring by then, this encounter could just as easily have turned into looting, since the soldiers held all the power in this type of situation.

The soldiers' diets could be good when they were close to a town, but only if they could afford it and get to the town. Trueman, in a letter from Hammonia on 2 July 1900, explained that when they were close to a town, they could purchase canned goods, jam, butter, milk, bread, potatoes, carrots, onions, and above all, animal fat. The fat allowed them to make chapattis, beef puddings, and suet puddings.¹²⁶ Trueman described how he and another officer used a Cape cart to travel six miles (9.7 km) to Ladybrand to do some shopping in April 1901. The road was atrocious though, and they damaged the cart, but simply acquired a new one in town.¹²⁷ It is highly doubtful, though, whether the men under Trueman's command shared fully in this bounty. They might have experienced elements of this, buying what they could when they could. As an officer Trueman had much greater mobility and more money to acquire foodstuffs. He might have bought some basic foodstuffs for his Company too, although he never said so in certain terms.

Buying food, though, was not a good solution if one could not transport it. Trueman again described in a letter dated 10 September 1900, near Bethlehem, how they were greeted by the welcome sight of a Natal Field Force Canteen, which sold food and other items at wholesale prices to the soldiers. However, the 2nd Battalion had just given up three of its precious wagons to higher command, so could not transport sufficient amounts of the bought food. A few days later the canteen went back to selling food at retail prices to the soldiers, but

¹²⁴ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 67.

¹²⁵ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 79.

¹²⁶ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 42.

¹²⁷ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 131.

due to weight and lack of transport space, the little that the soldiers were able to buy, had to be consumed on the spot.¹²⁸

Some officers shared their troops' food experiences, but there were also important differences. There was certainly a perception among some commentators that officers had it much easier. The cutting words of the Australian correspondent, W.M. Anderson, while with the 8th Division in April 1901, made it clear that he thought the officers overly privileged, comfortable, and selfish. He pounded this point in one of his articles in the *Daily Mail*: "the officer had whisky and water in his bottle" and "the commanding officer, crop full with a good breakfast". All the while, the Manchesters went hungry, thirsty, and barely had clothes.¹²⁹ However, on closer investigation this perception of coddled officers was too simplistic. Captain Trueman ate mainly biscuits and bully beef, such as at Edenvale on 17 April 1900. He mentioned how everyone, officers included, were on half rations near Dewetsdorp by the last week of April. When they reached Thaba 'Nchu by 30 April, his breakfast consisted of a few biscuits, cold coffee, and a pipe of Boer tobacco. In August 1900 they had another rough march, and their rations for nearly two weeks consisted mainly of biscuits, which was supplemented, too infrequently, with flour which they baked into chapattis. Writing on 22 August, about events near Reitz, he elaborated that one night his dinner was one-and-a-half ration biscuits and butter.¹³⁰

Even though some officers shared many of their men's hardships, they still were in a better position to supplement their diet, on account of their greater freedom of movement and funds. When the 2nd Battalion was in camp at Port Elizabeth in April 1900, there was little food available, but Captain Trueman was able to leave the camp with the other officers to eat a "rough" breakfast and lunch in the town, although he complained it was full of sand.¹³¹ A few months later Trueman was particularly lucky when a civilian convoy arrived while he was out on a task in Ficksburg, sometime in June 1900. He bought a box of Turkish Delight for 2s (and noted it cost only 1s in England), a box of nougat for 2s, a box of almond rock, and a box of butterscotch. He was excited to see that all these items were from some of the best London companies. "The very best sweeties! Quite surprising to get them here".¹³² He also bought a type of bun unknown to him, but still a pleasant luxury to find. He also bought plenty of eggs at 2d each, and milk in a wine bottle for 1s. Butter, however, was nowhere in sight. It is doubtful that the privates could have, in the first place, afforded to buy so many sweets. Moreover, they did not move around as much as Trueman did, who benefited from a horse and whose duties

¹²⁸ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 59.

¹²⁹ Anderson, 'The Day's March: Through Dust and Toil and Hunger after de Wet'.

¹³⁰ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 5, 13, 15, 54–55.

¹³¹ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 3–4.

¹³² Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 39.

and greater amount of free time allowed him to travel more often. While near Basutoland in May 1901, he and three other officers rode into the mountainous kingdom to buy eggs and fowl. They managed to buy 20 eggs, although they lost most of them while trying to retrieve a runaway horse.¹³³

The officers could also engage in more social activities, which gave them access to various luxury foods. In July 1900, Trueman and other officers were invited for a musical evening at a farmhouse near Hammonia owned by a Mrs Brummage, of Swiss nationality, but widow to an Englishman, and thus acceptable company. Trueman related that “they gave us tea and stuff that looked like bread, so I took the smallest I could see, but on eating it found it was cake, whereupon I removed as large quantities as was compatible with decency.”¹³⁴ In April 1901, Trueman had the good fortune to visit a Frenchman’s farm near Ficksburg, where he and another officer entertained their host by playing the piano, while they were served coffee which Trueman thought was particularly good.¹³⁵

Officers also had the opportunity to enjoy rich meals at restaurants. In August 1900 Trueman visited Harrismith, where he enjoyed dinner at the Commercial Hotel, where only officers and civilians were present. The menu offered soup, stewed giblets or crumb chops, roast chicken, beef ribs or a leg of mutton, and Princess Somebody’s¹³⁶ pudding. Trueman found the meal immensely enjoyable, in addition to the welcome change of sitting at a table with a tablecloth, glasses, and napkins. His only complaint was the lack of alcohol, since only coffee and water were available. For this meal, he paid 2s 6d. He was not used to this rich food, though, since he fell ill with stomach problems for two days afterwards. By the end of August he had another meal, at a railway hotel in Standerton, where he had soup, fish, haricot mutton, roast beef, chicken, fruit pie, cheese, coffee, bread, butter, potatoes, peas, bananas, and oranges.¹³⁷ It could, therefore, be good to be an officer when the situation allowed it.

The amusing account of tea with Mrs Brummage, recounted a bit earlier, does bring up another point worth investigating, and that is what the men drank, other than water.¹³⁸ In the discussion about looting, it is mentioned how Private Barron, of the 1st Battalion, was given ginger ale by a farmer. Tea, both imitation and real, were mentioned earlier too. Indeed, it appears that tea was a common way for the men to alleviate their thirst. It was safer too, since the water, often of suspect quality, was boiled in the process. Private Riley wrote on 16 March 1900 from

¹³³ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 141.

¹³⁴ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 35.

¹³⁵ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 130.

¹³⁶ His words. It is unclear what type of pudding he was referring to here.

¹³⁷ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 52–53, 58.

¹³⁸ Water and alcohol is discussed in their own sections in more detail.

Ladysmith that they sometimes received a little coffee.¹³⁹ Captain Trueman, while on duty on a steep hill near Hammonia in July 1900, wrote how their main beverage was tea, although it “is awful muck”.¹⁴⁰ For himself, though, he hid a tin of cocoa, which he nursed carefully on account of its extreme scarcity. This cocoa was a welcome addition to an often-dreary breakfast. He also mentioned coffee, but he compared it to drinking poison. Trueman stated that tea and coffee were normally taken without milk, due to its scarcity and expense. Milk was usually acquired by buying, or more often, by looting it, as was the case for Trueman in February 1901.¹⁴¹

Only a few sources mention fruit, in particular the letters written by Captain Trueman. It is not certain whether officers had the first pick of any fruit received or “commandeered”, or whether most men who wrote home neglected to mention it. Trueman did state, though, that while on campaign in May 1900, that they did not come across much fruit, and when they did, it was in small quantities. Thus, it is likely that the silence in the letters suggest that the men did not often see it. Trueman, whether just lucky or enjoying the privileges of rank, described eating fruit on several occasions. In May 1900, he ate watermelons and limes, the latter looted from a house. He also ate prickly pears, which “I consumed with great relish, but got my fingers and tongue covered with the prickles, and I had been shown how to eat them”.¹⁴² In June he enjoyed eating oranges, and thought “they are ripping”.¹⁴³ He mentioned, though, that the oranges were not available in great quantities, and since he saw so little fruit in general, wondered if they were out of season. Captain Chittenden, also 2nd Battalion, wrote that the battalion received about 450 oranges while resting at Hammonia, but this he considered an inadequate amount for the men.¹⁴⁴ In February 1901, Trueman reported a bounty of apples, grapes, and peaches thanks to unrestricted looting of Boer farms while operating near Hammonia.¹⁴⁵ Ironically, it appears that the 2nd Battalion, officers and privates included, enjoyed more fruit than usual while under siege in Bethlehem in February 1901. The town had an abundance of fruit trees in private gardens, which was a rare delight for the men.¹⁴⁶

Food, or the lack of it, had an emotional effect. It appears that where and what a person ate could evoke feelings. Captain Trueman, for instance, was immensely grateful when he ate inside a house again, at a crossroads near Senekal, in the last few days of May 1900. The

¹³⁹ Riley, ‘Another Letter from an Ashton Volunteer at the Front’, 6.

¹⁴⁰ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 41.

¹⁴¹ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 108.

¹⁴² Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 19–20.

¹⁴³ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 31.

¹⁴⁴ Chittenden, ‘Letter from Hammonia’, 14 July 1900.

¹⁴⁵ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 108.

¹⁴⁶ Charles Reay and Noble. ‘More about the Manchesters. Garrison Life at Bethlehem: A Letter Which Ran the Blockade’. *Manchester Evening Chronicle*, 26 March 1901.

last time he ate under a roof was in Port Elizabeth nearly two months previous.¹⁴⁷ In July 1900, while eating plum pudding, Trueman was reminded of Christmas back home, with snow visible on the mountains of Basutoland.¹⁴⁸ In a letter dated 22 August 1900, near Reitz, he begged his correspondent to “send me out some chocolate periodically as well as baccy [sic]. These two things are the greatest consolation when there is no dinner”.¹⁴⁹ Soldiers also craved certain types of food, and some were greatly upset when circumstances prevented them from satisfying those cravings. Sergeant Hobson wrote on 23 June 1901, referring to a convoy planned for Machadodorp, that

...when we got there [Schoemanskloof] I got about 24/_ [shillings] and was thinking about the Quaker Oats and Swiss Milk, butter etc. that I was going to buy when we arrived at Machadodorp. We were all going to have bags of stuff to take back with us but it did not come off as next morning we started back for Lydenburg with another convoy and we were pleased you can bet ... so we landed back here [Schoemanskloof] on Thursday jolly well footsore and hungry.¹⁵⁰

Officers and privates tried, or expected, to eat something more interesting than the usual fare on celebrations such as Christmas. This was, however, not always possible, and the disappointment was evident. Sergeant Winter, a 2nd Battalion reservist sent to reinforce the 1st Battalion, wrote on 2 January 1900 from Chievelay Camp in Natal that “Xmas Day was a very quiet one. We only got bully beef and our ration of bread for our dinners. No supplementary extras being given”.¹⁵¹ Captain Trueman had tinned plum pudding, turkey, and champagne, and he made sure to emphasise that it was only “one bottle”, for Christmas in 1900.¹⁵² Sergeant Hobson was glad of the plum pudding they received on Christmas 1901, especially after the mouldy, inedible bread they had the previous two days. Furthermore, his Company built two ovens of stones and old biscuit tins, in which his section made a roast.¹⁵³ Meanwhile in the Free State, the 2nd Battalion received a helping of pudding for Christmas 1901.¹⁵⁴ Celebrating Christmas with something more interesting than the daily rations was clearly important for morale.

¹⁴⁷ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 29.

¹⁴⁸ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 44.

¹⁴⁹ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 56.

¹⁵⁰ Hobson, ‘Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother’.

¹⁵¹ G.R. Winter. ‘Letter, Sergeant G R Winter, Natal, Describing His Company’s Arrival in Durban; Christmas Day in Camp; Attacks on the Boer Trenches; Company’s Attachment to the Royal Engineers. 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment’, 1 February 1900. MR 1/16/5/4. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

¹⁵² Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 95.

¹⁵³ Hobson, ‘Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother’.

¹⁵⁴ P. Lupton. ‘Diary, Captain P. Lupton, Volunteer Company, 2nd Battalion, 1901-1902’, MR 1/3/2/3. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

4.5 TOBACCO

The soldiers were extremely fond of smoking and tobacco was often scarce, especially during the first half of the war. For the 1st Battalion besieged in Ladysmith, tobacco ran out quickly. Private Sim felt its loss keenly, writing that “the worst of all was we could not get a smoke for over three months”.¹⁵⁵ Even for the soldiers fighting to relieve Ladysmith, tobacco was hard to come by. Private Fisher, a reservist attached to the stretcher bearers with Buller’s forces, wrote that it was a month since last he had a cigarette, and that soldiers were paying a shilling for a chew of tobacco, and 2s 6d for cigarettes. He had begged a certain Lizzie to send him smoking supplies. A few days later, though, he managed to get some cigarettes out of a Boer’s pocket, but it was unclear if the enemy was dead or captured, which was a welcome luxury after going without for weeks.¹⁵⁶ Fisher reported that once Ladysmith was relieved, one of the first things the 1st Manchesters asked for was “baccy”.¹⁵⁷ He wrote that in the days before the end of the siege, tobacco was sold for £5 10s a pound. According to an official auctioneer’s certificate submitted by Joe Dyson for sales in Ladysmith on 21 February 1900, one pack of cigarettes was sold for £1 10s, 50 cigars at £9 5s, ¼ lb (113.4 g) cake of “Fair Maid” tobacco cost £2 5s, ½ lb (226.68 g) cake of Fair Maid went for £3 5s, 1 lb (454 g) of sailor’s tobacco cost £2 3s, and a ¼ lb tin of “Capstan” navy cut tobacco was sold for £3.¹⁵⁸

After the siege, the tobacco situation for the 1st Battalion improved, although sometimes some still had to do without on occasion. Lance-corporal Darlington, after going without a smoke for nearly three months during the siege, was delighted when he received cigarettes from his brother and sister on 6 March 1900. A few days later, the battalion received a gift from Lady White in the form of a pipe and ½ lb (226.68 g) of tobacco for each man.¹⁵⁹ Just before Private Barron went to hospital in Pietermaritzburg at the end of April 1900, he received a parcel of tobacco from his friends in Manchester. This provoked much excitement among his fellow patients when he opened the parcel, and he had little choice but to share this gift with his comrades. He did, however, manage to hide some of this precious tobacco up his sleeve.¹⁶⁰ For others, supply chain confusion proved a nuisance, as related by Private Hawkins on 13 March 1900, as he and the other volunteers were separated from their tobacco on account of their kit being left behind when they went to Dewdrop Camp to join the 1st Battalion.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁵ Sim, ‘Letter from a Dukinfield Man at the Front’, 6.

¹⁵⁶ Fisher, ‘Letters from the Front’, 6.

¹⁵⁷ Fisher, ‘With the Ladysmith Relief Column’, 6.

¹⁵⁸ Dyson, ‘List, Food Prices during the Siege of Ladysmith’.

¹⁵⁹ E. Darlington. ‘Letters from Stalybridge Men at the War’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 21 April 1900, 8.

¹⁶⁰ Barron, ‘Letter from Private Wm. Barron’, 6.

¹⁶¹ Hawkins, ‘Letter from an Ashton Volunteer at the Front’, 6.

Although smoking was common, some soldiers did not partake, which made it rather ironic that Sergeant Hobson complained on 19 July 1901 at Lydenburg, that all he could buy at the dry canteen was tobacco and sauce, since everything else was sold out.¹⁶² This does show, however, that the tobacco supply had improved significantly for the soldiers since Ladysmith. Hobson wrote in another letter a few months later that they received a ¼ lb (113.4 g) of tobacco as a Christmas gift from the Field Force Canteen. Although it is difficult to draw concrete conclusions, it appears that the tobacco supply had improved significantly as the war dragged on, given the noticeable lack of complaints by 1901.

For the 2nd Battalion, the beginning of their South African campaign in April 1900 started poorly. Not only were they often short on rations, but tobacco was almost non-existent. Some, in desperation, even started smoking a herb in the veld. Private Hardman begged his friends to send him tobacco and cigarettes, “as we can buy nothing here, and now we are smoking a herb which grows on the veldt”.¹⁶³ A fondness for smoking was at least one thing they shared with the enemy. The Boers in the Free State smoked a herb which grew around Vrede. It was possibly *Alepidea amatymbica*, and the Boers carved up the plant’s roots and smoked it in their pipes.¹⁶⁴ It is highly likely that the Manchesters were taught by locals to smoke this same herb. A month later tobacco was still scarce. Lieutenant Colonel Reay wrote to Reverend A. Parry on 13 May 1900, thanking Parry for the gifts sent to the battalion, but requested that he organise another gift drive for tobacco.¹⁶⁵ Captain Trueman, in a disconsolate tone, wrote on 9 May 1900, from Hant Nek, that he was running out of tobacco and lighting appliances. However, a few days later he managed to get his hands on Boer tobacco. Trueman did not state how he managed it, but he compared it to English tobacco. He thought it was much hotter than English tobacco, although some of his comrades thought that English tobacco was hotter on the tongue. He later managed to get even more tobacco, mostly the kind used by the local Africans. However, he felt he still did not have enough, and begged in his letter, dated 14 May 1900, that the reader send him cakes or tins of tobacco by mail. His favourite was Lambert & Butler’s sun-dried honey dew. Trueman’s friends rose to his aid, because in a letter dated 22 August 1900, he wrote with delight how he received by mail, just in the nick of time, a good supply of “baccy”.¹⁶⁶ Tobacco was clearly an excellent present, and each 2nd Battalion man received a gift of ¼ lb (113.4 g) tobacco for Christmas 1901, as recorded in Volunteer Private

¹⁶² Hobson, ‘Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother’.

¹⁶³ Hardman, ‘With the 2nd Manchesters at the Battle of Dewetsdorp’, 6.

¹⁶⁴ Pretorius, *Kommandolewe Tydens Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, 76.

¹⁶⁵ Reay, ‘Letter from Colonel Reay’, 6.

¹⁶⁶ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 11, 21, 54.

Lupton's diary.¹⁶⁷ Much like the 1st Manchesters, the 2nd Manchesters stopped complaining about tobacco shortages by 1901.

4.6 ALCOHOL

Alcohol was, it seems, difficult to come by and thus, when the officers issued the men a ration of beer or rum, it was greeted with delight. Volunteer Private Hawkins wrote how they received a pint of beer a day when off-duty in April 1900 with the 1st Manchesters, who were still recovering from the effects of the siege of Ladysmith. However, he informed his readers that "it is surprising what a terrible thirst one develops in this country. A pint is just like giving a donkey one oat".¹⁶⁸ It is possible that the 1st Manchesters were given extra beer rations as part of the efforts to help them recover more quickly from the detrimental effects of the siege. Some soldiers were not avid drinkers, but turned it to their advantage, as seen when Private Smith, also with the 1st Manchesters writing on 16 May 1900, told his parents that he sold his share of beer ration to supplement his funds.¹⁶⁹ Sergeant Hobson wrote that the 1st Battalion received a pint of beer per man for Christmas 1901.¹⁷⁰ The same was the case for the 2nd Battalion that same year, according to Captain Lupton.¹⁷¹ The fact that Hobson and Lupton specifically mentioned this implied that beer rations were not a common occurrence.

Officers sometimes ordered an extra ration of rum just before or after an engagement with the enemy. On 6 January 1900, just after the Boer attack on Caesar's Camp was over, all the troops involved, which included a significant portion of the 1st Battalion, were issued a ration of rum.¹⁷² Although not stated outright, it appears this was a reward, but also a way to steady the frayed nerves of soldiers who had just experienced an intense and long firefight with the enemy. The British army, although not necessarily part of its official policy, did have a history of issuing rum to fortify or steady soldiers' nerves either before or after a battle. There were numerous examples of this occurring as late as the First World War.¹⁷³

Alternatively, the troops could sometimes buy beer at a canteen. Sergeant Winter, a reservist of the 2nd Battalion who was sent to Natal in December 1899, wrote on 2 January 1900 from Chieveley Camp how the men could get plenty of beer at the canteen. It was apparently so affordable that he heard about three or four men who had too much and got themselves into

¹⁶⁷ P. Lupton, 'Diary, Captain P. Lupton, Volunteer Company, 2nd Battalion, 1901-1902', MR 1/3/2/3. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

¹⁶⁸ Hawkins, 'Letter from a Dukinfield Soldier', 8.

¹⁶⁹ Smith, 'Letter from an Ashton Volunteer', 6.

¹⁷⁰ Hobson, 'Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother'.

¹⁷¹ Lupton, 'Diary'.

¹⁷² 'Boer War: Imposition and Administration of Martial Law: Ladysmith Staff Diary during Siege', 28 February 1900. WO 32/8136. The National Archives, Kew, 17.

¹⁷³ Holmes, *Firing Line*, 148–150.

trouble with the military police.¹⁷⁴ It is not certain, though, if the practice of selling beer at the canteen was common during the war, since it was not mentioned again by the Manchesters.

A lack of beer elicited some grumbling. Private Hawkins, at Dewdrop Camp in Natal in March 1900, wished for Tom's pints, since there was no beer in camp and the nearest source of drinkable water was two miles away, and muddy too.¹⁷⁵ His sentiment was echoed almost exactly by Volunteer Bugler Coffey, who wrote from Ladysmith on 5 April 1900, complaining that "we are in a god-forsaken hole, and if ____ [sic] was here he would go mad, for there is no beer to be had... We have to go two miles for a poor substitute - bad water". He then suggested to his mother "you might send us a drop out in a condensed milk can".¹⁷⁶ The battalion command clearly tried to impose some measure of control over access to beer. More generally speaking, there is further evidence in other studies which suggest that the British army did its utmost to control access to alcohol.¹⁷⁷

The officers, though, had different rules and experiences when it came to alcohol consumption. They had more reliable access and the quality was superior. Captain Trueman, in an entry dated 31 August 1900 in Standerton, enjoyed a meal with his fellow officers at the railway restaurant at the iron bridge which crossed the Vaal River. During this meal they had beer and port, which he described reverently as the "glory of glories".¹⁷⁸ That night he had another dinner, this time accompanied by champagne. He spoiled himself, because "I shan't have a treat for some time."¹⁷⁹ This turned out to be too pessimistic, because in September 1900 at Senekal, Trueman mentioned how one night they "eked out half a bottle of claret each" during dinner.¹⁸⁰ On Christmas eve of 1900, Trueman, Goldfinch, and Thornycroft enjoyed a bottle of champagne and a "very small" glass of port, which they had saved for the occasion.¹⁸¹ Trueman reported several more instances of the officers enjoying quality drinks, such as whisky after dinner in February 1901, and while at Ficksburg in May 1901 they drank champagne during an officer's dinner.¹⁸² The officers thus certainly drank more frequently than the rank-and-file did.

¹⁷⁴ Winter, 'Letter Describing His Company's Arrival in Durban', 1 February 1900.

¹⁷⁵ Hawkins, 'Letter from an Ashton Volunteer at the Front', 6.

¹⁷⁶ Wilfred Coffey. 'Letters from the Front: Letter from Bugler Coffey'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 12 May 1900, 6.

¹⁷⁷ Nasson, 'Tommy Atkins in South Africa', 128–129.

¹⁷⁸ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 58.

¹⁷⁹ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 58–59.

¹⁸⁰ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 62.

¹⁸¹ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 95.

¹⁸² Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 122. 141.

4.7 CLOTHING AND BOOTS

According to army regulations, the men were supposed to be issued a great coat, cape, helmet, pair of leggings, two pairs of boots, a cap, frock, two pairs trousers, tunic, two flannel shirts, two pairs of mittens, three pairs worsted socks, jersey, and a belt. On their persons they were expected to carry or wear their headgear (helmet or otherwise), great coat, frock, flannel shirt, trousers, one pair of socks, belt, ankle boots, and leggings. The rest of their issued clothing went into the valise.¹⁸³ This was the ideal, but in reality the men were issued what was available. When the reservists set out for South Africa in November 1899, they were issued the following clothing items: a pair of sturdy brown leather Blucher boots, field service cap, Kersey frock (tunic), great coat, pair of tweed trousers, jersey, two flannel shirts, two pairs worsted socks, and a belt¹⁸⁴ Major Anderson listed a number of additional items in his valise which included a pair of boots, pair of shoes, pair of mittens, three pairs of socks, two thick jerseys, cap, shirt, and a muffler. The valise, a small travelling suitcase, would go on the transport wagons, and both officers and men were allowed one.¹⁸⁵ Based on all the clothing gifts the privates received from family and friends, they also packed extra items. Despite being able to pack extra clothing, the rigours of campaigning ravaged clothing quickly. Consider the fact that the 2nd Battalion commenced operations in April 1900, but their clothing and boots were ragged by June. It should be added that the clothing was not generally regarded as being of poor quality. None of the Manchesters claimed so, and Page could find “no evidence of widespread dissatisfaction”.¹⁸⁶ Page mentioned that another problem was that the army insisted on maintaining a peace-time regulation which required soldiers to pay for replacement clothing, outside of certain intervals. This was, of course, a ludicrous policy during wartime.¹⁸⁷ The Manchesters, however, never complained that they had to pay for replacement clothing. Instead, they complained that they did not get clothing due to logistical shortcomings. If this policy was implemented in other regiments, it was likely on an *ad-hoc* basis, based on individual officers’ interpretations of regulations.

During the siege of Ladysmith, the clothing situation for the 1st Battalion was understandably dire. This was not helped by the fact that before the siege began, as claimed by Private Bates, that they had mobilised from Pietermaritzburg with only one shirt, one pair of socks, one pair of boots, and one suit of khaki.¹⁸⁸ By the end of that nearly four-month siege, the men’s limited

¹⁸³ ‘Nominal Roll, Squad Roll of “G” Coy., 1st Battalion (Captain Marsden’s)’.

¹⁸⁴ ‘A Visit to the Ashton Barracks’, *The Ashton Reporter*, 25 November 1899, 3.

¹⁸⁵ ‘Nominal Roll, Squad Roll of “F” Coy., 2nd Battalion (Major Anderson’s)’, March 1900. MR 1/8/4. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

¹⁸⁶ Page, ‘Supply Services of the British Army in the South African War, 1899-1902’, 241.

¹⁸⁷ Page, ‘Supply Services of the British Army in the South African War, 1899-1902’, 243.

¹⁸⁸ Bates, ‘Letter from an Ashton Soldier’, 5.

set of clothes was ragged. “The worst thing is, we are all in rags, no shoes to our feet”¹⁸⁹, wrote Private Kershaw to his mother on 2 April 1900.

The official resupply of clothing was an irregular affair for a considerable part of the war, and thus caused problems and embarrassment for the Manchesters. This was in part because clothes were bulky, heavy items to transport over land, and the army prioritised food and ammunition instead.¹⁹⁰ Writing on 3 June 1900 at Hammonia, Captain Trueman commented enviously how Brabant’s Horse, a locally raised mounted colonial unit, just got new clothes and tents, while many of the Manchesters were in rags and had no tents. The situation must have been desperate, because Trueman’s clothes, despite his rank, were so worn out that he split his breeches right across and walked around like that for two days before he could change his clothes and have them mended. On 2 July he wrote how the men’s clothes, especially their breeches, were in a “disgraceful state”, and by the last week of August, Trueman reported that many men no longer had serviceable trousers. Many wore sacks around their wastes, which looked somewhat like kilts, which he found amusing. Once at Standerton, by the end of August 1900, the men finally received new clothes, although underclothes and boots were still in short supply.¹⁹¹ Captain Chittenden wrote on 14 July 1900 that his khaki was stained, but mostly in one piece. However, many of the men had to patch their khaki clothing, while others did not patch their uniforms and went about in rags. One man was so ashamed of the holes in his trousers that he wore his great coat to hide it.¹⁹² In-between the large resupplies, there were smaller resupplies. In July 1900, Captain Chittenden reported how the 2nd Battalion received 40 shirts, a pair of drawers for each man, 50 pairs of socks per company (each company had about 80 men), jerseys for men who needed them, and boots for those in most desperate need.¹⁹³ Lieutenant Colonel Reay, in a letter from Hammonia dated 27 June 1900, commented on the poor state of the men’s trousers and boots,¹⁹⁴ and he was relieved when they finally received new clothing at Standerton at the end of August, which improved morale considerably.¹⁹⁵ However, the next resupply of clothing occurred only several months later, on 23 January 1901 while at Georgina, at the Elands River Bridge.¹⁹⁶ In an entry dated 18 September 1900, Private Andrews, near Lydenburg, thought it notable enough to mention to his readers that the 1st Battalion had received new clothing in the form of warm coats, shirts,

¹⁸⁹ Kershaw, ‘After the Siege of Ladysmith’, 6.

¹⁹⁰ Page, ‘Supply Services of the British Army in the South African War, 1899-1902’, 243.

¹⁹¹ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 30–31, 42, 56, 58.

¹⁹² Chittenden, ‘Letter from Hammonia’, 14 July 1900.

¹⁹³ Chittenden, ‘Letter from Hammonia’, 14 July 1900.

¹⁹⁴ Charles Reay. ‘Letter, Lieutenant Colonel Reay, Hammonia, Expressing Regret at the Major’s Return Home; Describes the Position of Other Brigades and Officer Casualties. 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment’, 27 June 1900. MR 1/16/5/8. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

¹⁹⁵ Reay, ‘Letter from Klip River to Colonel Gwatkin’, 2 September 1900.

¹⁹⁶ ‘Records of Service: 96th Regt and 2nd Btn Manchester Regiment’, 92.

socks, caps, and boots.¹⁹⁷ Although the supply was irregular, once the men received new clothes, they were understandably pleased. Private Clarke, of the 1st Battalion's Mounted Infantry, assured his parents in his letter dated 23 November 1900 from Lydenburg, that they looked "quite smart in our new suits".¹⁹⁸

As mentioned earlier, the soldiers sometimes received gifts of clothing from charities, friends, and family. In fact, some men requested extra clothing to be sent. Sergeant Hobson, writing on 9 July 1901 near Lydenburg, thanked his army colleague back in Manchester for the balaclava cap gift, which was incredibly useful given how cold it was at night.¹⁹⁹ Captain Chittenden wrote to his family to send him a shirt and trousers.²⁰⁰ This was in July 1900, a time when the 2nd Battalion were in desperate need of clothing and even the officers were struggling. The 1st Battalion received generous donations of clothing in the beginning of March 1900 from various charities representing different classes of society. Since most of the men were practically in rags after the siege, these gifts were highly appreciated.²⁰¹ As mentioned earlier, they received even more gifts later in April while recovering at Surprise Hill. The people back home in Manchester evidently took note of the plight of their regiment.

Apart from official resupplies and gifts, the Manchesters had a few other alternatives. Buying clothes was one option for those who could afford to do so. Sergeant Hobson, 1st Battalion, bought himself four pairs of extra socks for 4s each, and two pairs of drawers for 4s 9p each.²⁰² Another source of clothing was through looting, although this is not mentioned often in the sources. Private Powell managed to acquire "a lot of underclothing" from the Boer camp after the Battle of Elandsplaagte.²⁰³ Looting the Boers for clothing was not a common experience for the Manchesters, since it was never mentioned again. In fact, as the war progressed, there would have been little point looting the Boer combatants for clothing, since the enemy were running short from as early as September 1900, and as the war progressed, the Boers began to rely on the British soldiers for clothing.²⁰⁴ In addition, no Manchester mentioned looting clothes from farms, although it is difficult to imagine that this did not occur. There is evidence in other studies that British soldiers did loot clothing from farms.²⁰⁵

¹⁹⁷ Andrew, 'Letters from the Front: With the Manchester Volunteers. An Interesting Diary', 5.

¹⁹⁸ Clarke, 'Letter from a Soldier: In a Collision at Sea', 3.

¹⁹⁹ Hobson, 'Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother'.

²⁰⁰ Chittenden, 'Letter from Hammonia', 14 July 1900.

²⁰¹ 'Records of Service, 63rd and 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, 1758-1910', MR 1/1/2/1. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre, 169.

²⁰² Hobson, 'Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother'.

²⁰³ William Powell. 'An Ashtonian in the Battle of Elandsplaagte'. *The Stalybridge Reporter*, 25 November 1899, 6.

²⁰⁴ Pretorius, *Kommandolewe Tydens Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, 89.

²⁰⁵ Nasson, 'Tommy Atkins in South Africa', 130.

Boots were even more important than clothes, because without it, the men could not sustain marching long distances over lengthy periods of time. In theory, the men were supposed to receive two types of boots. One was called a “home boot”, which was thick-soled, stiff, and durable and was intended for garrison duties. The second was the “flexible foreign service boot” designed for marching. However, when the war started, most troops were shipped out with the home boot, which was completely unsuited for marching. When a group of Manchester reservists were equipped to reinforce the 1st Battalion in November 1899, they only received one pair of “sturdy” boots.²⁰⁶ Also, like clothing, boots were bulky and heavy, and thus posed the same problem to the transport columns, which had to prioritise food and ammunition. As will be discussed in the next chapter, marching with ill-suited footwear or poorly designed foreign service boots had serious medical consequences. M.S. Stone found a medical report which stated that the main cause of soldiers falling out from marching were “blistered feet due to poorly constructed and ill-fitting boots”.²⁰⁷ Page, however, concluded that the boots were adequate in terms of quality, based on the lack of widespread complaints. However, Page agreed that supplying replacement boots was a problem during periods of long marches where supply lines were overstretched.²⁰⁸

Apart from the health consequences, a lack of serviceable footwear also affected the combat readiness of the Manchesters. The 1st Battalion’s Records of Service notes that during the last days of the siege of Ladysmith, on 28 February 1900, they were called on to provide volunteers to march seven miles and intercept a column of Boer wagons retreating from Buller’s advance. Even though 250 men volunteered, they were unable to launch the operation due to the desperate condition of the men’s boots.²⁰⁹ The Records of Service estimated that about half of the battalion had no boots by the end of the siege.²¹⁰ By 9 August 1900 about a 100 2nd Manchesters’ lacked boots, and these men were sent back from Reitz to Harrismith for resupply and rest, since they were no longer deemed fit for duty.²¹¹

Consequently, the lack of sufficient functional boots elicited comment and caused great misery for those without. In an entry dated 2 July 1900, Hammonia, Captain Trueman complained about how his boots were close to falling apart, the soles nearly loose from the tops, but he figured a good stitching up would solve the problem, and he had two pairs.²¹² A few days later they traversed a rough kopje, which nearly destroyed his boots. He joked that “if the Boers

²⁰⁶ ‘A Visit to the Ashton Barracks’, 3.

²⁰⁷ Stone, ‘The Victorian Army: Health, Hospitals, and Social Conditions’, 184.

²⁰⁸ Page, ‘Supply Services of the British Army in the South African War, 1899-1902’, 242–243.

²⁰⁹ ‘Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3’.

²¹⁰ ‘Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/1’, 169.

²¹¹ ‘Records of Service: 96th Regt and 2nd Bttn Manchester Regiment’, 86.

²¹² Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 42.

don't chuck soon I will have to get a pair of Tommies".²¹³ The 2nd Battalion privates were in a far worse state with regard to footwear. Their commanding officer, Lt Col Reay, confirmed in a letter written to Major Anderson on 27 June 1900 that the men's boots were in a "sorry plight".²¹⁴ The Records of Service for the 2nd Battalion estimates that on 9 August 1900 about 100 men no longer had serviceable boots.²¹⁵ Captain Chittenden provided more detail in his letter from Hammonia on 14 July 1900. He described how many of the men walked about with their toes sticking out of their boots, and many whose boots no longer had soles.²¹⁶ According to Anderson, a correspondent describing a march in April 1901, about half the 2nd Manchesters had no soles, while dozens had no boots at all, limping on bare bloodied feet, or the feet protected by only a puttee wrapped around the bleeding sole.²¹⁷ However, Anderson's style and intent comes across as somewhat sensational. Nevertheless, keeping the 2nd Battalion supplied with a steady stream of serviceable boots was beyond the capabilities of the supply convoys.

4.8 BLANKETS AND TENTS

An unexpected finding of this study involves the crucial role played by blankets, which is not an aspect emphasised in the existing literature on British soldiers' experiences. Blankets were essential, because when the men were in the field in pursuit of the Boers, or operating in rough terrain, it was often the only item available to ward off the cold. In fact, even with tents, the blanket remained a sought-after item, since not even tents could completely keep the cold out. Captain Chittenden while in Hammonia in July 1900, obtained three additional blankets: one from the quartermaster, one from a store keep, and one borrowed from a new recruit who brought extra blankets. With four blankets, he was "nice and warm during the night".²¹⁸ Sergeant Hobson wrote on 9 July 1901 from Lydenburg how important the blankets were in alleviating the bitter cold at nights, when thin ice and hoar frost covered the ground.²¹⁹ Being caught in the open with no blankets was a miserable ordeal, as Private Gregory, 1st Battalion, endured after a brisk encounter with a Boer force on 22 July 1900: "it was a question which was most miserable, the time off duty or on. We were all extremely glad when daylight came".²²⁰

²¹³ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 44.

²¹⁴ Reay, 'Letter Expressing Regret at the Major's Return Home', 27 June 1900.

²¹⁵ 'Records of Service: 96th Regt and 2nd Btn Manchester Regiment', 86.

²¹⁶ Chittenden, 'Letter from Hammonia', 14 July 1900.

²¹⁷ Anderson, 'The Day's March: Through Dust and Toil and Hunger after de Wet'.

²¹⁸ Chittenden, 'Letter from Hammonia', 14 July 1900.

²¹⁹ Hobson, 'Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother'.

²²⁰ Gregory, 'The South African War. Interesting Letter from a Romiley Gentleman', 5.

The lack of blankets was therefore a common complaint. Not even the officers were exempt. Captain Trueman did not have a blanket on 30 May 1900, since the supply column, once again, did not catch up, but he somehow managed to “sneak” a blanket and waterproof sheet for himself. This was still not to his satisfaction, though, and early in June he bought blankets for himself and his horse at Hammonia’s farm stall. The rest of the 2nd Manchesters were less fortunate than Trueman’s horse, though. Trueman described how many of the men under his command in late June 1900 had no blankets or great coats, and had to share when off-duty.²²¹ Lieutenant Colonel Reay confirmed Trueman’s account, and wrote on 27 June 1900 that while they were at Ficksburg about a 100 men were without blankets.²²² The situation was so dire that it was decided to buy the men two blankets each at Ficksburg, which arrived on 10 July. However, H Company, due to a clerical error, received none and had to continue to make do with only their great coats, oil sheets, and “what blankets they have stolen or found”.²²³

The 1st Manchesters also suffered from a lack of blankets. It appears there were enough blankets in the baggage train, but on 7 August the men suffered a particularly cold night with no blankets on the way to Machadodorp. The Records of Service placed the blame on poor organisation and confusion, which caused the blankets to stay behind at Amersfoort with the baggage train, which did not move out that day with the departing troops. Losing blankets was disastrous and getting blankets to cold soldiers sometimes ended in misfortune. In the 1st Battalion’s Records of Service, it is reported that by 9 August 1900, while marching in the eastern Transvaal, approximately a quarter of the available blankets were lost to veld fires. The timing was particularly bad since the evenings continued to be cold with frequent frosts. A few weeks later, on 27 August, four men were sent out to fetch more blankets for their comrades keeping watch in trenches at Bergendal, the night directly after the battle there occurred. However, on their way back, the men lost their way and walked into the Boer lines. They were captured and “the Boers condemned the blankets to be burned at once”.²²⁴ It appears that the Boers were just as aware of the importance of the humble blanket, although it does seem odd that they chose to burn it in an act of spite, instead of just taking the blankets for themselves.

The supply of tents was also an irregular affair. Ironically, when the 2nd Battalion arrived in Port Elizabeth in April 1900 and made camp for two days, the Privates had tents, but the officers had none, because their tents had not arrived. Captain Trueman solved the problem

²²¹ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 28, 33, 40.

²²² Reay, ‘Letter Expressing Regret at the Major’s Return Home’, 27 June 1900, 1–3.

²²³ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 41. Keep in mind that June and July were, and still are, the coldest months of the South African winter, and even if not close to a European winter night, spending the night in the open with no shelter was and is incredibly unpleasant.

²²⁴ ‘Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3’.

by sharing a tent with a militiaman from another regiment, although he had to spend two uncomfortable nights sleeping on the ground.²²⁵ It seems, though, that the Privates lost their tents soon enough, since Trueman reported in June 1900, near Hammonia, that not only were his men in rags, but they had no tents too.²²⁶ The situation was eventually remedied. Captain Chittenden wrote that there were 44 tents for the 2nd Battalion in July 1900.²²⁷ Trueman confirmed this, writing on 10 July 1900, near Bloemfontein, that 40 tents arrived for the battalion with the English mess stores.²²⁸

The standard bell tent used by the army was heavy and cumbersome, and therefore transported on wagons. The wagons, as established earlier, could not keep up with swiftly marching troops or were parked a safe distance away if combat was expected. Consequently, the men often had to do without their tents. The standard army bell tent was 10 feet (3 metres) high, 12 1/2 feet (3.8 metres) in diameter, and weighed 66 lbs (almost 30kg) if cotton, or 70 lbs (31.75kg) if linen. It could shelter 15 men. The army calculated that a small wagon could transport 24 tents, and a large wagon 36 tents.²²⁹ Stone, however, stated that these bell tents were designed for only six men, but were often overcrowded with up to 18 men. It is possible, though, that different sized tents were used, based on availability and expedience. In addition, Stone found contemporary sources who claimed that these bell tents had poor ventilation, and that the smell of overcrowded tents where the men rested with their boots off was overwhelmingly vile.²³⁰

Given how cumbersome the tents were, and how slow the wagons were, there were numerous occasions where the men had to do without. The 1st Battalion experienced this on the day the war started, when it spent the night of 11 October 1899 in Ladysmith without tents, since the supply wagons only caught up the next day.²³¹ On 16 May 1900, the 1st Battalion was ordered on a night march to Modderspruit without its supply train and tents in anticipation of supporting an attack on Boer forces at Laing's Nek.²³² A few days later, on 19 May, they outpaced the wagons again, and spent the night in the open.²³³ They made do without their tents again in August 1900 when participating in swift manoeuvres to catch Boer forces.²³⁴

²²⁵ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 3–4.

²²⁶ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 30.

²²⁷ Chittenden, 'Letter from Hammonia', 14 July 1900.

²²⁸ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 44.

²²⁹ 'Nominal Roll, Squad Roll of "G" Coy., 1st Battalion (Captain Marsden's)'.

²³⁰ Stone, 'The Victorian Army: Health, Hospitals, and Social Conditions', 185.

²³¹ 'Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/1', 164.

²³² 'Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3'.

²³³ 'Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/1', 169–70.

²³⁴ Andrew, 'Letters from the Front: The Manchester Volunteers at the Front', 5.

The tents helped shelter the men from much of the elements, except the worst weather, natural disasters, and man-made disasters. Captain Trueman, while at Boyesburg, possibly at the end of June 1900, was immensely grateful they had a tent, “as it is raining cats and dogs”. The tents fared worse against strong wind, though, and in August 1900 the battalion had many of its tents blown down by unusually fierce winds accompanied by clouds of dust while camped at Mill River Bridge.²³⁵ Trueman’s tent leaked water like a sieve during an intense thunderstorm in March 1901, while a fellow officer’s tent was blown down by the fierce wind.²³⁶ More rarely, an extreme disaster befell a tent and its occupants. In August 1900, near Amersfoort, the 1st Battalion Volunteers’ tents caught fire, which destroyed five of their seven tents. Ironically, the fire was started by British shelling, which ignited the veld. The fire reached a rubbish pit which then spread to the tents. The cook, Volunteer Private Kenedy, attempted to save what he could from the tents, but was badly burned and died of his wounds.²³⁷ As a result, all tents were removed to Paardekop Station from 4 August to 28 October. The reason for this order is unclear, though, since the incident described above was surely an accident and uncommon. Still, tents were more than just shelter, and the Volunteers had lost much of their equipment which burned with the tents. They marched with only the clothes they had on, much of it already in tatters, many had no helmets and some were even using tin cans to serve as mess-tins.²³⁸ Disaster soon struck again. On 30 November, lightning struck one of the battalion’s tents, killing one man and wounding five others.²³⁹

4.9 PAPER AND INK

Writing utensils such as paper and ink were a precious commodity and often in short supply. In this period of letter writing as the main form of communication with loved ones back home, the scarcity of writing materials could be a serious inconvenience. Private Hawkins, writing to his friend Band Sergeant Holt in March 1900, asked him to extend his apologies to his various other friends, because his paper was left behind in Ladysmith with the baggage, and thus he was unable to write to all the people he had promised. He added that the piece of paper he had written on to Holt was from an old friend in the Rifle Brigade.²⁴⁰ However, some men were fortunate in receiving paper from family and friends by mail, such as Private Kershaw who received a packet of paper from his uncle.²⁴¹ Ink was sometimes also in short supply, depending on circumstances. Private Parr, despite being at Cheveley Camp on 27 December

²³⁵ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 40, 53.

²³⁶ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 129.

²³⁷ ‘Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/1’, 172.

²³⁸ Andrew, ‘Letters from the Front: The Manchester Volunteers at the Front’, 6.

²³⁹ ‘Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3’.

²⁴⁰ Hawkins, ‘Letter from an Ashton Volunteer at the Front’, 6.

²⁴¹ Kershaw, ‘After the Siege of Ladysmith’, 6.

1899, and thus much better off than his comrades besieged in Ladysmith, was unable to find ink in the camp, and begged his readers' forgiveness for writing in pencil.²⁴² Private Kershaw, writing to his mother shortly after the siege of Ladysmith, asked her to forgive him for writing in pencil, because ink was in such short supply, that they were only allowed to write the letter's address in ink.²⁴³

4.10 MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS

The Manchesters often used various other types of items which are not easily categorised. Candles, for instance, were an important small luxury which is difficult for a modern audience to appreciate. Captain Trueman wrote about events in the last week of April 1900 near Dewetsdorp, reporting that candles were impossible to find. At this point in time, they were hard in pursuit of the Boers.²⁴⁴ Trueman, therefore, took advantage of any opportunity to acquire candles, and he and others rushed to the shops at Vrede on 28 August 1900, where he bought various items, including candles.²⁴⁵ In January 1901, the 2nd Battalion was garrisoned in Bethlehem and was surrounded by Boer forces. Despite this, they were relatively well provisioned with basic foodstuff, but candles were in short supply. As a result, the men went to bed early.²⁴⁶ Soap, when it ran out, was sorely missed by some of the men. Private Turner, 2nd Battalion, complained in a letter dated 9 May 1900 that it was impossible to find soap. "If a man has a soap-wash once a week he is lucky".²⁴⁷ However, the next chapter about life on campaign, which covers hygiene, suggests that many men did not view hygiene as a priority, so perhaps not too many men missed soap. On a few occasions, some men bought rarer luxuries, usually the officers. Trueman wrote on 17 October 1900 that "I am very glad I came here [Harrismith] ... I have spent large sums of money here. You can get almost anything you want. I am investing in a Kodak".²⁴⁸ The Kodak hand-held camera first appeared in 1888 and it was thanks to this invention that the Manchesters were able to take several photographs while in South Africa.

Fuel for burning was scarce at times, especially in certain locations. Not only did Captain Trueman despise the Free State for its unchanging landscape, but he also resented the fact that there were few trees, which they were not allowed to chop down for fuel. As a result, their

²⁴² Parr, 'A Hyde Man's Experience: The Occupation of a Stretcher Bearer', 5.

²⁴³ Kershaw, 'After the Siege of Ladysmith', 6.

²⁴⁴ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 14.

²⁴⁵ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 57.

²⁴⁶ Reay and Noble, 'More about the Manchesters. Garrison Life at Bethlehem: A Letter Which Ran the Blockade'.

²⁴⁷ Turner, 'Letter from Alfred Turner', 6.

²⁴⁸ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 82.

main source of fuel in May 1900 was biscuit boxes.²⁴⁹ If an officer complained about a lack of fuel, then the common soldier probably had a worse situation. A few months later in November 1900, near Harrismith, Trueman mentioned again the scarcity of fuel for burning, and how they looted wooden posts and other wooden items from an unfortunate Jewish shopkeeper.²⁵⁰ While marching swiftly in support of Buller's column in August 1900, the 1st Battalion men carried wood chips with them to make fires.²⁵¹ At some point, though, the 2nd Manchesters learned that dried cattle dung also sufficed as a fuel source if wood was in short supply, and this helped them make fires while pursuing De Wet in April 1901.²⁵² In areas where trees were more plentiful, fuel collection expeditions occurred. The 1st Battalion, stationed in and around Lydenburg, sent out C and G companies to cut wood at the Jankowitz Farm on 22 November 1901, and again on 9 December.²⁵³ Although these descriptions of fuel are unglamorous, it is worth noting that a fire at night meant that food could be cooked or warmed up. Moreover, a fire helped stave off the cold. Most importantly, fire was needed to boil water for tea and coffee, and boiling water was the only safe way to consume contaminated water.

4.11 CONCLUSION

The Manchesters' supplies experience was, in general, perceived and portrayed as an exercise in deprivation. The British army undoubtedly performed a colossal feat in attempting to supply its largest force in the field since the Napoleonic Wars. However, the army in South Africa was too large and the infrastructure too undeveloped. Supplying locations and troops far from the main railway lines strained logistics considerably. The men sometimes received useful gifts from home, such as clothing, but these also relied on official supply channels and paled in comparison to the enormous amounts of supplies the army already struggled to provide. The situation was, perhaps, not as bad as the Manchesters made it appear. One can imagine that some days were quite ordinary and even though many letters complained of discomfort and misery, or more rarely rejoiced about surprisingly good eating, it is likely that there were just as many days where the supply situation was so uninteresting and adequate that there was simply nothing to write home about. What is clear, though, was that logistics did impact the men's experience of the war considerably. The situation was flexible, and depended on what the Manchesters were doing and where they were operating. In general, when the Manchesters participated in rapid marches to try and trap the enemy, their supply

²⁴⁹ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 30.

²⁵⁰ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 91.

²⁵¹ Andrew, 'Letters from the Front: The Manchester Volunteers at the Front', 5.

²⁵² Anderson, 'The Day's March: Through Dust and Toil and Hunger after de Wet'.

²⁵³ 'Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3'.

situation was invariably bad as the supply wagons struggled to keep up. As Private Fisher stated so strikingly in the heading of this chapter, “some days we have plenty, some none”.

This chapter has categorised various logistical and supply-related topics drawn from the Manchesters’ writings. It has explored some of these themes far deeper than many other studies about the British soldiers’ experiences in the South African War. In the process, it reveals new perspectives and insights about how the logistical situation impacted the Manchesters’ wartime experiences. An unexpected discovery, albeit a small detail, was how important the humble blanket was for the Manchesters. Without its limited protection, a cold evening out in the open veld was decidedly unpleasant. This example illustrates how even the smallest items could make a substantial difference in the Manchesters’ experiences.

This approach also illuminates larger issues. What is almost immediately apparent is that the Manchesters wrote extensively about food in their letters and diaries. They plainly spent a considerable time thinking about it, and food was indeed an important physical and emotional ingredient in war. This was even more true when they went hungry. That tired old saying that an army marches on its stomach does have some truth to it. Both the 1st and 2nd Manchesters suffered hunger, albeit in different circumstances and levels of intensity. The 1st Manchesters endured the siege of Ladysmith and the near starvation they suffered took such a toll on their bodies that it took them months to recover their strength. The 2nd Manchesters had a rough time of it shortly after they landed in South Africa in April 1900. Under the command of Lt Gen. Rundle, 8th Division, they were heavily involved in operations in the Free State to try and capture or trap Boer forces. It entailed long periods of marching with half and even quarter rations. Given that a full British army ration was already deficient in calories, they were essentially starving. The food situation generally improved when they were relatively stationary, such as on garrison duty, but both battalions would be drawn several more times into chasing after the enemy until the war’s end, with predictable hungry consequences.

The picture that emerges is that the Manchesters, when completely reliant on the official army supply channels, suffered shortages and discomfort, especially in food, clothing, and boots. There was, however, a solution for the inadequate food supply, and that was to plunder. Many soldiers resorted to looting, some almost from the very start of the war. Without the ability to loot the enemy countryside, the Manchesters would have had a significantly worse experience overall, particularly where food was concerned. When circumstances allowed extensive and systematic looting of the countryside, especially when marches were at a more normal pace, or they were stationary as town or blockhouse garrisons, then their food situation tended to improve noticeably. By 1901, the Manchesters were organising frequent looting expeditions into the countryside, and these clearly made a huge difference in the soldiers’ diet. The

scorched-earth policy may have been part of Kitchener's grand strategy to defeat the enemy, but for the Manchesters it was a vital source of sustenance and an excuse to loot with abandon. The Manchesters showed no moral discomfort about the looting and openly wrote about it, often in a matter-of-fact tone. However, even with extensive looting from 1901 onwards to supplement their rations, when the Manchesters were required to march long distances at a swift pace in pursuit of an elusive enemy, the men would again suffer supply shortages, since there was little time for looting.

The importance of looting in sustaining British soldiers has not always been fully appreciated. Looting due to supply shortages are certainly acknowledged, but they do not emphasise how integral it was.²⁵⁴ By delving deeply into the Manchesters' experience, the extent and importance of looting or "foraging" is significantly more pronounced. However, this did not mean that looting among other British units was similarly motivated. Miller did not find a conclusive connection between looting and a lack of food, and argued instead that looting was due to poor discipline.²⁵⁵ This was a large war fought over a huge area, and different motivations and causes behind looting certainly existed. The Manchesters, though, regarded looting as an important way to supplement their food supply, and the officers even helped organise looting expeditions.

Even though the British army was a modern, professional army, the conditions in South Africa often meant that its soldiers were required to live off the countryside. The Manchester experience suggests that the long-term maintenance of the large British force in South Africa was partly possible due to extensive looting of the enemy countryside, particularly for food. There is some irony that the Manchesters and the Boers, regarding food at least, relied heavily on looting and foraging. The Boers had to scour the countryside and farms, loot Africans, and raid the British for food.

The Manchesters, although they had occasional but deficient army rations, also relied heavily on looting the enemy, usually its civilians, the farms, and also Africans for food. The distinction between the professional British soldier and the Boer militiaman had become somewhat blurred, although the Manchesters were arguably better off. If their looting expeditions were interrupted by, for instance, Boer resistance, then they still had the official supply channels,

²⁵⁴ Andrew Page did not cover looting in his detailed study of the British army's logistics during the war. Fransjohan Pretorius touched very briefly on the link between inadequate food and looting in *Die Anglo-Boereoorlog*, 40. Bill Nasson was similarly brief about this link in 'Tommy Atkins in South Africa', 129–130, as was Louis Venter and André Wessels in 'British Soldiers' Anglo-Boer War Experiences as Recorded in Their Diaries', 79–80.

²⁵⁵ Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 128–129.

problematic as they were in many circumstances. The enemy, in contrast, had far fewer options.

5. LIFE ON CAMPAIGN

Duties, drudgery, and distractions

The little ragged yellow men from Manchester look no longer to Heaven for help; they hang their heads and drag their lagging feet across the dusty leagues of veldt. It is like following a funeral in Inferno. Not one of these haggard men utters a word; each is a machine, a poor, worn-out, broken-down affair, trailing in the dust of 500 wagons and countless trek oxen. They are creeping along at the rate of two miles an hour and hoping to catch De Wet.¹

According to Captain Paton of the 1st Manchesters “campaigning is most infernally uncomfortable and unpleasant”.² During the South African War, the Manchesters were involved in a variety of activities and duties which were mainly monotonous, dull, uncomfortable if not downright unpleasant, and often exhausting. This chapter investigates the daily experiences of campaign life in considerable depth, monotonous as it may have been, but was and still is an integral and often overlooked part of their experiences, despite how warfare is portrayed in modern media and video games as non-stop action and violence. In fact, there is a good chance that the Manchesters themselves may have entered the war with a similar misconception. They never mentioned this in their writings, but Miller’s work makes a compelling case that the average young British man had a warped perception of warfare due to various forms of media which glorified war. They expected pitched battles, not a long, drawn-out guerrilla war filled with what seemed never-ending unglamorous duties and various discomforts.³ Another important point to keep in mind is the role of the environment, which underpinned many of the campaign experiences which will be discussed. The Manchester experience shows that the notion of war as a grand adventure, with a series of ‘glorious’, pitched battles was a fallacy from the start. Duties and discomfort began almost as soon as the war started, and actual combat encounters were the exception, rather than the

¹ W.M. Anderson. ‘The Day’s March: Through Dust and Toil and Hunger after de Wet’. *Daily Mail*, 1 May 1901.

² Donald Paton. ‘Letter, Captain Paton, Dalmanutha, Describing the Move of Headquarters and 5 Companies to Helvetia; the Officers’ Occupation of the Station Master’s House; the Prospect of Being Sent to Garrison Ladysmith; Recent Fighting – Relatively Small Losses since the Beginning of the Year; Battle on 27 August; Battalion’s Lack of Popularity with Brigadier General Kitchener; Forthcoming March to Machadadorp and Schoemans Kloof. 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment’, 13 September 1900. MR 1/16/5/16. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre, 2.

³ Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 68–70, 97–98.

rule. The Manchesters' writings revealed three prominent sources of misery: marching, lack of hygiene, and insufficient sleep. These are aspects which deserve more attention than what have been allotted to them thus far in other histories. There were, though, a variety of ways the men could cope with these discomforts by distracting themselves from the realities of campaigning, which is another aspect this chapter will discuss in detail, given its importance in maintaining morale.

The discussion of the Manchesters' life on campaign is not meant to be an exhaustively detailed overview of all their activities. The topics discussed, and the details available, depend heavily on what the Manchesters wrote in their letters, and what the official records chose to include. Certain topics were not covered in detail in soldiers' letters. Miller is correct that the soldiers did not write much about aspects they viewed as 'boring', and thought their audiences would find it dull too, such as training exercises, uneventful guarding duties, and daily routines.⁴ The Manchester regulars, especially the 1st Battalion, likewise did not devote much attention to daily and uneventful routines. Consequently, the Manchesters, no matter the phase of the war, chose to include details about topics they and their audience found interesting, while only briefly mentioning or simply ignoring those topics they found uninteresting. Despite the soldiers' disinclination to 'bore' their readers about their daily routines and activities, they and sources such as the Records of Service, did reveal some aspects of life on campaign, although in the latter case, it was often just a few lines devoid of detail and emotion.

When the Manchesters' letters mentioned some aspects of life on campaign, it was usually due to some 'remarkable' aspect, in most cases something unpleasant and thus interesting enough to write about. The danger of this negative bias is that it is all too easy to conclude that life on campaign in South Africa was utterly deplorable. The reality was certainly more complex, and life on campaign likely involved a series of mostly unremarkable days. However, these unremarkable days were the last thing the men chose to write about. Nevertheless, the Manchesters' letters and diaries, supplemented by the more official Records of Service, do offer hints of what daily life was like during the war, and the topics the men chose to write about reveal where their minds were focused.

To explore the Manchesters' campaign experiences, this chapter is divided into three main sections, beginning with duties, followed by drudgery, and concludes with distractions. It starts with the Manchesters' duties, because their duties determined to a large extent how their campaign experiences unfolded. The most common duties included training, outpost, garrisoning, escorting convoys, blockhouse guarding, picketing, and scouring the countryside

⁴ Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 105.

for anything useful to the enemy as the scorched-earth policy was being systematically expanded from mid-1900. There is also a brief section about the officers' duties. Overall, the sources do not provide much detail about these duties, apart from an occasional complaint or interesting event that occurred.

Following on duties is a section called drudgery, so named because it is reconstructed from what were mostly complaints and grumbling. This section explores the results of the Manchesters' duties, which almost always started with marching, since marching was the primary means of reaching the locations where the men performed their various duties and was even the primary method of doing their duties when it involved escorting a convoy, or chasing after the enemy. Only rarely did they enjoy the benefits of modern rail transport. The men often wrote about sleeping, mostly the lack thereof. They also wrote extensively about the poor hygiene they suffered.

Life on campaign was not, however, a relentless litany of duty and hardships. There was time for various distractions to help the Manchesters' cope with the stresses and boredom they endured, which helped maintain morale. Some gambled or simply played games. Some turned to religion, while others thought about other regiments, or mused about the other ranks, whether higher or lower. Many thoughts inevitably turned to the war, and how soon it would end. Humour was another important coping mechanism. The Manchesters also appreciated a good wash or a swim. When possible, the men made time for various celebrations, especially Christmas.⁵ There were even occasions when concerts, music, and dances occurred. Sport was another important distraction, of which several types, such as soccer and cricket, were popular.

5.1 DUTIES

The British soldiers' various duties, which was such a defining feature of their campaign experience, is a topic which has not drawn much attention, normally mentioned or discussed only briefly.⁶ Miller's work has the most substantial discussion of duties, and covers four main types of duty: line, camp, picket, and fatigues. Line-guard duties involved looking after the horses and investigating suspicious activities. Camp guard had the men moving to a series of

⁵ Neil Armstrong presented a compelling argument about the intimacy of Christmas and how it was not simply a nineteenth century invention of a new tradition, but can be traced back as a series of cultural evolutions spanning nearly two centuries. Still, there is little doubt that Christmas was an important celebration for the late-Victorians, which helps explain why the Manchesters commented about their Christmas experiences while at war. (Neil R. Armstrong. 'The Intimacy of Christmas: Festive Celebration in England c. 1750-1914'. University of York, 2004, 310–315).

⁶ Pretorius, *Die Anglo-Boereoorlog*, 41; Spiers, *The Victorian Soldier in Africa*, 170–171; Venter and Wessels, 'British Soldiers' Anglo-Boer War Experiences as Recorded in Their Diaries', 74–76.

points in and around the camp, where they had to sit still for a time and keep watch. Picket guard was apparently the most difficult duty, and each man got a turn every three nights. It was monotonous but also essential, because the picket guards were the first line of warning against enemy attack. It could also be nerve-wracking, as the night and weariness played tricks on the mind, and some men felt anxious at every sound and movement in the dark. Fatigues, or fatigue duty, involved a variety of laborious tasks, ranging from digging trenches, burying the dead, moving supplies, looking after the horses, and various other labours.⁷

The Manchesters did not define their duties in this manner, but their description of picket duty was very similar to Miller's interpretation, except that the Manchesters made a further distinction between picket and outpost duty. The Manchesters did not discuss fatigues in much detail, only mentioning it in passing. Otherwise, this section of the chapter touches on various aspects covered by Miller and mentioned briefly by others. The main difference is that my interpretation of what constituted a duty differs from other studies and is based on the Manchesters' description. To the Manchesters, training, garrisoning a town or a line of blockhouses, escorting convoys, and implementing the scorched-earth policy, were regarded as duties too. In addition, the officers had their own unique set of duties.

Once in South Africa, training continued. When the 1st Battalion arrived at Fort Napier in Pietermaritzburg on 20 September 1899, the men and officers were kept busy with logistics, breaking in the horses for the Mounted Infantry company, and further training. Those Manchesters not directly involved in the logistical efforts or training mounts were sent out regularly on route marches to get them fit after their long voyage. One such march occurred days before the outbreak of war, on 9 October, when the battalion set out on a 16 mile (25.7 km) march, mostly uphill. When hostilities officially began, training continued unabated. On 16 October the 1st Manchesters were involved in battle exercises with the rest of the 7th Brigade, commanded then by General Ian Hamilton, 'attacking' Rifleman's Ridge. The Manchesters were pleased by Hamilton's positive remarks about their performance. The next day the brigade practised several more 'assaults' on nearby hills. As the war progressed, training exercises continued, depending on circumstances. When a new draft of Militia reinforcements reached the 1st Battalion, then recuperating in Natal, the newcomers underwent a course of musketry training on 25 April 1900. On 29 May 1900, the battalion practised 'alarm posts' while on outpost duty on and near Jonono's Kop, just north of Elandslaagte.⁸ Even after the war was over, training exercises continued. While at Harrismith, the 2nd Battalion engaged in musketry exercises on 9, 18, and 19 September 1902, which

⁷ Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 122–123.

⁸ 'Records of Service, 63rd and 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, 1758-1910', MR 1/1/2/3. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

involved firing from standing and prone positions at 200 to 500 yards (183 – 457 m) range.⁹ The Manchesters themselves did not provide details about training, or what they thought about it. It was certainly a part of their campaign life, although they did not regard it as something worth writing about.

Another common duty for the Manchesters was outpost duty. An outpost was a detachment of troops occupying a strategic or tactical position, usually some distance away from the main body of troops, who were expected to post sentries to warn of enemy attack, and to defend the position until reinforcements arrived. An outpost could be manned for hours, days, weeks, or even months, depending on circumstances. For example, Private Turner mentioned that when they joined the 17th Brigade in the Free State and began their advance, members of the 2nd Manchesters were sent to establish temporary outposts “over the hills”¹⁰ and post sentries. Given their pace of march, these outposts would have been occupied for only a few hours. While on outpost, the men performed a variety of tasks, depending on their length of stay. For most, the main duty was being on guard. However, if the length of stay was longer, labour-intensive duties occurred. Volunteer Private Hawkin, while with the 1st Battalion, was stationed on a hill outpost overlooking Nicholson’s Nek in Natal in April 1900. While there, his detachment built sangars and gun-pits in the few days they occupied the position.¹¹ Being on outpost duty, especially at a new, unestablished one, could be rather unpleasant. After participating in a short, sharp engagement with Boer forces near Sandspruit in the Transvaal on 22 July 1900, Private Gregory had “the most miserable night I ever spent”.¹² It was raining, windy, and they had no blankets while on outpost duty. They took turns every two hours to take up sentry positions, but getting a break made no difference to the wet, windy cold, since there was no shelter. Sometimes being ordered on outpost first involved a fight. The 1st Battalion Volunteers were ordered in July 1900 to move to a ridge, somewhere close to Sandspruit, and establish a line of outposts. However, as Captain Heywood, commander of the 4th VBMR explained, the cavalry did not scout the position properly, and a short but lively firefight ensued with about 20 concealed Boers. No one on either side was hurt and the Manchesters took the ridge. The outpost line was subsequently christened ‘Manchester

⁹ ‘Records of Service: 96th Regt and 2nd Btn Manchester Regiment, 1824-1914’, MR 1/1/2/6. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre, 104.

¹⁰ Alfred Turner. ‘Another Letter from Private A. Turner’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 19 May 1900, 6.

¹¹ Walter Hawkins. ‘Letter from a Dukinfield Soldier’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 2 June 1900, 8.

¹² W.F. Gregory. ‘The South African War. Interesting Letter from a Romiley Gentleman’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 1 September 1900, 5.

Ridge'.¹³ There are numerous more examples of outpost duty, for both regulars and Volunteers.¹⁴

Garrisoning towns or strategic positions was another of the Manchesters' duties. On 7 February 1900, Private Barron, a Manchester reservist attached to Buller's forces, reported that he was garrisoned at Estcourt, and that "it is no joke digging trenches all day at 115 [Fahrenheit; 46 °C] in the shade".¹⁵ The 2nd Manchesters, garrisoning Ficksburg in April 1900, were kept busy strengthening the town's defences and building a "bomb proof" shelter.¹⁶ Writing on 3 September 1900 from Dalmanutha, Volunteer Private Andrew described how they performed outpost, guard, and patrolling duties while on garrison. Occasionally, they escorted supply columns to the railway station, which was about 1.5 miles (2.4 km) from their camp. It appears, though, that part of their main duty was to guard a section of road near their camp. They were called up on parade at 05:00 with rifles and ammunition, and then manned a line of double trenches protecting a stretch of road. These trenches were constructed by them. It is unclear how long they had to guard these trenches every day. They were also ordered to send out armed parties into the countryside nearly every day to confiscate sheep, pigs, vegetables, and fuel. Raiding the countryside, though, was not considered a duty by Andrew, but more of an opportunity to supplement their rations, "so that occasionally we do get a decent meal".¹⁷

Since both battalions had the unlucky experience of being besieged during the war, it is worthwhile to discuss this aspect separately, although it bears many similarities with the less dangerous garrison duty described above. Firstly, the famous siege of Ladysmith where the 1st Manchesters were involved will be discussed. According to the Records of Service, the men worked nearly ceaselessly from 31 October to 2 November 1899 moving up stores of water, fuel, and other supplies to Caesar's Camp. This was accomplished by fatigue duty and

¹³ B.C.P. Heywood. 'Letters from the Front: Manchester Volunteers in Battle'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 15 September 1900, 5.

¹⁴ Orlando Smith. 'Letter from an Ashton Volunteer'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 23 June 1900, 6; F.W. Andrew. 'Letters from the Front: The Manchester Volunteers at the Front'. *The Manchester Evening News*, 10 October 1900, 5; Charles Hamilton Trueman. 'Correspondence, Bound Volume of Transcripts of Letters and Diary Entries from Captain Charles Hamilton Trueman, 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, Describing His Time and Service in South Africa during the South African (Boer) War. The Volume Also Contains Photocopied Newscuttings Relating to John Francis William Fitzgerald to Whom the Volume Belonged and Who Later Willed It to the Depositor. A Newscutting Relating to the Death of a Pte Lionel Parminter Is Pasted onto the End Papers, 1900-1901', MR 4/16/75. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre, 55; George Chadderton, 'An Ashton Volunteer's Letter to the Ashton P.S.A. Society', *The Ashton Reporter*, 23 June 1900, 6; Turner, 'Another Letter from Private A. Turner', 6.

¹⁵ William Barron. 'Letter from a Dukinfield Soldier in Natal: Still Living and like to Remain So'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 10 March 1900, 6.

¹⁶ 'Records of Service: 2nd Btn Manchester Regiment', 85.

¹⁷ F.W. Andrew. 'Letters from the Front: With the Manchester Volunteers. An Interesting Diary'. *The Manchester Evening News*, 14 November 1900, 5.

pack mules, since no wagons could get within 1.5 miles (2.4 km) of this defensive position. All this toil secured about 14 days of supplies. At the same time, parties of soldiers were tasked with digging sangars. Constructing defensive works continued as late as 11 February 1900, as most of the men were involved in digging more sangars, strengthening existing ones, and clearing ground. This was no doubt due to concerns of another strong Boer attack, as had occurred on 6 January 1900. In addition to this, there was the usual, though more intense picket duty, sentry duty, and even escorting work parties, such as 75 Indians who were digging for potatoes on Bester's Farm on 15 December 1899.¹⁸

As for the 2nd Manchesters, they were in a semi-state of siege in Bethlehem from 28 January to 24 April 1901. Initially, Lt Col Reay sent forays into the countryside, but the enemy presence became too strong, and the lines of communication were cut. A letter written on 25 February 1901 by Reay, with enclosed letters from Captain Noble and smuggled out by an African runner to Harrismith, described their experiences. Unlike the 1st Battalion in Ladysmith, they did not suffer food shortages, although they lacked most luxuries, such as candles and news from home. The men constructed elaborate defences around the town, consisting of miles of barbed wire and fortified outposts. Boer snipers, however, ensured that the Manchesters could not move safely beyond their own lines. The men were almost on constant outpost duty to ward off enemy incursions. There were numerous false alarms which interrupted sleep, but the enemy never launched an attack. In contrast to Ladysmith, the semi-state of siege at Bethlehem was apparently restful. Captain Noble stated that "we were all badly in need of rest after nine months of almost incessant marching, and a rest under present conditions is better than no rest at all".¹⁹ Being under siege was roughly similar to normal garrison duties but involved much greater intensity in terms of labour to strengthen or build new defences, not to mention a much higher state of alertness and anxiety.

The Manchesters often escorted vulnerable convoys from one location to another, over short or longer distances. Volunteer Private Brown described how large some of these convoys were, consisting of almost 300 waggons of all sorts, including hospital vans, Cape carts, baggage carts, water carts, and towed artillery,²⁰ although the men sometimes escorted smaller groups, such as engineers tasked with repairing cut telegraph lines, as was the case for Corporal Evans in October 1900.²¹ Private Turner, with the 2nd Manchesters in the Free

¹⁸ 'History, Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith Reprinted from the Records of Service', 1900. MR 1/3/1/2. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre, 1–11.

¹⁹ Charles Reay. 'More about the Manchesters: Garrison Life at Bethlehem'. *Manchester Evening Chronicle*, 26 March 1901.

²⁰ W. Brown. 'Serving with the Field Forces'. *The Gorton Reporter*, 30 November 1901, 5.

²¹ G.W. Evans. 'Letter from the Front: With the Manchester Mounted Infantry'. *The Manchester Evening News*, 27 November 1900, 6.

State, mentioned on 9 May 1900 how he spent several weeks escorting convoys from place to place, and it seems his company of Mounted Infantry scarcely finished one escort duty before joining the next convoy. When he wrote his letter, they had finally had a period of rest, which “will be a benefit to man and horse”.²² Volunteer Private Andrew described on 30 August 1900 one of the methods used to escort a convoy. The men would act as “connecting links between transports; marching in Indian file, a distance of 12 paces [9.1 m] apart”.²³ It was generally an unwelcome duty, since it meant leaving a more comfortable location, such as a town or a well-established camp. This was the case for Andrews, who wrote on 18 September 1900 from Dalmanutha: “just our luck. After a very welcome rest, and when the trenches were just completed the order came for us to move up country”.²⁴ They subsequently escorted a convoy from Dalmanutha to Machadodorp, and further orders meant they never returned to the trenches they built at Dalmanutha but rejoined the rest of the battalion further afield near Helvetia. According to the Records of Service for the 1st Battalion, the men stationed near Helvetia were also kept busy with escort duties that September, protecting convoys on the stretch of road close to their camp and outposts.²⁵ These are but a few of many examples²⁶ of escort duties performed by both battalions during the war.

Both Manchester battalions also served as blockhouse line garrisons at various times. At first, blockhouse lines were constructed to protect vital lines of communication, but Lord Kitchener launched a massively expanded blockhouse strategy in March 1901, in an effort to make the flying columns more effective, with the strategy that the Boers would be trapped between carefully placed, small inter-supporting strong points, connected by barbed wire, and the pursuing British columns.²⁷ Even though it was a major part of the strategy to win the war, with over 8 000 blockhouses built, garrisoned by almost 85 000 men, the Manchesters did not share much detail about this aspect of their lives.²⁸ The number of letters appearing in local papers was also significantly less during the last months of the war, as both the soldiers and

²² Alfred Turner. ‘Letter from Private Alfred Turner: Life on a Transport’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 12 May 1900, 6.

²³ Andrew, ‘Letters from the Front: The Manchester Volunteers at the Front’, 5.

²⁴ Andrew, ‘Letters from the Front: With the Manchester Volunteers. An Interesting Diary’, 5.

²⁵ ‘Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3’.

²⁶ C.H. Woods. ‘Christmas Day with the 2nd Manchesters’. *The Manchester Evening News*, 26 March 1901, 2; W. Caun. ‘Letters from the Front: A Manchester Soldier’s Experience’. *The Manchester Evening News*, 27 December 1900, 4; Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 25; Charles Reay. ‘The Second Manchesters in South Africa: Hard Work and Long Marches’. *Manchester Evening Chronicle*, 3 December 1900; ‘Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3’; Charles Reay. ‘Manchesters at the Front: Doings of the 2nd Battalion’. *Manchester Evening Chronicle*, 29 July 1901.

²⁷ Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 499.

²⁸ In general, British soldiers did not share many details about blockhouse life, but see Johan Hattingh and André Wessels. ‘Life in British Blockhouses during the Anglo-Boer War, 1887-1902’. *South African Journal of Cultural History* 13, no. 2 (November 1999): 39–55.

the public began to lose interest. In addition, as will be seen shortly, the 2nd Battalion's blockhouse duty from November 1901 to the end of the war was largely uneventful.



Photo 12: A blockhouse garrisoned by a section of Manchesters.

Source: 'Photograph Album, South Africa, Local View; Scenes in Camp; Informal Groups; on the March', c. 1900. MR 1/23/20. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

At first, though, blockhouses needed to be built. The 1st Manchesters were heavily involved in blockhouse construction. They were ordered on 6 December 1900 to begin construction of a line of blockhouses near Schoemanskloof, Helvetia, and Badfontein. On 10 December they started work on a fort and other defences. It should be mentioned, however, that they were often assisted by African work crews, in which case they guarded the Africans instead of doing labour. Be that as it may, on 27 February 1901 they were again involved in construction work near Mouse Point, while at the same time demolishing blockhouses built by the cavalry, although the reason for this was not stated. Later that year they were constructing blockhouses near Lydenburg on Howitzer Hill on 28 November 1901, on Target Hill a few days later, and

another blockhouse on 14 December. The 1st Manchesters were extremely active, though, constantly escorting convoys or mounting small raids. They were concentrated at Lydenburg, with small sections scattered all along the north-south road. They occupied strong points and 'forts', but these were never referred to as blockhouses. The first and only mention of the 1st Manchesters garrisoning a line of blockhouses was on 20 May 1902, when after a long period of marching under Colonel Park, they occupied a line of blockhouses protecting the railway line near Waterval-Boven.²⁹

The 2nd Manchesters also constructed blockhouses but spent more time manning the defences they helped build. Since the men did not write about this period much, the 2nd Battalion's Records of Service provided the details. On 24 November 1901 the battalion was ordered to hold a line of blockhouses from Harrismith to Van Reenen's Pass, known as the Section A Defences Harrismith District. Captain Lupton, a Volunteer officer, reported that he and his men built one blockhouse from 14 to 18 December 1901, near Wilge River Drift. They started a new one on 22 December at Nelson's Kop, and the next day laid a 15 mile (24 km) wire fence along the blockhouse line, from Albertina to De Beer's Pass. It is worth noting that December is one of South Africa's hottest months, so this would have been especially hot and thirsty work. The battalion then guarded this line of blockhouses until the end of the war on 31 May 1902. Lupton wrote that on 17 February 1902 they were ordered to break down an older blockhouse and then move it to a new position. They accomplished this in 11.5 hours, which Lupton believed was a new record.³⁰

The 2nd Manchesters had a mostly uneventful blockhouse line duty, except for occasional excitement or tragedy. On 5 December 1901, a Sergeant was accidentally shot and killed by a nervous sentry. On 19 January 1902 Captain Wynne broke his collarbone, although the details are scant. A few days later, on the 24th, a man drowned while bathing, and another passed away from enteric fever. A month then passed with nothing of note, until 27 February when a British drive from the north managed to push a large group of Boers into the Van Reenen's Pass line. The 2nd Manchesters were rushed from their line of blockhouses further south to reinforce the northern part of the line. The result was the capture of 760 Boers and a large number of livestock. Peace descended once more, but another man died from enteric fever on 3 March. On the 12th almost 150 Boers broke through into Natal, but were chased back by various mounted units, including the Manchesters' Mounted Infantry. On 1 April 1902, a Boer scouting party of about 70 men was spotted near Olivier's Hoek and the Manchesters

²⁹ 'Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3'; Marden and Newbigging, *Rough Diary of the Doings of the 1st Battn. Manchester Regt.*, 78–149.

³⁰ P. Lupton. 'Diary, Captain P. Lupton, Volunteer Company, 2nd Battalion, 1901-1902', MR 1/3/2/3. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

engaged them at long range, wounding one Boer and killing one horse. Once more the line was quiet, but Lieutenant Anderson injured his knee badly enough to be sent to hospital, but details are once again scant. Nothing further occurred until peace was signed on 31 May 1902.³¹ Blockhouse duty thus seemed restful in comparison to marching unless construction of defences was involved. Even so, building defences was only a short period of time, and apart from the occasional enemy visit or tragedy, this was an uneventful and probably monotonous duty.

Picket duty³² was a common task which occurred in almost every location and activity the Manchesters were involved in, whether it was one night in camp, garrisoning a town, manning outposts, or escorting convoys. Picket duty consisted of a small group of soldiers, as few as three men to a dozen or possibly even more, posted from 500 to 1 000 yards³³ (457 m to 914 m) from the main force in order to guard against enemy scouts or sound the warning about incoming enemy forces. There were many such pickets stationed around a friendly force. The 1st Manchesters performed this duty on the night of 27 October 1899 for a specially assembled force under command of Major-General French, who aimed to attack a Boer force near Ladysmith, although this operation was cancelled the next day.³⁴ Private Barron, a reservist of the 1st Battalion, was temporarily attached to the Natal Field Force and part of a force garrisoning Estcourt, and wrote on 7 February 1900 that he was often on outlying picket duty. However, it seems he and two others abandoned their post one night to loot a nearby farm. It is astonishing that he openly admitted this, and his letter was then published in *The Ashton Reporter*.³⁵ This admission of dereliction of duty went either unnoticed or was ignored by his officers, who certainly received newspapers from home and could have easily read about it, because Barron wrote two more letters, one published on 5 May 1900, and the other published on 23 June 1900, and all seemed well for him. Regardless, while at Camp Meerzicht with Buller's Natal Field Force in July 1900, volunteer Captain Heywood, reported that "writing is difficult here. We have a lot of picket work, and are shifted about from one place to another".³⁶ Picket duty was extremely common, as seen in the Records of Service for the 1st Manchesters, where one example mentioned five companies assigned to picket duty on 7 August 1900 during a marching expedition. Indeed, some nights in August made this duty extremely unpleasant, as it could reach temperatures as cold as or colder than -9 °C (15 °F), or so it was

³¹ 'Records of Service: 2nd Bttn Manchester Regiment', 101–2.

³² Sometimes spelled 'picquet' by the Manchesters.

³³ Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 122.

³⁴ 'Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/1', 167.

³⁵ Barron, 'Letter from a Dukinfield Soldier in Natal: Still Living and like to Remain So', 6.

³⁶ Heywood, 'Letters from the Front: Manchester Volunteers in Battle', 5.

claimed.³⁷ There were no blankets and a scarcity of fuel, which “did not improve the lot of the pickets”.³⁸ These are but a few of the many examples of picket duty, which were usually only mentioned if it was somehow unpleasant or disruptive.

The Manchester officers had additional duties to attend to, and depending on one’s rank, these duties were sometimes unpleasant. A captain, such as Trueman of the 2nd Manchesters, commanded a company of men, which in theory was a hundred men strong, but in practice was often closer to 70 or 80 men, depending on casualties and availability of reinforcements from home. Trueman left a glimpse of some of the duties a captain had to perform. A common duty was to visit the sentries at night, which was unpleasant, if not dangerous, due to the high probability of hitting his legs against rocks, or losing his footing in the dark, as was the case in May 1900 near Thaba ‘Nchu: “it is very rocky here and visiting the sentries by night is no fun. I went [sic] an awful smack and cut the knee of my breeches”.³⁹ In a letter from July 1900 near Hammonia, he mentioned that he woke up at 04:00 every morning to first go check on the sentries, before making his way back to be on time to wake his men in time for the stand to arms at 05:30. Another duty, less common but annoying, was to command the “baggage guard”, as was the case in July and August 1900. This often meant that he and his men would arrive back in camp late, due to the need to guard broken wagons as they were being fixed or having to wait for the slow wagons trying to traverse poor roads.⁴⁰

An officer’s duties sometimes had benefits. Captain Paton was extremely grateful when he was assigned as an adjutant to the commander in Dalmanutha, where he and possibly a few other officers occupied the small house of the station master. He wrote on 13 September 1900 that he was overjoyed at sleeping under a roof again for the past two days.⁴¹ While garrisoning Bethlehem, an unknown officer, who simply signed his letter as “Charlie”, wrote to his wife on 29 January 1901 that since he was part of Lt Col Reay’s staff, he was allotted almost a whole house to himself, where five out of the six rooms were for his own personal use.⁴²

As the war dragged on, the British began to denude the countryside of food, shelter, and people who could help the enemy, whether Boer or African. As seen in the previous chapter, opportunistic looting by the Manchesters occurred almost as soon as the war started, but it

³⁷ This might be an exaggeration, since modern weather measurements in what is now Mpumalanga (the old Eastern Transvaal), suggest average minimum night-time temperatures of about 10 to 12 °C in August. However, if the writer was using Celsius instead of Fahrenheit, then the estimate was accurate. Regardless, 10–12 °C is unpleasantly cold in the open, so it does not detract from the fact that it was uncomfortable and miserable to be on picket duty in these conditions.

³⁸ ‘Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3’.

³⁹ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 16.

⁴⁰ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 41, 47.

⁴¹ Paton, ‘Letter from Dalmanutha’, 13 September 1900, 1.

⁴² Charlie. ‘Letter, From “Charlie” to Sophy and Charles from the Garrison at Bethlehem, South Africa’, 29 January 1901. MR 3/16/74. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

was not officially sanctioned. However, as certain Boer commanders such as De Wet switched to guerrilla tactics, Lord Roberts quietly advised his generals in July 1900 to destroy farms suspected of harbouring or aiding the enemy. From then on, it evolved to include virtually any farm or source of supplies, and Kitchener had made 'scorched-earth' an official part of British strategy by March 1901.⁴³

The scorched earth policy, which included looting, became a part of the overall British war strategy as the war progressed through its long guerrilla phase, and thus necessitates a brief overview. Given the nature of war in general, enemy and civilian property were inevitably destroyed on occasion. War was and is a destructive affair. However, the situation escalated on 7 June 1900 when General De Wet launched devastating raids on three separate points on the railway between Pretoria and Bloemfontein, capturing or destroying immense amounts of supplies. In response, Lord Roberts proclaimed on 16 June 1900 that all houses in the immediate vicinity of an attack on the railway or telegraph lines would be destroyed. It did not stop the attacks. This was what one can call the seed of what would grow into a total scorched-earth policy in 1901, when Lord Kitchener inherited command from Roberts, who departed for Britain in December 1900. By March 1901, Kitchener had devised a three-fold strategy to end Boer resistance: he would continue and expand the scorched-earth policy begun by Roberts, wiping out farmhouses, mills, and other structures. It included denuding the countryside of anything that could be useful for the Boers from grain, livestock, to wagons. The other major piece of the strategy was to relocate a large proportion of the civilian population who might assist the enemy, whether Boer or African, into concentration camps. The third major aspect of the plan was to conduct huge sweeps using relatively mobile British columns to drive the agile Boer commandos into a network of blockhouse lines.⁴⁴ The strategy, although slow and brutal, would ultimately prove successful by May 1902.

The Manchesters' performed this destructive duty without hesitation and their writing showed no overt moral distress about it, unlike other studies where historians found several sympathetic, and even embarrassed admissions by British soldiers about the destruction and harm they were inflicting.⁴⁵ The loquacious Captain Trueman described how on 27 September 1900, near Elandskop, "I was out on the right flank, searching for forage and burning Cape carts, waggons and mealies, which I couldn't carry away, to prevent the Boers from making use of them".⁴⁶ His tone was matter-of-fact, suggesting that he viewed this as nothing out of

⁴³ Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 440, 493; Pretorius, *Die Anglo-Boereoorlog*, 31.

⁴⁴ Pretorius, *Die Anglo-Boereoorlog*, 27, 31; Page, 'Supply Services of the British Army in the South African War, 1899-1902', 114; Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 493, 499.

⁴⁵ Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 127-28; Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 440; Spiers, *The Victorian Soldier in Africa*, 171.

⁴⁶ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 77.

the ordinary, or that he simply viewed it as part of being a soldier. Roughly a month later, Corporal Evans, 2nd Manchesters Mounted Infantry, reported that they burned all the farms they found while escorting a large convoy from Bethlehem to Harrismith in October 1900.⁴⁷ Again, no discernible emotive tone is evident in the writing. By November 1900, Trueman wrote that he and his Mounted Infantry destroyed farmhouses whenever they encountered them while out on patrol or reconnaissance. He also mentioned destroying a mill near Hammonia in February 1901, which apparently had supplied a significant amount of ground flour to the Boer commandos in the Transvaal. Writing on 6 April from Ficksburg, Trueman reported how they discovered 8 000 sacks of mealies at a store with several houses near Clocolan. It took them three days to destroy it all.⁴⁸ Volunteer Private Brown, also with the 2nd Battalion, described in late October 1901 how they first tore down a nearby farmhouse for wood to burn, but this was just incidental and more about staying warm at night. Their real target was the African families in the area: “we got plenty of fowl, pigs, and curios from the kraals, and then we set them on fire and brought the K---- into the refuge [sic] camp”.⁴⁹ As with previous accounts of scorched earth raids, the writer betrayed no discernible feelings about the destruction he was wreaking. The only tone to be detected in a source came from Trueman’s letter written on 11 May 1901 from Ficksburg. He and his Mounted Infantry were heavily engaged in emptying the countryside of farms, crops, livestock, and Boer families. “I went off on a jaunt, removed some people from a farm, looted it, burnt the mealies etc. and outhouses and rejoined the column”.⁵⁰ His use of the word ‘jaunt’ implies that this was possibly a ‘pleasant’ outing for him, while the nonchalant listing of his destructive activities reinforces the idea that this was all just part of the job of being a professional soldier. Pakenham came to a similar conclusion, stating that professional soldiers did not necessarily worry about the moral implications of removing families, burning down farms, and destroying property if it was deemed necessary to defeat the enemy.⁵¹ Many of the Volunteers had a similar attitude, according to Miller.⁵² Ultimately, both regular and Volunteer Manchesters displayed no reservations about the scorched-earth policy.

Thus far, the 1st Manchesters have not been mentioned much, but their experience of scorched-earth duties was almost identical to the 2nd Battalion’s. The next few examples featuring the 1st Battalion are included to show that scorched-earth activities lasted right up to the end of the war and did not differ much from when it officially began. Before looking at the

⁴⁷ Evans, ‘Letter from the Front: With the Manchester Mounted Infantry’, 6.

⁴⁸ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 90, 106, 131.

⁴⁹ Brown, ‘Serving with the Field Forces’, 5.

⁵⁰ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 140.

⁵¹ Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 440.

⁵² Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 126.

last months of the war, one unusual example should be mentioned. On 10 and 11 December 1901, the 1st Manchesters closed off the passes to several farms near Wemmershoek. During this endeavour they made extensive use of African labourers, who collected the crops sown by the Boers and brought in 30 wagons worth of grain as a result⁵³ This was the only time the sources mentioned the Manchesters relying on African work crews to collect food supplies, although one can assume this must have occurred several times more during the war. As the war entered 1902, scorched-earth operations continued unabated. On 19 January 1902, somewhere between Dullstroom and Belfast, the 1st Manchesters captured 35 cattle and 500 sheep, of which 200 were slaughtered. They also destroyed two farms, a few stores, and captured one wagon and two carts. On 21 February they captured 400 cattle as they made their way to Wonderhoek via Hoedspruit. The next day they captured 400 more cattle. On 9 May they were part of an operation targeting the Houtenbek Valley, which resulted in 150 captured cattle and various other supplies, especially poultry. On 11 May, near Badfontein, the Mounted Infantry captured 150 sheep and other livestock.⁵⁴ These operations therefore did not differ much, except that the plunder was getting thin in their area at this late stage of the war. When the Boer leaders met at Vereeniging in May 1902 to decide whether they would finally sue for peace, reports about the supply situation caused them concern. The scorched-earth policy was having an effect, and it was estimated that 10 to 11 districts in the eastern Transvaal were barren wastelands, with little to no food for people and animals.⁵⁵

⁵³ 'Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3'.

⁵⁴ 'Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3'.

⁵⁵ Pretorius, *Kommandolewe Tydens Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, 80–81.



Photo 13: Sheep slaughtered by the Manchesters to deny the enemy a source of food.

Source: 'Photograph Album, South Africa, Local View; Scenes in Camp; Informal Groups; on the March', c. 1900. MR 1/23/19. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

Of note is that the earliest accounts in the sources about the Manchesters “collecting” Boer and African families date to April 1901. Captain Trueman mentioned it the first time in a letter dated 6 April 1901, when he and his Mounted Infantry were ordered to find and bring back two Boer families about 20 miles (32.2 km) from Clocolan. He mentioned another such mission in his letter of 13 April 1901. The 2nd Battalion’s Records of Service noted that they had cleared the civilian population of Bethlehem from 3–4 November 1901.⁵⁶ They sometimes had the help of African informers. Trueman wrote on 11 May 1901 that while he was out burning two farms and assorted outhouses, the local Africans betrayed the hiding place of one of the families, who were sheltering in a nearby cave with all their household goods. A troop of Yeomen reached this family first.⁵⁷ Trueman was one of the few sources who provided a description of how such a Boer family was treated when captured, and is thus quoted here in full. More notably, this description betrays a distinct lack of empathy and included a measure of amused contempt at the appearance of the older woman:

The first I saw of them was coming down the kopje singing the volksleid [national anthem, spelled *volkslied*], surrounded by Yeomen carrying or staggering under loads of feather beds etc. We only had the guns and limbers to bring them along, so finally decided to leave

⁵⁶ 'Records of Service: 2nd Bttn Manchester Regiment', 100.

⁵⁷ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 131, 134, 140.

all except one - a lady that goes out shooting [shouting?] “Kharkis” - she refused to come so had to be lifted onto the gun, and gunner sat beside her holding her on with his arm around her waist, she wasn’t very beautiful nor had she a fairy-like figure.⁵⁸

However, torching farms, mills, capturing livestock, and collecting families was not altogether safe, since the Boers sometimes opposed it. Evans mentioned that the enemy contested their advance in October 1900 almost every day, sometimes delaying their progress to a mere two miles (3.2 km) a day, but it seems that on this occasion the Boer attacks did not result in casualties.⁵⁹ In February 1901, Captain Trueman and his Mounted Infantry were ordered to destroy Steyn’s Mill, on the way to Fouriesburg. This, however, was opposed by the Boers and only after a fierce firefight and considerable British artillery fire did the enemy abandon the hill which obstructed the way to the mill. Trueman and his men destroyed it shortly after, although they were still being sniped at from long range while busy with this work. The next day they set out to destroy two more mills, but this time the enemy resistance was even fiercer, and ultimately Trueman’s Mounted Infantry and the other British units involved, 225 mounted men in total, had to retire to Fouriesburg after a day of fighting with several casualties.⁶⁰ On 27 July 1901, the 2nd Manchesters suffered three casualties on the flank while scouring the countryside. A Cape cart got stuck in a donga, and while trying to get it out, Volunteer Captain Stewart Wynne was severely wounded and captured, while Wynne’s groom and a corporal of the Mounted Infantry were taken prisoner.

A few months later the 2nd Manchesters faced much stiffer resistance as they participated in an operation to remove the civilians from Bethlehem in early November 1901. Although the exact reason for this operation is uncertain, it seems it was because General De Wet was based in the area between the towns of Lindley, Bethlehem, and Reitz since June 1900.⁶¹ Thus, removing the townsfolk from Bethlehem was a way to deny him access to resources and assistance. The Boers, therefore, would try to oppose such a move.⁶² Consequently, the rear-guard and right flank of the British column was attacked on the 3rd by what the Manchesters guessed were about 70–80 Boers, but only two horses were killed. On the 4th the Boers sniped at the outposts for most of the day. However, a much more serious attack was launched on the 6th. The advance guard of the column ran into about 60 Boers, who were eventually driven off by several units of mounted infantry. This, though, was a distraction, since a much larger attack was launched against the rear-guard by approximately 150 Boers. They concentrated mostly on a part of F Company, which resulted in significant casualties. Three

⁵⁸ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 140.

⁵⁹ Evans, ‘Letter from the Front: With the Manchester Mounted Infantry’, 6.

⁶⁰ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 114–20.

⁶¹ Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 542.

⁶² I consulted General De Wet’s memoir, *Three Years War* (1902), and it appears he was not directly involved in the Boers’ attempt to stop the evacuation of Bethlehem’s civilians.

men were killed, one of them a Volunteer. Three others were wounded, including the commander of F Company, Lieutenant Wright, and one man was taken prisoner. In addition, 11 more men were taken prisoner, of whom two were Volunteers.⁶³

Boer resistance continued to be a dangerous nuisance, as the experiences of the 1st Manchesters revealed. On 10 December 1901, roughly 50 Boers engaged their Mounted Infantry near Wemmershoek as the rest of the battalion secured a pass to allow a work party of Africans to harvest Boer crops. The Mounted Infantry operated further south, and thus isolated, came under attack, suffering one severely wounded casualty.⁶⁴ As late as 10 May 1902, the Boers still offered resistance where they could. On the Paardeplatz Road, north of Dullstroom, the 1st Manchesters came under attack by Grobbelaar's commandos. The Mounted Infantry, once again isolated from the main body, was attacked by about 60 Boers, and suffered one man wounded and two horses killed. Meanwhile, the rest of the column came under heavy sniping attacks all the way back to Dullstroom. The rear-guard was attacked with some energy too, and the Manchesters lost one man wounded there. G Company was evidently heavily involved in this fighting, and fired about 1 200 rounds.⁶⁵ It is evident that at no point was it possible to let one's guard down, especially on scorched-earth raids. The Boers, if able and present in sufficient strength, harried the destructive British columns as much as they could throughout the war.

The extent of the destruction the Manchesters wreaked on the countryside is difficult to fully convey in narrative form. The official accounts hold too many reports of scorched-earth operations to discuss without it becoming a monotonous litany of destruction, supplemented by scattered and mostly futile Boer resistance, which often consisted of long-range sniping. It is useful, though, to focus on a concentrated period in table format, to convey how much the scorched-earth policy dominated the Manchesters' campaign experiences. This example is from the 2nd Manchesters' Records of Service⁶⁶, and was selected because of its unusual intensity, focus, and the fact that during this period, the Manchesters' own Lt Col Reay commanded one of the columns, with the 2nd Battalion at its core.

Date	Location	Description
4–6 May	Steynsberg and Mealoppos Draai	Clearing the countryside, but the operation was challenged by the Boers and difficult terrain, but they still managed to destroy or confiscate large amounts of supplies.

⁶³ 'Records of Service: 2nd Bttn Manchester Regiment', 97, 100.

⁶⁴ 'Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3'.

⁶⁵ 'Records of Service: 2nd Bttn Manchester Regiment'.

⁶⁶ 'Records of Service: 2nd Bttn Manchester Regiment', 96–97.

Date	Location	Description
7 May	Bamboesberg and Fouriesburg	Dynamited a mill and expelled the civilians in Fouriesburg over the border into Basutoland.
16 May	Theron's Mill, 5 miles (8 km) east of Fouriesburg	Destroyed the mill but faced considerable Boer resistance.
16–21 May	From Fouriesburg to Inhoek	Traversed difficult terrain, but captured 87 carts and wagons, together with large amounts of food.
6 June	Klerksvlei	Destroyed a Boer armoury containing artillery shells, dynamite, and damaged rifles which were being repaired.
13–17 June	Marched via Wilge River Bridge, Tweefontein, and Jongberg to Bethlehem	During the journey confiscated large amounts of cattle, other livestock, and one prisoner captured.
7–9 July	Marched to Rondedraai, Holspruit, and Leeuwkop	Set the grass on fire, as well as confiscating or destroying large numbers of cattle, horses, sheep, wagons, and grain.
11 July	Marched to Weldedagga, by Tafelkop	Discovered a women's laager close by, and launched a surprise night raid on the women, capturing two men and 70 to 80 women and children. Also captured eight wagons, five Cape carts, and drove off the cattle.
13 July	Wilge River	The Mounted Infantry pursued a small party of Boers, killing two and capturing three. Captured four horses, three rifles, and 120 cattle.
26 July	Witkoppies	Captured a large number of horses and cattle. Most notably claimed the destruction of 13 000 sheep.
3 August	Rejoined the 17 th Brigade at Harrismith	During the last few days of this mission, 8 000 more sheep were destroyed, and 1 250 cattle brought in. The Boers also requested and were granted a temporary truce to return three Manchesters they captured on 27 July.

Table 2: Scorched-earth operations of the 2nd Manchesters from May to July 1901.

Scorched-earth operations of the 2nd Manchesters from May to July 1901.

Source: 'Records of Service: 96th Regt and 2nd Bttn Manchester Regiment, 1824-1914', MR 1/1/2/6. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

The Manchesters clearly had numerous different types of duties to perform. Their duties determined their activities, and these had an enormous impact on their experiences and perceptions. Keeping guard as a sentry was mostly tedious, while escorting one convoy after

the other led to long marches and sore feet. On the whole, these duties caused the various miseries the men endured, as discussed in the next section on drudgery.

5.2 DRUDGERY

Strongly connected to the Manchesters' duties were several discomforts, most notably the rigours of marching, poor sleeping conditions, and the challenge of maintaining hygiene. The unpleasantness of campaigning in South Africa is mentioned in several secondary sources, albeit not in considerable detail. It is normally interspersed in discussions regarding the decline of morale as the war went on.⁶⁷ Through employing the systematic, thematic-chronological method, this chapter reveals several hitherto under-appreciated aspects about life on campaign, most notably a closer look at the sheer intensity of what a long and sustained period of marching entailed. South Africa's environmental extremes and poor road infrastructure clearly made marching challenging at times, eliciting much comment and outright grumbling. In addition, was the importance of sleeping, or rather the lack thereof, which is barely mentioned in the existing literature, but the Manchesters wrote extensively about this. Lastly is the matter of hygiene, which is touched on in various studies, but the extent to which the matter of hygiene affected the men is another aspect which is highlighted in much more detail, since the Manchesters commented about this aspect frequently. Overall, it gives a significantly more intimate look into their experience, especially its more unpleasant facade, as experienced from the Manchesters' perspective.

The men spent a great deal of time writing about the seemingly endless marching, almost all of it negative in tone, and this was clearly an activity which dominated their life on campaign. To give an indication of how much a battalion could march in a span of almost two months, it is worth noting that the 2nd Battalion marched about 400 miles (643.7 km) between 3 December 1900 and 28 January 1901.⁶⁸ Marching in South Africa, whether it involved escorting a convoy, chasing after the Boers, or simply getting from one point to another, was time-consuming and exhausting, amounting to considerable distances. The marching experience started even before the men reached the frontlines, usually during training, albeit less intense. Reservists of the 2nd Battalion were assembled in Hulme Barracks during November 1899 to reinforce the 1st Battalion in Natal. These men, about 60 in number, went out for an exercise march on 23 November 1899. They attracted a small crowd, which followed them as they marched through Manchester. A good Samaritan gave some of the men at the back a beer, which was quickly and gratefully consumed. Some of the reservists were jauntily

⁶⁷ Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 125–126; Spiers, *The Victorian Soldier in Africa*, 166–171; Venter and Wessels, 'British Soldiers' Anglo-Boer War Experiences as Recorded in Their Diaries'.

⁶⁸ Wylly, *History of the Manchester Regiment*, 50.

smoking pipes and cigarettes as they marched. The women working at an outfitting shop crowded the windows and balcony, waved handkerchiefs and blew kisses at the passing troops. In all, the march lasted two and a half hours, covering about seven miles (11.3 km). By the end, the men were perspiring heavily, accompanied by red faces and sore feet. Apparently, some of the reservists could not even complete the march and had to fall out.⁶⁹

The marching exercise in Manchester, however, was a poor substitute for the realities that were waiting for them in South Africa. Volunteer Sergeant Newton provided a description of his first march in South Africa, writing on 19 March 1900 from Dewdrop Camp in Natal. He and the other volunteers marched through Ladysmith to join the ravaged 1st Battalion, still at Caesar's Camp. It was a mere five miles (8 km) that first day, but Newton claimed he would never forget it. Not only did he witness first-hand the sorry state of Ladysmith and what the soldiers there had endured, but this short march itself was gruelling. They went uphill, carrying their full kit, with 100 rounds of ammunition. "It was no kid's play, I tell you. It precious near sweat us to death".⁷⁰ A few miles, though, was a paltry distance compared to what they would march in the coming months. Newton and the Volunteers, together with those 1st Manchesters still able to walk, were subsequently sent out on regular route marches from Dewdrop Camp to get them fit.

Before continuing, though, it is useful to see what the army thought the men should do before and after a march to maintain their feet. It will be seen that the army's expectations were far removed from reality. South Africa simply did not have enough clean water, and given the chronic supply problems, oil was almost impossible to obtain, let alone other items, such as extra socks. The following insert is from 1st Battalion Captain Marsden's *Section Roll Book*, published by Cale and Polden's Military Series. This booklet was mainly intended to assist officers in managing the bookkeeping regarding the men under their command. However, it also contained some guidelines and advice regarding various military matters, such as training, equipment, and suggestions for marching:

In order that men may be able to perform marches well and with comfort, their boots should have thick broad soles, and the leather be well greased, soaked with boiled linseed oil, or rubbed with dubbing. To make dubbing: melt 3 ozs. of mutton fat, strain it, and add 1 oz. beeswax and mix well. Then, while cooling, add one big spoonful of turpentine, and stir well. Instead of mutton fat, ½ pint of neatsfoot oil may be used. To prevent blisters on the feet, keep the stockings well washed and clean. Before wearing them soap or grease them well; soft soap is the best. Wash the feet after every day's march, and rub them quite dry. If the feet are sore, rub them well with oil or fat of some kind. Blisters on the feet are not to be opened, but a worsted thread should be drawn through them. Chafing between the

⁶⁹ 'The Second Manchester Regiment: A Route March', *The Manchester Evening News*, 24 November 1899, 2.

⁷⁰ Harry Newton. 'The War. The Ashton Volunteers in Natal. Letter to the Sergeants' Mess'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 21 April 1900, 6.

thighs can be avoided by keeping the parts scrupulously clean, and when sore, powdering them with 'Fuller's Earth', starch, or dry clay.⁷¹

The training the men received, together with questionable advice, did not prepare them adequately for the realities of marching, especially over long distances which had to be sustained for long periods of time. Moreover, they would have to march in terrain that was extremely rough sometimes, and on bad roads. Not to mention that they would be far removed from regular supply lines and would have irregular access to safe and clean drinking water.

The distances and duration the Manchesters marched varied, depending on conditions and enemy action, but usually started early in the morning and could last late into the afternoon or even into the evening. The distances they could march in a single day were significant, anything between 14 miles to 20 miles (22.5 – 32.2 km), sometimes even further, and the pace was often sustained for several days. Captain Trueman wrote to a friend on 24 April 1900, describing the daily marching routine he had at the time. They were roused at 04:00, standing to arms until daybreak. They then marched, with short rests in-between, until about 16:00. However, merely stopping did not mean their duties ended. Unlucky men were sent on picket or outpost duty, while the rest usually collapsed in a heap, glad to be finally off their feet.⁷² Lieutenant Colonel Reay wrote on 22 September 1900 that since 29 July 1900 they had marched 45 days, averaging 14 miles (22.5 km) a day.⁷³ Trueman wrote on 10 September 1900, adding to Reay's information: "‘Toujours le trek'. We have been on the move every day since July 29th, with the exception of 4 days. Continuous 'trek' for 1 ½ months, 1 day's rest and 16 of trekking [sic]".⁷⁴ The marching pace, however, was not always backbreaking. Trueman, in the same letter dated 10 September 1900, admitted that "ever since Fitz Henry went sick we have been doing 10 or 12 miles (16.1 – 19.3 km), landing in camp about 1 p.m. Very nice!"⁷⁵

The 2nd Manchesters' heavy marching continued, with only a few rests. Private Caun claimed on 24 November 1900 "we have been on the march ever since we came out here, 18 and 20 miles [29 and 32.2 km] every day".⁷⁶ The Records of Service claimed that the 2nd Manchesters marched approximately 400 miles (644 km) from 3 December 1900 to 28

⁷¹ 'Nominal Roll, Squad Roll of "G" Coy., 1st Battalion (Captain Marsden's)', 1899. MR 1/8/3. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

⁷² Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 13.

⁷³ Charles Reay. 'Letter, Lieutenant Colonel Reay, Senekal and Bethlehem, to Colonel Gethin Concerning Officer Casualties; Recent Fighting; a Draft of Officers to the Battalion; the Capture of 26 Guns from the Boers on the 17 September. 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment', 22 September 1900. MR 1/16/5/17. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

⁷⁴ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 59.

⁷⁵ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 59.

⁷⁶ Caun, 'Letters from the Front: A Manchester Soldier's Experience', 4.

January 1901.⁷⁷ The seemingly endless marching continued for “Rundle’s Hounds”. Volunteer Private Brown, 2nd Battalion, writing somewhere at the end of October 1901, described how they marched for eight days, beginning at 04:00 and stopping at 19:00, covering about 14 miles (22.5 km) a day as they escorted a convoy to Bethlehem.⁷⁸

The 1st Battalion did its fair share of marching too. According to Sergeant Hobson, writing on 18 March 1902, they covered anything from 12, 16, to even 24 miles (19, 25.7 and 38.6 km) a day over a period of a few weeks.⁷⁹ During a sweeping operation in late March 1902, the 1st Manchesters covered a distance of 75 miles (120.7 km) in 60 hours.⁸⁰ Naturally, some days the marching progress was unusually slow, such as on 7 June 1901 when the 2nd Battalion made its way to Klerksvlei, when they only managed 3 miles (4.8 km) that day. They struggled with the cumbersome wagons, and one artillery piece broke loose, and ran backwards on the steep slope, causing damage to other vehicles and eventually crashing to a halt with a shattered wheel.⁸¹ The main culprit for slow progress was almost invariably rough terrain, which the wagons struggled with.

It is challenging to illustrate the intensity and frequency of these marching periods in narrative format alone. The following table is compiled from details in a letter written by Lt Col Reay,⁸² which provided a good overview of what a high intensity period of marching entailed:

Date (1900)	Destination/mission
29 July	Marched from Hammonia to Naauwpoort Nek to assist General Hunter in capturing a Boer force, but on reaching Fouriesburg two days later (on one day alone they marched 32 km) heard the Boer’s had already surrendered.
1 August	Started out to Harrismith, reaching it on 6 August, marching roughly 10 (16.1 km) to 15 miles (24.1 km) a day.
8 August	Left Harrismith for Vrede (111 km, or 69 miles using the modern N3 highway), via Mill River and Reitz. Reached Vrede on 27 August. Seemed to march at a more leisurely pace, roughly 6 km or 3.7 miles a day.
27 August	Left the rest of the brigade at Vrede to escort an empty convoy to Standerton.

⁷⁷ ‘Records of Service: 2nd Bttn Manchester Regiment’, 92.

⁷⁸ Brown, ‘Serving with the Field Forces’, 5.

⁷⁹ Williams Hobson. ‘Personal Papers, 7113 Sergeant William Hobson, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters [to His Brother] about the Boer War (with Transcripts), Service Programs, 1901-1988’, MR 3/17/104. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

⁸⁰ ‘Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3’.

⁸¹ ‘Records of Service: 2nd Bttn Manchester Regiment’, 96.

⁸² Reay, ‘The Second Manchesters in South Africa: Hard Work and Long Marches’.

Date (1900)	Destination/mission
29 August	Returned to Vrede, arriving on 1 September.
4 September	Departed Vrede for Bethlehem, via Kalhoen Krantz and Georgina. Arrived on 11 September.
6 September	Marched to Senekal, where they engaged the Harsbruck Commando on the 15 th after a forced march. This engagement was apparently a stalemate.
17 September	Marched to Ventersburg, surprising a Boer force at Brankhorstfontein, but they escaped.
18 September	Marched to attack a nearby hill, only to find that it was occupied by friendly forces, Lovat's Scouts, much to everyone's surprise.
19 September	Marched to Bethlehem via Senekal, arriving there on the 22 nd .
25 September	Marched through Sterkfontein to reach Reitz on the 30 th , fighting several skirmishes on the way, but enjoyed a long rest afterwards.
12 October	Ordered to Harrismith to resupply. Another long rest period.
2 November	Ordered to Vrede to serve as a garrison force.
<p>Table 3: A sample of an intense period of marching for the 2nd Manchesters from 29 July to 2 November 1900. Source: Reay, Charles. 'The Second Manchesters in South Africa: Hard Work and Long Marches'. <i>Manchester Evening Chronicle</i>, 3 December 1900.</p>	

The marching experience, which was frequent, often long, and exhausting, was heavily influenced by the environment. The poor state of the roads, rough terrain, extreme temperatures, and climate all played a part. Volunteer Private Andrew, with the 1st Battalion, provided some details about the difficulties they faced. On 30 August 1900 he wrote that on their way to Machadodorp, their march was considerably delayed by a dust storm, and further compounded by the breakdown of several wagons and thus they covered only about six miles (9.7 km) before nightfall, but the rest of the column did not wait for them. "No ordinary accident, however, is allowed to interfere with the progress of a column, which presses on regardless of everything".⁸³ As they marched to Schoemanskloof in September 1900, Andrew noted how difficult the rough road made their marching and their route was littered with dead bullocks and horses. The terrain was also mountainous, which did not help, although he did appreciate the beauty of the landscape. He was less appreciative of the day's heat, followed by the night's

⁸³ Andrew, 'Letters from the Front: The Manchester Volunteers at the Front', 5.

cold.⁸⁴ On 2 September 1900 the 1st Battalion encountered another bad road in hilly terrain on their way to Helvetia, and it was “simply buried with dead horses, mules, and oxen”.⁸⁵ While marching in the picturesque Drakensberg mountains near Golden Gate on 5 June 1901, the 2nd Battalion allocated two companies to road repair, while the other companies struggled with drag ropes to pull the heavy wagons up the poor road.⁸⁶ One did not even need a dust storm to become dusty, as Sergeant Hobson, 1st Battalion, experienced on his way to Machadodorp in April 1901, getting covered in red dust from the dirt roads.⁸⁷ If it was not dust, it was rain. Private Caun was unimpressed by having to march through “torrents of rain”⁸⁸ on some days. Lieutenant Colonel Reay described the 2nd Battalion’s march to Standerton in late August 1900 as “very uncomfortable, as it poured with rain most of the way”.⁸⁹ Captain Trueman remarked in February 1901 that during one of their marches they got soaked by rain the day before, “but fortunately I had a dry change and had one blanket more or less dry to sleep in, but the wretched men had no dry things at all”.⁹⁰ Marching through the rain did not get any less pleasant as the war dragged on, and on 26 January 1902 the 1st Manchesters endured another miserable wet march.⁹¹

Moreover, South Africa’s small rivers and streams, though unimpressive by European standards, were serious obstacles to wagons and caused many men to complain about crossing narrow but muddy drifts (a local term for shallow river crossings). Water, usually a welcome sight in South Africa, was an unwelcome impediment when the Manchesters had to escort convoys or march quickly. Captain Trueman observed on 15 August 1900 that marching was considerably easier if there were only a few drifts to cross, as was the case in the countryside around Mill River Bridge. He made this comment based on earlier experiences with drifts, where he and his men had to assist wagons which all too often got stuck in the mud, or even broke down as they crossed the drift. On 7 August 1900 he wrote that “our last waggon bust its wheel slap in the middle ... and finally dragged the beastly thing across without the wheel”.⁹² He provided several more examples of bad drift crossings.⁹³ The 1st Battalion’s Records of Service noted the difficulties presented by drifts and rivers to wagons, describing the arduous efforts to cross the Wilge River on 11 March 1902, which took “six hours and forty

⁸⁴ Andrew, ‘Letters from the Front: With the Manchester Volunteers. An Interesting Diary’, 14 November 1900, 5.

⁸⁵ ‘Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/1’, 174.

⁸⁶ ‘Records of Service: 2nd Bttn Manchester Regiment’, 96.

⁸⁷ Hobson, ‘Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother’.

⁸⁸ Caun, ‘Letters from the Front: A Manchester Soldier’s Experience’, 4.

⁸⁹ Reay, ‘The Second Manchesters in South Africa: Hard Work and Long Marches’.

⁹⁰ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 115.

⁹¹ ‘Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3’.

⁹² Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 48.

⁹³ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 55.

minutes to get the waggons over ... half of them having to be off loaded by the baggage guard ('K' Company) and pulled out of the mud by drag ropes".⁹⁴

Due to various challenges, from the environment to supply problems, the condition and presentation of the men during these marches were a far cry from the public's imagination. Instead of neat, proud lines of marching soldiers as if on parade, all in perfectly kept uniforms, the reality was almost the exact opposite. Captain Trueman referred to a description from a newspaper which he thought described the march of a division perfectly, as a march was "no glitter of arms, bands playing and troops stepping in quick time, but the hideous row of K--- shouting to their oxen, an enormous quantity of very dirty troops marching out of step, the convoy stretching over miles".⁹⁵ Volunteer Private Andrew described the condition of his fellow Volunteers marching with the 1st Battalion in August 1900, who "are in tatters; some with no helmets; others with bundles of [wood] chips to make fires with, and the tin cans to replace mess-tins; and then again, some with veils to keep the dust out of their eyes".⁹⁶ Volunteer Private Brown, likely referring to marching in October 1901, informed his reader that "it is a different procession here than what you see in England, what with nearly 300 wagons, beside hospital vans, Cape carts, baggage carts, water carts, guns, etc".⁹⁷

The formations and strategies used in the larger marching columns were sometimes mentioned, adding a unique glimpse into how a large, strung-out column tried to deter Boer attacks or increase its speed. The greatest challenge was protecting the long supply line of wagons, which could extend several kilometres. On 9 August 1900, the 1st Manchesters marched with Buller's forces to Ermelo, and the Records of Service stated that the large number of wagons, combined with the inexperience of the supply officers, caused considerable delays and strategic concerns about Boer attacks. As a result, the decision was made to place entire battalions of infantry and cavalry in extended line formation parallel to the wagons. Thus, the men could simply turn left or right in the event of an enemy attack, and would be already in extended order and ready to defend the column. The cavalry performed vanguard and rear-guard duties, but withdrew at night into the camp, with infantry sections protecting the camp by manning outposts arranged in a rough circle around it.⁹⁸ On 15 August 1900, Volunteer Private Andrew provided more details, describing a march of 15 miles (24.1 km), where the 1st Manchesters acted as left flank support for Buller's enormous square column, which Andrew claimed was about 10 miles (16 km) in length and width.⁹⁹ This meant,

⁹⁴ 'Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3'.

⁹⁵ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 31.

⁹⁶ Andrew, 'Letters from the Front: The Manchester Volunteers at the Front', 6.

⁹⁷ Brown, 'Serving with the Field Forces', 5.

⁹⁸ 'Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3'.

⁹⁹ Andrew, 'Letters from the Front: The Manchester Volunteers at the Front', 6.

though, that even if a column followed a road, the marching itself for a significant proportion of the men did not necessarily occur on the road. Sergeant Hobson, also 1st Battalion, reminded his readers on 23 June 1901 that marching in South Africa was not just a simple matter of walking on a road. The men who guarded the flanks had to traverse rough terrain. He explained that “what makes these convoys harder work [is that] you are on the flanks about half a mile from the road and you scramble up and down rocks and dongas and it make [sic] it about twice as long”.¹⁰⁰

However, some columns showed less formational organisation. Writing on 7 August 1900, Captain Trueman related how the 2nd Manchesters caught up from the rear to Lt Gen. Rundle’s 8th Division, and he and his company were detached to accompany the wagons. He described a scene of chaos. The line of wagons he estimated at about seven or eight miles (11.2 – 12.9 km), and he reckoned their progress was about one mile (1.6 km) an hour due to constant wagon breakages and drifts to cross. When they stopped for the night, there was no order, with the wagons a confused, tightly packed mess. He was convinced that if the enemy had attacked them then, they would have easily destroyed the supplies in the densely parked wagons. Despite the chaos, it appears that Rundle’s division did post flank guards while on the march, a necessity due to the constant threat posed by opportunistic enemy raiding parties. On 22 February 1901, Trueman wrote how he and his men served as the column’s right flank, and how they had to scramble over a rough, mile long hill in the dark.¹⁰¹ As for speed, the 2nd Battalion Records of Service mentioned on 4 July 1901 that all their ox wagons were replaced by mules, in preparation for participating in a “flying column”, intended to chase the nimble Boers operating north from Harrismith.¹⁰² However, the sources did not describe how effective these protective measures were, or whether the switch to mules drastically increased their marching speed. The marching formation must have been effective, though, since the Manchesters and the columns they formed part of were not overrun by enemy attacks, despite some serious engagements which will be discussed in the next chapter.

What elicited frequent complaint was the lack of sufficient food, touched on in the previous chapter. The seemingly cheerful Private Mills of the 2nd Battalion, although generally positive about the food they received, admitted on 20 April 1900 that during a march they received relatively poor rations in the form of tinned meat and hard biscuits.¹⁰³ Lance-Corporal Hodkinson, also 2nd Battalion, wrote about the same period. He added that they were often ordered to carry just one day’s rations and were followed by two day’s rations per wagon.

¹⁰⁰ Hobson, ‘Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother’.

¹⁰¹ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 47–48, 119.

¹⁰² ‘Records of Service: 2nd Bttn Manchester Regiment’.

¹⁰³ A. Mills. ‘Letter from A. Mills’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 26 May 1900, 6.

However, marching columns often outpaced the wagons, which explains why the marching troops went hungry so often. In any event, Hodkinson did not agree with the cheerful Private Mills. He claimed that they marched 12 to 14 hours a day, but only received half rations, and sometimes even quarter rations, which was one biscuit a day.¹⁰⁴ Captain Trueman wrote on 7 August 1900 that while serving with his men as rear-guard for Rundle's supply column, they only gave him a cold Maconochie ration (which was tinned beef and vegetable stew), a biscuit, and a cup of tea, which was the only food he received for an entire day of marching.¹⁰⁵ One would have expected that the men close to the supply wagons would have been fed better, but in this case, the quartermasters were tight-fisted. Most men, though, were usually a long distance from the trailing wagons. Private Caun wrote on 24 November 1900 that their marching rations were "not enough to feed a mouse on. You can guess what starvation we are going through after marching all day".¹⁰⁶ Private Woods, 2nd Battalion, wrote despondently in January 1901 that "the pangs of hunger gnaw very bad at times"¹⁰⁷ as they marched. The food supply during a hard march did not improve over time, since Sergeant Hobson of the 1st Battalion wrote on 5 November 1901 that he had a breakfast consisting of "a crust of bread and drink of water".¹⁰⁸ Marching on an empty stomach was a relatively common experience.

If hunger was not already bad enough, some troops endured anxiety as they marched, knowing that the enemy might strike suddenly with little to no warning. Captain Trueman experienced this early on during the 2nd Battalion's campaign in April 1900. They disembarked from their train and began a night march, with him leading the vanguard. He distrusted their guide, so kept his weapon ready to shoot the man at the first sign of treachery. He also expected an attack at any moment, as he recalled: "It was most exciting but precious jumpy".¹⁰⁹

Even though it often proved the case that no attack occurred, sometimes the enemy did offer resistance. Corporal Evans, with the 2nd Battalion's Mounted Infantry, wrote on 1 November 1900 from Harrismith, that they engaged the Boers several times while marching from Bethlehem to Harrismith in October 1900. In this example, though, the Manchesters also faced danger from friendly fire. Evans and three other men were picketing a hill captured from the Boers earlier that day, when they were suddenly attacked that night by the Grenadiers. No one was injured, though. He reported that apparently the same thing happened with the other half of his company on the opposite end of the column, when they were mistakenly attacked by the Scots Guard, in daylight, no less. They also escaped harm. Still, the skirmishes with

¹⁰⁴ A. Hodkinson. 'Interesting Letter from the Seat of War'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 2 June 1900, 6.

¹⁰⁵ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 49.

¹⁰⁶ Caun, 'Letters from the Front: A Manchester Soldier's Experience', 4.

¹⁰⁷ Woods, 'Christmas Day with the 2nd Manchesters', 2.

¹⁰⁸ Hobson, 'Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother'.

¹⁰⁹ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 5.

the Boers on that day of marching resulted in about 30 men wounded, although the Manchesters suffered no harm. The Boer attacks did not stop, though. They were attacked the next morning, in the rear, but managed to beat the Boers off, and marched 20 miles (32.2 km). The following day the Boers attacked again, the fight lasting almost five hours. That night, Evans and his company had to sally out to capture a nearby hill to help secure the camp.¹¹⁰ Private Caun, writing on 24 November 1900 about events earlier that month, claimed they saw hard fighting while marching, and that the 2nd Manchesters suffered casualties almost every day as they escorted various convoys over a period of 20 days.¹¹¹ This was an exaggeration as Wyly's history of the regiment lists only seven casualties for that month.¹¹² Still, Caun's overstatement of their casualties may be an indication of the stressful impact these attacks had on him and others, and was thus amplified in his imagination.

The Boer attacks on moving columns of British troops, even though infrequent, continued until the war ended. Trueman provided a detailed account of a 'fighting march' in February 1901. They started out on 17 February on their way to Fouriesburg, and had to go through Commando's Nek. He and his company were part of the rear-guard. They faced significant resistance and were fighting on the march for almost two days, but suffered only eight wounded, which Trueman attributed to the night march they performed, which bypassed some of the Boer positions.¹¹³ On 8 June 1901, the 2nd Battalion, then protecting the left flank of the column as it marched to Harrismith, faced heavy fire from about 70 Boers. They did not suffer casualties, but a wagon leader of the B Company, an African named Jim, was wounded in the arm.¹¹⁴ Volunteer Private Brown, likely writing about events in late October 1901 and in considerably less detail, reported that they lost five men wounded and one killed, presumably caused by Boer sniping and harassing attacks during an eight day march escorting a convoy to Bethlehem.¹¹⁵ As for the 1st Battalion, they suffered attacks on the march too, but the nature of these did not differ from what the 2nd Battalion endured. For example, the Records of Service noted some sniping on 6 October 1900, mostly at stragglers. Nearly a year later, on 3 October 1901, a large force of Boers sniped at the 1st Manchesters as they were escorting captured Boer families and livestock, resulting in four men being wounded. As late as 9 May 1902, the 1st Manchesters came under attack while serving under Colonel Park as part of a sweeping column in the Houtenbek Valley. The flank guards were under enemy fire almost the whole 10

¹¹⁰ Evans, 'Letter from the Front: With the Manchester Mounted Infantry', 6.

¹¹¹ Caun, 'Letters from the Front: A Manchester Soldier's Experience', 4.

¹¹² Wyly, *History of the Manchester Regiment*, 48–49.

¹¹³ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 112–19.

¹¹⁴ 'Records of Service: 2nd Bttn Manchester Regiment', 96.

¹¹⁵ Brown, 'Serving with the Field Forces', 5.

miles (16.1 km) they marched that day, and one mounted infantryman died of his wounds, while two men were captured, stripped, and then released by the Boers.¹¹⁶

The men maintained the gruelling pace of marching with different coping mechanisms, mostly psychological. Private Turner, a mounted infantryman with the 2nd Manchesters, had the privilege of observing how his less fortunate unmounted comrades endured the hard marching. One method was embarrassment or humiliation. He claimed that despite bleeding feet, and some with no boots at all, few men willingly dropped out to seek medical treatment. He explained that one reason was that “the men who fall out often get chaffed by their comrades if they have not a serious sickness, some consider it almost cowardly to fall out”.¹¹⁷ Turner added that hope was another coping mechanism, with many men hoping that they would get a chance to rest and wash their bleeding feet at the next stop. However, he added that they were often disappointed. The drawback of these two coping mechanisms was that this stubborn persistence resulted in some men ruining their feet to such a degree that they finally could walk no more and thus became ‘casualties’ who required medical treatment. Some coping measures were more practical, even if only minor. Private Woods, 2nd Manchesters, writing on 25 January 1901 from Mill River Bridge, was almost pathetically grateful when they were allowed to ride on the wagons every third day of marching, “which eases the feet a bit”.¹¹⁸ Some simply got marching fit. Sergeant Hobson eventually got used to the heavy marching. On 4 September 1901 he wrote that he was footsore and had blisters from heavy marching, but that he could notice his feet and body hardening. Roughly two months later, on 5 November 1901, he wrote that he had marched 45 miles (72.4 km) in two days, but his feet were so hard by then that he suffered no blisters. Despite this, though, he still described this experience as “the hardest day I ever had in my life”.¹¹⁹

As for what the Manchesters felt about the marching experience, they expressed various opinions, depending on circumstances. For some, the heavy loads they carried elicited grumbling. Lance-Corporal Hodkinson, 2nd Manchesters, wrote that when they left Rosendal on 20 April 1900, they each carried a blanket, waterproof oil sheet, a day’s rations, 150 rounds of ammunition, and their rifle equipment. In the chapter on supplies it was mentioned that items such as the blankets and oil sheets normally went on the wagons. This occasion was probably an exception to the rule. Nevertheless, Hodkinson did not appreciate being overburdened, stating that “they load us up like horses, and treat us like a lot of slaves”.¹²⁰ Less than two weeks later, Hodkinson grumbled again in an entry dated 1 May 1900. After describing all the

¹¹⁶ ‘Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3’.

¹¹⁷ Turner, ‘Letter from Private Alfred Turner’, 6.

¹¹⁸ Woods, ‘Christmas Day with the 2nd Manchesters’, 2.

¹¹⁹ Hobson, ‘Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother’.

¹²⁰ Hodkinson, ‘Interesting Letter from the Seat of War’, 6.

privations they suffered on the march, he stated that “it is shameful the way we are treated”.¹²¹ In a rare display of complaint, the author of the 1st Battalion’s Records of Service described their march in August 1900 through the eastern Transvaal as

...unpleasant. High and bitterly cold winds carried volumes of dust from the convoy, mixed with fine ashes from the burnt veldt; all day into one’s eyes ... water was extremely scarce and all hands got into an advanced state of dirtyness [sic]. In this respect things were nearly as bad as in the siege [Ladysmith].¹²²

Volunteer Private Brown described to a friend an eight day march, where the 2nd Manchesters usually started the day at 04:00 and ended at 19:00. He endured wind, cold, and rain, not to mention the unwelcome attention of the enemy. He ended his letter with optimistic bravado: “but you see I am still alive to tell the tale”¹²³. Volunteer Private Andrew, when the 1st Manchesters halted for a rest on 16 August 1900, wrote that “I can tell you it is a great relief after our long marches”¹²⁴. Private Woods, 2nd Manchesters, wrote “we had a lively time of it on Christmas Day. We were fairly starved. We set off on the march at five in the morning with nothing inside us but a drink of very weak coffee”.¹²⁵ Many descriptions of hard marches often had a similar matter of fact tone, as if it had become an unavoidable, unpleasant fact of life while on campaign.

In contrast, some men had a different perspective about marching. Lieutenant Colonel Reay reported in a letter dated 22 September 1900 that the men were sick and tired of the constant marching, but he believed marching was more interesting than garrisoning “these little Dutch towns”.¹²⁶ Of course, he rode on a horse. Some rank-and-file, like Private Mills, were also positive about marching. In Mills’ case, though, it was scarcely a month since the 2nd Battalion landed, and he might have been trying to reassure his mother, or was trying to portray bravado. On 20 April 1900 he wrote that they had marched 18 miles (28.9 km) one day and then fought the Boers immediately after. He also mentioned a night march, covering 20 miles (32.2 km), and with boots full of water as they crossed a stream, yet he wrote “we are getting on splendidly so far”¹²⁷. He was proud, too, of Lt Gen. Rundle complimenting the Manchesters on their marching prowess. Sergeant Hobson of the 1st Manchesters expressed similar pride in March 1902 when he and his company were praised for their hard marching by Colonel Park.¹²⁸

¹²¹ Hodkinson, 6.

¹²² ‘Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3’.

¹²³ Brown, ‘Serving with the Field Forces’, 5.

¹²⁴ Andrew, ‘Letters from the Front: The Manchester Volunteers at the Front’, 5.

¹²⁵ Woods, ‘Christmas Day with the 2nd Manchesters’, 2.

¹²⁶ Reay, ‘Manchesters at the Front: Doings of the 2nd Battalion’.

¹²⁷ Mills, ‘Letter from A. Mills’, 6.

¹²⁸ Hobson, ‘Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother’.

While marching by foot, horse, and wagon was the main means of transport, on rare occasions the Manchesters enjoyed the benefits of modern transport, although the experience was far from luxurious and sometimes stressful. South Africa's few rail lines were crucial logistical arteries, but they were extremely limited in scope and reach. They only connected a few main cities and ports. Thus, on one hand the use of trains to transport troops was a feature of 'modern' warfare. Yet, paradoxically, once they left the main rail lines, most of the Manchesters' movements did not differ much, if at all, from how the British army moved during the Napoleonic Wars (1803 – 1815) nearly a century earlier. The seemingly endless marching by foot and mount was only occasionally relieved by rail assistance, but several sources described the experience in some detail. Captain Trueman, on his way to the front in the Free State in April 1900, was derisive about Cape rail, stating that "mention must be made of the trains which is ludicrous. The line is Government and made of course as cheaply as possible, therefore there are no tunnels. The line winds in and out or rather round about hills and when going on the flat or up a hill ... I believe one could get out and walk".¹²⁹ As slow as this journey was, Trueman was a little apprehensive due to rumours that the Boers sniped at the trains and blew up the tracks. He was relieved this did not occur, and at least his journey was in a proper passenger cabin. Trueman's account is supported by Private Turner's letter of 15 April 1900. He added that each passenger cabin had a bag of water for the men, and he was pleased by the efforts of the locals and the quartermaster to feed them at each stop. Just like Trueman, though, he was a little apprehensive. He noted that almost all the bridges had been destroyed. He and the others were instructed to carry 100 rounds of ammunition in case of attack, and they had to put out the lights at night to make it harder for Boer marksmen.¹³⁰ Lance-Corporal Hodkinson was also on this train, although his only comment was that he was one of the men in the third class compartments which lacked good suspension, "and we got an awful shaking-up before we got to the end of our journey".¹³¹

The 1st Manchesters, probably due to a scarcity of passenger carriages in their part of the front, largely travelled in open cattle trucks, which was generally uncomfortable. Private Hawkins wrote on 22 July 1900 that he and other reinforcements for the 1st Battalion travelled from Modder Spruit Station, just south of Elandsplaag, to Zandspruit Station. It was an uneventful 19 ½ hour journey in open cattle trucks.¹³² His experience did not differ from the rest of his 1st Battalion comrades who were in the country when the war started. On 11 October 1899, the day the war began, the battalion was sent up to Ladysmith on open cattle trucks and the author noted it was particularly cold near Mooi River. They went into battle at Elandsplaagte

¹²⁹ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 5.

¹³⁰ Turner, 'Another Letter from Private A. Turner', 6.

¹³¹ Hodkinson, 'Interesting Letter from the Seat of War', 6.

¹³² Walter Hawkins. 'Letter from Private W. Hawkins'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 1 September 1900, 6.

in open cattle trucks on 21 October. However, in a rare treat, most of the 1st Battalion travelled in passenger carriages when they left Elandslaagte Station on 20 July 1900, although about a third of the men were downgraded to riding with the baggage. They were back in open trucks on 2 March 1902, when they were ordered to travel by train from Belfast to Bronkhorstspuit. It rained during the journey and the writer of the Records of Service left the details to the imagination.¹³³ Sergeant Hobson, writing on 21 April 1901, also experienced the open cattle truck journey, but his letter provides a little more detail about the discomfort of such a trip, as well as the apprehension such a journey caused. He and other reinforcements left Pretoria station for Machadodorp on open cattle trucks, a trip which took two days:

...you have to have [rifle] magazines charged so as to be ready if we were attacked. You always have two or three men on the look out. We passed any amount of railway trucks that have been blown off the lines also several engines a fine smash up. You go on till it is dark and then stop at the nearest station and post a guard and get tea or dinner and try and get to sleep if you can by lying on tent bags, boxes and kits. It is very hot during the day but very cold at night with very heavy dew.¹³⁴

¹³³ 'Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3'.

¹³⁴ Hobson, 'Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother'.



Photo 14: A section of 2nd Manchesters enjoying the benefits of modern transportation in an open cattle truck.

Source: 'Photograph Album, 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, South Africa', c. 1900. MR 1/23/24. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

Another notable source of drudgery was lack of sleep. Some will argue that it is unsurprising that British soldiers suffered poor sleeping experiences during the war and is thus barely worth mentioning. Even so, the fact that the men themselves commented so often about this means that it should not be rejected so easily. This was clearly something they thought worthy of writing about to family and friends and must have thus been a significant and often unpleasant part of their experience. The Manchesters' quality of sleep depended on the nature of the shelter they had, if any, and depended on what they were doing at the time. The sources reveal several causes for lack of sleep, the first being sleeping in the open with hardly any shelter or sometimes no shelter, or even a blanket. Another cause was intense periods of marching, especially at night. The local fauna, such as insects, also plagued the men's sleep, while the Boers were a more dangerous threat at night. Almost as bad as an actual Boer attack was a false alarm which invariably ended any prospect for further sleep. Still, the soldiers sometimes managed to construct makeshift shelters when tents were unavailable, while the officers occasionally, and the men more rarely, were lodged in houses and other closed structures, which was a welcome 'luxury'.

A commonly mentioned interruption of sleep was to go on "parade" or "stand to arms" almost every early morning, with rifle and ammunition.¹³⁵ According to Captain Trueman, one of the

¹³⁵ The *Queen's Regulations* do not explain what this type of morning parade was supposed to entail, except that it was to occur daily. From what I understand, it was akin to a daily muster of all ranks to ensure all able-bodied men were present, as well as an opportunity for officers to inspect troop readiness, announce important information, and issue orders for the day.

reasons for this, other than issuing the day's orders and inspecting the troops, was to prevent a dawn attack by the Boers.¹³⁶ Volunteer Private Andrew described in October 1900 how at Schoemanskloof they went on stand-to roughly half an hour before dawn, and remained in this state until it was light enough to see the surrounding hills. There were several days of heavy rain, but they still went on stand-to, which "as you may imagine, was not pleasant".¹³⁷ The main effect of these frequent stand to arms was that the men rarely had the luxury of sleeping late into the morning, but began their day well before sunrise.

Being caught in the open while it was wet and cold, with no shelter or blanket, made sleep unpleasant, if not impossible. Bandsman Powell, after the Battle of Elandsplaagte on 21 October 1899, was caught in the open with no blanket or shelter, and it was pitch dark, wet, and cold. He stated that "I should not like to go through the same thing again".¹³⁸ Private Turner, on his way to the Free State, ended one of his letters detailing events in April 1900 with a sarcastic "it has just started raining. We are sleeping in the open so we shall rest well".¹³⁹ As related in the chapter on supplies, the frequent lack of blankets and tents made sleeping out in the open an unpleasant experience. Even officers, such as Captain Trueman, noted the discomfort of the rank-and-file, writing on 24 April 1900 that "we have no tents. The men sleep where they are with the blankets which they carry and waterproof sheets which are in the waggons".¹⁴⁰ Trueman and the other officers, though, had the privilege of sleeping under tarpaulin sheets spanned between two or more wagons, so were at least dry.

It was the frequent marching, though, that seemed to lie at the heart of unsatisfactory sleep. The collection of letters left by Captain Trueman strongly suggests that hard marching was the main cause for his poor sleep. He wrote on 7 August 1900 that he slept only two and a half hours during almost 24 hours of marching, and on 22 August he again had little sleep due to heavy marching. He made the same complaint in a letter dated 6 September. Since he was part of the Mounted Infantry by 1901, his company covered a significant amount of ground, with little rest. On 17 February 1901 he provided an idea of how much they moved, and how little sleep it afforded him and the men. After a short skirmish with some Boers in the morning near Hammonia, they loaded up wagons with confiscated wheat in the afternoon, which an infantry company escorted away. They stayed the night on the farm, with no tents, only great coats, blankets, and waterproof sheets to ward off the night's chill. They were roused at 01:00 to march to Klip Nek, which the trailing infantry occupied by dawn. He then proceeded ahead

¹³⁶ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 41.

¹³⁷ Andrew, 'Letters from the Front: With the Manchester Volunteers. An Interesting Diary', 5.

¹³⁸ William Powell. 'An Ashtonian in the Battle of Elandsplaagte'. *The Stalybridge Reporter*, 25 November 1899, 6.

¹³⁹ Turner, 'Another Letter from Private A. Turner', 6.

¹⁴⁰ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 13.

with the rest of the Mounted Infantry to destroy a nearby mill. They returned to Klip Nek to have some breakfast, heading out again at 10:00 to Hammonia, reaching it at 13:00 amidst a cold thunderstorm. Here they only rested half an hour before heading out to Ficksburg, which they reached at 19:00. Trueman thought they did about 40 miles (64 km) that day.¹⁴¹

Marching into the night, unsurprisingly, affected sleep adversely. Private Scott, a 1st Manchester mounted infantryman, wrote on 23 November 1900 that he and his company came in late to camp, around 23:00, because they were on the right flank. The baggage with their blankets had not even made it to camp, so they spent a cold evening out in the open.¹⁴² Trueman was not fond of night marching, stating on 26 May 1900 that “travelling by night is not at all a nice game, you don’t get your full quantity of sleep”.¹⁴³ This would happen a few times as he escorted slow, trailing wagons into camp, arriving as late as 03:00 in the morning, and then having to wake at 05:00 to begin the next day’s marching. His worst experience, though, was in September 1900. Just as he thought he would be able to sleep, he received orders that he and his Mounted Infantry had to head out with Lt Gen. Rundle at 23:30 to capture a hill overlooking Senekal. He was so exhausted he fell asleep in his saddle. They halted for half-an-hour, during which he fell asleep on the ground, still clutching the reins of his horse. They arrived at the hill at 05:00, but there were no Boers for them to fight.¹⁴⁴

The local fauna sometimes interrupted sleep too. Captain Trueman and his men were assailed one night by various biting and crawling insects in Fouriesburg in February 1901, noting how “I woke up during the night scratching like one o’clock”, and found Goldfinch doing the same, while Thorny remarked ‘he felt something walking over his face!’¹⁴⁵ This was, ironically, while sleeping in a house. Sergeant Hobson of the 1st Battalion, after spending an exhausting day on the march in March 1902, lay down where he stopped, in the open, and near the bank of a river. However, his sleep was interrupted by stinging flies, whose bites left painful lumps.¹⁴⁶

Being under the threat of attack, or even attacked by the enemy, naturally made for uneasy sleep. Many of the men besieged in Ladysmith tried to sleep under trying and stressful conditions. Private Kershaw wrote that many of them did not have any shelter at night, sleeping on rocks in the open, even in the rain.¹⁴⁷ Although it is unclear, it appears he was referring to those Manchesters who were stationed close to Caesar’s Camp’s fortifications in case of enemy attack. He specifically stated that they could not pitch tents. Direct enemy action made

¹⁴¹ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 49, 55, 62, 110.

¹⁴² W. Scott. ‘Letters from the Front’. *The Gorton Reporter*, 19 January 1901, 3.

¹⁴³ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 25.

¹⁴⁴ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 55, 62.

¹⁴⁵ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 115.

¹⁴⁶ Hobson, ‘Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother’.

¹⁴⁷ Kershaw, Ernest. ‘After the Siege of Ladysmith’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 12 May 1900, 6.

sleep impossible, as was the case for Volunteer Private Andrews during an engagement on 26 August 1900, when the enemy “would not let us rest, for they sniped the whole night through”.¹⁴⁸ On 3 April 1901, after a long day beginning at 09:00, destroying mealies and collecting a few Boer families, involving nearly 20 miles (32.2 km) of marching, Trueman finally reached the main camp near Clocolan at 19:00. He went to bed, but was “awakened by co-pop, co-pop, co-pop. I sat up in bed and heard phut, phut, phut, phut, round my tent, and then a tremendous lot of firing, all the bullets fetching up in camp”.¹⁴⁹ It was a sneak attack, and the Manchesters were firing blindly into the darkness from within their tents. Trueman claimed that the Boer attack faltered only after the camp’s Maxim gun opened fire, although he and his Mounted Infantry then spent the rest of the night hunting some horses that had stampeded during the attack. He was unimpressed with the outposts who failed to detect the Boers, who came within 500 yards (457 m) of the camp. Sergeant Hobson, writing on 21 April 1901, described how on the night he and the other Manchester reinforcements arrived in Machadodorp, his first sleep while with the 1st Battalion was interrupted by Boer sniping on his outpost, after which a flurry of rifle fire from other units and British artillery firing star shells¹⁵⁰ lit up the night, and dispelled any further rest he might have had.¹⁵¹

False alarms were another source of sleep deprivation. Anxious sentries sometimes shot at phantom enemies, waking up the whole camp and interrupting everyone’s sleep. Captain Trueman betrayed irritation in April 1900, writing that “some blighter said he saw a Boer and fired at him. Consequently there was vast alarm. But it must have been rot as no Boer appeared”.¹⁵² Sergeant Hobson was equally annoyed by false alarms, because it interrupted a sleep which, luxuriously, could last until 07:00 in the morning if not interrupted. He wrote on 7 June 1901, from nearby Lydenburg, that he was part of a section guarding a blockhouse, but they were sometimes woken by false alarms. He described how it usually unfolded: first, he slept in his clothes. If there was an alarm, there was no time to get dressed, as they were expected to get to their assigned blockhouse in less than three minutes. He and six others rushed to their blockhouse, which was about 300 yards (274 m) from where they slept. The rest of the night was spent waiting for an attack that did not come.¹⁵³ Although not explicitly stated, the men could rarely really relax while in hostile territory, and had to be constantly alert, interrupting their sleep and adding to their already anxious mindset.

¹⁴⁸ Andrew, ‘Letters from the Front: The Manchester Volunteers at the Front’, 5.

¹⁴⁹ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 131–32.

¹⁵⁰ This was a form of artillery projectile designed to be shot up into the air and provide bright light as it slowly fell back to earth.

¹⁵¹ Hobson, ‘Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother’.

¹⁵² Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 7.

¹⁵³ Hobson, ‘Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother’.

When one was not under threat of shelling, and had the time, simple shelters could be constructed if tents were unavailable, and seemed to make a small difference against the cold or rain. Captain Trueman, writing on 17 April 1900, had to bed down for the night in the open while it was raining, but he managed to obtain some water-proof sheets which he rigged into a rough shelter. Despite this rough shelter, he still only managed a little sleep, and admitted that during the marching “I kept falling asleep on my horse”.¹⁵⁴ It appears that April 1900 was a wet month in the Free State and the 2nd Battalion officers quickly made a plan by stretching tarpaulin sheets between wagons to create a shelter, which Trueman claimed kept him dry until he had to go out on duty, such as inspecting the pickets. Captain Chittenden, also 2nd Battalion and writing on 14 July 1900, preferred sleeping on a mattress, which he obtained from Dr Black (who “acquired” it from a farmhouse outside Thaba ‘Nchu), and placed it inside a wagon, since he felt this was much better than sleeping in a tent, especially in wet weather.¹⁵⁵ The rank-and-file could not commandeer wagons so easily, but they still managed to improvise. Volunteer Private Andrew, attached to the 1st Manchesters, explained how they would erect temporary shelters called “tamboos” while marching with Buller’s column in August 1900. It consisted of two blankets, two rifles repurposed as poles, two straps, and a few pegs. Each could accommodate two to three men, “and we get along comfortably enough”,¹⁵⁶ although each morning their blankets were covered in frost. While on garrison duty at Dalmanutha in September 1900, Andrew implied they built more substantial tamboos, which they constructed close to the trenches by the road they guarded. He thought it made their camp look untidy, but it sheltered them from the heat and the “biting cold at night”.¹⁵⁷ As a brief comparison, the Boers were in a similarly bad position for tents, even from the start of the war due to inadequate planning. Most spent many evenings in the open, and some built makeshift shelters out of branches, blankets, sheets, corrugated iron, and stones.¹⁵⁸

It was not always doom and gloom, though, and if one was an officer, such as Captain Trueman, then there was the rare occasion where sleeping accommodation could be quite comfortable. The fact that officers such as Trueman wrote about this rare luxury reinforces the supposition that the rank-and-file’s sleeping experience was likely much worse. Writing on 9 May 1900 from Hant Nek near Thaba ‘Nchu, Trueman expressed delight in sleeping in an actual bed for once. On 31 August 1900 he wrote that “we had great luxury this morning, we

¹⁵⁴ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 6.

¹⁵⁵ G. Chittenden. ‘Letter, Captain G Chittenden, Hammonia, Describing Sickness in the Battalion, Improved Conditions in Camp, Boer Movements, Shortage of Provisions. 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment’, 14 July 1900. MR 1/16/5/11. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

¹⁵⁶ Andrew, ‘Letters from the Front: The Manchester Volunteers at the Front’, 5.

¹⁵⁷ Andrew, ‘Letters from the Front: With the Manchester Volunteers. An Interesting Diary’, 5.

¹⁵⁸ Pretorius, *Kommandolewe Tydens Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, 100–103.

did not stand to arms, and did not rise till 7 a.m., also I slept and am sleeping this night in a house".¹⁵⁹

Sometimes even the rank-and-file slept in structures more substantial than tamboos. Volunteer Sergeant Newton, writing on 19 March 1900 from Camp Dewdrop in Natal, slept in a 'luxurious' shelter which was a shed with sacks for mattresses and no blankets.¹⁶⁰ Some of the other Volunteers, such as Private Smith, slept in what he assumed was an old warehouse while in Ladysmith.¹⁶¹ Sergeant Hobson wrote from Lydenburg on 7 June 1901 that he and his company were having "a very easy time of it ... my section is at a house it is called the red house ... there are scarcely any doors or windows ... but at any rate we are under cover and the floor is always dry if not soft".¹⁶² This quote is telling, because it encapsulates the main reasons for poor sleep incredibly well, while showcasing how little it took to make the common soldier grateful if a simple but dry windowless structure was considered a blessing.

Apart from sleep, hygiene was another regular challenge for the Manchesters while at war in South Africa. As noted, water was scarce in many parts of the country and the men's duties such as swift marches also prevented them from washing regularly. Hygiene was thus challenging to maintain for those who valued it. Even shortly after the war had started, or shortly after entering the country, hygiene was almost immediately an issue. Bandsman Powell, writing from Ladysmith on 25 October 1899, ended his letter with the admission that he had not had a change of clothing for nearly three weeks.¹⁶³ The 2nd Battalion landed at Port Elizabeth on 11 April 1900 and many soon felt the lack of a good wash. Captain Trueman wrote in April 1900 that he had not had a wash since he left the transport ship, and no soap bath since leaving Britain on 16 March. Furthermore, he reported that they normally slept in the clothes they marched in, and that he had only removed his clothes twice since landing.¹⁶⁴ It is safe to assume that the rank-and-file suffered similarly if not worse.

Being relatively stationary also did not necessarily ensure regular hygiene. Private Turner, writing on 9 May 1900 from a camp near Bloemfontein, finally enjoyed a rest after weeks of marching, but "if a man has a soap wash once a week he is lucky".¹⁶⁵ He added that it did not help matters that the nearest source of water was about three miles (4.82 km) from camp. While the 1st Battalion was still recovering from the siege of Ladysmith at Surprise Hill in Natal, Volunteer Private Hawkins described on 2 June 1900 how they could only go out for a wash

¹⁵⁹ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 17, 58–59.

¹⁶⁰ Newton, 'The War. The Ashton Volunteers in Natal. Letter to the Sergeants' Mess', 6.

¹⁶¹ Orlando Smith. 'Letter from Another Ashton Volunteer'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 21 April 1900, 6.

¹⁶² Hobson, 'Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother'.

¹⁶³ Powell, 'An Ashtonian in the Battle of Elandsplaagte', 6.

¹⁶⁴ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 7.

¹⁶⁵ Turner, 'Letter from Private Alfred Turner', 6.

every four days. The washing area was also about three miles (4.82 km) from the camp, and they had to be escorted by a cavalry force of 20 men in case of a Boer attack.¹⁶⁶ Not even a wash was safe from danger, it seems. It is worth noting that one source suggests that some men had to be forced to wash. On 14 July 1900, Captain Chittenden of the 2nd Manchesters wrote from Hammonia that “some of the men have had to be scrubbed; they won’t clean themselves and the other men won’t allow them near them”.¹⁶⁷ He added that there was no reason not to wash where they were stationed, since they were at rest and a river was close by. He did not explain why these men refused to wash, but he did mention that it was extremely cold at this point, which might explain their unwillingness.

Constant marching, of course, played havoc with efforts to maintain hygiene. Captain Trueman wrote on 24 April 1900, during a time of near constant marching for the 2nd Battalion, that he often went five to six days without taking off his clothes. On the rare day they had a short rest, they were able to wash a bit, but were ordered not to wash in any rivers, lest they “pollute” the water.¹⁶⁸ This was a valid concern due to typhoid, which army doctors knew was spread through contaminated water from faeces or urine which entered the water, and the *Salmonella Typhi* bacteria could survive weeks in soil and water.¹⁶⁹ Private Hardman, also with the 2nd Manchesters in the Free State, stated in his letter of 9 May 1900 that “we are having it very rough here, and are very lucky if we can manage a wash or a shave once a week”.¹⁷⁰ The 1st Battalion did not have it any easier when they were deemed fit enough to rejoin military operations. They joined Buller’s forces as he invaded the Transvaal from Natal. Captain Heywood of the 4th VBMR, who wrote from Sandspruit on 2 August 1900, described that they were “brown, dirty, and more or less ragged”.¹⁷¹ Sources of water being located far away from temporary marching camps was a constant challenge throughout the war, as Sergeant Hobson related on 21 April 1901, when on his way to Machadodorp, he had to walk one Sunday morning almost 1.5 miles (2.4 km) to the nearest water source to wash. When water was not close, he sometimes managed to “get a swill at the water column outside the stations”.¹⁷² It is uncertain what “stations” he was referring to, since it does not seem to refer to railway stations. He may have been talking about water wagons accompanying the troops.

¹⁶⁶ Hawkins, ‘Letter from a Dukinfield Soldier’, 8.

¹⁶⁷ Chittenden, ‘Letter from Hammonia’, 14 July 1900.

¹⁶⁸ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 13.

¹⁶⁹ Stone, ‘The Victorian Army: Health, Hospitals, and Social Conditions’, 193–194.

¹⁷⁰ Jack Hardman. ‘With the 2nd Manchesters at the Battle of Dewetsdorp’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 9 June 1900, 6.

¹⁷¹ Heywood, ‘Letters from the Front: Manchester Volunteers in Battle’, 5.

¹⁷² Hobson, ‘Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother’.

Each battalion usually had one water wagon assigned to it, although it was usually inadequate for all the men.¹⁷³

Hygiene was virtually impossible to maintain during the siege of Ladysmith. Private Kershaw, who wrote to his mother after the siege was lifted, stated that besides the lack of food, he was “filthy for we could not get a wash for weeks, and we could get no soap”.¹⁷⁴ Private Bates, writing shortly after Ladysmith was relieved, went even further, claiming that he had not had a wash since the war started, and thus they all looked “crummy”.¹⁷⁵ However, he tended to exaggerate in his letter.¹⁷⁶ Private Fitton, though, another veteran from Ladysmith, seemed to suggest the same in his case, and stated that “we were four months without taking our clothes off or boots off, but we can do it now, thank God for that”.¹⁷⁷ Corporal Bramwell, writing to his wife after the siege, reckoned that he spent nearly three months without washing and a change of clothing, and deemed it “something awful”.¹⁷⁸ Evidently, many of the 1st Manchesters did not get an opportunity to wash themselves or their clothes once the war started, and when the siege of Ladysmith began, they lost that opportunity altogether. This inability to maintain regular hygiene was more than likely an important contributing factor to the high incidence of typhoid and dysentery during the siege, to be discussed in the next chapter.

Even the officers, at least the lower ranking ones such as captains and lieutenants, struggled to maintain hygiene at times. Captain Trueman wrote on 17 April 1900 that since he had landed in South Africa (eight days previously), he did not have a bath. Moreover, on the ship itself there was no soap, so he did not have a proper soap wash for almost a month. Since landing, he had slept in the clothes he marched in, and had only removed his clothes twice since landing. However, as an officer he was ordered not to grow a beard, and thus had to, somehow, find enough water to shave every three to four days. He did not explain how he managed this feat. On 3 May he wrote that his poor hygiene remained largely unchanged. He claimed that there were times where he did not remove his boots at all for five days or more.¹⁷⁹ Naturally, being an officer did have some advantages. Lieutenant Pierce of the 2nd Manchesters had the good fortune to be appointed as Ficksburg’s temporary commissioner in June 1900. He lived in a furnished, confiscated house for a few days and happily stated that

¹⁷³ Page, ‘Supply Services of the British Army in the South African War, 1899-1902’, 294–295.

¹⁷⁴ Kershaw, ‘After the Siege of Ladysmith’, 6.

¹⁷⁵ W. Bates. ‘Letter from an Ashton Soldier’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 7 April 1900, 5.

¹⁷⁶ For instance, he also claimed that they killed thousands of Boers at Elandslaagte.

¹⁷⁷ F. Fitton. ‘Letters from Ladysmith’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 7 April 1900, 6.

¹⁷⁸ T. Bramwell. ‘Letter, Corporal T Bramwell, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Caesar’s Camp, Ladysmith to His Wife, Describing Conditions during the Siege’, 18 January 1900. MR 1/17/29.

Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre, 2.

¹⁷⁹ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 7, 10, 13.

“I’ve even had a bath or two”.¹⁸⁰ This does imply, however, that bathing was far from common for him, echoing Trueman’s own experience. Some officers, though, claimed that it was a lack of effort and resourcefulness which prevented men from keeping themselves clean. Captain Chittenden wrote on 14 July 1900 that he had little trouble keeping himself and his clothes clean, but this was due to him being in a favourable location with a clean and plentiful supply of water.¹⁸¹ Captain Paton, writing from Dalmanutha on 13 September 1900, was glad to “keep fairly clean”¹⁸² since reaching the town and being allowed to rest. It is evident that before then, maintaining hygiene was challenging. Proper bathing also required the right equipment. Captain Tilland in his letter of 20 January 1901, ironically from Badfontein (roughly translated from Afrikaans as ‘Bath Fountain’), begged his reader, Colonel Hardcastle, to “send me up a medium sized sponge? Mine has deserted”.¹⁸³ If officers struggled with hygiene, then one can assume that the regular rank-and-file found it even more challenging.

Many British soldiers thus had body lice, which was mainly caused by the irregular and infrequent opportunities to properly wash their clothes.¹⁸⁴ Body lice was naturally not something men would be keen to write about to family and friends, but a few Manchesters did confirm this unpleasant aspect of campaigning. Of note is Captain Trueman’s account of lice. On 2 July 1900 he commented about the generally poor state of the men: “I believe nearly every one of them have lice on them ... several officers have a few of them”.¹⁸⁵ He was quick to reassure his reader that he did not have lice, and stated that the secret was to wash one’s clothes as much as possible, even when it was cold. The battalion’s doctor, Dr Black, personally assured him that he would not catch a cold washing his clothes in the windy chill on top of the hill, because the air was good. This does seem to suggest, though, that if one chose to make the effort, had the time, and was in the right place with a decent source of water, it was possible to wash more regularly and avoid lice.¹⁸⁶

Keeping clean was challenging, but there were good spots to wash or bathe if one was lucky enough to come across them, and was thus a welcome experience. Volunteer Private Smith,

¹⁸⁰ W.K. Pierce. ‘Letter, Lieutenant W K Pierce, Ficksburg, Describing the March from Senekal; Setting up Camp; Recent Skirmishes. 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment’, 13 June 1900. MR 1/16/5/7. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

¹⁸¹ Chittenden, ‘Letter from Hammonia’, 14 July 1900.

¹⁸² Paton, ‘Letter from Dalmanutha’, 13 September 1900, 1.

¹⁸³ Tilland. ‘Letter, Captain Tilland, Badfontein, to Colonel Hardcastle, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Describing Recent Fighting; Boer Peace Delegate’s Visit; Conditions in Camp’, 20 January 1901. MR1/16/7. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre, 4.

¹⁸⁴ Pretorius, *Die Anglo-Boereoorlog*, 41; Stone, ‘The Victorian Army: Health, Hospitals, and Social Conditions’, 182.

¹⁸⁵ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 42.

¹⁸⁶ Although Trueman did complain only two months previous that he was not getting a regular wash or change of clothing. See the previous paragraph. I suspect that conditions had to be right for the men, even junior officers, to wash regularly.

while out on an exercise march around Surprise Hill camp in Natal in May 1900, enjoyed a swim in the Tugela river.¹⁸⁷ Captain Trueman wrote on 3 June 1900 that there was a river with a waterfall close to Hammonia, and that the men were sent down to bathe, and that he believed this was the first time since they landed where they were able to take a proper bath: “quite a luxury!”¹⁸⁸ Trueman expressed again how good it felt to be “so nice and clean”¹⁸⁹ in August 1900, since they were not constantly marching for a change, but resting at Mill River Bridge, near Reitz. While resting close to the Komati River in August 1900, Volunteer Private Andrew and others in the 1st Manchesters wasted no time getting a wash “to take off a coat or two of ancient dirt”.¹⁹⁰ Trueman was delighted when he found a good bathing spot close to Worringham in March 1901.¹⁹¹ Sergeant Hobson of the 1st Battalion, writing from Machadodorp on 21 April 1901, regarded washing his shirt and underclothes as a “treat”.¹⁹² An interesting aspect which is not referred to at all in other sources was that some men had to share towels. The aforementioned Hobson wrote on 8 August 1901 from Lydenburg that “when I get home I will have one [towel] to my own cheek”.¹⁹³ At this point, though, they did at least have easy access to Sunlight soap, which was sold at one shilling per packet. Even when some lucky few men were on their way home, they still took every opportunity to enjoy a swim. Hobson, writing on 25 April 1902 from Simonstown, could not resist the enticing white sand beach and had a “champion sea bathe”.¹⁹⁴ As will be seen in the next section, bathing was one of many distractions from the drudgery of war.

5.3 DISTRACTIONS

There were various ways the men could distract themselves from the discomfort and stress of campaigning. Activities such as reading, games, sport, and other pastimes were important ways to relax, maintain morale, and stave off boredom. Without distractions, a soldier's existence could quickly become dreary, which in turn affected morale negatively. Sergeant Hobson of the 1st Manchesters provided some idea of how wearisome the boredom was. He wrote on 7 June 1901 from Lydenburg, where they served as a garrison. He began by stating his admiration for the clear, crisp, winter night skies, which were sometimes so bright that one could read by star and moonlight. However, his tone changed quickly to weariness as he explained that darkness usually descended early at about 17:30, and without candles he could

¹⁸⁷ Smith, ‘Letter from an Ashton Volunteer’, 6.

¹⁸⁸ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 30.

¹⁸⁹ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 54.

¹⁹⁰ Andrew, ‘Letters from the Front: The Manchester Volunteers at the Front’, 5.

¹⁹¹ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 127.

¹⁹² Hobson, ‘Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother’.

¹⁹³ Hobson, ‘Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother’.

¹⁹⁴ Hobson, ‘Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother’.

not even stay up to read, unless nature itself provided enough light. The town itself did not offer much either. It was under martial law and civilians were required to be inside their homes at 18:00. One could of course talk to other soldiers, but Hobson did not seem to find that idea compelling. Thus, when he was not on duty, and without candles and unable to read, he just turned in early.¹⁹⁵ It is easy to imagine that prolonged periods of this level of boredom could weaken morale. In fact, Miller's study on the British Volunteers confirms this was the case.¹⁹⁶ The Manchesters, though, did not complain often about boredom. Instead, they usually focused on the hardships of the campaign. Nonetheless, whether their pursuit of distractions was motivated by boredom or just to forget about their ordeals, they described several activities.

Gambling is mentioned a few times, which suggests that it was relatively common. Some of the officers were involved in gambling, as recounted by Captain Trueman in a letter dated 12 March 1901 from Worringham. He explained that on 4 March he won £4 6s thanks to his fellow officer, Thornycroft, who rode to victory on the mare called Pearl.¹⁹⁷ A horse race betting stub preserved in the Manchester Regiment Archive, also indicates that horse race gambling occurred (see below). This event was in Harrismith, dated 27 January 1901.¹⁹⁸ Sergeant Hobson discussed various gambling games. Writing from Lydenburg in July 1901, he was astounded by the amounts of money his peers were betting. Apparently, they often bet in pounds, with one man losing close to £80 in one night, or so he heard. The most popular gambling game was mud-hook; a game of three dice, on a cloth marked with squares with diamond, spade, club, heart, crown, and anchor. A man placed a bet on any square he wished, and the dice roll would determine whether a certain square won or not. Hobson also mentioned games of cards but did not specify which types. According to hearsay, the gambling organiser, who was apparently a soldier in the 7th Brigade, sent about £2 000 home since he started these gambling nights in Lydenburg. Hobson primly assured his reader that the gambling organiser did not get a penny from him, mostly because he had only been paid twice since landing in the country and only had £2 10s on him.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁵ Hobson, 'Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother'.

¹⁹⁶ Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 96–118.

¹⁹⁷ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 124.

¹⁹⁸ 'Bookie's Card, Manchester Regiment Race Meeting, Harrismith', 1901. MR 1/27/2/6. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

¹⁹⁹ Hobson, 'Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother'.

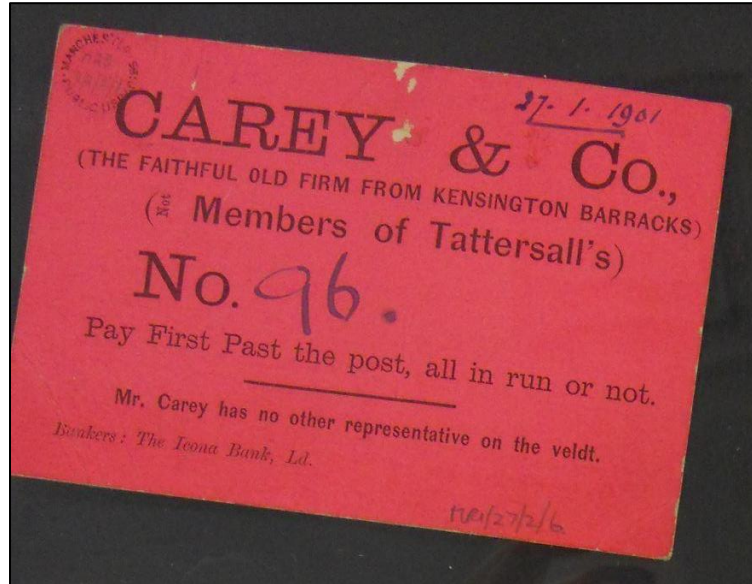


Photo 15: A horse-racing stub from Harrismith, 27 January 1901.

Source: 'Bookie's Card, Manchester Regiment Race Meeting, Harrismith', 1901. MR 1/27/2/6. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

Games were not only for money, though, but were a good way to pass the time or to relax. In some cases, it even proved a distraction from nearby fighting. Captain Trueman wrote on 6 September 1900 that he was involved for almost a whole day in a firefight, where he and some of his men were pinned down in a farm's graveyard. When the engagement was finally over, he and his men returned to their horses, only to find that the soldiers who were supposed to hold their horses were playing cards behind a wall. They were so absorbed by their game that they did not notice that two of the horses had wandered off. Trueman was, understandably, unimpressed. He again mentioned cards as a game on 17 February 1901, referring to their officer's club in Ficksburg, which had eight packs of cards.²⁰⁰ Even though there is limited evidence, one can reasonably assume that if board and card games were played for money, then they were also played casually. Another type of recreation was field game days, which were organised at battalion or higher levels. Trueman described such an event, which occurred on 2 October 1900 at Reitz, and involved several different regiments in the 8th Brigade. He called it a "Gymkana".²⁰¹ He proudly proclaimed that the Manchesters won every tug-of-war event. He joined the Officer's Scurry over 300 yards (274 m) but achieved nothing

²⁰⁰ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 64, 109.

²⁰¹ This term originated from nineteenth century India, and since the 2nd Manchesters spent time in India from 1885 to 1897, it explains how Trueman came to know it. In India, the *Gymkhana*, likely inspired by the Hindi word *gedkhana* (ball playing area or court), was an opportunity for soldiers to showcase their athletic prowess and horsemanship. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gymkhana> [Accessed 7 December 2023].

of note. Other field games included sack races, bareback horse races, and a bareback mule race for the African helpers and wagoners.²⁰²

The Manchesters mentioned religious ceremonies several times, although most men's attitude to religion was nondescript. Some sources portrayed the average British soldier as not overtly religious, apart from a few truly sincere Christians. However, some chaplains defended 'Tommy Atkins', stating that on the surface, especially during peacetime, they did not appear religious and this was possibly caused by the hardships of their lives, but in battle, almost all of them thought about God.²⁰³ Michael F. Snape explored the relationship between the British soldier and religion in significant detail, and found that the situation was far more complex. Snape argued that even though the average late-Victorian soldier came from the supposedly immoral unskilled working class, they were not impervious to religion. They were exposed to religion in Sunday school. Many did dislike compulsory church parades, but during a campaign the attendance of soldiers for voluntary church services was notably high. They were also more likely to pray and trust in the mystical protective qualities of carrying a Bible when in battle, no doubt because death had become a much more distinct possibility. Many of them also displayed a feeling of superiority towards 'heathen' enemies. The average late-Victorian soldier did have religious sentiments, although it seemed to show itself most prominently during times of danger.²⁰⁴ The Manchester experience of religion largely supports these findings.

Religious ceremonies and faith itself were likely welcome distractions for some, and a source of comfort for the more sincerely faithful. Even before reaching South Africa, the men had access to religious services. Volunteer Private Emmott wrote in his diary that he attended three Sunday morning church services while *en route* to the front via ship in late May and early June 1900.²⁰⁵ Shortly after the 1st Manchesters were relieved from Ladysmith, a special thanksgiving ceremony was held by Reverend J.J. Tuckey on 4 March 1900. The Records of Service mentioned that the battalion went to a church service in Lydenburg on 13 October 1901. It appears the men did not really have much choice in the matter, based on the wording. The battalion went to church again the next Sunday, 20 October. It is likely that since the 1st Battalion were close to a church, the officers decided the men might as well attend, although their reasons for deciding this were unstated.²⁰⁶ Volunteer Corporal Lees wrote on 17 March

²⁰² Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 78–79.

²⁰³ Pretorius, *Die Anglo-Boereoorlog*, 37.

²⁰⁴ Michael F. Snape. *The Redcoat and Religion: The Forgotten History of the British Soldier from the Age of Marlborough to the Eve of the First World War*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2005, 240–241.

²⁰⁵ Emmott, William. 'Diary, Extracts from the Diary of Private William Emmott, Oldham Active Service Section. May to June 1900', MR 1/3/2/2. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

²⁰⁶ 'Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3'.

1900, from Dewdrop Camp in Natal, that he had just attended a church parade, with 100 rounds of ammunition. However, he shared no thoughts about the church service, but focused more on the fact that they always had to carry ammunition.²⁰⁷ Even while attending a religious ceremony, the men had to be prepared for combat. On 24 December 1900, the 2nd Manchesters escorted a convoy from Winburg to Colonel White, whom they met on Christmas. In a display of inter-regimental camaraderie, White instructed his Stafford Regiment band to play Christmas hymns, and invited the “bandless” Manchesters to join, “so the day did not pass without some observances”.²⁰⁸

Some men, though, stated their thoughts on religion more overtly, although not always clearly. Volunteer Private Clarke wrote to his sister on 6 July 1900, still *en route* to South Africa. In his hurry to leave home, he forgot his *Novena to our Lady of Perpetual Succour*, and asked his sister to mail it to him at her earliest convenience. He praised Madonna's many virtues profusely, the following line indicates his depth of devotion, and possibly suggests a revival of his faith as he realised he was getting closer to the front: “I feel very happy for now I have a grand motive to live, for the honour of our Lady and Old England, that once bore the happy name ‘Our Lady’s Dowry’”.²⁰⁹

Some writers used lines with the word “God” in their letters, such as “thank God”, although given the lack of proper context in the rest of the source, it can easily be interpreted as a form of literary emphasis and not true faith. Still, the letter by Private Fitton to his sister in March 1900, after the relief of Ladysmith, did make a notable number of references to God. He thanked God for keeping him safe during the fighting in Ladysmith, and expressed pity for his slain comrades by wishing God's blessings on them and their families. He also thanked God for the fact that he could finally take off his clothes and boots after almost four months.²¹⁰ However, it is impossible to judge a man’s true level of faith from a few expressions that may or may not be purely stylistic. His thoughts might very well have dwelt more strongly on religion after his harrowing experiences in Ladysmith, but it might also have been just the way he spoke. Private Sim offered a heartfelt expression of faith when Ladysmith was relieved. When the first relief troops marched in, he wrote that “we went on our knees and prayed, and thanked the Lord for His goodness, as we were fairly done up”.²¹¹

²⁰⁷ Samuel Lees. ‘Letter from Corporal Lees, of Ashton’. *The Stalybridge Reporter*, 28 April 1900, 6.

²⁰⁸ Charles Reay. ‘Manchester Soldiers at the Front: What the 2nd Battalion Has Been Doing’. *Manchester Evening Chronicle*, 23 March 1901.

²⁰⁹ James Clarke. ‘Letter from a Soldier: In a Collision at Sea’. *The Stalybridge Reporter*, 21 July 1900, 6.

²¹⁰ Fitton, ‘Letters from Ladysmith’, 6.

²¹¹ R. Sim. ‘Letter from a Dukinfield Man at the Front’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 5 May 1900, 6.

Some men appeared to value religious services, although whether as a form of distraction or for its religious value is hard to determine. Volunteer Private Smith, who had joined the 1st Battalion shortly after the relief of Ladysmith, made an ambiguous statement about the night services held at Dewdrop Camp. He wrote that “at night there is a short service, so that we pass time over very nicely”.²¹² He was assuring his readers that he was in good spirits and health just before he wrote this unclear line. He either meant that he was doing well because of the regular night services, and thus he found religious value in them, or that the night services were just a pleasant way to pass the time.

Another distraction were opinions, often critical, about commanding officers. The lack of communication from headquarters, for instance, irked Captain Trueman. On 3 May 1900 he wrote that he received no news about anything, until he was suddenly ordered out, with no information about the mission, only to find out that he and his men were marching into combat moments before the first shots rang out. He expressed similar frustration on 10 July 1900 due to the lack of coherent, solid information from headquarters about what was happening – were the Boers really going to attack them? Or were they in retreat? Or was the 8th Brigade to go out and attack Ficksburg? Trueman was also perplexed by the reasoning behind the marches they were sent on. They did a triangular march stretching almost 24 miles (roughly 39 km) in August 1900, from Reitz to Plaatkop, then the Wilge River, and back to Reitz, and thought it “unnecessary” marching. Writing at the end of August 1900, Trueman did appreciate Lt Gen. Rundle expressing gratitude for the hard marching the 2nd Manchesters did, but he did not appreciate Rundle’s empty promise of it not being repeated ever again. Less than a day after Rundle’s gracious thanks, the battalion had the worst time of it ever, according to Trueman. He did not provide more details, but immediately after making this statement, he asked his reader to send him chocolate and tobacco to help console him.²¹³

Captain Paton of the 1st Battalion, writing on 13 September 1900, was unimpressed with Brigadier-General Frederick Walter Kitchener, brother to the more famous Lord Horatio Herbert Kitchener. Paton was convinced that recent losses in the battalion were due to confusing orders and sudden counter-orders. He provided an example, which occurred on 27 August. They had dug trenches the previous night, only to find the next morning that the Boers had done likewise about 400 yards (356 m) in front of them, but at some points it was 200 yards (183 m) close. The two forces then fired at each other, the Boers apparently supported by a pom-pom and a Maxim machine gun. Thanks to the trenches, the Manchesters suffered no casualties and had the Boers pinned in place, according to Paton’s assessment. However,

²¹² Smith, ‘Letter from Another Ashton Volunteer’, 6.

²¹³ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 10, 44, 55–56.

at about 14:00 they received the inexplicable order to retire from their position. To make matters worse, the terrain they had to retire over was flat, with little cover. He had the men retire gradually, with the others providing covering fire. Still, he suffered four casualties which he thought were avoidable. He ultimately blamed these bizarre orders on generals ignorant of the situation on the ground. "This is only a sample ... of many orders ... received from a man bearing a great + [sic] popular name. Personally I do not greatly regret being away from his command".²¹⁴

Some officers were also critical about the army's strategy and tactics. Captain Trueman, chasing the Boers in the eastern Free State, wrote on 3 October 1900, in a cutting sarcastic tone, that "the authorities have come to the conclusion that Infantry cannot catch men on horses; so now we occupy the towns".²¹⁵ He alluded in his letter that 'flying columns' would now pursue the Boers. Little did he realise that his battalion would eventually join one of these columns. He thus expressed disgust in a letter dated 23 January 1901 from Eland's River, that they had received fresh marching orders to join a flying column, despite the men, horses, and cattle being "done up"²¹⁶ from all the previous marching they had done. Trueman's vitriol continued. Writing on 22 February 1901, he described an event where they went out on a night march through Commando's Nek. "I call it the most crack brained expedition, and for what? To bust 3 mills".²¹⁷ He was grateful that they only suffered eight wounded after traversing such difficult and hostile ground. Captain Tilland, of the 1st Battalion, wrote on 20 January 1901 that the general was more nervous than normal, and how modern technology exacerbated these nerves: "thanks to the blessings of commⁿ [sic] by telegraph we get about 3 shaves [false warnings] a night, all of which tells us we are going to be attacked in five minutes or so."²¹⁸

On the other hand, some men had positive opinions about their superiors, even admiration. Private Barron first described the difficult terrain they fought in, and how the Boers used every inch to their advantage. He then stated that "no wonder that Buller had his work cut out, and he deserves all the praise the country can give him".²¹⁹ Volunteer Private Andrew was also a Buller enthusiast, stating that "General Buller came quite close to me the other day, and asked a question of one of our company".²²⁰ Although seemingly off-handed, one gets the impression that Andrew was impressed, as if he was visited by a celebrity. Many other British soldiers

²¹⁴ Paton, 'Letter from Dalmanutha', 13 September 1900, 5.

²¹⁵ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 78.

²¹⁶ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 98.

²¹⁷ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 112.

²¹⁸ Tilland, 'Letter from Badfontein to Colonel Hardcastle', 20 January 1901, 2.

²¹⁹ William Barron. 'A Local Man at Ladysmith'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 5 May 1900, 6.

²²⁰ Andrew, 'Letters from the Front: The Manchester Volunteers at the Front', 5.

were similarly proud and fond of General Buller. He was well known for his genuine concern about his soldiers, for his personal bravery, and was thus popular among the men.²²¹

The officers occasionally reflected on the men under their command. Captain Paton, writing early in the war on 14 November 1899 to the “Major”, wrote that “I don’t think one’s patience is so likely to get tried with a battalion abroad as with a dirty lot of little recruits as one gets at home ... I have had a pretty fair stomachful of them ... they are such slow fellows to move”.²²² Almost a year later he wrote again to the “Major”, on 13 September 1900, that:

I have tried to watch my temper with my men, and to act up to several limits you kindly gave me, and I think my company is now in fairly good trim and we seem to get on pretty well together. They are not a company of lambs by any means, but they are a good tough and staunch lot of men as ever were.²²³

Although the men under his command tested his temper, he eventually managed to form a rapport with them and began to appreciate their qualities. Captain Trueman displayed a weary acceptance of the fact that his men would, on occasion, behave like careless children and their antics were a form of distraction, albeit unwelcome. Writing on 10 July 1900, he reported that

...one of our men shot off his middle finger cleaning his rifle, I wish they would be more careful as they might shoot somebody else as well as their own fingers ... the shot went off just as we were sitting down to lunch, and we rushed from our tent thinking the Boers were attacking us.²²⁴

The men also distracted themselves by assessing other regiments, especially about who deserved praise or not. Writing from hospital a few days after the Battle of Elandsplaagte on 21 October 1899, Captain Paton gleefully boasted how the Manchesters had outperformed the 2nd Gordon Highlanders. “We came under fire first, and though the Gordons tried hard to get ahead of us, we kept our lead”.²²⁵ However, Private Evans believed that the Manchesters did not get enough praise for Elandsplaagte in the newspapers, and sent a letter directly to the editor of the *Manchester Evening News* to set the record straight.²²⁶ When Volunteer Sergeant Newton joined the 1st Manchesters just after the siege of Ladysmith, the regular infantry shared their thoughts about the Gordons with him. Newton reported that the battalion thought the Gordons’ performance at Elandsplaagte was weak. At Ladysmith, the Manchesters were upset

²²¹ Spiers, *The Victorian Soldier in Africa*, 164–165.

²²² Donald Paton. ‘Letter, From Captain Donald Paton, Officer’s Hospital, Wynberg, Concerning Officer Casualties; Major Melville’s Return to England; the Aftermath of the Battle at Elandsplaagte. 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, 14-29 November 1899’, MR 1/16/5/3. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre, 1–2.

²²³ Paton, ‘Letter from Dalmanutha’, 13 September 1900, 8.

²²⁴ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 44.

²²⁵ Paton, ‘Letter from Officer’s Hospital’, 5.

²²⁶ J.W. Evans. ‘A Manchester Private’s Description of Elands Laagte’. *The Manchester Evening News*, 27 November 1899, 4.

that the Gordons were ordered away from Caesar's Camp a few hours before the Boer attack on 6 January 1900, and that once again the Gordons were spared the worst of the fighting as a result, while the Manchesters bore the brunt. The Manchesters also reported that during the siege the Gordons were mainly stationed at the river, where they could bathe regularly and faced little danger. To add insult to injury, they were convinced the Gordons were also allowed more opportunity to rest and sleep.²²⁷ The Manchesters were clearly not fond of the Gordons. Spiers explained that the Gordons enjoyed widespread coverage in the press in both Scotland and the rest of the British Isles. They were a popular image of Scottish prowess on the battlefield. However, this made other regiments resentful, even other Scottish regiments. At the Battle of Magersfontein (11 December 1899), members of the Seaforth Highlanders complained that the Gordons and Guards did not do much. The Manchesters would not have agreed with Spiers' favourable assessment of the Gordons' performance during the siege of Ladysmith.²²⁸

Several months later, some of the Manchesters still felt they did not get sufficient recognition. Writing on 13 September 1900, Paton complained that "I think our people have showed themselves much steadier under fire than some of the regiments whose names are always before the public for doing noble things".²²⁹ He suspected that the reason for the lack of praise was because the 1st Manchesters commander, Lt Col Curran, and the Brigade commander, Brigadier-General Kitchener, were at odds, and Kitchener subsequently neglected to emphasise their contributions in his reports. On 23 January 1901, Trueman referred to Major-General Barrington Campbell and his "infernal Guards"²³⁰ (2nd Scots Guard), who had been "pottering" around Harrismith while the 2nd Manchesters had been continually in the field since 4 December 1900 with almost no rest. It was more galling to him, because Campbell then gave the Manchesters new orders to trek to Ficksburg. The Manchesters were clearly unimpressed with the Scottish regiments.

This feeling that the Manchesters were ignored in favour of more famous regiments is illustrated by a poem, which first appeared in the *Natal Witness*, but was copied by Private Barron in his letter of 5 April 1900. The identity of the writer is unknown, but it must have been one of the Manchesters. It refers to the fighting at Caesar's Camp on 6 January 1900:

You've sung the song of the Imperial Light Horse.

And sung what was right, of the Devons—

²²⁷ Newton, 'The War. The Ashton Volunteers in Natal. Letter to the Sergeants' Mess', 6.

²²⁸ Spiers, *The Scottish Soldier and Empire*, 168–169.

²²⁹ Paton, 'Letter from Dalmanutha', 13 September 1900, 3.

²³⁰ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 98.

Plenty to say of the Gordons gay.

And of Jack, with his 4-point-7;

But, spare a word, just a little word,

For the Manchester lads so true—

Sixteen only at break of day,

And at fall of night but two.

God! how them laddies must ha' fought,

Through that terrible day so trying:

Steady and straight, as on parade—

And, like true British, dying!

They've earned your thoughts, and give 'em thanks.

Give praise to the gallant few—

Sixteen only when the fight began,

And, when it was over, Two!²³¹

Regimental rivalry and envy were certainly prevalent, but on occasions the men also had admiration for other regiments. Private Fisher, a reservist attached to Buller's relief column, openly admired the Royal Dublin Fusiliers. Writing on 16 March 1900, he thought "they are demons. They are always in it wherever we go, always in the fighting line, and there is [sic] only a handful of them".²³² Mannion, a 1st Manchester Private, writing on 10 February 1900 from Simonstown, observed the arrival of the London Imperial Volunteers and Canadian Volunteers. He thought them "a fine body of active, lithe young men, polite, civil, and obliging. They may not take the roughing same as us, but I am sure they will give a good account of themselves".²³³

The 2nd Manchesters had mixed opinions about the Yeomanry. The Yeomanry had a reputation for 'friendly fire' incidents. Trueman claimed in September 1900 that "the Yeomanry fire at everyone they see, and our M. Inf. [Mounted Infantry] say that they would rather meet the Boers".²³⁴ In contrast, Trueman, writing from Ficksburg on 13 April 1901, expressed sorrow at the idea of the Yeomanry leaving them for Harrismith, because "they are such awful good

²³¹ Barron, 'A Local Man at Ladysmith', 6.

²³² Jack Fisher. 'With the Ladysmith Relief Column'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 21 April 1900, 6.

²³³ T. Mannion. 'Interesting Impression of Cape Town'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 24 March 1900, 6.

²³⁴ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 74.

sorts”.²³⁵ Only a few months later, though, he was scornful, but also pitied, newly arrived Yeomanry units. In August 1901 he wrote that some of the Yeomanry units in Harrismith were barely trained, and he did not think they knew how to ride horses. He then described a debacle where high command thought it wise to send these untrained men on a night attack against a Boer laager. “I can scarcely credit it, it seems the act of a maniac”.²³⁶ The result was an embarrassing defeat, with 41 men captured, four wounded, and four killed.

The Manchesters’ attitudes to their own Volunteers, in the Volunteer Active Service Companies, were generally positive. They regarded their Manchester Volunteers little different from their own regulars. Volunteer Sergeant Hobson, referring on 23 June 1901 to the safe arrival of the 1st Manchester Volunteer Company in Britain, related that “I have not heard anything but praise about them from the men in the Battalion”.²³⁷ The Manchester Volunteers were trusted by Manchester commanders to serve in important and dangerous combat positions. On 12 November 1901, the 2nd Battalion Volunteers formed part of the advance guard which attacked General De Wet’s position at Langberg, from 06:00 to 12:00, before being ordered to retire to an outpost overlooking the camp. During this action, three Volunteers were wounded and a regular officer, Captain Noble, was mortally wounded.²³⁸

It should be mentioned that there are some differences of opinion about how the Volunteers were viewed and employed during the war. Spiers found that the Scottish Volunteers were mostly welcomed into the ranks and those who served in the frontline units endured all the discomforts and dangers which the regular soldiers did, similar to the Manchester Volunteers.²³⁹ Miller, though, came to a different conclusion which suggested that the Volunteers were met with scepticism by commanders and relegated to guarding duties. Apart from the City of London Imperial Volunteers (CIV), the Imperial Yeomanry and the Volunteer Service Companies were not highly regarded by commanders, and thus often relegated to less critical positions and tasks.²⁴⁰ Although it is beyond the parameters of this thesis to explore how the Volunteers were viewed and used, it does appear that the situation was complicated and that the Volunteers were treated differently based on various factors. In the case of the Manchesters, the Volunteers were welcome reinforcements, highly regarded, and there is no indication that they were treated differently from the regulars.

²³⁵ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 146.

²³⁶ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 153.

²³⁷ Hobson, ‘Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother’.

²³⁸ P. Lupton. ‘Diary, Captain P. Lupton, Volunteer Company, 2nd Battalion, 1901-1902’, MR 1/3/2/3. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

²³⁹ Spiers, *The Scottish Soldier and Empire*, 184.

²⁴⁰ Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 107, 121.

Another form of distraction for the Manchesters was to reflect on the war. This should be no surprise, since the war dominated their daily lives, and thoughts and opinions about when it would stop, or how the war was progressing, were only natural. What is striking was how many of the Manchesters expressed the desire for the war to end, and this wish for an end developed remarkably quickly in some cases. Those desiring a swift end to the war were not just the Volunteers, but also the regular soldiers. Compared to many other topics, perceptions about the war were often written about. Unsurprisingly, those few historical studies concerned with the experiences of British soldiers during the South African War also focused on these perspectives. Historians concentrated particularly on the men's desire for the war to end, given the prevalence of this desire.²⁴¹ This thesis, though, reveals a more sophisticated and varied picture of how the soldiers' thoughts about the war manifested and developed.

The Manchesters reflected about the war itself, specifically about how easy, or hard victory would be, and when it would end. Even before hostilities began some Manchesters speculated about how long the war would last. According to the Records of Service for the 1st Battalion, the soldiers were heavily influenced by the opinion of the local townsfolk in Pietermaritzburg. They considered the locals to have a better understanding of the political situation, as well as having a better comprehension of the nature and determination of the Boers. Thus, the townsfolk convinced some of the soldiers that Kruger would back off at the last moment, but even if he did start hostilities, one good defeat on the battlefield would force him back to the negotiation table. The author of the Records of Service noted, with the benefit of hindsight, that

...if a people who had mixed freely with the Boers for generations were so badly at fault in their estimate of the Dutch character it is hardly to be wondered at that the small British force then holding Natal had no idea of the prolonged nature of the struggle in which they were about to enter.²⁴²

It is thus little wonder that Private Evans, while recovering in hospital after being wounded at Elandsplaagte, speculated optimistically that "this war will not last above another two or three months, as we are beating them everywhere we meet them".²⁴³

Others were more judicious in their assessment about how long the war would last. Captain Trueman wrote on 17 April 1900 that "they say if the Boers get another Paardeberg ... the war will end, though there will be a lot of guerrilla warfare by marauding parties".²⁴⁴ Trueman's sources were astonishingly astute given the limited information available. Of course, the

²⁴¹ Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 96–98; Spiers, *The Victorian Soldier in Africa*, 168, 172–173; Venter and Wessels, 'British Soldiers' Anglo-Boer War Experiences as Recorded in Their Diaries', 68, 76.

²⁴² 'Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3'.

²⁴³ J.W. Evans. 'Letter from a Wounded Manchester Soldier'. *The Manchester Evening News*, 21 November 1899, 4.

²⁴⁴ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 7.

guerrilla war would last much longer than anyone could have imagined. Corporal Evans served in the 2nd Manchester Mounted Infantry, and he wrote on 1 November 1900 from Harrismith that “we have been kept busily engaged with the enemy, in fact I am just beginning to think that the war has just begun”.²⁴⁵ Private Caun, also writing from Harrismith on 24 November 1900, agreed with Evans: “we have been fighting all this last two weeks, and have had a rough time at Winburg ... we have lost some men every day, so you will see that the war is not yet over”.²⁴⁶ Trueman, writing from Eland’s River on 23 January 1901, felt that the war in his area was more intense than ever. “The place is just as full of Bogers [sic] as it was 3 months ago and a great deal fuller than it was 6 months ago. Then you treked [sic] about without a shot being fired, now you get sniped if you are 2 miles from camp”.²⁴⁷ By 13 April 1901 he was highly sceptical about the war ending soon, stating that he heard rumours of the Boers growing sick of the war, but he had heard these rumours too often to regard them with much credibility.

The 1st Battalion’s experiences during the siege of Ladysmith clearly demotivated some of its regular soldiers. When the 1st Manchesters, already in Natal, received word on 12 October 1899 that the war had begun, they were at first “much relieved that the period of uncertainty was now over”,²⁴⁸ although the officer who wrote this entry in the Records of Service thought that the men showed little excitement about the war itself. The siege, though, had a definite impact on some men’s desire for the war to end as quickly as possible. Corporal Bramwell, after describing the poor rations and the hard fighting at Caesar’s Camp on 6 January, stated in his letter of 18 January 1900 to his wife that “I am finished with the army after this it has been something awful”.²⁴⁹ Sergeant Hall, who wrote to his wife on 3 March 1900, reckoned the war would last about a month or so, and was eager to go home after nearly four months of siege: “I have had quite enough of South Africa”.²⁵⁰ This hope for the war to end was shared by Private Hunt. Writing on 23 May 1900, he thought the war should be over in about a month. He continued by writing that “I shall be thankful when it is all over”²⁵¹, and explained that the fighting at Elandslaagte and Lombaard’s Kop, followed by the Siege at Ladysmith, had taken a heavy toll on him.

Some men grew tired of the war remarkably quickly, without having the siege of Ladysmith as motivation. Reservist Private Fisher wrote to a friend, sometime in January 1900, to tell any men speaking about the war at home “to come out and try it. All the men wish it was over, and

²⁴⁵ Evans, ‘Letter from the Front: With the Manchester Mounted Infantry’, 6.

²⁴⁶ Caun, ‘Letters from the Front: A Manchester Soldier’s Experience’, 4.

²⁴⁷ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 101.

²⁴⁸ ‘Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3’.

²⁴⁹ Bramwell, ‘Letter from Ladysmith to His Wife’, 18 January 1900.

²⁵⁰ Tom Hall. ‘Letters from Ladysmith’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 7 April 1900, 6.

²⁵¹ Walter Hunt. ‘Letter from a Hooley Hill Lad in South Africa’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 23 June 1900, 6.

so do I, for I have seen enough”.²⁵² He was only about two months into the war at that point, but admitted that at first he was eager to see the country and participate in the war, but this enthusiasm clearly did not last long. Private Barron, writing on 5 April 1900, mentioned the arrival of the first batch of Volunteers for the 1st Manchesters, and thought they were turning into a good looking body of men thanks to constant drill. However, he claimed that many of them did not like it, and that “the majority say they will stop at home and read about the next war”.²⁵³ Private Hardman, a 2nd Manchester regular, was barely a month into the war and already tired of it. In a letter dated 9 May 1900, he asked his friend Tom to advise “Glue Pot” (presumably a nickname for a friend or family member), that “he can consider himself lucky in staying at home, as it is awful out here”.²⁵⁴ In fact, he had such a low opinion of the war that he promised to give his campaign medal to Glue Pot when he returned. Private Turner, also a 2nd Manchester and writing on the same day as Hardman, had a slightly more positive outlook. He thought that the men were in good spirits and health, but he admitted that most of them hoped the war would be over by September 1900. The 1st Manchesters in Natal shared these sentiments. Volunteer Private Smith wrote on 16 May 1900 that “according to the *Natal Mercury*, the war is nearly over, and I for my part shall not be sorry, as soldiering on active service is at the best very hard work, but I am not sorry I came out here, because the sights I have seen and the experience I have gained will make a lasting impression”.²⁵⁵ Smith’s statement is remarkable, because he had only joined the 1st Battalion on 15 March 1900, and compared to what the regular line infantry had experienced, had not experienced a fraction of what the war entailed, and yet he was ready to return home two months after arriving. It is evident that the reality of war swiftly led to thoughts of home for some men.

However, the war did not end as soon as the men hoped, and this became apparent as it entered its guerrilla phase. The continued, seemingly endless discomfort and hardships of campaigning certainly contributed to hopes that the war would end soon. The ‘Fighting First’, who endured much hardship in Ladysmith, would continue fighting, and consequently some continued hoping for an end. Captain Paton, writing on 13 September 1900 from Dalmanutha, was into his eleventh month of the war, and expressed how “we are all heartily sick of this war and the discomfort”.²⁵⁶ Yet, another year passed, and Sergeant Hobson wrote on 21 September 1901 that he hoped the rumours of them going home soon were true, because he did not want to endure another rainy season for fear of his health. On 8 August 1901 he wrote

²⁵² Jack Fisher. ‘Letters from the Front’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 24 March 1900, 6.

²⁵³ Barron, ‘A Local Man at Ladysmith’, 6.

²⁵⁴ Hardman, ‘With the 2nd Manchesters at the Battle of Dewetsdorp’, 6.

²⁵⁵ Smith, ‘Letter from an Ashton Volunteer’, 6.

²⁵⁶ Paton, ‘Letter from Dalmanutha’, 13 September 1900, 2.

that “I do not care how soon [he leaves] as there is neither profit or glory in being here”.²⁵⁷ The experience of fighting an elusive enemy employing a guerrilla war strategy added to frustrations. Hobson, who was clearly fed up, wrote on 23 September 1901 that he hoped the Boers would just give a “jolly good fight and have done with it”.²⁵⁸ Instead, the Boers were just “messaging about” around Lydenburg for roughly two weeks, such as blowing up a mill outside town where the British garrison had just sent a few wagon loads of mealies. All the while, Hobson never saw the enemy, nor had the opportunity to shoot at them.

Homesickness contributed to the men’s wish for the war to end. Naturally, it took a while for homesickness to overcome some men’s enthusiasm or sense of duty. For instance, Private Turner of the 2nd Battalion wrote on 15 April 1900 that “on Easter Sunday morning [we] awoke and found that instead of being in Old England we are in South Africa fighting for home and the Queen, still quite happy. Very few take war at all seriously, they go on as a point of duty”.²⁵⁹ However, Turner’s positive attitude did not last long. Rumours of, or personally witnessing Boers surrendering, kindled the hope that the war would end, especially during the first year of conflict. Turner, writing to his sister again on 9 May 1900 from Bloemfontein, related how he and the others had heard rumours that Kruger had surrendered and that the war would soon be over. He hoped to be home by August 1900. He stated with a hint of dry humour that “by next post, if the war is not over, I shall have words of excitement”.²⁶⁰ Captain Heywood, commander of the Volunteers with the 1st Manchesters, after hearing the news of the capture of Cronje, wrote that “the news of the capture of 5 000 of the enemy makes us all hope that it won’t be long before we are home again, Botha, who is here [Transvaal, near Meerzicht], is said to be sick of fighting, and only waiting for De Wet to give in”.²⁶¹ Some men, like Volunteer Private Andrew, learned to distrust the rumours, stating on 29 September 1900 that “rumours are floating about that we are to return home soon, but the reality seems a long time coming”.²⁶²

Humour was an important emotional coping mechanism during the campaign, and the Manchesters often favoured sarcasm, although not exclusively. Humour was and is an essential coping mechanism for soldiers, as “bitter humour helps men to discharge dangerous tensions”.²⁶³ Volunteer Private Brown wrote sarcastically to a friend about spending nights without a blanket or shelter as follows: “How would you like to be stranded in a field up Moston

²⁵⁷ Hobson, ‘Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother’.

²⁵⁸ Hobson, ‘Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother’.

²⁵⁹ Turner, ‘Another Letter from Private A. Turner’, 6.

²⁶⁰ Alfred Turner. ‘Letter from Alfred Turner’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 23 June 1900, 6.

²⁶¹ Heywood, ‘Letters from the Front: Manchester Volunteers in Battle’, 5.

²⁶² Andrew, ‘Letters from the Front: With the Manchester Volunteers. An Interesting Diary’, 6.

²⁶³ Holmes, *Firing Line*, 243.

with no shelter, and have to get up in the middle of the night to go on guard for two hours? It would be all right, wouldn't it?"²⁶⁴ On 20 January 1901, Captain Tilland wrote from Badfontein that "we never sleep at night, and work most of the day, so between the two, we get a very restful time".²⁶⁵ Captain Trueman wrote on 4 March 1901 that "we are having a ripping time here, the only thing that spoils it being the war!"²⁶⁶ Shortly after arriving in Natal, Volunteer Private Riley reckoned that "this game [the war] beats camp life into fits. We sleep where we can and eat when we can. We cannot get anything to drink except water, which is not so very good. Sometimes we get a drop of coffee".²⁶⁷ Sarcasm was used often, and examples can be found throughout this chapter and the rest of the thesis. Sarcasm was an almost intrinsic strategy which soldiers employed often and effectively. Indeed, many of the direct quotes used in this study contain a hint of sarcasm, because they are so effective at conveying the soldiers' attitudes.

There were a few other forms of humour apart from sarcasm. Hazing²⁶⁸ new recruits or Volunteers could be amusing for the more experienced Manchesters. Private Fisher wrote on 16 March 1900 that it was amusing to haze the Volunteers a bit. "Our volunteers have arrived in Ladysmith. You should see them. It is laughable when we were telling them about the different battles."²⁶⁹ The men also had several amusing expressions they used in camp, as related by Volunteer Private Andrew in October 1900 while serving with the 1st Battalion. 'Kif' meant all is right; 'cushy' meant comfortable or home-like; 'Blighty' referred to Britain; 'fed up' meant sick of it or had enough; 'routy' was for bread; 'bond-hook' referred to a rifle; 'decks' meant taking a look or go see; 'scoff' meant eating; 'glue' was used for cornflour or porridge; 'dixie' was the camp kettle; 'sky-blue' was the term for ginger beer; 'see your party off' was a rough way of saying get out of the way; 'gave 'em nothing' actually meant the opposite; 'only a yarn' meant the truth; and 'wads' were buns.²⁷⁰

Performing one's duty could take a heavy toll on body, mind, and spirit. Despite this, or due to this, the men engaged in a wide range of recreational activities to keep their spirits up, such as birthday celebrations. Privates Ghent and Smith, of the 3rd VBMR, shared a birthday on 8 June, and this was more than sufficient excuse to celebrate in 1901. The writer of this account did not share his name with the paper, but was certainly an eyewitness, due to his use of

²⁶⁴ Brown, 'Serving with the Field Forces', 5.

²⁶⁵ Tilland, 'Letter from Badfontein to Colonel Hardcastle', 20 January 1901, 1.

²⁶⁶ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 122.

²⁶⁷ Harry Riley. 'Another Letter from an Ashton Volunteer at the Front'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 28 April 1900, 6.

²⁶⁸ The practice whereby new recruits were forced or tricked into performing humiliating tasks, or new recruits who were made fun of by the more experienced soldiers.

²⁶⁹ Fisher, 'With the Ladysmith Relief Column', 6.

²⁷⁰ Andrew, 'Letters from the Front: With the Manchester Volunteers. An Interesting Diary', 5.

personal pronouns such as “we” and “our”. The celebration was held at the Permanent Picquet Blockhouse, part of a line guarding Van Reenen’s Pass through the Drakensberg Mountains. Fellow Ashton volunteers were summoned from the neighbouring blockhouses. Making the best of their limited resources, they held a tea, followed by a smoking concert where Ghent sang the comic song called “Barney’s Chicken” and Smith sang “The Volunteer”. Various other songs followed, and recitations. The festivities lasted into the cold night, and ended with the men singing “Auld Lang Syne”.²⁷¹

Christmas was important, based on the sheer number of times it is described in letters. It was also a reminder of home and the people they left behind, which likely explains why it is mentioned so often. Private Parr, the reservist serving as a stretcher bearer with Buller’s forces, was satisfied with his 1899 Christmas, despite there being no pudding or chocolate. He explained that he and the other men did not mind just having bread, cheese, and corned beef, because their arrival was unexpected, and more importantly, they were all just too happy to be so close to the frontlines. The last point may have been an attempt at bravado.²⁷² Captain Trueman wrote that he and his Mounted infantry company had a “sing-song” for Christmas 1900. This was after he and his fellow officers privately enjoyed tinned plum pudding, champagne, and turkey.²⁷³ Sergeant Hobson described a pleasant 1901 Christmas in Lydenburg. At 05:00 he and a few others gathered to sing “Christmas Awake”, and a few other hymns. Later that day they received some tobacco, a small plum pudding, and a pint of beer as gifts from the Field Force Canteen. His Christmas was, ironically, further enhanced when he was ordered to picket duty. Normally, this was an unpleasant and monotonous task, but that Christmas day the picketing spot was at the “spruit” almost 3 miles (5 km) distant, where he took the opportunity to get a good wash without having to wait his turn or share the water with others.²⁷⁴

Duty or circumstances did spoil Christmas for some. Christmas 1899 in Ladysmith during the Boer siege was obviously unpleasant for most. Private Bumby, clearly feeling very sorry for himself: “Mother, I was expecting a little Christmas pudding from you, for we had nothing but a hard biscuit for a Christmas dinner”.²⁷⁵ Private Lake, also writing to his mother, mentioned horse meat for Christmas in Ladysmith.²⁷⁶ Some men in Ladysmith decided to celebrate Christmas on the day they were relieved. Lance-Corporal Darlington described 28 February

²⁷¹ ‘Ashton Volunteers Hold a Birthday Party at Van Reenan’s Pass’, *The Gorton Reporter*, 13 July 1901, 3.

²⁷² E. Parr. ‘A Hyde Man’s Experience: The Occupation of a Stretcher Bearer’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 27 January 1900, 5.

²⁷³ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 95.

²⁷⁴ Hobson, ‘Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother’.

²⁷⁵ George Bumby. ‘Letters from Ladysmith’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 7 April 1900, 6.

²⁷⁶ David Lake. ‘Letters from the Front’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 14 April 1900, 6.

1900 as the best Christmas he ever had. He received a box of bullets that morning, and a bit of pudding for dinner.²⁷⁷ Duty could be an obstacle to a happy Christmas. Private Woods of the 2nd Manchesters described a dismal Christmas for 1900, because he had a hard day of marching, with nearly nothing to eat except weak coffee before they started. When they finally stopped for the day, the local pond was of extremely poor quality, but they used it anyway for tea, supplemented with some army biscuits. They did get some gingerbread for two shillings a pound, which was a small consolation. However, Woods was unlucky to be on guard duty that night, and he stated sarcastically how that “finished up the happy day”.²⁷⁸

Concerts were relatively common affairs and evidently a good distraction. Captain Trueman described several concerts in his letters. No other source besides Trueman went into much detail and most did not even mention them. The reason for this is unclear, because some of the concerts Trueman described involved both officers and men from the 2nd Manchesters. One type of concert was organised by civilians. In honour of the British re-entry into Harrismith on 8 August 1900, the local townspeople organised one. Only a few privates were present, though, since most of the rank-and-file were quartered outside the town. The fact that Trueman mentioned this indicates that the rank-and-file would probably have attended this concert if they could. It featured singing, which began with “God save the Queen”. Trueman thought “the concert was much better than I should have thought, one performer was a pleasure to listen to”.²⁷⁹

The second type were concerts organised by the soldiers. Of particular interest was Trueman’s description of a soldiers’ concert performed in Harrismith almost two months later, although a few civilians also performed. Trueman thought it “was on the whole Rot”, but described some of the highlights anyway:

Bugler H. gave a sketch first which was really excellent. Corp. R. set his teeth and went at the ‘Bedouin Love Song’ like a bull dog [sic]. A lady got so nervous that she did not know what she was doing, and got out of tune. It wound up with some chap singing ‘All’s Well’, at least they were the only words we could hear.²⁸⁰

Trueman had high standards, it seems, but one can assume that others with a less refined ear would have enjoyed the concert, if only as a change of pace and some much-needed distraction.

Trueman described various other concerts. In a letter from Ficksburg on 17 February 1901, he wrote how he performed the song “Anchored” during a concert in the smoke-choked town hall. He also played the part of a servant in a theatrical performance, *The Duchess of*

²⁷⁷ E. Darlington. ‘Letters from Stalybridge Men at the War’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 21 April 1900, 8.

²⁷⁸ Woods, ‘Christmas Day with the 2nd Manchesters’, 2.

²⁷⁹ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 52.

²⁸⁰ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 82–83.

Bayswater, which was organised by Airey, the Transportation Officer. A few days later they had an impromptu concert in the highlands of Basutoland, and once back in held Ficksburg several more.²⁸¹ There was often mention of singing and music. Moreover, *ad-hoc* singing and music was popular among both the officers and the men. In March 1901, at Peka in Basutoland, Captain Trueman described how the local commissioner invited him and his men to dinner, after which they all had drinks and songs together until about 01:30. On 5 May 1901 he wrote that they had an officer's dinner with speeches and music. At one of the cricket matches held in Harrismith in August 1901, Trueman recounted how the Manchesters faced off against Major Slea's team, and during the match the band played and it was a festive occasion.²⁸²



Photo 16: The Manchester band practising on the veld.

Source: 'Photograph Album, South Africa, Local View; Scenes in Camp; Informal Groups; on the March', c. 1900. MR 1/23/21. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

Evidence of dancing was mainly found in Captain Trueman's collection of letters, and focused almost exclusively on the officers. While at Harrismith in October 1900, he off-handedly mentioned that they had occasional dances. He was fortunate enough to go to a dance in March 1901 at Ladybrand, where there were 15 couples. They danced until midnight, after which they went to the local club and had drinks and sang songs. This ended at 02:00, and unfortunately for him, he had to get up to do his rounds at 04:30, but it seems he did not mind

²⁸¹ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 111–12, 122–24.

²⁸² Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 125, 137, 158.

paying this price in lost sleep. He had another evening dance in Ficksburg in May 1901, which he thought was a particularly good one, although he did not elaborate.²⁸³ He attended another dance in Harrismith in August 1901, organised by the subalterns, and to his delight the “ladies were a cut above anything I have seen out here”.²⁸⁴ Officers clearly had several occasions to enjoy dances, and with women no less. As for the Manchester rank-and-file, the picture is unclear. They were surely just as fond of dances, but Trueman did not mention them during these occasions, and their own correspondence did not mention this aspect. It is likely that the ordinary soldier enjoyed fewer dances while on campaign, if any, but it cannot be ruled out, especially dances organised among themselves. No one chose to write about dances, though, which suggests it was uncommon for the ordinary soldier.

Sport was a more common form of relaxation for both officers and the rank-and-file. Unsurprisingly, football (soccer) was extremely popular, especially with the ordinary soldiers. There are two photographs showing the Manchesters and their football enthusiasm. The first is a group photo of a football team, presumably F Company’s team. They even had football uniforms, as seen in the first photo below.²⁸⁵ The album does not identify the men, the location, or the exact date the photo was taken, except that it was 1900. The other photo, second below, is from an album of the 2nd Battalion, and shows a football game being played in the veld.²⁸⁶ Once again, there are no details included, and the date is extremely vague (sometime in 1900). Apart from the photos, several letters mention football. Private Barron, 1st Manchesters, wrote on 5 April 1900 that a certain Law Gregory seriously injured his ankle while playing football.²⁸⁷ He was not the only one to get injured. One of the 2nd Battalion officers, Captain Chittenden, wrote about the men playing football in a letter from Hammonia, dated 14 July 1900. One of his fellow officers, Neville, was hit directly in the groin, and the injury was so bad that he was sent home to Britain to recover. There does not appear to be a note of amusement in the text, though it surely must have caused considerable laughter.²⁸⁸ Volunteer Private Martin wrote that on 28 May 1901, at Van Reenen’s Pass, “we played the Mountain Battery at football, but we lost – three goals to one. It is to be hoped we beat them next time”.²⁸⁹ He added that they played all sorts of sports, although he did not elaborate further.

²⁸³ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 82, 124–25, 138.

²⁸⁴ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 158.

²⁸⁵ ‘Photograph Album, South Africa, Local View; Scenes in Camp; Informal Groups; on the March’, c. 1900. MR 1/23/21. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

²⁸⁶ ‘Photograph Album, 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, South Africa’, c. 1900. MR 1/23/24. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

²⁸⁷ Barron, ‘A Local Man at Ladysmith’, 6.

²⁸⁸ Chittenden, ‘Letter from Hammonia’, 14 July 1900.

²⁸⁹ R. Martin. ‘Letter from the Front’. *The Gorton Reporter*, 29 June 1901, 6.



Photo 17: F Company's football team.

Source: 'Photograph Album, South Africa, Local View; Scenes in Camp; Informal Groups; on the March', c. 1900. MR 1/23/21. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.



Photo 18: The 2nd Manchesters playing football in the veld.

Source: 'Photograph Album, 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, South Africa', c. 1900. MR 1/23/24. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

Cricket was played too and seems to have been a sport enjoyed by both officers and the men. Captain Trueman definitely enjoyed the game, as he mentioned playing it numerous times in his letters. At first, he bemoaned the lack of cricket, writing on 28 July 1900 that it was all the worse, because he read about cricket in old newspapers, yet he himself had not seen or held a bat. However, he soon got to play, and quite regularly at that. In a letter dated 17 October

1900 from Harrismith, he mentioned that they would play a cricket match against the Yeomanry in a few days. He had another game a few days later against the East Yorkshires, whom, he claimed, were saved by the time running out. On 4 March 1901 he described a cricket match between the officers and the men in Ficksburg. The officers declared it a win after securing 179 runs for four wickets, of which Trueman secured 50 runs, although he was disappointed with a few bad strikes. There was another match between the officers and men, as described in his letter of 27 April 1901.²⁹⁰ These are but a few examples of cricket matches he played during the campaign.²⁹¹

The officers typically favoured other types of sport more suited to their social standing. In one of the 2nd Manchesters' photograph albums, there is a photo of an officer in mid-swing with his golf club in the veld, dressed up on his day off on a Sunday morning sometime in 1900, as shown in the photo below.²⁹² Captain Trueman wrote on 13 September 1901 that he went on leave to Uitenhage to play golf.²⁹³ Lieutenant Colonel Reay wrote from Vrede on 4 September 1900 that he and the officers played polo nearly everyday on account of the good weather.²⁹⁴ Trueman, while at Ficksburg in March 1901, wrote that he played a game of polo, but his pony was unused to the game, so he did not have much success. He mentioned another game of polo in his letter of 5 May 1901, and that this time it was good.²⁹⁵ It is unlikely the other ranks played polo since it required horses and horsemanship, although there was no reason why those not on duty could not watch the officers at play.

The officers also played various other sports when possible. In the three months or so they were semi-besieged in Bethlehem, from February 1901 to the end of April, Captain Noble wrote that he often played games like polo and cricket.²⁹⁶ In fact, the very same Captain Noble broke his wrist during a game of polo on 18 April 1901.²⁹⁷ Trueman mentioned in a letter on 4 March 1901 that he played tennis on occasion. Additionally, the officers participated in horse races. Trueman entered two of his horses, Auster and Johnny, into the Argentines Race in Ficksburg, May 1901. He rode Auster himself and his friend Hall rode Johnny. Auster came fifth and Johnny was sixth.²⁹⁸ However, the race was won, once again, by Thornycroft's horse

²⁹⁰ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 46, 82, 84, 88, 123, 136.

²⁹¹ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 105, 107, 121, 133, 157.

²⁹² 'Photograph Album, 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, South Africa'. The writing underneath the photo is unfortunately too faded to make out his name.

²⁹³ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 161.

²⁹⁴ Charles Reay. 'Letter, Lieutenant Colonel Reay, Vrede, to Colonel Gwatkin, Concerning the Proposed Move to Bethlehem; the Fine Weather. 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment', 4 September 1900. MR 1/16/5/14. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

²⁹⁵ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 123, 138.

²⁹⁶ Reay, 'More about the Manchesters: Garrison Life at Bethlehem'.

²⁹⁷ 'Records of Service: 2nd Bttn Manchester Regiment', 95.

²⁹⁸ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 122, 138.

called Pearl. It is likely that there was gambling involved with most horse races, as described earlier. Even though few, if any rank-and-file participated directly in horse racing, they were more than likely spectators.

Other forms of sport are mentioned, though these seem to have been rarer. On 1 April 1901, the 2nd Manchesters cheered on a 100 yards (91,4 m) footrace between Colour-Sergeant Forster of D Company and Mr Collett of the National Bank Orange Free State. Collett was the ex-champion footracer of the Free State. Forster, to the delight of the Manchesters, won the race by 6 inches (15.2 cm).²⁹⁹ It appears they might have managed swimming sports as well. There is a photo from the 2nd Battalion album showing a man diving into a large canvas pool, surrounded by a crowd of onlookers.³⁰⁰ There is also a photo of two men playing table tennis on an ordinary dining table, most likely looted from a farmhouse, with another man looking on.³⁰¹ The identity of the men, the battalion, and the date are unknown, except that the photo may have been taken in 1900.



Photo 19: Under the photo it says “Sports at Harrismith, ‘01”. The 2nd Manchesters swimming in a makeshift pool.

Source: ‘Photograph Album, 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, South Africa’, c. 1900. MR 1/23/24. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

²⁹⁹ ‘Records of Service: 2nd Bttn Manchester Regiment’, 95.

³⁰⁰ ‘Photograph Album, 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, South Africa’.

³⁰¹ ‘Photograph Album, South Africa, Local View; Scenes in Camp; Informal Groups; on the March’, c. 1900. MR 1/23/19. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.



Photo 20: Two Manchesters playing table-tennis on the veld.

Source: 'Photograph Album, South Africa, Local View; Scenes in Camp; Informal Groups; on the March', c. 1900. MR 1/23/19. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

Sport was an important form of relaxation, not only during the South African War, but other modern wars too. Football was an obsession for British soldiers in the First World War. One general observed that “however tired the rascals may be for parades, they always have enough energy for football”.³⁰² Some Manchesters clearly understood its important role in maintaining morale. Captain Chittenden explained that all the battalion’s companies had at least one football, which “makes them forget their troubles for a while”.³⁰³ Lieutenant Colonel Reay included an extract from a letter from an unknown officer, NCO, or maybe a veteran Volunteer, who lauded the Volunteer Company officers, Captain Lupton, Lieutenant Cronshaw, and Lieutenant Routley: noting “during the whole of my twenty-three years’ service I have never served under better or more considerate officers towards their men. Their study is to make the time pass pleasantly by promoting football, cricket, etc”.³⁰⁴

³⁰² Winter, *Death’s Men*, 155-156.

³⁰³ Chittenden, ‘Letter from Hammonia’, 14 July 1900.

³⁰⁴ Reay, ‘Manchesters at the Front: Doings of the 2nd Battalion’.



Photo 21: Unknown 2nd Manchester officer, playing golf on his Sunday day off.

Source: 'Photograph Album, 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, South Africa', c. 1900. MR 1/23/24. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

There were also a few more uncommon activities the men used to distract themselves. The officers in the 2nd Manchesters organised an Officer's Club in Ficksburg. Captain Trueman wrote on 17 February 1901 that it was in a barely furnished house, but contained various amusements such as numerous old newspapers, eight packs of cards, and a piano, which was "awfully and fearfully out of tune".³⁰⁵ Volunteer Captain Lupton, also serving in the 2nd Manchesters, chose to spend his day off from weeks of blockhouse duty by fishing on 28 February 1902. He was headquartered at the Nelson's Kop blockhouse, which was relatively close to the Wilge River Drift. He presumably made his way to the Wilge River and caught 21 fish.³⁰⁶ Those with a more artistic persuasion sketched, as a photo from the 2nd Battalion's 1901 album suggests (see below), although the identity of the soldier, whose uniform looks impeccable while sitting on a termite heap, is not mentioned.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁵ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 109.

³⁰⁶ Lupton, 'Diary'.

³⁰⁷ 'Photograph Album, 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, Harrismith, Liddles Farm, 1901-1902', MR 3/23/69. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.



Photo 22: A 2nd Manchester sketching while sitting on a termite heap, according to a description below the photo.
Source: 'Photograph Album, 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, Harrismith, Liddles Farm, 1901-1902', MR 3/23/69. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

An important distraction for the Manchesters was to write letters, read letters from home, and read newspapers and other literature sent from home by family and friends. This was an essential and valuable link to loved ones. The enormous effort mounted by the British army to ensure a regular flow of mail between Britain and its troops in South Africa, as discussed in the first chapter, is testament to its importance for morale. This has been briefly mentioned in a few other studies about the British soldier during the war. Miller states that “letters, particularly those that offered news of home, were a real treat”.³⁰⁸ Spiers sums up the importance of letter writing during the war well, arguing that the soldiers had a strong desire to keep in touch with family and friends, and to share their news from the front and receive news from home.³⁰⁹ The positive effect on morale of receiving mail was evident in Captain Trueman’s elation on 22 August 1900, writing “the mail duly arrived and I got piles of literature and all sorts of good things”.³¹⁰ Sergeant Hobson related on 23 June 1901 from Lydenburg that “you can hardly believe how everyone is when a convoy gets here as everybody expects letters by it”.³¹¹ Hobson, writing again on 19 July 1901, expressed his sincerest thanks to his

³⁰⁸ Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 125.

³⁰⁹ Spiers, *The Victorian Soldier in Africa*, 13.

³¹⁰ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 54.

³¹¹ Hobson, ‘Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother’.

brother for sending him a range of newspapers from home: “Guardians, Couriers, Golden Penny’s, Harpuchey Guardian”.³¹²

It was not always easy to write, but the men did their best. Volunteer Captain Heywood complained on 2 August 1900 from Meerzicht, that “writing is difficult here. We have a lot of picket work, and are shifted about from one place to another”.³¹³ Captain Paton had a similar problem writing on 13 September 1900 from Dalmanutha that “I should have answered your letter long ago, but we have been having pretty busy times ever since I received it at Meerzicht”.³¹⁴ On 18 March 1902, Sergeant Hobson explained that it was difficult to reply to letters while he was out marching and far from the main communication lines.³¹⁵ Duties were clearly regarded as an unwelcome interference to writing letters. A lack of paper and stamps was also a challenge. Private Fisher lamented at the end of a long letter that “I will finish for this time—no more paper, no stamps, no money”.³¹⁶ Although not necessarily a challenge apart from making a letter maybe more difficult to read, some men preferred writing in ink rather than pencil. Private Parr wrote on 27 December 1899 that he “cannot get any ink for the pen, so you will have to excuse the pencil”.³¹⁷ Private Kershaw asked his mother on 2 April 1900 to forgive the pencil, but was thankful for the paper which “Uncle Harry” sent him, and promised to write to him as soon as he was more recovered from the siege of Ladysmith.³¹⁸ Sergeant Hobson explained on 4 September 1901 that writing was difficult. He had borrowed a fountain pen to write with, but midway through he had to return it (one can clearly see the change from ink to pencil), and that he was sitting under a wagon and using his canteen as a desk.³¹⁹

At times the mail was irregular due to various problems, such as slow transport or enemy interference. Some men, like Captain Trueman who was an avid letter-writer and mail enthusiast, found this distressing. He complained on 3 May 1900 that he had not received a single letter since disembarking on 11 April. On 15 August 1900 he complained again, stating that he had not received any mail for almost a month. The mail delivery service remained an irregular affair well into the war, with Trueman complaining again about late mail on 17 February 1901. Sometimes, though, it was not the mail services who were at fault, and Trueman was simply upset that when the mail arrived on 17 March 1901, no one had sent him anything.³²⁰ The strangest thing that happened to Trueman’s mail, as related on 18 July 1901

³¹² Hobson, ‘Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother’.

³¹³ B.C.P. Heywood. ‘Letters from the Front: Manchester Volunteers in Battle’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 15 September 1900, 5.

³¹⁴ Paton, ‘Letter from Dalmanutha’, 13 September 1900, 1.

³¹⁵ Hobson, ‘Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother’.

³¹⁶ Fisher, ‘Letters from the Front’, 6.

³¹⁷ Parr, ‘A Hyde Man’s Experience: The Occupation of a Stretcher Bearer’, 5.

³¹⁸ Kershaw, ‘After the Siege of Ladysmith’, 6.

³¹⁹ Hobson, ‘Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother’.

³²⁰ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 11, 54, 109, 129.

from Standerton, was “I got a letter from Mary to-day, dated March 29th., which had been opened at Ficksburg and thrown into a refuse pit; a lot of letters of that date were similarly treated”.³²¹ This was evidently not due to enemy action, but some kind of irregularity. Sergeant Hobson, writing from Lydenburg on 7 June 1901 to his brother Robert, was despondent about the irregular mail service, but was also excited at the hopeful prospect of receiving a heap of mail. He wrote:

I shall be very glad when the next convoy comes in when I hope to have a letter from one of you. No one in the Company has had one from home yet, so we shall be all very glad when it arrives, as it is three months without any news from home, so I think we shall have bags of news as the soldiers say.³²²

5.4 CONCLUSION

The bulk of the Manchesters’ life on campaign clearly did not involve constant combat, but was quite the opposite. As has been demonstrated, the environment they campaigned in had a significant impact. Moreover, instead of combat, it was the Manchesters’ daily duties that largely determined their campaign experiences, although it is worth noting that there is no indication in the sources that the regular line infantry performed different duties from the Volunteers and the Militia. All the men, whether professional or Volunteer, performed the same responsibilities and faced the same dangers. Due to the nature of this topic, few Manchesters provided details about their various tasks. It was part of their routine, and from their perspective, probably not very interesting. These often merged into a series of connected duties. For example, when serving as a garrison, it involved several interlinked duties such as building fortifications, escorting convoys, posting pickets, or manning outposts.

Of particular interest is their participation in the scorched-earth policy, which Kitchener officially introduced by March 1901, although it was already quietly encouraged by Lord Roberts since July 1900, and possibly even earlier. More notable is the general lack of emotion when the Manchesters related these destructive activities. Instead, the tone is mainly business-like or matter of fact, as if this was nothing out of the ordinary and just one more duty among many. As discussed in the previous chapter, the scorched earth strategy allowed the men to loot foodstuffs, which was a welcome addition to their often limited diet. Looting and destruction on this scale was not portrayed as unusually immoral by the Manchesters and was likely an unspoken expectation regarding the nature of war, as had been the case for millennia.³²³ However, the Manchesters were not therefore all enthusiastic looters and arsonists. Certainly,

³²¹ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 150.

³²² Hobson, ‘Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother’.

³²³ Holmes, *Firing Line*, 353–355; John Keegan. *A History of Warfare*. London: Hutchinson, 1993, 302.

many of them felt uncomfortable about these activities, but their letters did not include such moral reflection.

The Manchesters' experiences of campaigning in South Africa appears miserable. However, writing about uneventful days and activities made for poor reading, and was certainly boring to write about. It was only natural that the men wrote about events which were noteworthy in some way, usually negative. On the other hand, it is difficult to imagine that conducting war on the veld was, at best, anything but uncomfortable. The seemingly endless marching certainly dominated their experience and was undoubtedly challenging on even the best days. Moreover, the rough terrain, unpredictable climate, poor roads, and the enemy made marching even more difficult on many occasions. It is little wonder the men wrote extensively about this aspect of campaign life. Fear of humiliation, hope, or simply getting fitter helped some men cope with the hardship of marching, though it was still challenging and could even result in casualties as men stubbornly kept on marching well past what their ruined feet could endure. In some ways, the marching they endured was little different from what a British regiment would have experienced during the Napoleonic Wars almost a century earlier. The South African War, while undeniably 'modern' in terms of weaponry and other new technologies, also featured notable contradictions in aspects of warfare which did not differ much from preceding centuries.

The Manchesters also wrote a surprising amount about sleeping and hygiene. Some will say that this is hardly a surprising revelation, yet the Manchesters chose to write about this and thus it deserves attention. For them, this was an aspect which stood out while at war. Hygiene challenges were also commonly mentioned, especially in letters and diaries. The fact that soldiers endured unhygienic conditions is predictable, but it is rarely explored from the soldier's viewpoint. The existing literature about the British soldiers' experience is limited on these two topics, and the systematic, thematic-chronological approach has elevated these two experiences into sharper focus. The inability to maintain adequate hygiene clearly bothered a number of Manchesters, while the rigours of campaigning combined with their various duties caused many men to frequently miss a good night's sleep.

To survive emotionally and mentally while on campaign, the Manchesters turned to various distractions to escape the realities of war, even if only for a while. Gambling was one of the expected distractions, but the extent of gambling and how well organised it was, especially in Harrismith, is surprising. Other distractions ranged from religion, thoughts about the war, humour, celebrations such as Christmas, and concerts. Indeed, a poor Christmas was cause for complaint, which indicates how potentially important this was for the men, since it was one of the few things they could look forward to, often getting extra food and even pudding. The

main distraction which stood out was sports such as football and cricket, although the officers tended to indulge in other more exclusive sports too, such as golf, polo, and tennis. Both the men and their officers fully appreciated how important sport was to maintain morale.

6. DEATH AND DANGER

Combat and disease

The Manchester Regiment, who had been in the early attack, were at first slightly leading. With the characteristic hardihood of British infantry, all of them marched straight-backed at the enemy, too often careless of taking cover, despite the rattling, hissing, spitting Mauser bullets. Tommy Atkins says, in fact, "What!? Hide from yokels! Let them shoot!"¹

We next came to Naauwpoort Junction, a place of a recent battle. Many graves were visible in a neat (new) little cemetery of our poor soldiers. This place, will no doubt, be a sad remembrance of this terrible war.²

A commonly held view is that war is about battles, fighting, and death. However, those periods where death and harm occurred during the South African War were unpredictable and infrequent. For the Manchesters, as for most British soldiers, the war was mostly a combination of boredom, duties, suffering, distractions, and other activities. Still, they knew that danger was always potentially around the corner. It could come at any moment: during battle, a skirmish, a sniper's bullet, or a Boer surprise attack, whether on the march or resting in camp. Even worse was an enemy which was harder to spot than the Boers, namely disease, which caused considerably more harm than the enemy did. The approach used in this thesis has broken up the Manchesters' experiences into themes, but the men were in actuality challenged by a combination of different factors: the terrain itself, the enemy's knowledge of the terrain, the enemy's different approach to war, and the impact of modern weapons.

The main intent of this chapter is to explore how the men perceived and experienced death and danger. Of all the experiences of the war, the Manchesters wrote most extensively about the experience of combat. As unpleasant a fact though it may be for most scholars, and indeed most human beings, war was and is about killing and facing extreme danger. It was only natural for the Manchesters to write about this unique and highly emotional phenomenon, even though combat encounters were the exception, rather than the rule. Other British soldiers did likewise, as a handful of secondary sources reveal.³ The Manchesters emphasised their

¹ 'The Fighting at Elandsplaagte', *The Ashton Reporter*, 28 October 1899, 6.

² Alfred Turner. 'Another Letter from Private A. Turner'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 19 May 1900, 6.

³ Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 104–110; Spiers, *The Victorian Soldier in Africa*, 161–163, 167, 169.

combat experiences in their letters home, because it was a profound experience. In addition, their readers back home would have undoubtedly found their accounts fascinating. I agree with Miller's assessment of why the Volunteers' letters emphasised combat so often, although I argue that it also applies to the regulars. In short, the men regarded combat as "the most exciting and rewarding occurrence in their tour".⁴

It is important, though, to first discuss their military training, as well as the popular contemporary perceptions regarding the 'Tommy Atkins' stereotype and how the public expected its soldiers to act. Many in British society enthusiastically accepted the stereotype of the courageous and nonplussed working-class British soldier, who seemed to regard death with contempt and marched boldly at the enemy in disciplined lines, spurning cover. The Manchester experience shows that this was simply not the case. Infantry training was also in a period of transition, and without yet having been involved in a major war against an enemy mostly armed with modern weapons, the British Army did not appreciate how dangerous frontal attacks against entrenched defenders had become. Indeed, no European army truly understood the implications. Ultimately, the men's training and imagination formed the basis of their expectations, especially for those who had never experienced combat before.

Only then can one discuss the Manchesters' thoughts and feelings when under fire from modern artillery and rifles. The discussion begins with how the Manchesters perceived combat, both before and after the experience. The thematic-chronological approach, though, is not perfect, so there is some overlap with topics which follow later. One important theme to discuss is how modern smokeless weapons made it extremely difficult to spot a well-concealed rifleman. Most Manchesters were also inexperienced and the South African War was thus for most their "baptism of fire", and most frustratingly against an enemy they struggled to see. This section then continues by exploring how the men's thoughts and feelings about combat changed over time, or did not in some cases. Furthermore, it investigates the different ways they chose to portray combat, and the extent to which society's expectations shaped their accounts. Other topics related to the experience of combat cover fighting on the march, returning fire at the enemy, and ammunition expenditure and what it reveals about the intensity of combat. The romanticised bayonet charge will be examined to determine what role it played in combat. In addition, regimental rivalry, especially with the Scottish regiments, and how it influenced the Manchesters' behaviour in combat, will be discussed.

The experience of combat did not end when the last shot was fired. And danger was not only found on the battlefield. After combat, the wounded had to be collected, and the dead buried. This was when many men had the time to appreciate the damage that combat inflicted on man

⁴ Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 105.

and beast. This was generally regarded as an unpleasant, and often horrifying experience. Many men suffered wounds and some died, the nature of which needs to be discussed, because combat led to pain and death. It was not neat and clinical, but bloody, horrifying, painful, and tragic. Many men also reflected after combat about whether their sacrifices were worth it.

The chapter includes a discussion about illness, as an ever-present foe that caused more harm than the Boers did. The British Army's casualties during the South African War were primarily due to various illnesses, mostly dysentery and enteric fever (in most cases this was typhoid), which were exacerbated by inconsistent hygiene, frequent exposure to the elements, hard physical activities such as long and regular marches, and poor rations. There were roughly 100 000 British casualties during the war. Of this, approximately 22 000 British soldiers died, of which just over 16 000 were due to illness.⁵ This gives a rough indication of the extremely high proportion of casualties caused by various medical issues. The chapter will conclude by looking at how the Manchesters perceived death, of which there were ample reminders around them.

6.1 PERCEPTIONS OF COMBAT

Before discussing how the Manchesters experienced combat, it is necessary to explore their perceptions and attitudes toward it, starting with the influence of their training prior to the war, since it formed an expectation of what they would encounter. Spencer Jones has argued that the late-Victorian army did not have what other armies would have considered a cohesive tactical doctrine and there were differences of opinion in the War Office. As a result, there were considerable differences between battalions and how each trained its soldiers, due the confusion at the top.⁶ Still, Spiers provides a useful summary of what British infantry training prior to the South African War generally entailed. It involved several aspects, much of it still untested in the theatre of a modern war. The infantry was to approach the battlefield in closely packed column or quarter-columns, which made them vulnerable if caught by artillery or concealed riflemen, as occurred at the Battle of Colenso. When close to the enemy, the main body was screened by covering infantry in extended order. This was followed by three lines of men, a firing line, a support line, and a reserve line, all in extended order. The greater space between the men in the lines was to reduce the impact of modern firepower. By the 1890s, modern rifles were extremely well suited to a sustained, heavy 'rain' of fire which suppressed the enemy and made it a daunting proposition to advance forward. However, volley-fire was

⁵ Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 572.

⁶ Spencer Jones. 'The Influence of The Boer War (1899 – 1902) on the Tactical Development of the Regular British Army 1902 – 1914'. University of Wolverhampton, 2009, 30.

still the preferred mode of shooting in the British army because they believed it directed and concentrated the volume of fire, preserved ammunition, and enhanced discipline. Training did, however, encourage a greater use of cover when assaulting an enemy with modern weapons. As a final element, a vigorous attack was regarded as 'morally superior' to the defence. It was believed that a determined attack by brave and disciplined men was the best way to take an enemy position, although losses would be high. The men were encouraged to cheer, beat drums, sound bugles, or play pipes during the assault. Bayonet training for close-quarter fighting was an important component of fostering this 'aggressive spirit'. In fact, the bayonet as the ultimate and 'morally superior' offensive weapon persisted well into the First World War in British training, with disastrous consequences. It was not so much that the bayonet was really a weapon of mass slaughter, far from it, but rather that it instilled a measure of confidence and courage.⁷ Still, one can argue that despite its shortcomings, the greatest benefit of British training prior to the South African War was its focus on discipline, which enabled the soldiers to endure considerable casualties before breaking rank.⁸

The Manchesters' training formed one element of their expectations regarding combat, but the image of the stereotypical Tommy Atkins and his supposed behaviour and view of combat also played a role. The Manchesters were aware of the Tommy Atkins image, with his dogged persistence, almost inhuman courage, and his disdain for unprofessional soldiers like the Boers. For instance, a war correspondent, describing the advance of the Manchesters at the Battle of Elandsplaagte, evoked this image of Tommy Atkins who under heavy fire marched in orderly fashion, eschewing cover. He placed the following words into their mouths: "What!? Hide from yokels! Let them shoot!"⁹ This was of course a fanciful account. As will be discussed later, the Manchesters, in their own words and records, clearly stated that they sought cover while under fire at Elandsplaagte, and advanced in short rushes under the covering fire of comrades. However, the Manchesters received newspapers from home, and certainly read accounts such as the above. Consequently, some adopted this Tommy Atkins stereotype when writing about their own experiences and perceptions of combat.

⁷ Some brief context is useful here. As the firepower of the individual soldier increased by leaps and bounds during the nineteenth century, military theorists were becoming increasingly concerned about how to conquer an enemy position covered by a killing zone swept by rapid-firing magazine rifles and machine guns. This was a problem debated in all major European armies. Although Spencer Jones did not discuss in detail the British army's opinion prior to the South African War, it is clear from Spiers' research that the British were influenced by ideas from the continent that the solution was a vigorous and bold attack, even though casualties would be high. This thinking, even though experiences during the South African War briefly dispelled it, returned in force on the eve of the First World War. See Jones, 'The Influence of the Boer War on the Tactical Development of the British Army', 48–56.

⁸ Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, 238–52, 265; Winter, *Death's Men*, 39–40.

⁹ 'The Fighting at Elandsplaagte', 6.

Men with no combat experience typically exhibited eagerness at getting to grips with the enemy, especially the Volunteers. This was likely a combination of bravado and genuine curiosity about what combat was like. Despite all the pre-war influences from various media, old war stories by family members, and other influences as soldiers across the ages were exposed to, Richard Holmes made a powerful argument that ultimately, “most soldiers set off on the road to battle conscious of the fact that they are about to embark upon an experience which, for good or ill, is unique”.¹⁰ This was no different for the Manchesters. Volunteer Sergeant Hobson wrote on 21 April 1901, on his way to join the 1st Manchesters at Lydenburg, that “I suppose we shall get right in the thick of the Boers as we hear there are plenty about ... if we are lucky enough to get there in time we shall join one of them so may see a scrap after all”.¹¹ His desire was frustrated, however, and he wrote on 23 June 1901 from Lydenburg that “it does not look like we shall get much fighting as we are stuck in the town doing guards [sic] etc”.¹² Nearly a month later he still had not seen combat and was still in Lydenburg, writing on 19 July 1901 with some annoyance that “things are very quiet round here they would have as much war as we are getting on Salsbury [sic] Plain”.¹³ Volunteer Private Martin, with the 2nd Manchesters, wrote on 23 May 1901 from Van Reenen’s Pass to his old workmates at the National Gas Engine Company, after a false alarm, that “we have not fired a shot yet, but last night I thought we were going to have some fun ... I wish they would come out here, as we are all dying for a fight”.¹⁴

Some men tried to convey an attitude of bravado after they had experienced combat. Captain Paton was wounded in the leg just as the final charge at Elandslaagte was launched, and he wrote that “I got knocked over just as the charge was starting, and I can tell you I felt right down mad with rage to see them all sweep past me as I sat on the ground unable to do anything but shout”.¹⁵ He used various other bold words describing the action, such as “a real good fight” and a “real cheery fight”. It should be noted that he was writing to a fellow officer in Manchester, so he might have been trying to impress his colleague. Private Evans, writing from hospital after taking a wound through the neck at Elandslaagte, wrote that “I daresay I will be able to knock about in another month or so to have another rub at the Boers, as I

¹⁰ Holmes, *Firing Line*. 73.

¹¹ Williams Hobson. ‘Personal Papers, 7113 Sergeant William Hobson, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters [to His Brother] about the Boer War (with Transcripts), Service Programs, 1901-1988’, MR 3/17/104. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

¹² Hobson, ‘Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother’.

¹³ Hobson, ‘Personal Papers, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters to His Brother’.

¹⁴ R. Martin. ‘Letter from the Front’. *The Gorton Reporter*, 29 June 1901, 6.

¹⁵ Donald Paton. ‘Letter, From Captain Donald Paton, Officer’s Hospital, Wynberg, Concerning Officer Casualties; Major Melville’s Return to England; the Aftermath of the Battle at Elandslaagte. 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, 14-29 November 1899’, MR 1/16/5/3. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre, 5.

believe I bear a charmed life”.¹⁶ Volunteer Captain Heywood wrote on 2 August 1900 from Sandspruit, almost gleefully in tone, how “we waited a long time before any fighting fell to our lot [the Volunteers], but on July 22nd ... we had our first experience of coming under fire”.¹⁷ Heywood stated that when he visited the two wounded men in hospital, they were in good spirits and “proud of being the first Volunteers from Manchester to be hit”.¹⁸

Some of the Volunteer Privates had a similar attitude to Heywood. Volunteer Private Hawkins, referring to the same events as above, wrote to a friend that “I am pleased to inform you that since I last wrote we have been in two engagements with the enemy near here”.¹⁹ It should be noted, though, that Heywood contradicted this sense of bravado several times in his letter. Despite him claiming to look forward to his first fight, and describing another engagement as their “next show”, he stated shortly after that enemy shelling was disconcerting, and that withdrawing from the field while the enemy was shooting at them was unpleasant. Moreover, Heywood wrote a few paragraphs later how he wanted the war to end so he could go home. These contradictions give the impression that this sense of bravado was for the audience’s sake.

Others expressed an eager anticipation for their next combat encounter, which may have been a continuation of bravado or peer pressure. However, this chapter will touch later on the strong possibility that some men did enjoy combat, so this excited anticipation may have been true for some. Private Fisher, even after the vivid and emotional descriptions he provided about the horrors he witnessed on the battlefield, eagerly speculated on 16 March 1900 that the “next battle will be Biggersburg, near Dundee. I shall be in it again, I hope”.²⁰ Captain Trueman initially found the notion of combat disconcerting. His first taste of combat involved coming under shell fire at the farm of Wakkerstroom, just three miles (4.8 km) from Dewetsdorp on 21 April 1900, which he found extremely stressful. So much so that he expressed relief when a frontal assault against the Boers was cancelled, as will be discussed later. However, it seemed that a form of peer pressure later changed his attitude, or he felt ‘left out’.

Writing on 28 July 1900, Trueman expressed the hope that he would meet the enemy when he and his men were ordered to help catch some Free State burgers near Fouriesburg. He then added that “we ought to at last have a regular set to; so far I haven’t been under rifle fire,

¹⁶ J.W. Evans. ‘Letter from a Wounded Manchester Soldier’. *The Manchester Evening News*, 21 November 1899, 4.

¹⁷ B.C.P. Heywood. ‘Letters from the Front: Manchester Volunteers in Battle’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 15 September 1900, 5.

¹⁸ Heywood, ‘Letters from the Front: Manchester Volunteers in Battle’, 5.

¹⁹ Walter Hawkins. ‘Letter from Private W. Hawkins’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 1 September 1900, 6.

²⁰ Jack Fisher. ‘With the Ladysmith Relief Column’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 21 April 1900, 6.

though everyone else has in the [battalion] I should think”.²¹ It is notable that he categorised coming under shell fire and rifle fire as two completely different experiences, although one can only speculate as to why. It is possible that shell fire was perceived as impersonal and mechanistic. It was not that the gunners were deliberately taking aim at a particular soldier, or so the Manchesters might have thought. Coming under rifle fire, though, might have felt more personal given that another person was deliberately aiming at another with the intent to do serious harm. This was hinted by Pretorius as a possible explanation, since he observed that the Boers, much like the Manchesters, seemed to distinguish between artillery fire and rifle fire as different types of combat experiences.²² Holmes provided a compelling explanation, best illustrated by quoting one of the soldier’s Holmes interviewed about the subject of whether soldiers feared rifle fire or enemy artillery more: “a sniper’s just another man, and your training tells you what to do. But what do you do about some f---- four miles away?”²³ A soldier’s ability to react to a weapon system made a strong difference to how they perceived it.

Tales of courage and self-sacrifice during combat were another possible influence on a man’s perception and subsequent behaviour during combat. Captain Trueman explained the strength of these ideas when he described his own dilemma during a skirmish with the Boers on 7 November 1900. As he and others of the Mounted Infantry were fleeing enemy fire, one of his men was thrown from his horse just behind him. Trueman had a decision to make then, writing that “visions of stories one hears floated before me, V.C’s [Victorian Crosses], carrying men out of action, etc., and I wondered what I ought to do”.²⁴ The Boers were trying to cut him off, so he had to decide quickly. In the end, he escorted the dismounted man to safety instead of just leaving him behind. It should be added that the dismounted soldier did not make this easy for Trueman, as he first refused to go, and then refused to mount up with Trueman. Despite these complications, they reached safety.

In contrast, some men described combat as an unpleasant experience. Private Sim, writing about events during the Battle of Platkop on 6 January 1900, wasted no words, stating how “I had my two chums shot dead, one at each side of me. The colonel was wounded about five yards away, and to make it worse, we hadn’t a drink of water or anything else, and we were

²¹ Charles Hamilton Trueman. ‘Correspondence, Bound Volume of Transcripts of Letters and Diary Entries from Captain Charles Hamilton Trueman, 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, Describing His Time and Service in South Africa during the South African (Boer) War. The Volume Also Contains Photocopied Newscuttings Relating to John Francis William Fitzgerald to Whom the Volume Belonged and Who Later Willed It to the Depositor. A Newscutting Relating to the Death of a Pte Lionel Parminter Is Pasted onto the End Papers, 1900-1901’, MR 4/16/75. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre, 45.

²² Pretorius, *Kommandolewe Tydens Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, 153–154.

²³ Holmes, *Firing Line*, 211.

²⁴ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 87.

fighting for 17 hours so we had a hard time of it”.²⁵ Sergeant Hall thought Platrand was even worse than Elandslaagte, and the letter he wrote to his wife on 3 March 1900 is exceptionally emotive, starting with a rhetorical question that she had probably seen the details of the battle in the papers, but then continued with his own perceptions, stating that:

...it was an awful time ... poor Sergeant Johnson, Sergeant Wood, and Connor, and the Drum Major were killed, and about 30 men, and 30 wounded ... I never in all my life want to be in such a fight again ... it will be a sad job for poor Mrs. Johnson, with six little children to look after, as none of them will be able to work for some time yet.²⁶

Private Fisher, temporarily attached as a stretcher bearer to the Ladysmith relief column, wrote that “I thought the other three battles I was in were demons but this was nothing else only complete slaughter. All round it was awful. The Boers must have lost terribly and the smell of them would have knocked you down”.²⁷ He was probably referring to Buller’s decisive outflanking manoeuvre against the right edge of the Colenso defences, which began on 14 February 1900 at Hussar Hill.

More rarely, some men contradicted themselves, expressing both the desire for combat in one line, only to admit relief at not being present during combat in another line. On 27 October 1899, Private Bumby participated in an operation around Ladysmith, led by Major-General French to engage Boer forces, but he stated, in a frustrated tone, that the Boers avoided them. Other troops were then sent out, but this time the Boers fought, and Bumby sarcastically remarked that “they [the other British units] had a very good day, and were lucky in not having more men killed. I, too, was perhaps lucky I was not there”.²⁸ He seemed to be referring to the Battle of Modderspruit and Nicholzen’s Nek, on 30 October 1899, where half of the Manchesters were present and suffered one man killed and five wounded. Nevertheless, what makes Bumby’s statement noteworthy is the contradictory nature of it. On the one hand, he seemed irritated about not having a fight, but in the very next line he expressed relief that he was not involved in the next operation, especially given the ignominious result. This contradiction again reinforces the suspicion that some men tried to convey an air of bravado to their audience.

Other men were less ambiguous about their desire to avoid combat. Private Barron, a 1st Manchester reservist who was attached to Buller’s relief force in Natal, wrote on 7 February 1900 that “I am still in the land of the living, and like to remain so, as we can’t get a chance of

²⁵ R. Sim. ‘Letter from a Dukinfield Man at the Front’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 5 May 1900, 6.

²⁶ Tom Hall. ‘Letters from Ladysmith’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 7 April 1900, 6.

²⁷ Fisher, ‘With the Ladysmith Relief Column’, 6.

²⁸ George Bumby. ‘An Ashtonian at the Front: Not Satisfied with the Food’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 2 December 1899, 6.

getting any nearer to the front”.²⁹ Barron was part of a force stationed at Estcourt to protect Buller’s line of communication. It appears that once he witnessed the state of the wounded men coming down from the front lines, he was not keen to go there himself. Captain Trueman, having experienced his baptism of fire on 21 April 1900, was still shaken afterwards. He was thus dismayed when he wrote that “the next day we were formed up and told we were to attack the Boer position, I wasn’t at all comfortable especially as the [Regiment] was to lead the attack, and I to be in the firing line. However, we did not eventually”.³⁰ His relief was evident.

6.2 THE EXPERIENCE OF COMBAT

The men, even junior officers, were often told very little about their movement, and were thus often surprised to learn they were heading into combat. This was the case for the men heading into the Battle of Elandsplaagte on 21 October 1899. In the early hours of the morning, 341 Manchesters boarded a train at Ladysmith on the line to Dundee.³¹ There were four companies heading out – C, D, F, and G, which was roughly half the battalion’s strength. They were led by Lt Col Curran, with Major Watson, Captains Melville, Marden, Paton, Adjutant Newbigging, Lieutenants Danks, Hardcastle, Deakin, Fisher, and Hunt-Grubbe. Private Stokes wrote that they received no information.³² Corporal Kelly reported the same.³³ Another soldier wrote how “we were dished out with a bit of bread each, and bundled into iron trains. None of us knew where we were going”.³⁴ This lack of information must have caused some of them a measure of anxiety, although they did not mention it in their letters. The 2nd Manchesters also sometimes had little forewarning that they were heading into combat. Captain Trueman wrote on 3 May 1900 from Thaba ‘Nchu that “we were ordered out the other day suddenly, we did not know what for, and it was not till we spread out to attack that we knew we were in for a fight”.³⁵

A disconcerting feature of the new smokeless rapid-fire rifles was how it made it difficult, if not impossible, to spot the enemy. The Gordons and Devons at Elandsplaagte, as related by Spiers, found it frustrating to be fired at, but not able to return fire, because the Boers were so well hidden. Moreover, they questioned the practicality of volley-fire when there was no

²⁹ William Barron. ‘Letter from a Dukinfield Soldier in Natal: Still Living and like to Remain So’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 10 March 1900, 6.

³⁰ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 12.

³¹ Wylly, *History of the Manchester Regiment*, 6.

³² Stokes, ‘Thurmiston Man Describes the Battle of Elandsplaagte’, *The Leicester Chronicle*, 25 November 1899, 7.

³³ W. Kelly. ‘Sidelights on the War: From the Soldier’s Point of View’. *The Manchester Weekly Times*, 24 November 1899.

³⁴ *Reading Mercury, Oxford Gazette, Newbury Herald, and Berks County Paper*. ‘A Soldier’s Tale of the Battle of Elandsplaagte’. 30 December 1899, 9.

³⁵ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 10.

obvious target to concentrate on.³⁶ The Manchesters were equally disconcerted by the impact of modern weapons. Referring to Elandsplaagte on 21 October 1899, Captain Melville explained to a journalist that he and his men were unable to see a single Boer, even when they advanced to within a quarter of a mile (402 m) while under heavy rifle fire.³⁷ Private Nelson, a Manchester reservist temporarily attached to Buller's army in Natal, either participated in or witnessed the Battle of Colenso on 15 December 1899. He stated that "they [the Boers] held a position as strongly fortified as Gibraltar. They don't come out and fight, but are hidden from us in the rocks".³⁸ Private Fisher, another Manchester reservist attached to Buller's force, reported that "our men cannot see any Boers at all when they are firing—they are so cunning ... sometimes our men are firing all day and do not see a Boer to fire at".³⁹ This disconcerting experience of unseen enemies did not change as the war progressed.

Trying to engage a well-hidden enemy persisted into the rest of the war as it changed into its final guerrilla war phase. Some men expressed irritation at being shot at, but being unable to return fire. Lance-Corporal Hodgkinson, with the newly arrived 2nd Manchesters, expressed frustration at the end of his letter, stating that "we have been under fire four or five days, but have not fired a shot ourselves yet".⁴⁰ On 22 July 1900, the Volunteers with the 1st Manchesters engaged a small party of Boers, and Captain Heywood wrote that "I think 300 yards [274 m] was about the range they opened fire on us from small rifle-pits, where they were quite invisible".⁴¹ In January 1901, Captain Trueman spotted four Boers in the distance before they disappeared suddenly. He led a small party in pursuit, but then came under fire, and wrote that "I couldn't see them, and was kneeling with my field glasses when a bullet pitched quite close ... I told the men to fire at the sky line at 2 000 x,⁴² this must have been near them as they went away".⁴³ Trueman reported that on 3 February 1901, on their way to Ficksburg, the column was ambushed. However, he "only fired a few shots at the Bogers [sic] as I hadn't the faintest idea where they were".⁴⁴ Trueman was involved in a difficult encounter on 18 February 1901, about two miles from Fouriesburg, where a Boer force chose an excellent position by a drift, which held up the column almost the entire day. The enemy

³⁶ Spiers, *The Victorian Soldier in Africa*, 161.

³⁷ 'The Transvaal War: Arrival of Wounded at Southampton', *The Hampshire Advertiser County Newspaper*, 27 December 1899, 3.

³⁸ Nelson, 'To the Editor of the Reporter', *The Ashton Reporter*, 27 January 1900, 6.

³⁹ Fisher, 'Letters from the Front', 6.

⁴⁰ A. Hodgkinson. 'Interesting Letter from the Seat of War'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 2 June 1900, 6.

⁴¹ Heywood, 'Letters from the Front: Manchester Volunteers in Battle', 5.

⁴² I am not exactly sure what Trueman meant by this, and I could not find a source to explain this. However, I believe Trueman had instructed his men to adjust the back sight of the Lee-Enfield rifle for 2 000 yards (1828.8 m) distance firing.

⁴³ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 102.

⁴⁴ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 106.

eventually abandoned the position before they were outflanked, and to Trueman's disgust he found out afterwards that he and his men had been firing at the wrong part of the hill.⁴⁵

The near invisibility of the enemy was also recorded several times in the 1st Battalion's Records of Service, expressing a combination of admiration and frustration. During their first battle in 20 years at Elandsplaagte on 21 October 1899, it described how "fire was returned by 'D' and 'G' Companies at 1 700 yards [1 554 m], but the Boers were admirably concealed, and afforded a very poor target".⁴⁶ Referring to the Battle of Modderspruit and Nicholson's Nek on 30 October 1899, it commented on how "the enemy offered no target, and it was impossible to distinguish them (when seen) from our own men".⁴⁷ The other Records of Service (there are two) betrayed some frustration regarding the 30th, recording that the "enemy as usual invisible except at extreme ranges".⁴⁸ Nearly a year later it described an engagement near Van Wyks Vlei on 22 August 1900, stating that "we hardly ever saw a Boer, but their fire was heavy and accurate while we were on the ridge".⁴⁹ Again it is clear that in a sense the Manchesters were not only at war with the Boers, but also the environment, which made it easy for the Boers to conceal themselves.

The 1st Manchesters experienced their "baptism of fire" at the Battle of Elandsplaagte, which was a sizable and notable engagement. As mentioned in the beginning of this thesis, the Manchester Regiment was inexperienced due to almost two decades of peaceful postings. As a result, the South African War was the first time that most of them experienced combat, and many chose to write about it. Before looking at their "baptism", a brief overview of the significance of the battle needs to be provided, although it is not the intent to discuss the reasons for or the battle itself in great detail, since there are numerous secondary sources which discuss these aspects.⁵⁰

The Battle of Elandsplaagte was significant in several ways, for both the British Army in South Africa, and the 1st Manchesters in particular. This was one of the few battles in the war where the British doctrine of the three-phase set-piece battle played out almost flawlessly, at least from the high vantage of the commanders and historians. The battle began with the first phase, an artillery bombardment to 'soften up' the enemy and silence its artillery, which laid the foundation for the second phase, the infantry assault. Once the Boers were driven from their

⁴⁵ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 118.

⁴⁶ 'Records of Service, 63rd and 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, 1758-1910', MR 1/1/2/3. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

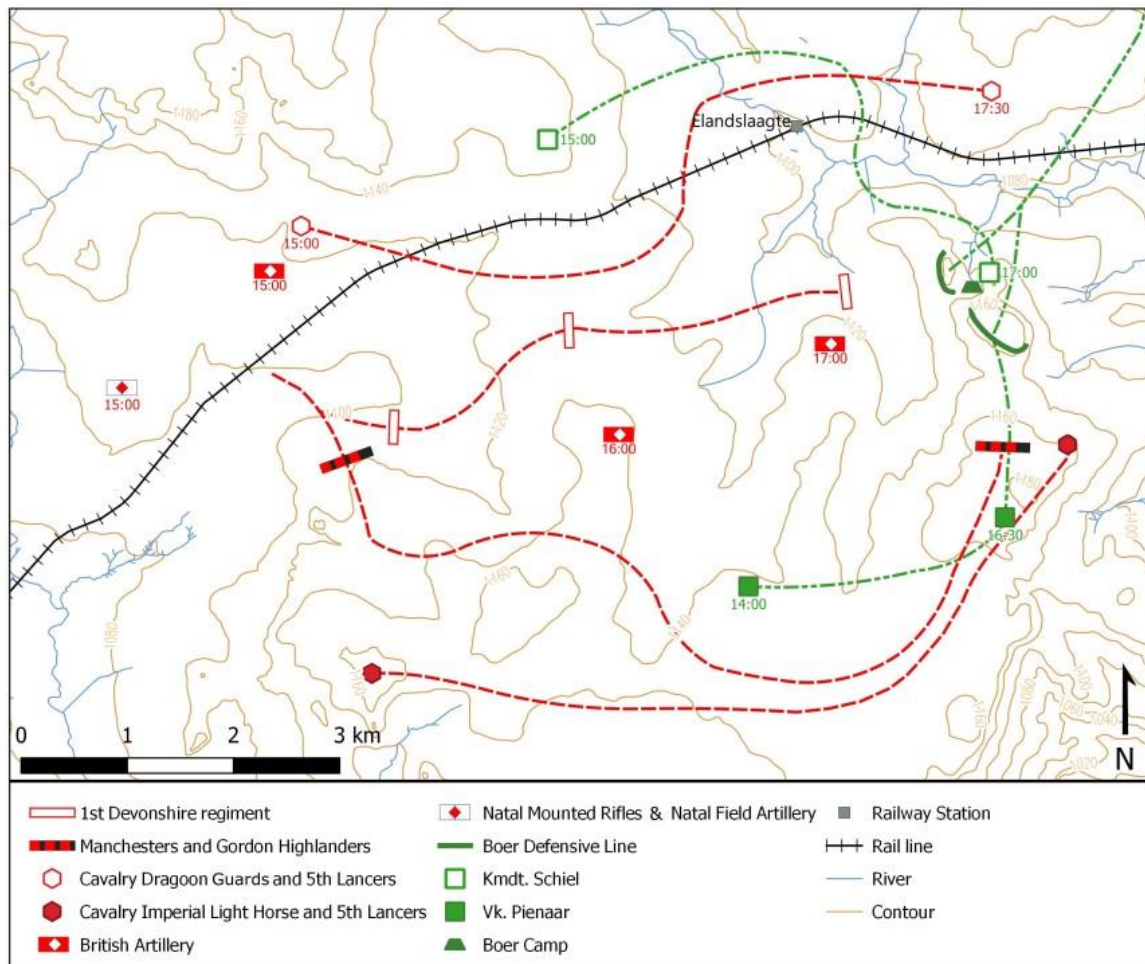
⁴⁷ 'Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3'.

⁴⁸ 'Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/1', 167.

⁴⁹ 'Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3'.

⁵⁰ Breytenbach, *Geskiedenis van Die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog 1899-1902: I Die Boere-Offensief*, 237–263; Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 133–141.

position by the infantry, the cavalry was unleashed as part of the third and final phase. They were positioned on the flanks to cut off the enemy's retreat, which turned the Boer withdrawal into a rout, although darkness prevented the cavalry from causing more damage. It was one of the few British victories during the pitched-battle phase of the war, which would soon be followed by several British defeats, particularly the battles of Stormberg, Magersfontein, and Colenso on 10, 11, and 15 December 1899.



Map 6: The Battle of Elandslaagte, with the most recent cartographic data.

Source: Mr A.C. Greyling, Lecturer, Department of Geography, UNISA. Based on information from Breytenbach, J.H. *Geskiedenis van Die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog 1899-1902: I Die Boere-Offensief*. Vol. 1. Pretoria: Die Staatsdrukker, 1969, 256.

The Manchesters were part of the infantry assault, and this was the moment where their reputation was born. At Elandslaagte they were an inexperienced unit, but their solid performance and courage while under fire drew attention. Elandslaagte would consequently form the foundation of the 1st Manchesters' reputation and self-identity, ultimately contributing to their nickname as the 'Fighting First'. Captain Paton believed that

...I don't fancy we shall have a finer fight all through the campaign than Elandslaagte, for it was a splendid bit of manoeuvring and most gallantly carried out by the men. They behaved magnificently, and the staff are full of the very highest praises of our regiment.⁵¹

This battle, despite being a victory, was attained with some loss, though. The number of British casualties was 50 killed and 213 wounded, which was roughly seven percent of the British force. This result hinted that the war would not be as quick and easy as the public, soldiers, and politicians had imagined. Writing to his mother on 12 August 1899, Private Mayer predicted that the war would be "a soft affair, and we shall get a medal for almost nothing, as the infantry will not be very likely be required to fight".⁵² Mayer severely underestimated the Boers, or maybe he wanted to reassure his mother. It was, however, a cruel irony since he was killed during the Manchesters' assault at Elandslaagte. The Manchesters lost, according to official estimates, 14 men killed and 29 wounded.⁵³ Moreover, the victory at Elandslaagte did not prevent the Boer encirclement of Ladysmith on 2 November 1899, trapping the 1st Manchesters in a protracted siege until 28 February 1900.

As the Manchesters at Elandslaagte crossed the ridge facing the main Boer position at Elandslaagte at approximately 16:30,⁵⁴ they came under long-range fire from concealed riflemen, which was their "baptism of fire". The enemy started firing from approximately 1 000 to 1 500 metres away. The Manchesters dove down to the ground, seeking whatever cover they could find the exposed slope of a grassy hillside. They remained like this, pinned down, for almost seventeen minutes, and four men were hit.⁵⁵ Their casualties at this point would have been much heavier if the Boers had waited for them to advance before opening fire. Private Wall wrote to his friend in Gorton that "we got the order to drop on the field, and then came the funniest sensation I ever had in my life, when I could see the bullets dropping round my head. We lay like that for 17 minutes, and dared not stir".⁵⁶ For Private Little, it was much

⁵¹ *The Manchester Guardian*. 'Letter from an Officer of the First Manchester'. 14 December 1899, 3. His family did not disclose his identity in the letter to the newspaper, but the Manchester Regimental Archives has a copy of a letter he wrote to a fellow officer still in Manchester, where he recounts the same events, and thus allowing him to be identified as the author of the letter in the newspaper (Paton, 'Letter from Officer's Hospital').

⁵² Ben Mayer. 'A Gorton Soldier Killed by the Boers'. *The Ashton Herald*, 28 October 1899, 7.

⁵³ Wylly, *History of the Manchester Regiment*, 8. It is worth noting that Wylly contains some spelling errors of the casualties' surnames. It should be Melville, instead of Melvill, and it is Mayer, instead of Major.

⁵⁴ There is some discrepancy regarding the exact time. Breytenbach has it as 16:30, but the other sources, including the Records of Service, has it as 15:30. Breytenbach, however, is probably closer to the right time, since shortly after the attack was concluded, night fell. This means that the assault had to have been later, rather than earlier.

⁵⁵ J.H. Breytenbach. *Geskiedenis van Die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog 1899-1902: I Die Boere-Offensief*. Vol. 1. Pretoria: Die Staatsdrukker, 1969, 249; 'Records of Service, 63rd and 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, 1758-1910', MR 1/1/2/1. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre, 165; Marden and Newbigging, *Rough Diary of the Doings of the 1st Battn. Manchester Regt.*, 12-13; Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 137; Wylly, *History of the Manchester Regiment*, 7.

⁵⁶ Michael Wall. 'A Gorton Man at the Battle of Elandslaagte'. *The Ashton Herald*, 2 December 1899, 8.

the same, writing that “it makes a fellow feel funny when the bullets first start whistling round your head”.⁵⁷ It appears that for some soldiers, the experience of getting shot at for the first time was difficult to comprehend. This feeling is echoed in other modern conflicts, and as explained by Holmes, “for many soldiers their first experience of coming under fire is one of surprise and disbelief”.⁵⁸ Captain Paton chose to express his first time under fire as:

...an unpleasant quarter of an hour lying in the open with no cover at all, and the Boers using us as targets from about 2 000 yards [1 828 m] off. They made pretty fair practice, for though they only got two men in the front line the bullets were kicking up the dirt all around us. I got a bullet through my helmet, one of my Tommies had the heel of his boot shot off, and another got a shot through his water bottle.⁵⁹

For some, the experience was outright terrifying, and one man did not hesitate to say so. One of the officers admitted that

...the time I felt most inclined to run away was, oddly enough, when we were nearly a mile [1.6 km] from them and were firing long-range volleys at each other. I am sure they are trying to pick-off the officers, as while I was lying by myself in the open the bullets pattered all around me, but when I went up to speak to one of my n.c.o.'s [sic] there did not seem half as many.⁶⁰

One soldier, whose name was not revealed, but whose sister won a competition for sending in the best soldiers' letter, wrote an extraordinarily colourful and descriptive letter about his experience at Elandsplaagte. There are certainly some exaggerations, but it is an exceptional example. Of interest is his description of how he and Sergeant Lloyd tried their best to keep together during the assault on the Boers. When Lloyd was wounded, this unknown soldier took great lengths to secure his safety first. Moreover, he and Lloyd did not rush headlong into the enemy position, as some contemporary accounts about Tommy Atkins would have their audiences believe. One paper, for instance, stated that “in the Battle of Elandsplaagte the British soldiers absolutely refuse to take cover, flinging themselves against the enemy with desperate courage”.⁶¹ The following account proves the previous statement a journalistic fantasy:

The Boers were about a mile in front of us then, behind a large mountain and we were all spread out. One dare not look up, as shots were simply coming in torrents over the top of the hill. Sergeant Lloyd and I were lying behind a rock together. Then the General gave the order that the whole force was to charge ... we all went on our own then, though keeping together as much as possible. Lloyd and I never parted ... we were running and firing for the whole mile, dodging behind rocks as much as possible. Men were dropping all around us. Lloyd and I got within 300 yards [274 m] of them, when Lloyd dropped, shot through the arm and thigh, poor old chap. He begged me not to leave him. I took off my coat and tore it up for bandages. While I was bandaging his leg a shot passed through my helmet. Then another came and passed through the calf of poor Lloyd's other leg. Poor

⁵⁷ M. Little. 'An Ashtonian at Elands Laagte: Sad Death of Poor Old Ned Dewhurst'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 2 December 1899, 5.

⁵⁸ Holmes, *Firing Line*, 146.

⁵⁹ 'Letter from an Officer of the First Manchester', 3.

⁶⁰ *The Wrexham Advertiser*. 'The Fight at Elandsplaagte: An inside View'. 25 November 1899, 7.

⁶¹ 'War Notes', *The Yorkshire Evening Post*, 24 October 1899.

old chap, I could have cried for him. He stuck to it like a brick, and never murmured once. I got him on my back and carried him behind a large stone. Then I had to go and join my company, which by now had got to the top of the hill.⁶²

Some men claimed that they enjoyed combat. During the fighting at Elandslaagte, Private Evans wrote that “we kept advancing, laughing and joking and facing their heavy fire”.⁶³ Captain Paton asserted that “I enjoyed the battle tremendously from the start to the time I got knocked out; and I am sure my men were not a bit funky either, but treated the whole thing as a huge joke”.⁶⁴ His choice of phrasing, however, indicated that he assumed his men also enjoyed it, which is doubtful. Another officer declared that “on the whole I enjoyed it ... I had an excellent view of every thing [sic], as my company supplied half the firing line”.⁶⁵ Miller describes the same phenomenon.⁶⁶ These statements contain a hint of bravado, since few wrote about enjoying combat. However, treating battle, or expressing the experience of combat as enjoyable is mentioned in other studies of combatants in twentieth century wars. Winter, writing about the experiences of men during the First World War, speculated that men coped with the stress of battle in different ways. Some assumed a feeling of detachment from events around them, whilst others coped by ‘enjoying’ the battle, or at least thought they did, claiming that they advanced into battle “with jokes and fits of laughter”.⁶⁷ Some men might have truly enjoyed combat, as was the case for some of the twentieth century soldiers in Joanna Bourke’s *An Intimate History of Killing*.⁶⁸

Some of the reservists waiting to rejoin the 1st Manchesters first experienced combat while attached to other units. Private Fisher was one, as a 1st Battalion reservist attached to Buller’s forces as a stretcher bearer. His baptism of fire, he recalled, took place on 18 January 1900. The fighting on 18 January near Acton Homes was a skirmish, albeit certainly fierce, and was a British victory with only three or four casualties (not 160 casualties as Fisher mentioned). It is also possible that he might have been describing an event during the British attack on Thabanyama, which occurred on 20–23 January 1900.⁶⁹ Fisher wrote that he and his comrades were unarmed as they searched for the wounded in a ravine, but they were unaware of Boers on the nearby hills. They consequently came under sudden fire, and this was a harrowing experience. He stated that “it was the first time I had ever been under fire ... we had nothing to defend us at all ... I expected being hit every second, but we kept getting in the

⁶² ‘A Soldier’s Tale of the Battle of Elandslaagte’, 9.

⁶³ J.W. Evans. ‘A Manchester Private’s Description of Elands Laagte’. *The Manchester Evening News*, 27 November 1899, 4.

⁶⁴ ‘Letter from an Officer of the First Manchester’, 3.

⁶⁵ ‘The Fight at Elandslaagte: An inside View’, 7.

⁶⁶ Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 108.

⁶⁷ Winter, *Death’s Men*, 179–180.

⁶⁸ J. Bourke. *An Intimate History of Killing*. London: Granta, 2000, 13–43.

⁶⁹ Breytenbach, *Geskiedenis van Die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog 1899-1902: III Die Stryd in Natal*, 113–167.

long grass and crawling along the ground”.⁷⁰ He escaped unharmed, but his courage must have been sorely tested, especially being unarmed.

As the war progressed from its transitional phase into a guerrilla war, the baptism of fire was less dramatic as major battles became rarer, and the British had learned the dangers of reckless frontal attacks. Yet, the first time under fire remained memorable. The 2nd Manchesters’ first contact with the Boers was heralded by the sound of heavy guns about three miles (4.8 km) from Dewetsdorp, at Wakkerstroom farm, on 20 April 1900. Private Hardman recounted that “to our surprise three loud reports sounded, and three shells from the Boer guns came screeching over our heads and exploded within 30 yards [27 m] of us. You may guess that it made us all feel rather shaky being taken by surprise ... we sought the refuge of a hill”.⁷¹ An artillery duel then developed between the two sides, with the 2nd Manchesters entrenched on their hill, subjected to almost 36 hours of shelling and long-range rifle fire, according to Hardman. Wyllly and the Records of Service stated it was closer to 50 hours.⁷²

Captain Trueman, initially at the rear with the baggage, went through his “baptism” at Wakkerstroom the next day and found it just as disconcerting. He wrote that “I was sitting quietly with the waggons, when ‘bang’, ‘pop’, a shell landed just clear of them. Just imagine my feelings! and [sic] then Boers popped shells into the laager at odd intervals during the day. It isn’t a game I like at all. I was in an awful funk”.⁷³ In a letter addressed to another friend, written on 24 April 1900, Trueman added more details about his baptism of fire, writing how “I have been under fire, but it makes your knees knock under you when you hear ‘bang’, ‘whew’, ‘pop’ and a shell comes singing through the air. You can hear it coming but can’t get out of the way and don’t know where it will pitch”.⁷⁴

Private Mills, though, expressed his baptism of fire in a matter of fact, almost unperturbed tone. Almost like the quintessential ‘Tommy Atkins’, he wrote to his mother on the day of the fighting at Wakkerstroom, and related how “the Boer shells are coming pretty warm again now they have had time to get their breakfast while we had ours ... a shell has just dropped among eight men and never hurt one of them. We are getting fresh meat for dinner”.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Jack Fisher. ‘Letters from the Front’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 24 March 1900, 6.

⁷¹ Jack Hardman. ‘With the 2nd Manchesters at the Battle of Dewetsdorp’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 9 June 1900, 6.

⁷² Wyllly, *History of the Manchester Regiment*, 45; ‘Records of Service: 96th Regt and 2nd Bttn Manchester Regiment, 1824-1914’, MR 1/1/2/6. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre, 84.

⁷³ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 9.

⁷⁴ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 11–12.

⁷⁵ A. Mills. ‘Letter from A. Mills’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 26 May 1900, 6.

The 2nd Manchesters were maybe fortunate, despite the duration of the encounter. There was a clear shift in British tactics by April 1900, where costly frontal attacks were less common. In fact, Lord Roberts had by this point in the war issued a proclamation to all commanders to avoid such attacks.⁷⁶ As a result, the 2nd Manchesters had a much less dramatic and ‘heroic’ baptism of fire, but by not participating in a large-scale attack against prepared enemy defenders in a strong position, they avoided the heavy casualties the 1st Manchesters had suffered. In fact, they suffered no casualties from their ‘baptism of fire’, although their nerves were certainly tested.

The 1st Manchester Volunteers had a more ‘exciting’ baptism of fire than the 2nd Manchesters did. Volunteer Captain Heywood, writing about the first firefight they experienced near Sandspruit on 22 July 1900, described how the Boers subjected them to heavy fire as they approached two hills, and in a proud, almost playful tone he explained how “there were some wonderfully close shaves. Campbell had his helmet shot through, and Stirke’s backsight [of his rifle] was knocked awry ... my fellows were cool and steady, asking for the range and taking careful aim when they saw something to fire at”.⁷⁷ Despite this seemingly daring assault, they did not suffer casualties, although it must be said there were only about 20 Boers shooting at them. However, the Volunteers, regardless of regiment, often felt they had to prove themselves equal to the regulars,⁷⁸ so Heywood may have exaggerated their level of composure. In addition, as seen in the account of Captain Paton previously, some officers tended to view or express the experience of combat differently from the rank-and-file.

Coming under artillery fire was a generally uncomfortable, if not a terrifying experience, regardless of how many times an individual encountered it. At the Battle of Elandsplaagte, the 1st Manchesters came under shell fire while waiting at the train station the morning before the battle commenced in earnest that afternoon, and the Boer fire was remarkably accurate. However, it had little physical effect, and Marden and Newbigging speculated that the shell fuses were probably defective, as most did not burst when striking the surface.⁷⁹ Even so, the shelling discomfited the officers and men, and forced them to withdraw to a safe distance. A letter by Private Evans observed that “the shells [were] getting a little too warm for us, we had to retire a little down the line [railway] ... and take up a position behind boulders to await an attack”.⁸⁰ One soldier reported that “after two hours’ riding [on the train] shells began flying over our heads. One dropped only twenty yards [18.2 m] from me, but luckily it did not burst.

⁷⁶ Wylly, *History of the Manchester Regiment*, 45.

⁷⁷ Heywood, ‘Letters from the Front: Manchester Volunteers in Battle’, 5.

⁷⁸ Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld*, 107.

⁷⁹ Marden and Newbigging, *Rough Diary of the Doings of the 1st Battn. Manchester Regt.*, 10–11.

⁸⁰ Evans, ‘A Manchester Private’s Description of Elands Laagte’, 4.

Off we had to go behind hills for cover”.⁸¹ It is notable that the 1st Manchesters did not regard this brief spell of Boer shelling as their baptism of fire. Instead, they perceived their baptism to have occurred when they came under Boer rifle fire, as related earlier.

Whether the Manchesters regarded coming under artillery fire as a baptism of fire or not, it was clearly a nerve-wracking experience. Private Barratt, wounded in the foot by shrapnel at Ladysmith when he fought in the Battle of Platrand on 6 January 1900, gave a description of how he experienced shellfire, writing that “I was struck early in the afternoon, the shot and shell flying round where I lay like hailstones. I could not move from the place I was struck as the firing was one mass of flames, so I had to be there amongst the dead and wounded expecting every minute would be my last.”⁸² On 30 July 1900 the Volunteer Company under Captain Heywood, with the 1st Manchesters, was held in reserve in the rear, out of sight of Boer riflemen during a reconnaissance mission near Sandspruit. However, the Boer artillery had a rough idea of their whereabouts, and Heywood wrote that “it was trying, as more than 30 shrapnel [shells] burst over or near us”.⁸³ Only one man was lightly wounded from all this. According to Heywood, even the Gordon Highlanders found the enemy shelling disconcerting. The Gordons were behind a ridge, but one section came over to the Volunteers’ position, but quickly retired back behind their ridge when a shell burst close to them. One cannot help but detect a note of derision for the Gordons, even though the Manchester Volunteers were equally reluctant to advance forward. Private Scott, writing to his father on 23 November 1900, recalled a fight near Badfontein where “we had to get cover as well as we could but the Boers kept up a very good fire with their guns and wounded a lot of our men and killed a lot of horses ... we had to remain in the position till darkness relieved us of our sufferings”.⁸⁴ Captain Trueman, despite his first encounter with Boer shelling at Wakkerstroom, continued to feel discomfort when artillery shells flew over his head. In September 1900, close to Bethlehem, he and his Mounted Infantry were involved in a large skirmish by a farm cemetery. He wrote:

...we were firing away at them when ‘bang’ ‘whif’ came a shell and just skimmed over us and our horses ... we thought they were firing at us ... so good a shot the first time, that the next must hit us ... I certainly thought few would leave that place alive. To our great relief it flew high over us.⁸⁵ [The Boer gunners were targeting the British artillery to the rear]

⁸¹ ‘A Soldier’s Tale of the Battle of Elandsplaagte’, 9.

⁸² Sam Barratt. ‘Interesting Letter from a Chapel Soldier at Ladysmith: Wounded in the Legs’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 14 April 1900, 6.

⁸³ Heywood, ‘Letters from the Front: Manchester Volunteers in Battle’, 5.

⁸⁴ W. Scott. ‘Letters from the Front’. *The Gorton Reporter*, 19 January 1901, 3.

⁸⁵ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 63.

In contrast, some men were unimpressed by the Boer artillery, pretended indifference, or showed professional curiosity devoid of obvious feelings of discomfort. Lieutenant Colonel Reay had an almost detached, academic interest in the effectiveness of artillery. Alternatively, Reay may have just assumed the role of the brave, professional, and nonchalant senior officer since he was writing to a colleague. On 16 September 1900 Reay described to Colonel Gethin that “they shelled us. We replied with our own gun which fired lyddite. It was most interesting, and not dangerous judging by results, though the Boer shooting was excellent”.⁸⁶ Some men tried to make light of the enemy artillery, although their accounts still betray some apprehension, since the men sought better cover or improved their defences shortly after. Captain Tilland wrote on 20 January 1901 from Badfontein that “one of the local Long Toms came and called on us on the 8th. They fired 25 rounds of shrapnel ... the bag was nil [no casualties suffered], though I expect they thought that they had butchered the whole garrison. So after that we dug a good deal”.⁸⁷ In spite of the relatively low casualties inflicted by artillery during the war, it impacted the men’s nerves, and this was the case for numerous other engagements on both the British and Boer sides.⁸⁸ It is important to mention, though, that the amount of artillery used in most engagements during the South African War paled in comparison to the battlefields of the First World War, where massed artillery wreaked havoc.

While the 1st Manchesters were in the siege of Ladysmith they came under regular artillery fire, particularly from the ‘Long Tom’, a 155 mm calibre Creusot siege gun. Yet, the men’s letters did not dwell on this aspect. For most, it was the hunger and squalor that stood out, as discussed in previous chapters. It is only the Records of Service which noted the effect of the Boer artillery fire during the siege. From other accounts of this siege, it is certain that the irregular Boer bombardment did affect the men’s nerves, and it is impossible to imagine the Manchesters were immune. The Boer artillery ensured that the British garrison was unable to pursue its duties and recreations normally. Reducing morale through the simple act of playing a game of football or cricket was simply too dangerous.⁸⁹

The first shelling close to the Manchesters occurred on 2 November 1899, with no physical effect while the men were still busy constructing defences such as sangars. On the 6th there was more shelling, but again no casualties. At this point, the Manchesters were in the camp

⁸⁶ Charles Reay. ‘Letter, Lieutenant Colonel Reay, Senekal and Bethlehem, to Colonel Gethin Concerning Officer Casualties; Recent Fighting; a Draft of Officers to the Battalion; the Capture of 26 Guns from the Boers on the 17 September. 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment’, 22 September 1900. MR 1/16/5/17. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

⁸⁷ Tilland. ‘Letter, Captain Tilland, Badfontein, to Colonel Hardcastle, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Describing Recent Fighting; Boer Peace Delegate’s Visit; Conditions in Camp’, 20 January 1901. MR1/16/7. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre, 1.

⁸⁸ Pretorius, *Kommandolewe Tydens Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, 310, 315.

⁸⁹ Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 267.

and defensive positions, most notably Caesar's Camp, which they would hold for the rest of the siege. More severe shelling occurred on the 7th, but the defensive structures were almost finished, and the Manchesters were in good cover. However, the bombardment coincided with a Boer attack, and the Manchesters suffered three killed and 18 wounded. It is unclear whether the Boer shelling or their riflemen was responsible for the bulk of the casualties. On the 10th there was some shelling at a sangar, but no casualties. On the 11th a shell landed right on top of the Manchester camp, but no one was hurt. One can continue in this vein up to 31 January 1900, after which the Boer guns focused on the British artillery instead of the Manchesters. The casualties caused by enemy shelling was minimal. According to the Manchesters, the reason for this was due to the nature of their defensive works. Owing to the rocky soil, they constructed rifle pits and sangars instead of trenches. Each provided head cover for the occupants, and were difficult to spot among the grass and bushes. As a result, the Boer gunners usually aimed at more obvious targets, such as stronger, enclosed defensive structures placed further to the rear, which had stone-faced walls up to 16 feet thick (4.8 m). None were breached by enemy fire. Writing on 1 March 1900, the author explained that "it is due to this system that the battalion lost so very slightly from the severe and continuous shelling".⁹⁰ What the men thought of the continuous bombardment, though, remained unstated.

The Boers' famous 'Long Tom' had a reputation which commanded respect and dread, even among those who did not feel its effects first hand. Captain Trueman wrote on 24 April 1900 of the Boer forces around Dewetsdorp, stating that "they have a Long Tom, which gentleman I have no desire to meet".⁹¹ However, the 2nd Manchesters did eventually make the Long Tom's acquaintance, with deadly effect for an innocent bystander. According to Private Turner, their camp near Bloemfontein was shelled by the Boers, writing "my word, they did give us a whistle with their pom-poms and Long Tom ... you 'duck' when you hear them coming. I did not believe it, but being there and seeing, I am convinced. I have a piece of Spion Kop [sic]".⁹² What Turner meant by this last sentence was that he had a piece of the shell fired by the Long Tom after this incident. Although not a piece from the actual Battle of Spioenkop, he evidently decided that any shell fragment from a Long Tom counted as a valid souvenir of Spioenkop. It seems that the Long Tom and the Battle of Spioenkop had become synonymous in the mind of the British infantryman, even for those who were not there.

⁹⁰ 'Records of Service, 63rd and 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, 1758-1910', MR 1/1/2/3. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

⁹¹ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 14.

⁹² Alfred Turner. 'Letter from Alfred Turner'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 23 June 1900, 6.

The Manchesters also had a healthy respect for the modestly named “pom-pom”. The pom-pom was the nickname given to a converted Maxim-Nordenfelt machine gun, which fired larger calibre 37 mm explosive rounds. It was one of the world’s first autocannons. What made the pom-pom terrifying was its smokeless explosive ammunition, its high rate of fire, its ability to maintain a sustained weight of fire, and the distinctive sound it made: hence ‘pom-pom’. Private Fisher, after witnessing the fierce battles around Colenso in mid-February 1900, thought that “the Boer pom-poms sound terrible”.⁹³ Private Hawkins wrote that after they fired some volleys at the Boers at an engagement near Dalmanutha in August 1900 (probably during the Battle of Bergendal), it “drew their pom-pom on to us, and it is no joke, I’ll assure you”.⁹⁴ Captain Trueman, fighting a skirmish on 17 September 1900, witnessed how a Boer pom-pom landed several hits on the 8th Division’s general staff, which lightly wounded Lt Gen. Rundle in the back and two others suffered equally minor wounds. However, Trueman stated that “the pom-pom didn’t fire many shots and I am glad to say it did not try conclusions with us”.⁹⁵ Private Caun, 2nd Manchesters, stated simply but strikingly that “the pom-pom is a terror of a thing”.⁹⁶ However, since these weapons were not fielded in great numbers during the war, it is impossible to say whether more of them would have inflicted greater casualties. Private Scott encountered a pom-pom near Lydenburg, which fired several belts of ammunition into their force, but “happily without doing much damage”.⁹⁷ The psychological effect of the pom-pom, as the world’s first autocannon, far outstripped its deadliness.⁹⁸

The sound of combat, especially made by the weapons and projectiles, was noted by the men, as just discussed regarding the pom-pom. Several Manchesters tried to describe other sounds of combat. Their description of the sound is a colourful, albeit terrifying addition to what it sounded like to be shot at. Private Evans used the word “whizzing” to describe the sound of bullets passing over his head, and compared the impacts to “hailstones”⁹⁹ as he struggled up to the Boer position at Elandslaagte. Private Little, also at Elandslaagte, described the sensation as a “tin whistle playing a tune about your ears”.¹⁰⁰ Private Nelson, temporarily attached to Buller’s division in Natal, wrote that the bullets at the Battle of Colenso “fell like a hailstorm”.¹⁰¹ Private Fisher wrote that “the bullets kept whistling past my ears”.¹⁰² Private Scott

⁹³ Jack Fisher. ‘With the Ladysmith Relief Column’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 21 April 1900, 6.

⁹⁴ Walter Hawkins. ‘Letters from the Front’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 3 November 1900, 5.

⁹⁵ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 71.

⁹⁶ W. Caun. ‘Letters from the Front: A Manchester Soldier’s Experience’. *The Manchester Evening News*, 27 December 1900, 4.

⁹⁷ Scott, ‘Letters from the Front’, 3.

⁹⁸ Page, ‘Supply Services of the British Army in the South African War, 1899-1902’, 238.

⁹⁹ Evans, ‘A Manchester Private’s Description of Elands Laagte’, 4.

¹⁰⁰ Little, ‘An Ashtonian at Elands Laagte. Sad Death of Poor Old Ned Dewhurst’, 5.

¹⁰¹ Nelson, ‘To the Editor of the Reporter’, 6.

¹⁰² Fisher, ‘Letters from the Front’, 6.

described the sound as the “old pling-plong of the Mauser rifle”,¹⁰³ while Captain Trueman described the sound as “ping ping”,¹⁰⁴ “phit phit”,¹⁰⁵ or “ping-pong, ping-pong, the voice of the Mauser”.¹⁰⁶ Trueman later decided that “co-pop” was a better approximation of the Mauser’s sound.¹⁰⁷ Writing on 30 January 1901, Trueman speculated that the Boers were running out of Mauser bullets, because he was encountering more Martini-Henry shots, exclaiming “by Jove! what a row the Martini-Henry bullet does make, as it phuts into the ground beside you”.¹⁰⁸ Soldiers from subsequent twentieth century conflicts used similarly evocative descriptions to describe the sounds of bullets, like birds flapping their wings in one’s face, or the crack of a whip.¹⁰⁹

Being shot at delivered its own unique sound, but a large, pitched battle was a cacophony of noise. Private Fisher provided a description of this overwhelming tumult, such as occurred when Buller outflanked the Boers at Colenso in mid-February 1900. Even though he was a 1st Manchester reservist attached to the stretcher bearers, and thus not always at the forefront of the fighting, the noise was tremendous. He wrote that “then the firing commenced—naval guns, field artillery guns, Maxim guns, machine guns, and Mauser rifles, and our rifles ... talk about the noise when you are in a factory, it is nothing to it ... the rifles and guns are like thousands of kettledrums playing at once”.¹¹⁰

After passing through shells and bullets for the first time, many men still felt a measure of discomfort, even fear, whenever they came under fire, regardless of which phase of the war they found themselves in. Private Fitton, at Elandsplaagte, wrote how “it is an awful thing to see your comrades drop by your side dead and wounded, poor fellows, but God bless them, and their poor mothers and sisters and brothers”.¹¹¹ The Volunteers under Captain Heywood, which he claimed were so cool and focused on 22 July 1900, were much less so on the 30th. Still near Sandspruit, the 1st Manchesters participated in a “forceful” reconnaissance, but the Boers repulsed it, and the whole force, Volunteers included, had to withdraw while under fire. Heywood wrote that “we had to retire for a very long way over a perfectly open plain, and perhaps fifty Boers were firing at us ... It was very unpleasant”.¹¹² Private Scott of the 1st Manchester Mounted Infantry described a skirmish, the location and date of which are unknown, “where my horse was shot, and where I went through the liveliest ten minutes that

¹⁰³ Scott, ‘Letters from the Front’, 3.

¹⁰⁴ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 69.

¹⁰⁵ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 86.

¹⁰⁶ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 86.

¹⁰⁷ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 99.

¹⁰⁸ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 104.

¹⁰⁹ Holmes, *Firing Line*, 162.

¹¹⁰ Fisher, ‘With the Ladysmith Relief Column’, 6.

¹¹¹ F. Fitton. ‘Letters from Ladysmith’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 7 April 1900, 6.

¹¹² Heywood, ‘Letters from the Front: Manchester Volunteers in Battle’, 5.

I ever went through, and I don't wish to experience the same again".¹¹³ Near Geluk Farm, in the vicinity of Dalmanutha, on 26 August 1900, the 'Fighting First' engaged the Boers again. Captain Trueman and his 2nd Manchester Mounted Infantrymen were involved in a small skirmish close to Rietfontein on 26 September 1900. As they worked their way round the left flank of the Boers, they were surprised by Boer fire about 600 yards (548 m) away. Trueman was frank about his state of mind, writing that "the bullets began to pepper around us. I began to wonder if I should be hit, then 'flip' came one knocking the dust over my horse and me. I don't know which was most frightened, the horse or myself".¹¹⁴ Private Caun of the 2nd Manchesters admitted that he never got used to coming under fire, referring to a fight near Winburg that "it is a bit queer when the shot and shell is flying all around you. You expect every minute to be bowled over, but I have escaped up till now".¹¹⁵ Trueman, ten months into the campaign by January 1901, was still uneasy when under fire. While marching to Bethlehem, their convoy was attacked, and he wrote that "it was beastly uncomfortable with bullets whistling over you and shells ruffling your hair".¹¹⁶

When coming under fire, most men dove for cover, as they did even at the beginning of the war during the Battle of Elandsplaagte. Private Sim wrote about his battle experiences up to the end of the siege of Ladysmith as "I have had a hard time of it. I have been in five battles, and come out without a wound, but felt plenty of splinters when the bullets and shells hit the stones where we were taking cover".¹¹⁷ Private Hawkins wrote that during the Battle of Bergendal, they were ordered to take a hill on the left flank to prevent the enemy withdrawing to Belfast, but as they crossed the ridge-line of the hill "we were at once greeted with thousands of bullets, and were glad to take advantage of all cover".¹¹⁸ Volunteer Private Andrew also wrote about this engagement and he somewhat understated the experience, as expected of Tommy Atkins, by writing that "it was warm work, the bullets fairly pouring into us".¹¹⁹ Unlike Tommy Atkins marching fearlessly into enemy fire, Andrew likely took cover just like the rest of his comrades. For Corporal Evans of the 2nd Battalion's Mounted Infantry, an engagement in October 1900, somewhere between Bethlehem and Harrismith, was "the worst fire that I have been under since I came out here. After two hours' engagement we were sent

¹¹³ Scott, 'Letters from the Front', 3.

¹¹⁴ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 76.

¹¹⁵ Caun, 'Letters from the Front: A Manchester Soldier's Experience', 4.

¹¹⁶ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 100.

¹¹⁷ Sim, 'Letter from a Dukinfield Man at the Front', 6.

¹¹⁸ Hawkins, 'Letters from the Front', 5.

¹¹⁹ F.W. Andrew. 'Letters from the Front: The Manchester Volunteers at the Front'. *The Manchester Evening News*, 10 October 1900, 5.

out escort to [sic] a gun, meeting with a terrible fire ... having to lay on our stomachs as the shots came over us like marbles”.¹²⁰

As battles progressed, or the men passed through several engagements, some seemed to become accustomed to enemy fire, or stopped fixating on it. Private Little, at Elandslaagte, stated that it made him “feel funny when the bullets first start whistling round your head, but you soon get used to it”.¹²¹ Private Ollerenshaw, also referring to Elandslaagte, felt largely similar, although he did still seem to be aware of his own mortality during combat, writing that “fighting is all right when you get used to it, but it makes you feel a bit shaky when you see your chums falling dead and wounded by your side; it makes you think you might be the next to fall”.¹²² One of the officers wrote that “the bullets were simply raining on us like hail ... but somehow one hardly notices them when once fairly started”.¹²³ Private Fisher, after experiencing his “baptism of fire” on 18 January 1900, wrote how “somehow, I took no notice and went straight on altogether that day”.¹²⁴ The experience of ‘getting used to’ enemy fire was reported by combatants in later twentieth century conflicts too, where many recounted that once they overcame the initial emotions under fire for the first time, some were relieved, and some became detached. Whether relieved or simply adopting a sense of detachment, these mechanisms allowed them to endure subsequent combat encounters.¹²⁵ Even some of the Boers, with no military training, wrote that once the shooting started and they conquered their anxiety, they entered a highly focused state of concentration, while others became excited by the fighting. Either way, this helped them endure combat and become ‘used to’ it.¹²⁶

Not all hostile encounters were large, and being sniped at from long range was quite common, especially during the guerrilla phase. Although it seemed to cause few casualties, it contributed to the general state of anxiety the Manchesters felt. During the siege of Ladysmith, Boer sniping was frequent. The men, however, did not write about this aspect, but the Records of Service noted several incidents of unusually heavy sniping directed at the men, such as on 27 December 1899. The Manchesters were more active than usual that day, although the Records of Service did not specify what the men were busy with which drew the snipers’ attention.¹²⁷ It is impractical to list all occurrences of sniping, which persisted throughout the war on numerous occasions and the men did not all write about it. However, the following

¹²⁰ G.W. Evans. ‘Letter from the Front: With the Manchester Mounted Infantry’. *The Manchester Evening News*, 27 November 1900, 6.

¹²¹ Little, ‘An Ashtonian at Elands Laagte. Sad Death of Poor Old Ned Dewhurst’, 5.

¹²² Ollerenshaw, ‘Interesting Letter from the Front’, *The Ashton Reporter*, 9 June 1900, 6.

¹²³ ‘The Fight at Elandslaagte: An inside View’, 7.

¹²⁴ Fisher, ‘Letters from the Front’, 6.

¹²⁵ Holmes, *Firing Line*, 147–48.

¹²⁶ Pretorius, *Kommandolewe Tydens Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, 154.

¹²⁷ ‘History, Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith Reprinted from the Records of Service’, 1900. MR 1/3/1/2. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre, 5.

selections from May to July 1901, from the 2nd Battalion's Records of Service, illustrates how often relatively serious sniping incidents occurred, especially when the men were on the march. On 28 and 29 May about 50 Boers sniped at A Company from 700 yards (640 m), but inflicted no casualties. On 6 June there was heavy sniping on the flanks and rear of the column as it moved near Klerksvlei. The Manchesters suffered no casualties, but other regiments suffered three men killed and three wounded. On 8 June, just after leaving Klerksvlei, the column was targeted again, by an estimated 70 Boers, whose sniping wounded one of B Company's African drivers in the arm. More than a month later, on 23 July 1901, between Standerton and Bothaberg, near Vrede, the rear and flank guards were sniped at by roughly 50 Boers. The battalion suffered no harm, but one Imperial Yeoman was killed.¹²⁸ There were many more such entries in both the 1st and 2nd Battalion Records of Service, which indicates that sniping was a common occurrence, which could occur at almost any time.

Only a few Manchesters commented about the Boer sniping, despite it being a regular occurrence throughout the war. It is possible that it was so common that it had become 'ordinary' and 'monotonous', and thus not worth mentioning. Volunteer Private Andrew recalled how they were unable to rest on 26 August 1900 after a long day, because "the enemy, however, would not let us rest, for they sniped the whole night through".¹²⁹ He made it sound more like an annoyance than a truly dangerous experience. Andrew wrote again on 18 September 1900, from Schoemanskloof, that "some men who went out bathing the other day were sniped at by Boers concealed in the hills so that we have to be careful where we go".¹³⁰ This statement reinforces the reality that they were, essentially, operating in hostile territory and that few places were truly safe. Captain Trueman described a march from Harrismith to Reitz in November 1900. His tone seemed resigned, writing that "the Boers started sniping after 'Elands's River' [sic] and continued up to 'Reitz'. I only came under fire once when we [the Mounted Infantry] were Advance Guard, it was the same old game, snipe and run away".¹³¹ No one was hit, except a few horses. The sniping was taking its toll, though, because on 23 January 1900, Trueman admitted that "this everlasting sniping gets on my nerves and makes me feel jumpy".¹³² The Manchesters did not provide much detail about why sniping was such a strain, but Winter gave a convincing explanation in the context of the First World War. A sniper's bullet arrived with no warning and there was thus no way to counter it. It also made a range of disconcerting sounds. The soldier, if not hit, would hear the bullet as

¹²⁸ 'Records of Service: 2nd Bttn Manchester Regiment', 96–97.

¹²⁹ Andrew, 'Letters from the Front: The Manchester Volunteers at the Front', 5.

¹³⁰ F.W. Andrew. 'Letters from the Front: With the Manchester Volunteers. An Interesting Diary'. *The Manchester Evening News*, 14 November 1900, 5.

¹³¹ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 92.

¹³² Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 101.

it “buzzed”, “swished”, or “flicked” through foliage near them, and only then would the crack of the sniper’s rifle arrive.¹³³

Ambushes were also a potential threat, which again meant that it was dangerous for the Manchesters to fully relax. There are numerous examples of unexpected attacks throughout this chapter, but herewith a few specific examples of how suddenly the enemy could appear. This was the case for Corporal Evans, a 2nd Manchester mounted infantryman. He was part of an escort for telegraphists to repair a damaged telegraph line, possibly in October 1900. All appeared safe, and he settled down to eat, “but judge our surprise when we received a heavy fire of explosives. We at once retired, several others and myself leaving our dinner behind”.¹³⁴ Captain Trueman wrote on 23 January 1901 how the advance guard of their column, commanded by his colleague Thornycroft, was ambushed by 40 Boers on a hill who waited for them to come within 400 yards (365 m). The result was a hasty retreat over 1000 yards (914 m) before they reached cover, but they made it without suffering casualties.¹³⁵ On 30 March 1901, the 1st Manchester Mounted Infantry escorted Lt Gen. Walter Kitchener (Lord Kitchener’s brother) but were ambushed on the road between Witklip and Lydenburg. Private Gilligan was killed, Private Stewart seriously wounded, and two were captured. Kitchener was almost captured as his horse was shot from under him, but he managed to escape.¹³⁶ The 2nd Manchesters A Company, just as they prepared to leave their outpost to continue the march on 24 July 1901, were ambushed in dense fog by about 40 Boers, who had stealthily infiltrated their outpost line. On this occasion, no one was hurt, although four Manchesters were taken captive, but were returned four days later.

There was an occasion where inquisitiveness landed Private Smith in some trouble. While on sentry duty close to the outpost line at Harrismith on 15 October 1901, he noticed a party of Boers driving back their cattle which had strayed too close. Smith, evidently curious, wandered about 800 yards (731 m) closer to watch them, only to find himself suddenly surrounded by a group of Boers, who swiftly disarmed and captured him. He was returned later that day.¹³⁷ It is worth noting that once the Boers resorted to a guerrilla war strategy, they had no means of keeping prisoners, so they stripped captives of whatever useful items they carried, such as clothes, weapons, and ammunition, and then released them.

Man-made obstacles were sometimes a source of danger, especially barbed wire, which could delay a soldiers’ advance and make them easy targets. This was an ominous foreshadowing

¹³³ Winter, *Death’s Men*, 109.

¹³⁴ Evans, ‘Letter from the Front: With the Manchester Mounted Infantry’, 6.

¹³⁵ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 101.

¹³⁶ ‘Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3’.

¹³⁷ ‘Records of Service: 2nd Bttn Manchester Regiment’, 97, 99.

of the First World War, but happened on a smaller scale during the South African War. At some point during the advance at the Battle of Elandsplaagte, the Manchesters had to traverse barbed wire,¹³⁸ where they suffered casualties while the officers cut a way through.¹³⁹ Captain Trueman, leading 15 men of the 2nd Manchester's Mounted Infantry on 17 September 1900, encountered barbed wire just before they reached the top of a hill. As they worked their way through this, without wire-cutters, a group of hidden Boers opened fire. Trueman led four men to the right flank, but again the barbed wire proved a problem, and in the end his men had to pull him through it, during which he left a fragment of his cloak behind.¹⁴⁰ A few days later he encountered barbed wire again, and the way he described this encounter, which turned out to be a case of mistaken identity, indicated a healthy apprehension for these obstacles. Trueman stated that "I expected a battle and was dashing up [with his Mounted Infantry], when about 500 yards [457 m] off I came upon a barbed wire fence. I was in a funk as we had to dismount and cut or knock it down. This done we rushed up ... [but] what we had taken for Boers were [Africans]".¹⁴¹

Being fired at by the enemy was expected, but being attacked by one's own side was an unwelcome additional source of peril. Given the confused 'fog of war', the Manchesters came under friendly fire from their own comrades on several occasions. It was easy to mistake a friend for an enemy, and vice versa. Captain Trueman described the following incident where their Quartermaster, Wynne, was shot at by overeager Yeoman in September 1900:

Wynne (the Quartermaster) was riding along with an English farmer about 300 yards [274 m] from the column. Two Yeoman called to him 'kom hier' [come here]. The farmer said they were Boers, so as the Yeomen were dismounting, they galloped away. Though he was in khaki kit, they fired 19 shots at him and the farmer, and though they were only 250 yards [228 m] off hit neither. They have been caught since, and they say they thought Wynne was a Boer. Rot!¹⁴²

Trueman was consequently wary of situations which might lead to friendly fire since they occurred more frequently than desired. During an operation with his Mounted Infantry later that September in 1900, he approached an occupied ridge with great caution, writing "after careful inspection I made up my mind that they were our people and they turned out to be Yeomanry. Thank goodness they did not fire on us as they did on some of Macdonald's

¹³⁸ The exact sequence of events is difficult to determine. According to Breytenbach, the barbed wire was traversed much sooner. Pakenham has it as along the crest of the main ridge and thus agrees with Breytenbach. The Records of Service and Wylly state it to be halfway up the enemy-occupied hill.

¹³⁹ J.H. Breytenbach. *Geskiedenis van Die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog 1899-1902: I Die Boere-Offensief*. Vol. 1. Pretoria: Die Staatsdrukker, 1969, 251; 'Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/1', 165; Marden and Newbigging, *Rough Diary of the Doings of the 1st Battn. Manchester Regt.*, 14; Wylly, *History of the Manchester Regiment*, 7–8; Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 137.

¹⁴⁰ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 69.

¹⁴¹ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 73.

¹⁴² Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 67–68.

cavalry".¹⁴³ Trueman claimed that the Yeomanry had developed a reputation among the 2nd Manchesters for friendly fire incidents. Corporal Evans, with the 2nd Battalion's Mounted Infantry, wrote on 1 November 1900 from Harrismith that they engaged the Boers several times while marching from Bethlehem to Harrismith in October 1900. However, they were also targeted by British units. Evans and three other men were picketing a hill captured from the Boers earlier that day, when they were suddenly attacked that evening by the Grenadiers. No one was injured, though. He reported that the same thing apparently happened with the other half of his company on the opposite end of the column when they were mistakenly attacked by the Scots Guard during daylight hours. They also escaped harm. Others were not so lucky. On 9 December 1901 at Albertina, a sentry accidentally shot and killed Sergeant Francis of the 2nd Manchesters' G Company.¹⁴⁴ On another occasion, the 1st Manchesters manned a line of trench outposts between Onverwacht and Driefontein on 26 April 1902, in support of a blockhouse line. The blockhouses and other supporting infantry started firing down the Manchester line at about 08:20 at what they thought were Boers. The Manchesters were under heavy fire for almost 50 minutes before order was restored, during which the officers' mess sergeant was hit in the stomach.¹⁴⁵ Danger and death was thus a constant companion and could even appear unexpectedly from those the Manchesters considered their compatriots.

The Manchesters endured numerous attacks while marching, so much so that it is discussed under a separate heading. This was particularly the case as the war transitioned into its guerrilla phase from June 1900, and had become a full-fledged guerrilla war by September 1900. Since this last phase lasted several years, engaging the enemy while on the march occurred frequently. Relaxing one's guard could have serious consequences, which surely added a near constant psychological strain. The 2nd Manchesters, due to the nature of their operations after they landed in South Africa in April 1900, were often attacked while marching. Their concern about being suddenly attacked began almost as soon as they arrived in South Africa. Private Turner described the precautions they were ordered to take while still on the train enroute to the Free State. They carried 100 rounds of ammunition in case of attack, and were allowed no lights in their carriage. During the journey he reported passing several destroyed bridges and tracks, and the danger was thus very real.¹⁴⁶ Captain Trueman described how early on during the 2nd Battalion's campaign in April 1900, they disembarked from their train and began a night march, with him leading the vanguard and he was intensely anxious and alert.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 73.

¹⁴⁴ 'Records of Service: 2nd Bttn Manchester Regiment', 101.

¹⁴⁵ 'Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3'.

¹⁴⁶ Turner, 'Another Letter from Private A. Turner', 6.

¹⁴⁷ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 5.

It often proved the case that no attack occurred while marching, until the Boers suddenly attacked or blocked the route. The fact of the matter was that the enemy was completely unpredictable and knew the terrain well, thus enabling them to launch surprise attacks on marching troops and convoys at any point or time.¹⁴⁸ Corporal Evans, 2nd Manchesters, mentioned a rear attack on their column one day in late October 1900, while marching from Bethlehem to Harrismith, followed by a more serious attack the next day which lasted almost five hours.¹⁴⁹ On 6 November 1900 they helped ward off an attack on the right flank of a convoy they were escorting from Harrismith to Vrede, during which Private Hall, a mounted infantryman, was seriously wounded. From Vrede, which they reached on 9 November, they marched to Standerton, and were attacked in the flanks and rear almost every day, but these were driven off with comparative ease. Even though these harassing attacks on the marching columns were normally not serious, they still caused casualties on occasion, and almost certainly kept the men in a high state of alertness and persistent anxiety.

More rarely, a serious attack was launched. One such encounter occurred on 16 November 1900, as the 2nd Manchesters escorted a convoy from Standerton to Vrede. The battalion's F Company was guarding the left flank and was surprised while in the open by a Boer sneak attack. They suffered heavily before the men, one by one, moved to cover. One man was killed, while another was mortally wounded, and a third seriously injured. Two others sustained minor wounds. During this encounter two men displayed great courage. Corporal Richardson volunteered three times to go back and retrieve two men left behind, but they were believed killed,¹⁵⁰ so he was prohibited by his officers. Private Haines also tried to go back, but was similarly denied.¹⁵¹ Private Caun, writing on 24 November 1900, claimed that they suffered casualties almost every day as they escorted various convoys over a period of 20 days.¹⁵² This was an exaggeration, as Wylly's history of the regiment lists only seven casualties for that month.¹⁵³ Still, Caun's overstatement may be an indication of the stressful impact these attacks had on him and others, and was thus amplified in his imagination, or he was including casualties suffered by other British units.

¹⁴⁸ The Boers implemented several reforms when they transitioned to guerrilla warfare. They improved their mobility by abandoning their heavy wagons. They also sent the commandos back to their home districts, where they knew the terrain well. The commandos also broke up into smaller units and thus were even faster and more difficult to detect, but these scattered units could coalesce quickly back into a larger force if their commanders had identified a vulnerable British target (Pretorius, *Die Anglo-Boereoorlog*, 28–29). For example, General Christiaan De Wet largely operated in his home territory between Bethlehem, Reitz, and Lindley in the north-eastern Free State (Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 542).

¹⁴⁹ Evans, 'Letter from the Front: With the Manchester Mounted Infantry', 6.

¹⁵⁰ They were alive, though, and were retrieved safely after the fight.

¹⁵¹ 'Records of Service: 2nd Bttn Manchester Regiment', 88–89.

¹⁵² Caun, 'Letters from the Front: A Manchester Soldier's Experience', 4.

¹⁵³ Wylly, *History of the Manchester Regiment*, 48–49.

Fighting on the march persisted until the end of the war. Captain Trueman provided details of another 'fighting march' in February 1901. They started out on 17 February on their way to Fouriesburg and had to go through Commando's Nek. He and his company were part of the rear-guard. They faced significant resistance and were fighting on the march for almost two days, but suffered 'just' eight wounded, which Trueman attributed to the night march they performed, which bypassed the Boer positions.¹⁵⁴ Volunteer Private Brown, likely writing about events in late October 1901, reported that they lost five men wounded and one killed, presumably caused by Boer sniping and harassing attacks, during an eight day march escorting a convoy to Bethlehem.¹⁵⁵

The Volunteers with the 2nd Battalion played an essential part in holding off a Boer attack during one of the marches. On 13 November 1901, the Volunteers were assigned to the rear-guard of the column, which was an important position, because the Boers often attacked this part of marching columns. About 100 Boers subsequently launched an attack on the rear near Tweefontein, which nearly broke through, ironically due to a panicked withdrawal of the Imperial Yeomanry. Captain Lupton made sure to mention this, implying that the line held due to the resistance of the more steadfast Manchester Volunteers who suffered only two wounded.¹⁵⁶ Evidently, different Volunteer units also displayed a sense of rivalry.

The 1st Battalion also suffered attacks on the march once they recovered from their ordeal at Ladysmith by July 1900. On 26 August 1900 they guarded the left flank of the 7th Brigade as it moved from Geluk to Bergendal farm. Near Waaikraal, 'G' and 'J' Companies came under Boer fire, and worse, they were in an exposed position with little cover. They suffered three killed and eight wounded, which was a high toll compared to most Boer attacks on moving columns. The next day the situation remained precarious, and they lost ten men wounded and four were captured.¹⁵⁷ Boer attacks on marching columns were usually not as ferocious as at Waaikraal. The Records of Service noted some sniping a few days later, on 6 October 1900, mostly at stragglers. Nearly a year later, on 3 October 1901, a large force of Boers sniped at the 1st Manchesters as they were escorting captured Boer families and livestock but suffered only four men wounded.¹⁵⁸

The Manchesters were not passive victims, but before exploring their response against the enemy, it is useful to briefly summarise their main weapon: the Lee-Enfield magazine rifle. The Lee-Enfield was a modification of its predecessor, the Lee-Metford, which was introduced

¹⁵⁴ Trueman, 'Letters and Diary Entries', 112–19.

¹⁵⁵ W. Brown. 'Serving with the Field Forces'. *The Gorton Reporter*, 30 November 1901, 5.

¹⁵⁶ P. Lupton. 'Diary, Captain P. Lupton, Volunteer Company, 2nd Battalion, 1901-1902', MR 1/3/2/3. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

¹⁵⁷ 'Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3'.

¹⁵⁸ 'Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3'.

in 1888 and used a smaller and lighter .303-inch calibre bullet. Both the Lee-Metford and Lee-Enfield had a magazine which held ten bullets. However, in 1892 the smokeless cordite propellant was invented. It was much more powerful and burned hotter than gunpowder, and eroded the Lee-Metford's shallow barrel grooves quickly. In 1895 a stronger barrel was built at Enfield, and the Lee-Enfield magazine rifle was born.¹⁵⁹ It should be noted that many British troops were still equipped with the Lee-Metford at the start of the war, but as the war progressed, the Lee-Metfords were systematically being replaced. The Lee-Metford/Enfield was a decent weapon and even the Boers respected its qualities. British officers preferred it to the Mauser, but Page did not explain the reason why. The Boer assessment of the Lee-Metford/Enfield was that it was almost as good as the Mauser, but they preferred the Mauser due to its higher rate of fire and slightly better accuracy. Even though the Mauser only had a five-bullet magazine, it could be reloaded in one swift action with a five-bullet clip. The Lee-Metford/Enfield's larger ten-bullet magazine had to be painstakingly reloaded one bullet at a time once emptied. The Boers felt this reduced its potential fire rate far too much during a lengthy engagement.¹⁶⁰

The Manchesters returned fire at the enemy with their Lee-Metfords/Enfields, although it was not always as easy as imagined, and volley fire was still used. Some were surprised at how difficult it was to hit a person. Volunteer Captain Heywood and his company of citizen-soldiers fired at a group of about 20 fleeing Boers, but Heywood found it "astonishing how hard it is to hit a man galloping at 700 or 800 yards [640– 732 m], and I am afraid we did them no more harm than they did us".¹⁶¹ The 1st Manchesters persisted with volley fire even after all their fighting experience. According to Volunteer Private Hawkins, together with the regulars, they poured volley fire into the Boers several times while fighting near Dalmanutha in August 1900. Although not specified, it is likely Hawkins was referring to the Battle of Bergendal, 21–27 August 1900. From Hawkins' perspective, these volleys were "splendid",¹⁶² and it must have been an impressive sight and sound as disciplined volleys rang forth. Whether it was effective, though, is open to debate. Spiers certainly did not believe so.¹⁶³ Corporal Evans of the 2nd Manchesters Mounted Infantry also wrote about firing off volleys during an engagement in October 1900.¹⁶⁴ It appears their training influenced their tactics for a considerable time into the war.

¹⁵⁹ Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, 240-241.

¹⁶⁰ Page, 'Supply Services of the British Army in the South African War, 1899-1902', 239; Pretorius, *Kommandolewe Tydens Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, 27.

¹⁶¹ Heywood, 'Letters from the Front: Manchester Volunteers in Battle', 5.

¹⁶² Hawkins, 'Letters from the Front', 5.

¹⁶³ Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, 251.

¹⁶⁴ Evans, 'Letter from the Front: With the Manchester Mounted Infantry', 6.

When operating in smaller units, it appears that volley fire was used less often, and individual skill and initiative featured more prominently. In desperate close quarter fighting, such as at the Battle of Platrand, individual skill and marksmanship were a pronounced advantage. Privates Pitt and Scott, who were awarded a Victoria Cross for their tenacity and bravery that day, provided some details of what was, essentially, a deadly ordeal of patience and swift reaction time. Pitt recalled that the Boers were about 16 yards (14.6 m) from their sangar, and it was almost certain death to leave the safety of cover. Even slight movement provoked a flurry of fire. Still, Scott was able to spot and hit a Boer who tried to take a shot at Pitt, who had accidentally provoked the enemy rifleman to rise from cover by moving slightly.¹⁶⁵

Some firefights ended in an unexpected manner. On 10 July 1900, Lt Col Reay led a small party of 20 mounted 2nd Manchesters to scout an enemy position. They were surprised by enfilading fire at 500 yards (457 m) distance and hastily retreated. However, Volunteer Lieutenant Hogan was thrown off his horse, but managed to shoot one of the Boers in the stomach with his revolver. However, he admitted that he then fainted shortly after shooting the man. The combination of extreme stress, falling off his horse, and then shooting another man, must have caused him to lose consciousness. The Boers did not kill or capture him, though. Instead, they robbed him of his sword and revolver, and emptied his pockets. Hogan, waking up after what seemed a short time, made his way back to the others while they provided covering fire.¹⁶⁶

At other times, small units engaged in long-range firefights, using cover but not approaching closer to the enemy than they felt comfortable with. On 17 September 1900, Captain Trueman and 15 men of the 2nd Manchester Mounted Infantry gained the summit of a hill, from where they “ensconced ourselves behind rocks and proceeded to blaze away at the Boers on an opposite ridge ... we kept up a sniping match for some time”.¹⁶⁷ The fact that they did not launch a reckless assault, but stayed in cover, at a distance, again suggests a healthy respect for modern firepower at this point in the war, in contrast to how ‘Tommy Atkins’ was expected to behave according to the popular media of the time.

Ammunition expenditure was high during the first months of the war, especially during large engagements, and was the natural consequence of using rapid-firing magazine rifles. Most of the bullets never found their target. Statistics are hard to come by, but during the First World War, it was estimated that one company of British 2nd Grenadiers at Ypres in November 1914, expended about 24 000 rounds of ammunition to inflict roughly 900 German casualties on one

¹⁶⁵ ‘The Splendid Defence of Caesar’s Camp: Details of the Fight. Interview with the Two Survivors.’, *Manchester Guardian*, 18 May 1900.

¹⁶⁶ ‘Records of Service: 2nd Bttn Manchester Regiment’, 85.

¹⁶⁷ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 69.

day of fighting. This translated to one hit per 26.6 rounds fired, and these are generous figures and do not take account of casualties caused by artillery fire, so the real figure was probably much lower.¹⁶⁸ It should also be noted that the British Expeditionary Force was exceptionally well-trained in comparison to the young German conscripts who charged at them over open ground.¹⁶⁹

The Manchesters' expended far more ammunition during the South African War, with far fewer hits given the Boers' use of cover and eschewing of costly frontal attacks. However, the exact figures are impossible to calculate and thus remain speculative. At the Battle of Elandslaagte on 21 October 1899, 341 men of the 1st Manchesters helped attack the Boer position. They estimated that the engagement took about two hours, during which the Manchesters fired approximately 32 000 rounds.¹⁷⁰ On average, therefore, each Manchester fired roughly 93 rounds, and the Manchesters as a group thus fired an average of about 266 rounds per minute, or four to five rounds per second. The noise must have been astounding at certain points, although the reality would not have been this neat and simple as these numbers suggest. During the Battle of Platrand on 6 January 1900, the 1st Manchesters estimated that they fired between 35 000 to 45 000 rounds¹⁷¹, from about 03:30 to 19:00. The Rifle Brigade expended 17 000 rounds, and the Gordons fired 5 200 rounds.¹⁷² Conservative estimates, using the 35 000 figure for the Manchesters, puts the total number of rounds fired at roughly 57 200 for the whole force. This engagement lasted 930 minutes, which equates to a rough average of 61 shots fired per minute, or one shot every second. Of course, these numbers are too neat and the reality would have been more chaotic, with periods of relative calm, interspersed with periods of furious firing. Still, it gives an idea of the volume of fire, and this was just from the British side. As for the 'hit rate', enemy casualties at Platrand were 181, according to Boer sources.¹⁷³ If one accepts these figures, then the British troops involved fired an average of about 316 rounds to hit one Boer. These figures, though, also do not take account of casualties inflicted by artillery. In short, it is not always fully appreciated how much ammunition was used, especially during large engagements.

As the war dragged into its guerrilla phase, ammunition expenditure decreased as engagements tended to be smaller. The 1st Manchesters sent out four companies under Major

¹⁶⁸ Holmes, *Firing Line*, 169.

¹⁶⁹ John Keegan. *The Face of Battle: A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo, and the Somme*. London: Johathan Cape Ltd, 1976, 219.

¹⁷⁰ 'Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3'.

¹⁷¹ The ammunition boxes got mixed up between the different regiments involved, so an accurate count was impossible.

¹⁷² 'Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith', 7.

¹⁷³ J.H. Breytenbach. *Geskiedenis van Die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog 1899-1902: III Die Stryd in Natal*. Vol. 3. Pretoria: Die Staatsdrukker, 1973, 57.

Watson on 30 July 1900 to reconnoitre the route to Amersfoort. They were forced to take cover on a ridge for several hours as a Boer force, of indeterminate size, shelled them. It appears the Boers kept their distance, since they only subjected the Manchesters to fierce, but ineffectual long-range rifle fire as the latter withdrew to the camp that evening. The Manchesters fired 4 500 rounds in total.¹⁷⁴ This Manchester force was about the same strength as those who fought at Elandsplaagte but expended significantly less ammunition. It was certainly not a pitched battle, and neither side chose to launch an assault on the other, so there were no close targets to fire at. While marching from Geluk on 26 August 1900, the 1st Manchesters, forming the left flank of the 7th Brigade's column, came under attack. It had only two companies in the firing line, while the others were left in reserve. They felt it unwise to launch a frontal attack due to the terrain, which favoured the Boers. It also appears the Boers were quite close, with one estimate placing a Boer trench within 500 yards (457 m). That day the Manchesters fired 10 751 rounds, without any significant advance being made.¹⁷⁵ This was again a rather small engagement, and neither side was willing to launch an assault.

The bayonet charge was a highly romanticised aspect of warfare since its inception,¹⁷⁶ and some of the Manchesters proved to be no exception. Indeed, it reflected late Victorian society's growing fascination and adoration of heroic and martial masculinity.¹⁷⁷ Moreover, some military theorists believed that the bayonet charge was an important way to foster an aggressive spirit, and symbolised a man's strength, skill, and moral worth. In Britain during the 1890s, military theorists still regarded an infantry bayonet attack as the most effective way to conquer an enemy position. However, on the eve of the South African War some British officers began to doubt the efficacy of the bayonet charge. Modern firepower made frontal attacks by bayonet an extremely dangerous proposition.¹⁷⁸ The debate was ongoing, and the men's training still included bayonet drills, which undoubtedly spurred their imaginations.¹⁷⁹ However, most men would be disappointed, because the Boers rarely stood their ground to be stabbed. Indeed, most men in modern warfare wished to avoid such a fate. As quoted from Fred Majdalany in Holmes' *Firing Line*: "The man almost invariably surrenders *before* the point is stuck into

¹⁷⁴ 'Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3'.

¹⁷⁵ 'Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3'.

¹⁷⁶ Holmes, *Firing Line*, 378–79.

¹⁷⁷ Attridge, *Nationalism, Imperialism and Identity in Late Victorian Culture*, 47–48; Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities*. Abingdon: Routledge, 1994, 82–83, 145–46; Nasson, *The War for South Africa [the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902]*, 261–62; Spiers, 'War', 91–93.

¹⁷⁸ Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, 250.

¹⁷⁹ 'Training Booklets, Volunteer Force Regulations, Infantry Training, Frontier Warfare and Bush Fighting, Musketry and Field Service Regulations, 1898-1910', MR 1/13/2/10. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre. Even though this booklet was published for the Volunteer forces, there is little doubt that the Regular battalions would have also included bayonet training.

him.”¹⁸⁰ Still, this idea survived into the twentieth century, as the futile and costly bayonet charges of the First World War illustrated.¹⁸¹ The infantry training manual compiled by Lord Roberts in April 1902 stated with complete sincerity that “the use of the bayonet as a weapon of both attack and defence is a necessary part of the instruction of the soldier trained to fight on foot”.¹⁸²

Yet, the idea of the ‘glorious’ and decisive bayonet charge resonated with some Manchesters. Private Wall, at the Battle of Elandslaagte, wrote to a friend that “with a wild cheer we rushed upon them, cutting them down right and left. We did not leave one of them to tell the tale.”¹⁸³ Wall wrote that they were about 20 yards (18.2 m) from the enemy, and the charge was heralded by a fanfare of bugles and bagpipes. Wall may have been trying to impress his friend, although it is possible that he was so caught up in the moment that his memory was distorted. Private Bates also exaggerated the bayonet charge at Elandslaagte, claiming that “we got on the hill with fixed bayonets, and you should have heard the yells. We killed thousands of the Boers”.¹⁸⁴ Drummer Toomey recounted with enthusiasm how “I and the big drummer got orders from Colonel Ian Hamilton to ‘sound the charge’. Our men at once fixed bayonets; up came the Gordons, and with one British cheer they went at them. The Boers were frightened at the bayonet, and retired with heavy loss”.¹⁸⁵ The battalion’s Records of Service paints a substantially more muted picture of the bayonet charge at Elandslaagte. It stated that most of the enemy had already withdrawn, while the few remaining Boers had surrendered, apart from a few.¹⁸⁶ One of the Manchester lieutenants confirmed the official record of the final charge, stating that “they were completely beaten when they saw the bayonets, and begged for mercy, some throwing down their arms, and allowing themselves to be taken prisoners, others fleeing like a flock of sheep”.¹⁸⁷

The image of the deadly bayonet even gripped the imagination of those Manchesters who had never used one before. Private Fisher, temporarily attached to Buller’s forces in Natal, witnessed an assault against two Boer-held hills, in late January 1900. The exact details are vague, though. However, he claimed that afterwards the men were showing the blood on their

¹⁸⁰ Holmes, *Firing Line*, 378.

¹⁸¹ Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, 53–55, 89–93.

¹⁸² ‘Training Booklets, Volunteer Force Regulations, Infantry Training, Frontier Warfare and Bush Fighting, Musketry and Field Service Regulations, 1898-1910’, 93.

¹⁸³ Wall, ‘A Gorton Man at the Battle of Elandslaagte’, 8.

¹⁸⁴ W. Bates. ‘Letter from an Ashton Soldier’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 7 April 1900, 5.

¹⁸⁵ Charles Toomey. ‘The Fight at Elandslaagte: An inside View’. *The Wrexham Advertiser*, 25 November 1899, 7.

¹⁸⁶ ‘Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3’.

¹⁸⁷ ‘The War from Tommy’s Point of View: A Lieutenant Who Went through Elandslaagte’, *Pearson’s Weekly*, 27 January 1900, 484.

bayonets to each other, each boasting about how many Boers they had bayoneted to death.¹⁸⁸ However, the odds that these men encountered a sufficiently large number of steadfast Boers to bayonet are extremely low, and most likely the exaggerated bragging of men saturated with adrenalin and ecstatic about their victory. Private Fisher would mention the ‘deadly’ bayonet again. During Buller’s successful outflanking manoeuvre at Colenso in mid-February 1900, Fisher wrote how “we drove them from one hill to another with the bayonet; they [the Boers] don’t like that”.¹⁸⁹ Of course, as a stretcher bearer, Fisher would not have been personally involved, but he seemed to be enthralled by the tales he heard.

The allure of the bayonet charge persisted well into the campaign, despite it being known that the Boers retired long before the Manchesters could come within reach. On 8 July 1901, at a place called Holspruit, Captain Trueman wrote that “our advance party fixed bayonets, but ‘Boggert’ mine did not wait for that”.¹⁹⁰ Whether it was during the pitched battle phase or the guerrilla war phase, the Boers did not believe in holding ground to the last man, and had normally vacated it by the time the Manchesters were close enough to launch a bayonet charge. It was more than likely not the bayonet itself that caused the almost always outnumbered Boers to retire, but rather the proximity of the Manchesters and the danger of being overrun or outflanked.

Several letters again described a strong sense of regimental rivalry during battles. Even Pakenham alluded to this aspect of soldiering when he described events at the Battle of Elandslaagte.¹⁹¹ The regimental system helped foster a sense of loyalty, comradeship, and pride in the men who served in these institutions.¹⁹² As a result, competition between regiments was commonplace, such as fighting bravely, leading an attack, or capturing enemy positions and equipment. Private Wall expressed pride in the fact that the Manchesters were in the lead when the final assault at Elandslaagte was launched.¹⁹³ He was not alone in this sentiment, since Captain Paton also emphasised this point, proudly proclaiming how “the M.R. [Manchester Regiment] showed them all, Gordons included, the way to the front”.¹⁹⁴ Intense regimental rivalry was even more evident in the Manchesters’ eagerness to reach the Boer guns at Elandslaagte first. The Manchesters managed to beat the Gordons to the abandoned Boer guns, and proudly took possession of them. The Records of Service claims that it was Captain (Adjutant) Newbigging who reached the guns first. Holmes explains that since the

¹⁸⁸ Fisher, ‘Letters from the Front’, 6.

¹⁸⁹ Fisher, ‘With the Ladysmith Relief Column’, 6.

¹⁹⁰ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 151.

¹⁹¹ Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 138.

¹⁹² Holmes, *Firing Line*, 307–15; Keegan, *A History of Warfare*, 12–15.

¹⁹³ Wall, ‘A Gorton Man at the Battle of Elandslaagte’, 8.

¹⁹⁴ Paton, ‘Letter from Officer’s Hospital’, 5.

early days of artillery, these weapons held an almost spiritual sway over their operators, and were thus given a status which far exceeded their actual effect on the battlefield.¹⁹⁵ Of course, artillery had become far deadlier by the end of the nineteenth century. But still, the guns were a valuable prize to capture and a boost to morale and regimental pride.

Most engagements ended when night fell. This was the case after the Battle of Elandslaagte, but spending the night on the battlefield was perceived as being almost worse than the fight itself. Drummer Toomey wrote that

...shortly after the engagement it turned pitch dark, and it was horrible to think of the poor boys lying around us—dead, dying, and wounded ... not a bit of sleep could we get for the cold and the rain and the moaning. One poor officer of the Gordons, who was wounded in three places, lay near me all night, and to make matters worse I could not get a drink of water until morning.¹⁹⁶

Toomey's letter, however, was published in another paper a few days later, and in that transcription, Toomey stated he was unable to find water for the wounded Gordon officer.¹⁹⁷ Bandsman Powell also experienced the night on the battlefield as unpleasant, and wrote his friend Tom:

...it went dark as soon as the battle was over, and we had to lie on the battlefield amongst the dead and the wounded. We could not sleep, as it was so wet and cold, and we had nothing to eat for 24 hours, and not even a drink of water. We had to sip water out of the stones to quench our thirst. I should not like to go through the same thing again.¹⁹⁸

One of the unwounded officers at Elandslaagte wrote that “the most horrible part came afterwards ... in the dark in the pelting rain and wind. You cannot possibly imagine anything more pitiful than to sit out there all night and hear Tommy's loud bragging, mixed with the groans of the wounded and dying”.¹⁹⁹

After an engagement, groups of men would search the field for the wounded and the dead. Some men spent the evening searching the battlefield of Elandslaagte. Private Wall described that “of course we had to patrol the battlefield all night, picking up the wounded and burying the dead, and it was the horriblest [sic] sight I ever saw in my life—Boers, horses, and a few of our men scattered about like dead sheep”.²⁰⁰ The morning after Elandslaagte the search for the wounded and the dead continued more efficiently. Several men were tasked with this. An unknown officer wrote that “I was set to work with all the men we could spare to help the

¹⁹⁵ Holmes, *Firing Line*, 297–298.

¹⁹⁶ Toomey, ‘The Fight at Elandslaagte: An inside View’, 7.

¹⁹⁷ Charles Toomey. ‘Elandslaagte: Story of the Drummer Boy Who Sounded the Charge’. *The Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 29 November 1899, 8. – This is certainly one of the disadvantages of the published letters. The content could be distorted due to human error when retyping a letter for publication.

¹⁹⁸ William Powell. ‘An Ashtonian in the Battle of Elandslaagte’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 25 November 1899, 6.

¹⁹⁹ ‘The Fight at Elandslaagte: An inside View’, 7.

²⁰⁰ Wall, ‘A Gorton Man at the Battle of Elandslaagte’, 8.

doctors in the field ... I found two chaps in the Gordons whom I knew fairly well stone dead within twenty yards [18.2 m] of each other”.²⁰¹ Private Fisher, serving as a stretcher bearer with Buller’s forces until he could rejoin the 1st Manchesters, had the unenviable task of going up Spioenkop after the battle to collect the British wounded, and “the men were shouting for water and groaning all about”.²⁰²

Some Manchesters expressed horror at seeing the aftermath of a fight. This was an aspect they shared with the Boer enemy, who were similarly horrified by seeing the bodies of friend and foe alike.²⁰³ After Elandslaagte, Bandsman Powell described it as “rather a strange sight for Sunday morning to be going in search of our comrades who were killed or wounded. Some had almost their heads blown off, in fact, it was too horrible to describe”.²⁰⁴ Another soldier wrote with empathy and horror, stating “Oh, God, what a sickening sight! On the top of the hill one could not step without falling over a dead boer or a wounded one. I spoke to one poor fellow [a Boer] who was shot through the chest and offered him a drink, but he would not have it, for he thought it was poison”.²⁰⁵ Fisher was appalled at the destruction the artillery inflicted on the Boers when Buller finally outflanked Colenso in mid-February 1900. He visited the Boer trenches each time a section was cleared, and the following is a particularly vivid description of what he saw and how it made him feel:

In one trench I went into I even saw some women. One was dead, the other dying; also a little child at the breast dead. The mother had a bandolier on full of cartridges. The Boers hit with lyddite were as yellow as mustard. They must have suffered terribly, for everywhere we went we saw dead Boers half-buried, and horses and millions of flies around. It was terrible to witness.²⁰⁶

Some men, although horrified by what they saw, could not help but be impressed, awestruck, or even satisfied by the damage modern artillery inflicted on the enemy. Private Evans, after the Battle of Elandslaagte, experienced the sight of dead men and horses strong enough to make “the bravest man quiver”,²⁰⁷ but he was also impressed by the deadly work done by the British artillery. Private Scott, a 1st Manchester mounted infantryman, was similarly both impressed and horrified by the slaughter done by artillery during the Battle of Bergendal, 21–27 August 1900. He wrote that “They were making a good stand at this place, but before the day was out they were running ... out of the way of our lyddite and shrapnel. I had a look round the trenches that night, and it was awful to see the effects of lyddite – men cut clean in two

²⁰¹ ‘The Fight at Elandslaagte: An inside View’, 7.

²⁰² Fisher, ‘Letters from the Front’, 6.

²⁰³ Pretorius, *Kommandolewe Tydens Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, 162–169.

²⁰⁴ Powell, ‘An Ashtonian in the Battle of Elandslaagte’, 6.

²⁰⁵ ‘A Soldier’s Tale of the Battle of Elandslaagte’, 9.

²⁰⁶ Fisher, ‘With the Ladysmith Relief Column’, 6.

²⁰⁷ Evans, ‘A Manchester Private’s Description of Elands Laagte’, 4.

and men blown to pieces, legs and arms severed from the body”.²⁰⁸ Captain Trueman wrote on 22 February 1901 that he saw the remains of a Boer foot and part of the leg lying on the veld after a short skirmish where the artillery drove the enemy off, but he was not horrified and seemed pleased that “we got one”.²⁰⁹

As disturbing as the sight of dead and wounded men were, the sight of wounded or slain animals also prompted comment. After Elandslaagte, Private Little wrote “it is the first battle I have been in, and it is horrible to see the sights after daybreak. I could not look at a dead horse before, but it will harden anyone on the battlefield”.²¹⁰ Volunteer Private Smith, who arrived at Ladysmith on 14 March 1900, on route to the 1st Manchesters, wrote that once they arrived, “we saw an awful sight, such as dead horses and houses that had been blown up”.²¹¹ It is fairly common in modern warfare for some soldiers to be more disturbed by the image of dead and wounded animals than they were of men. It is possible that the sight of slain or suffering animals was more disturbing, since they were innocent victims of human brutality, and this fact was not lost on some of the more sensitive men.²¹² For Private Turner, the smell of dead horses at Wepener was unpleasantly memorable, writing on 9 May 1900 “The stench was unbearable ... you could see in places twenty horses lay in a heap, just has [sic] they had been shot ... the stench passing them was awful”.²¹³

Notwithstanding the upsetting sight of the dead and wounded, plunder was at least one welcome boon for the victors. After Elandslaagte the Manchesters enthusiastically joined the post-battle looting of the Boer camp, the prisoners, and the slain. Bandsman Powell managed to acquire several sets of underclothing for himself.²¹⁴ Private Evans, due to his wounds, was upset that he could not “join the fun”²¹⁵ as the others helped themselves to Boer provisions. Captain Paton, as he was carried past his troops, noted that they were “gloriously happy”²¹⁶ with looted Mauser rifles, pistols, bandoliers, stores, blankets, and provisions. Indeed, they carried as much as they could.

Apart from loot, another reason for joy was seeing a friend or family member alive after combat. For at least two soldiers at Elandslaagte, who were brothers, the battle had a happy ending. The one brother wrote that

²⁰⁸ Scott, ‘Letters from the Front’, 3.

²⁰⁹ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 114.

²¹⁰ Little, ‘An Ashtonian at Elands Laagte. Sad Death of Poor Old Ned Dewhurst’, 5.

²¹¹ Orlando Smith. ‘Letter from Another Ashton Volunteer’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 21 April 1900, 6.

²¹² Holmes, *Firing Line*, 106–7.

²¹³ Turner, ‘Letter from Alfred Turner’, 6.

²¹⁴ Powell, ‘An Ashtonian in the Battle of Elandslaagte’, 6.

²¹⁵ Evans, ‘A Manchester Private’s Description of Elands Laagte’, 4.

²¹⁶ ‘Letter from an Officer of the First Manchester’, 3.

...I was then inquiring after Bob, and I found him at last, after shouting his name for twenty minutes, sitting as contented as one wished to be on the body of a dead Boer smoking a fag. He jumped up and rushed over to me with his arms out, surprised, saying he had just been having a good cry, for he had been told I was shot. So you can guess the hand-shake we gave one another.²¹⁷

The intent of this section is not to provide a ghoulish litany of casualties, but a short overview of the Manchester Regiment's overall casualties during the war that shows that the men were surrounded by the possibility of death or harm on a regular basis. There are variations in the numbers, as is usually the case. According to a newspaper article published after the war, 3 590 Manchesters (both battalions) were sent to South Africa. Of these, 946 were regulars, 2 167 were Militia reinforcements, and 477 were Volunteers. The article claimed that the Manchester Regiment suffered 11 percent casualties. The casualties were 65 men killed in action, 24 died of wounds, 139 died from illness or accidents, three men were 'missing', and 22 were captured by the enemy.²¹⁸ The article did not specify how many men were sent to each battalion. One list of casualties for the 1st Battalion for the war was 75 men and four officers killed, 15 officers and 145 men wounded, 93 men dead from disease, and 408 men invalided.²¹⁹ The Records of Service differed only by one, stating that one officer had died from disease, bringing the total casualties to 20 officers and 721 men.²²⁰ The 'Fighting First' certainly earned their name. These are just sterile numbers, though. The reality of witnessing one's battalion losing men seemed to affect some observers emotionally, such as an unknown officer in the 1st Battalion, who wrote a letter to Lt Col Reay in the 2nd Battalion. Reay shared a short extract of what this officer wrote to him, which was published on 29 July 1901, and reflected how "up to date we have had just over 200 men killed or wounded, and a good many invalided. More than half the men who left Gibraltar in August, 1899, have disappeared".²²¹ As for the 2nd Battalion, its casualties during the war included 14 men killed, of whom five were officers. Four officers and 28 men were wounded, while one officer and 38 men were taken prisoner or went missing. Lastly, 56 men died of disease. This brought their overall losses to 141.²²² The number of men invalided was not included. Unlike the 1st Battalion, the 2nd missed the large-scale engagements typical of the first months of the war. However, they still lost men, and thus they too had that spectre of possible death or harm hanging over them.

²¹⁷ 'A Soldier's Tale of the Battle of Elandsplaagte', 9.

²¹⁸ *Manchester Guardian*. 'The Manchester Regiment in South Africa: The Losses of the War'. MR 2/A/13. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

²¹⁹ 'Roll of Honour, Casualty Return, "F" Company, 2nd Battalion, 1900-1901', MR 1/5/1/3. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

²²⁰ 'Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3'.

²²¹ Charles Reay. 'Manchesters at the Front: Doings of the 2nd Battalion'. *Manchester Evening Chronicle*, 29 July 1901.

²²² Wyllly, *History of the Manchester Regiment*, 57–58.

Danger was ever-present, but the men had different information and opinions about what an 'acceptable' casualty rate was during combat. At the Battle of Elandslaagte, the Manchesters suffered between 10 to 14 deaths and 29 to 32 wounded,²²³ which was roughly 13 per cent of their starting strength. Private Wall had their casualties at "only" 11 dead and 36 wounded.²²⁴ Another of the soldiers shared Wall's opinion, writing that "our regiment did not lose many under the circumstances ... twelve were killed and 50 wounded".²²⁵ Private Evans disagreed, regarding 12 killed and 30 wounded, a heavy price to pay and proof that it was a tough fight.²²⁶ Private Little agreed with Evans.²²⁷ Corporal Kelly, who led a section of 20 men, was happy about the victory, but also appalled at the high casualties, writing that "we charged them and paid them well out, but I am sorry to say we had very few left when it was finished".²²⁸ The substantial casualties suffered by the attacking Manchesters at Elandslaagte were the inevitable consequence of facing modern firepower. It occurred often during the first months of the war, with British generals flinging their troops into frontal assaults at the Boers who were often in good cover or trenches.²²⁹

Those who survived their wounds were not always recovered quickly, sometimes spending several hours in the heat of the sun, or the cold of evening before help arrived. No doubt some men succumbed from their wounds before help came. Captain Paton, immobilised by a leg wound at Elandslaagte, wrote that:

...night was fast closing in, and a steady drizzle had commenced, and as usual in this place the cold became intense. Firing was still going on in the distance, and from time to time five or six shots were fired at us on the battlefield by some brutes ... all the field around seemed covered with men groaning in agony, or calling for an ambulance in vain. I prefer to say no more of that night on the field, for it is best forgotten.²³⁰

This might have been a form of self-censorship to spare his mother uncomfortable details, or it was difficult for him to write about that night. Paton was not alone for too long, though, since "one of the men [Private Rogers] stuck to me all night and did all in his power for me, and I shall never cease to be grateful to him. I am jolly glad he spotted me as he came straggling

²²³ The numbers, just like the accounts by the soldiers, vary from source to source and may or may not include the number of men who succumbed afterwards from their wounds: Marden and Newbigging, *Rough Diary of the Doings of the 1st Battn. Manchester Regt.*, 16–17; Wylly, *History of the Manchester Regiment*, 8.

²²⁴ Wall, 'A Gorton Man at the Battle of Elandslaagte', 8.

²²⁵ 'A Soldier's Tale of the Battle of Elandslaagte', 9.

²²⁶ Evans, 'Letter from a Wounded Manchester Soldier', 4.

²²⁷ Little, 'An Ashtonian at Elands Laagte. Sad Death of Poor Old Ned Dewhurst', 5.

²²⁸ Kelly, 'Sidelights on the War: From the Soldier's Point of View'.

²²⁹ T.H.E. Travers. 'Technology, Tactics, and Morale: Jean de Bloch, the Boer War, and British Military Theory, 1900-1914'. *The Journal of Modern History* 51, no. 2 (June 1979): 264–86. The lessons of the South African War were not fully appreciated, and ordering waves of men to their doom was tragically common during the First World War.

²³⁰ 'Letter from an Officer of the First Manchester', 3.

back after the charge”.²³¹ Paton’s ‘anonymous’ letter in *The Manchester Guardian* reveals a few more details, about how Rogers kept him warm by covering them both with his great coat and then hugging Paton for much of the night.²³² This level of comradeship, even between men divided by social class and rank, occurred often.²³³

After the Battle of Platrand on 6 January 1900, the 1st Manchesters found it similarly difficult to recover the wounded due to darkness and the difficult terrain. Most wounded were only recovered the following morning.²³⁴ On 19 December 1901, the 1st Manchesters were attacked at night in their camp near Elandspruit. It was a serious and confused fight, with many casualties on both sides. The Manchesters suffered seven killed and 25 wounded, including five officers. However, a dense fog rolled in during the early morning hours of 20 December, which stopped the fight, but also made it difficult to retrieve the wounded. Most of the wounded were only recovered once it was light enough to see, while the dead were buried.²³⁵

Darkness, however, could also be a help. Private Barratt, badly wounded in the foot at the Battle of Platrand, was collected by the ambulance men when night fell, because enemy firing died down significantly once night descended, “a relief I shall never forget”.²³⁶ At Waaikraal on 27 August 1900, the 1st Battalion was unable to collect their wounded due to the proximity of the enemy, but the dark proved a useful ally here too, and they collected their wounded that evening.²³⁷ At Elandspruit on 19 December 1901, the Boers launched a surprise night attack against the 1st Manchesters’ camp. Captain Deakin was shot through the throat early in the attack as he was at one of the pickets surrounding the camp, but despite the darkness, Privates Carter and Stevenson carried him down. However, they were intercepted by some Boers. Carter escaped, but Stevenson was stripped, while Deakin, in his wounded state, was robbed. Deakin was left where he was dropped, but Sergeant Derbyshire found him later and returned him to camp for treatment.²³⁸

Even though most bullets did not find a target, men were hit, sometimes fatally. Although another uncomfortable topic, it conveys the visceral sense of combat. The type of wounds depended on the weapon which caused them, as well as the position of the man hit, and the direction the fire was coming from. During the Battle of Platrand, the 1st Manchesters bore the brunt of an unusually determined Boer attack. They suffered heavy casualties early on, most

²³¹ ‘Letter from an Officer of the First Manchester’, 3; Paton, ‘Letter from Officer’s Hospital’.

²³² ‘Letter from an Officer of the First Manchester’, 3.

²³³ Holmes, *Firing Line*, 272–73.

²³⁴ ‘Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3’.

²³⁵ ‘Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3’.

²³⁶ Barratt, ‘Interesting Letter from a Chapel Soldier at Ladysmith: Wounded in the Legs’, 6.

²³⁷ ‘Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3’.

²³⁸ ‘Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3’.

of these from men shot in the back by a party of Boers who managed to circumvent some of the defences at Caesar's Camp during the early morning hours. As the Manchesters fought on, and the situation began to stabilise, most of their casualties were from wounds to the head or the forearms, since the men were now firing back at the enemy in front of them, either lying down flat on the ground or shooting over defensive works.²³⁹ Private Hunt, in a matter of fact tone, wrote to his former employer that Peter Hartley was shot through the brain at Platrand.²⁴⁰ It appears he was just sharing news about a mutual acquaintance killed, rather than a close friend. Some encounters were at such extremely short range that some men were wounded by physical blows. Captain Noble, while leading a night attack on a Boer outpost on 15 February 1901, was clubbed in the head by a rifle-butt. He made a full recovery, though.²⁴¹

A few examples from official records suffice to reinforce the fact that wounds were common throughout the war, causing suffering and sometimes death. Private Broadbent, a 1st Manchester mounted infantryman, was severely wounded in the arm and the thigh on 24 July 1900 during a reconnaissance near Meerzicht. On 30 July they suffered additional casualties during a reconnaissance in the direction of Amersfoort. They were pinned down by Boer shell fire and long-range rifle fire for several hours, during which Private Evans of G Company was hit in the head, dying shortly after. Private Fletcher of F Company escaped with a slight forearm wound, but Private Whitehead, also F Company, received a severe thigh wound. On 14 February 1901, Captain Crichton of the Mounted Infantry was wounded in the stomach during an action near Helvetia. Lieutenant Merriman, also with the Mounted infantry, was wounded in the head, while Privates Ashton and Crowther were also severely wounded. They were part of a small force of 25 Mounted Infantry protecting a blockhouse construction party in the Badfontein Valley on 24 October 1901. On 19 December 1901, Major Hudson's leg was shattered by a bullet during a serious night attack launched by the Boers against the British column encamped at Elandspruit, and he died the next day. The Manchesters suffered heavy casualties during this night attack, as they were on outpost duty and were thus in the firing line from the start. Sergeants Ford and Davies were killed, along with Privates Redford, Bohin, Brundett, Frost, and Holmes. There was a considerable number of wounded, including five officers, and 14 men wounded, with most listed as severe.²⁴² This grisly list of only a part of the casualties suffered in the 1st Manchesters illustrates that these men were frequently in dangerous situations, with potentially deadly consequences.

²³⁹ 'Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3'.

²⁴⁰ Walter Hunt. 'Letter from a Hooley Hill Lad in South Africa'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 23 June 1900, 6.

²⁴¹ Charles Reay. 'More about the Manchesters: Garrison Life at Bethlehem'. *Manchester Evening Chronicle*, 26 March 1901.

²⁴² 'Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3'.

Seeing men wounded, and hearing about wounded comrades, elicited certain responses, ranging from horror, concern, and even fascination. Private Parr, writing on 27 December 1899 from Chieveley Camp, referred to seven Manchesters with wounds in the hospital. Parr, one of the Reservists, volunteered as a stretcher bearer with Buller's force while he waited to re-join the Manchesters. It is not clear when these Manchesters he spoke of were wounded, but it must have been before Ladysmith was besieged, and may have been due to combat at Elandsplaagte, Modderspruit, and Nicholson's Nek. Parr seemed intrigued by their wounds, describing them in detail:

...there are about seven of my regiment here wounded, one shot right through just above the stomach on the right side, one with an arm off, another one getting his arm taken off, and another officer shot through the arm and side, and one the top of his left shoulder taken off, and one with six bullet wounds.²⁴³

It is unclear whether his interest in their wounds was morbid fascination or sympathetic concern. However, this graphic description serves to remind readers of the potentially agonising and debilitating consequences of modern combat. Private Barron, stationed at Estcourt in February 1900, also waiting to re-join his 1st Battalion comrades, described the sight of wounded men passing through by rail, writing that "there are some sickening sights amongst them – some of them with legs and arms missing, and some shot through the eyes; and some of these poor fellows say they got hit before they ever fired a shot".²⁴⁴ Here one is reminded again about how modern weapons had changed the battlefield, where many men were hit without even seeing the enemy.

Since the Battle of Elandsplaagte was a major engagement for the Manchesters, with several men writing about it, the effects of this battle on the body can be discussed in some detail. Wounds ranged from minor to mortal, and the men's writings reveal empathy and concern for comrades. Private Little wrote to his sister that "I am very sorry to tell you poor old Ned Dewhurst was shot in the head just as the fight ended. I got three chums to help me, and we carried him on our rifles ... and sat with him all night in the rain, expecting every minute to see him die, but he lived until morning, and then died".²⁴⁵ Private Evans described his neck wound, which he miraculously survived. The bullet travelled nearly fourteen inches (35.5 cm) down his back. He added that "we lost 12 killed and 30 wounded, some of whom will die, and others disabled for life. There was a comrade of mine just had his left arm taken off. His name is Dainty".²⁴⁶ A man simply known as Albert wrote to his parents that "I am very sorry to let you

²⁴³ E. Parr. 'A Hyde Man's Experience: The Occupation of a Stretcher Bearer'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 27 January 1900, 5.

²⁴⁴ William Barron. 'Letter from a Dukinfield Soldier in Natal: Still Living and Like to Remain So'. *The Ashton Reporter*, 10 March 1900, 6.

²⁴⁵ Little, 'An Ashtonian at Elands Laagte. Sad Death of Poor Old Ned Dewhurst', 5.

²⁴⁶ Evans, 'Letter from a Wounded Manchester Soldier', 4.

know that ... I happened to get shot in the left hand. The bullet went through the palm of my hand ... I am glad to say that no bones were broken”.²⁴⁷ Sergeant Lloyd, who suffered three hits, survived. The soldier who was with him reported that “Lloyd is getting on grand; he is out of danger, though I am afraid he will have to have one of his legs taken off”.²⁴⁸ Several officers were wounded, including Captain Paton, who wrote “I got hit on the inside of the thigh ... and they cut the bullet out of my right hip joint. How it got there I don’t know ... it has broken nothing, and I have got the bullet as a trophy”.²⁴⁹ Paton described the wounds of some of the other officers: Melville had a broken arm from a Mauser bullet through his right bicep, while Captain (Adjutant) Newbigging sustained a large wound in the shoulder as the bullet exploded out of the back. Paton was sure it was an explosive bullet, but as Keegan explained in *The Face of Battle*, when a normal bullet is set tumbling inside the body when it hits bone, its exit can cause extensive damage to the tissue, which then resembles an expanding or exploding bullet wound.²⁵⁰ Sergeant-Major Haddon added that Lt Col Curran, the commander of the 1st Manchesters, was shot through the shoulder, and Lieutenant Danks was shot through the cheek.²⁵¹ Paton explained that “Danks I am afraid is rather bad, and there was a talk of a bit of his skull having to be lifted to take the pressure off the brain. I hope he will be alright, for he is a very good young fellow”.²⁵² The Records of Service noted that Danks died in Britain from his wound on 31 May 1900. Danks was the son of Reverend G.W. Danks, who was the vicar of Morton, Gainsborough.²⁵³ In all, five out of ten or eleven officers were wounded. Leading from the front, while wielding a sword and revolver, made them an obvious target.

The wounds caused by artillery were less frequently described, which perhaps emphasises again that artillery during the war generally had less physical impact, although it certainly had a significant psychological effect. Private Barratt was “severely wounded in the left foot by a bursting shell”²⁵⁴ during the Battle of Platrand. It turned out his heel was blown off from the rest of his foot, but the doctors managed to reconnect it successfully and his heel was not amputated. However, when conditions were right, the Boer artillery could reap a deadly toll, as it did at the Battle of Spioenkop on 23–24 January 1900. A 1st Manchester reservist, Private Fisher, witnessed the carnage first hand, since he was one of the stretcher bearers sent up to collect the wounded. He claimed “it was something dreadful to see our men blown to pieces, heads blown off, legs, and arms. I never saw such a sight in my life. It was just like a

²⁴⁷ John Willie and Albert, ‘The War from Tommy’s Point of View: From One Who Was Wounded at Elandslaagte’, *Pearson’s Weekly*, 13 January 1900, 450.

²⁴⁸ ‘A Soldier’s Tale of the Battle of Elandslaagte’, 9.

²⁴⁹ Paton, ‘Letter from Officer’s Hospital’, 3.

²⁵⁰ Keegan, *The Face of Battle: A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo, and the Somme*, 265.

²⁵¹ Haddon, ‘The Manchesters in Natal’, *Manchester Evening Chronicle*, 29 November 1899, 3.

²⁵² Paton, ‘Letter from Officer’s Hospital’.

²⁵³ ‘War Notes’.

²⁵⁴ Barratt, ‘Interesting Letter from a Chapel Soldier at Ladysmith: Wounded in the Legs’, 6.

slaughterhouse, the ground was soaked in blood”.²⁵⁵ While near Sandspruit on 30 July 1900, despite some heavy shrapnel bursts overhead, the Volunteers with Captain Heywood suffered only one man lightly wounded in the arm.²⁵⁶ In general, serious wounds caused by artillery occurred rarely, but when they did, it could rend bodies asunder.

The Manchesters appeared to regard “luck” or some form of divine intervention as the main determining factors in whether they became casualties. Several men engaged at Elandsplaagte mused about the role of fate. Bandsman Powell thought he was “lucky to be alive”.²⁵⁷ Private Little wrote that he “managed to escape [bullets] up to the present”.²⁵⁸ Private Stokes believed “it is all luck; you don’t know what you are doing when you are fighting”.²⁵⁹ Private Evans was not so lucky, but fortunately for him his wound was not life-threatening, and as a result he thought he led a “charmed life”.²⁶⁰ A soldier simply known as Albert wrote that “after seven hours of hard fighting with the Boers, I think myself lucky that I escaped with such a slight wound [his left hand]”.²⁶¹ Captain Paton, although upset at not seeing the end of the battle, realised how lucky he was, stating “it was rough luck getting knocked over in the first engagement ... [the bullet] just missing the femoral artery by a hair’s breadth. Jolly lucky, wasn’t it, that it wasn’t a quarter of an inch higher?”²⁶² He also gave thanks that he was fortunate enough not to lose his leg, since he heard of several others who were not as lucky.²⁶³ Corporal Kelly wrote that “God knows how I escaped being shot, the bullets were whizzing all ways”.²⁶⁴

As the war dragged on, the Manchesters continued to reflect on the role of luck. Private Fisher, attached as a stretcher bearer with Buller’s relief column, thought it “a miracle I was not hit”.²⁶⁵ Corporal Bramwell, writing to his wife about the Battle of Platrand mused “thank God I am still in the land of the living, but I have been very very lucky. My word the Colour Serg, Sgt Connor, Drum Major Sgt Walsh of the band Billie Framton + 14 [sic] more of the Company dead. I got hit just below the right eye”.²⁶⁶ Volunteer Private Hawkins stated twice in a letter to his friend that they were lucky to sustain no casualties at their first encounter near Sandspruit on 22 July

²⁵⁵ Fisher, ‘Letters from the Front’, 6.

²⁵⁶ Heywood, ‘Letters from the Front: Manchester Volunteers in Battle’, 5.

²⁵⁷ Powell, ‘An Ashtonian in the Battle of Elandsplaagte’, 6.

²⁵⁸ Little, ‘An Ashtonian at Elands Laagte. Sad Death of Poor Old Ned Dewhurst’, 5.

²⁵⁹ Stokes, ‘Thurmiston Man Describes the Battle of Elandsplaagte’, 7.

²⁶⁰ Evans, ‘Letter from a Wounded Manchester Soldier’, 4.

²⁶¹ ‘The War from Tommy’s Point of View: From One Who Was Wounded at Elandsplaagte’, 450.

²⁶² ‘Letter from an Officer of the First Manchester’, 3.

²⁶³ Paton, ‘Letter from Officer’s Hospital’.

²⁶⁴ Kelly, ‘Sidelights on the War: From the Soldier’s Point of View’.

²⁶⁵ Fisher, ‘Letters from the Front’, 6.

²⁶⁶ T. Bramwell. ‘Letter, Corporal T Bramwell, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Caesar’s Camp, Ladysmith to His Wife, Describing Conditions during the Siege’, 18 January 1900. MR 1/17/29. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre, 1.

1900, and in a second engagement “our company was again in luck, having only two wounded”.²⁶⁷ The Manchesters clearly acknowledged the role of fate, divine intervention, or luck in battle, and this belief was shared by other soldiers involved in subsequent twentieth century conflicts.²⁶⁸ Soldiers knew they had little agency during combat, and becoming a casualty was normally a matter of being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

6.3 DISEASE: THE GREATEST ENEMY IN THIS COUNTRY

The Manchesters in fact had a significantly higher chance of falling to disease than to an enemy bullet. The devastating impact of disease during this war is well known among historians. Elizabeth Rawlinson-Mills, for instance, explored how the South African landscape, with its few sources of clean water, was linked closely with disease, as portrayed in poetry published in British newspapers.²⁶⁹ Although referred to earlier, it bears repeating that the 1st Manchesters suffered 93 men dead from disease, and 408 men invalided, most of which would have been due to illness. The 2nd Manchesters had 56 men die from disease, but the Records of Service did not record the number of men invalided. However, it did record the battalion’s strength at certain points during the campaign. On 23 January 1901, there were 181 men sick in hospital out of a total strength of 1055. On 30 April 1902, there were 86 men in hospital out of a total battalion of 848.²⁷⁰ If the earlier figure of 3 590 total men in both battalions, and the Records of Service numbers can be trusted, then fatalities from disease (149 men) constituted about four percent. In comparison, deaths from combat (89 men) were roughly two and a half percent.

The Manchesters were plagued by disease almost from the start of the war. Private Turner of the 2nd Manchesters, although unintended, made an ominous foreshadowing of what they themselves would soon experience. The battalion passed through Naauwpoort Junction by rail on its way to the front on 12 or 13 April 1900. They stopped briefly, and there was a large hospital, where they heard that six men had just died that morning from enteric fever (usually typhoid).²⁷¹ Roughly a month later the 2nd Battalion would fall victim too. Writing from camp near Bloemfontein on 9 May 1900, Turner reported that “I am sorry to say, we are losing a number of our own troops (seven this week) to fever”.²⁷² Captain Trueman confirmed the

²⁶⁷ Walter Hawkins. ‘Letter from Private W. Hawkins’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 1 September 1900, 6.

²⁶⁸ Holmes, *Firing Line*, 193.

²⁶⁹ Rawlinson-Mills, “‘That Far-off Southern Tomb’”: Visions and Versions of South Africa in British Newspaper Poetry of the 1899-1902 South African War’, 120–23.

²⁷⁰ ‘Records of Service: 2nd Bttn Manchester Regiment’, 92, 102.

²⁷¹ Turner, ‘Another Letter from Private A. Turner’, 6.

²⁷² Turner, ‘Letter from Alfred Turner’, 6.

outbreak of disease in a letter, also dated 9 May 1900, stating that Major Anderson was hospitalised in Bloemfontein with dysentery, while “Ansted, a militia (Volunteer) captain, a very nice chap, has gone sick today to Thabanchu [sic]”.²⁷³ Anderson would later go home to recuperate. Captain Chittenden, sad to lose a comrade, wrote to Major Anderson on 14 July 1900 from Hammonia that “I am very sorry that you had to go home, I know that you would have liked to remain with the [Regiment]. Still, one can’t prevent sickness. We had a lot of dysentery in the [Regiment] ... we have lost five men, Enteric and Dysentery. We are getting on far better now we have had a good rest, and we can purchase food”.²⁷⁴ Some men clearly recognised that incidents of sickness decreased notably when the men were not constantly on the march, and had access to sufficient food. Chittenden reported several more men suffering various ailments, but the most noteworthy was ‘Pope’, who had caught a fever which raised his temperature to a dangerously high 103 °F (39,4 °C). By 1 July 1900, the 2nd Battalion’s Records of Service recorded that 55 out of 885 men were sick in hospital.²⁷⁵ Danger was thus all around, not only from a mobile and cunning enemy, but also the more sinister threat posed by invisible microbes.

During the siege of Ladysmith, the 1st Manchesters had suffered heavily from diseases caused by the prolonged unsanitary conditions, poor diet, and stress. Marden and Newbigging claimed that almost all the men were suffering from dysentery or fever after the siege was lifted.²⁷⁶ Private Barratt summarised it well, writing that “we have been besieged for and bombarded for four months ... so that the sick and wounded soldiers could not be conveyed to a proper hospital ... and we have had many died [sic] from dysentery and fever”.²⁷⁷ When Barratt wrote on 6 March 1900, the prevalence of disease was still so severe that he warned his brother that he might not hear from him again, since men who appeared healthy one day, suddenly fell ill and died the next.

In fact, many were still falling ill weeks after the siege. Volunteer Private Chadderton, who arrived in March 1900, related in a letter of 8 May 1900 that “most of them [the regulars] were [still] suffering from dysentery and fever through the water they had to drink”.²⁷⁸ As mentioned, both doctors and the men understood that contaminated water was the chief cause of illness. Volunteer Private Hawkins, also newly arrived at Ladysmith, wrote to Band-Sergeant Holt that

²⁷³ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 18.

²⁷⁴ G. Chittenden. ‘Letter, Captain G Chittenden, Hammonia, Describing Sickness in the Battalion, Improved Conditions in Camp, Boer Movements, Shortage of Provisions. 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment’, 14 July 1900. MR 1/16/5/11. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

²⁷⁵ ‘Records of Service: 2nd Bttn Manchester Regiment’, 86.

²⁷⁶ Marden and Newbigging, *Rough Diary of the Doings of the 1st Battn. Manchester Regt.*, 47.

²⁷⁷ Barratt, ‘Interesting Letter from a Chapel Soldier at Ladysmith: Wounded in the Legs’, 6.

²⁷⁸ George Chadderton, ‘An Ashton Volunteer’s Letter to the Ashton P.S.A. Society’, *The Ashton Reporter*, 23 June 1900, 6.

“I have been in conversation with that friend of yours (Powell, of the Manchester Regiment Band²⁷⁹), and he sends his best ... he looks like a mere skeleton, as the dysentery has told a tale on him”.²⁸⁰ Private Barron mentioned, although maybe an exaggeration, that about 50 percent of the 1st Battalion suffered from dysentery in March 1900, yet many of them refused to see the doctors. Some feared it would prevent them from going up to the front, while others did not want to go to the hospital. Barron, however, thought them foolish, and believed that if they went into battle as sick as they were in two weeks’ time, it would be the end of them.²⁸¹ Sickness, though, soon spread to the newly arrived Volunteers in Natal. By May 1900 they had lost four men dead, according to Chadderton, though he was relieved to add that none of the dead were Ashton men. Volunteer Private Smith, also with the recovering 1st Manchesters in May 1900, wrote that “there are a great many men here very ill with dysentery and enteric fever. It is the greatest enemy ... in this country”.²⁸²

Casualties from disease continued to be a problem throughout the war. On 7 October 1900, Volunteer Private Andrew, with the 1st Manchesters, reported the Volunteer Company’s deaths up to that point, which consisted of only one man killed in action, but dead from disease.²⁸³ In a letter from Bethlehem on 25 February 1901, Captain Noble’s enclosed correspondence revealed that three men, Private A. Baker, Private W. Hutchinson, and Lance-Corporal Walton had died from enteric fever between 3–18 February, noting “I am sorry to say that we have a good deal of sickness in the Regiment, though not more than is generally unavoidable in this sort of work”.²⁸⁴ Men continued to die, officers included. The Volunteers with the 2nd Manchesters lost Lieutenant Harved Greaves to enteric fever on 18 November 1901, and Lieutenant Mookhouse to dysentery on 25 January 1902. Both officers passed away in the hospital at Harrismith. Captain Lupton was upset that he was unable to attend the former’s funeral, since they had to leave Harrismith early that morning.²⁸⁵

Not everyone died or went home from sickness, but many had to suffer through it. Private Barron, whose observations about the men’s attitudes to sickness was discussed earlier, was himself felled by disease two months later. He was admitted to the hospital at Pietermaritzburg, from where he wrote to his friend Matthew Bailey on 19 May 1900 that “I have been this last month with enteric fever; but thank God, I have got over the worst of it, and

²⁷⁹ This was Bandsman Powell, whose description of the Battle of Elandslaagte was published in *The Ashton Reporter* of 25 November 1899.

²⁸⁰ Walter Hawkins. ‘Letter from an Ashton Volunteer at the Front’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 21 April 1900, 6.

²⁸¹ William Barron. ‘A Local Man at Ladysmith’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 5 May 1900, 6.

²⁸² Orlando Smith. ‘Letter from an Ashton Volunteer’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 23 June 1900, 6.

²⁸³ Andrew, ‘Letters from the Front: With the Manchester Volunteers. An Interesting Diary’, 5.

²⁸⁴ Reay, ‘More about the Manchesters: Garrison Life at Bethlehem’.

²⁸⁵ Lupton, ‘Diary’.

I am getting a little better.”²⁸⁶ He added that when he saw himself in the mirror, he was shocked at his appearance. This description provides an idea of how serious typhoid was. It did not kill Barron, but it took longer than a month for him to recover. Captain Trueman wrote on 26 May 1900, from Senekal, that “since leaving Brandsdrift I have been seedy, had a sort of light fever and get done [tired] very easily”.²⁸⁷ Trueman had it rather easy, though. Captain Paton, the same who was wounded in the leg at Elandslaagte, was in hospital at Dalmanutha for almost five weeks. Writing on 13 September 1900, he related how

...in spite of my being reported to you as being invalided home with enteric fever I am still out in this country ... I had a bad go of my old Indian fever [meaning unclear], and what the doctors called enteric poisoning, and then on recovering from that I had a go of jaundice ... however, I missed nothing, and have been awfully fit ever since.²⁸⁸

Due to the threat of disease, some men were sent away to hospital or even back to Britain to recover if it was serious enough, but this brought about mixed feelings for some. Volunteer Private Chadderton, with the 1st Manchesters, wrote in May 1900 that his company alone had already seen two men sent home to Britain on account of illness. They had arrived in early March, which emphasises how quickly illness had spread in their ranks. However, some men, such as Trueman, betrayed a hint of jealousy and even disbelief when colleagues were sent away due to illness. Trueman wrote on 26 May 1900, with obvious envy, that Major Anderson had gone home due to illness. “Lucky chap, say I!”²⁸⁹ On 6 September 1900, he expressed astonishment when he heard that “Jebb got sick of fever there [Bloemfontein], and as the doctors did not know whether it was serious or not, he was left behind – a most extraordinary proceeding I should say”.²⁹⁰ Jebb was later sent home to Britain to recover. It is worth keeping in mind that Trueman simply had to endure his fever and make the best of it, as described earlier. He might, therefore, have thought his colleagues were being mollycoddled. Captain Chittenden thought one man was exaggerating his ailments. He wrote on 14 July 1900 that “Ray is in hospital, a wheel of a wagon went over his legs, he is a poor soldier, he came sick a few times, very little wrong with him”.²⁹¹

²⁸⁶ William Barron. ‘Letter from Private Wm. Barron’. *The Ashton Reporter*, 23 June 1900, 6.

²⁸⁷ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 25.

²⁸⁸ Donald Paton. ‘Letter, Captain Paton, Dalmanutha, Describing the Move of Headquarters and 5 Companies to Helvetia; the Officers’ Occupation of the Station Master’s House; the Prospect of Being Sent to Garrison Ladysmith; Recent Fighting – Relatively Small Losses since the Beginning of the Year; Battle on 27 August; Battalion’s Lack of Popularity with Brigadier General Kitchener; Forthcoming March to Machadadorp and Schoemans Kloof. 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment’, 13 September 1900. MR 1/16/5/16. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre, 6.

²⁸⁹ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 25.

²⁹⁰ Trueman, ‘Letters and Diary Entries’, 61.

²⁹¹ Chittenden, ‘Letter from Hammonia’, 14 July 1900.

6.4 PERCEPTIONS OF DEATH

Given the persistent overarching threat of death at any moment, whether from disease or an enemy bullet, some of the Manchesters shared their thoughts about how they perceived death. Some reflected on the possibility of their own demise, and others described what they felt when witnessing the burials, graves, or bodies of others. Private Barrat, writing from Ladysmith to his brother on 6 March 1900, appeared resigned, even calm, about the possibility of his own death. He instructed his brother:

...if you do not hear from me again in the course of a month or two you must enquire of [Lieutenant-Colonel] Curran ... I expect a medal and a clasp. These I should like you to have if anything happens to me. I mention this because we see fellows walking about all right one day and then hear of them being buried in a few days after.²⁹²

On their way to the front by train, Private Turner of the 2nd Battalion wrote on 15 April 1900 that “we next came to Naauwpoort Junction, a place of a recent battle. Many graves were visible in a neat (new) little cemetery of our poor soldiers. This place, will no doubt, be a sad remembrance of this terrible war”.²⁹³ Burying their dead was not discussed in much detail, but Volunteer Captain Lupton, serving with the 2nd Battalion, made a point to identify his fellow Volunteers who were wounded or slain. As a result, he wrote a single yet powerful line about burying Private Baley after an encounter somewhere between Vaalplaat and Tiger Kloof on 6 November 1901, writing that “Pt Baley & 2 others buried under trees on farm near Elands R [river] Bridge”. Lupton also described the burial of a well-regarded 2nd Battalion officer, Captain Noble, who suffered wounds in both thighs and the scrotum while leading an assault on a Boer position with the Volunteers at Langberg on 12 November 1901, and died shortly after. Noble was the son of Colonel Noble, who lived in Innswick, Murrayfield, Edinburgh. His body was carried all the way to Harrismith, where it was buried in the town’s cemetery on 15 November, with almost the entire battalion present, as well as other notables such as Lt Gen. Rundle and his staff.²⁹⁴ On occasion, the writers of the Records of Service for the 1st Manchesters betrayed slight hints of emotion for fallen comrades, mostly for fellow officers. On 21 January 1902 it stated “to the regret of all ranks, Captain Menzies died of his wounds at 5:45 a.m. this morning. He was buried on the left of the Witpoort Road, where it passes between two round stoney kopjes, about 700 yards west of Paardeplatz Ridge”.²⁹⁵

²⁹² Barrat, ‘Interesting Letter from a Chapel Soldier at Ladysmith: Wounded in the Legs’, 6.

²⁹³ Turner, ‘Another Letter from Private A. Turner’, 6.

²⁹⁴ Lupton, ‘Diary’.

²⁹⁵ ‘Records of Service, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, MR 1/1/2/3’.



Photo 23: The grave of Private Gilligan.
Source: 'Photograph Album, 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, Harrismith, Liddles Farm, 1901-1902', MR 3/23/69. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.



Photo 24: The grave of Captain Noble.
Source: 'Photograph Album, 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, Harrismith, Liddles Farm, 1901-1902', MR 3/23/69. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.



Photo 25: The grave of Privates Taylor, Ishmael, and Baley; killed in action, 6 November 1901.
Source: 'Photograph Album, 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, Harrismith, Liddles Farm, 1901-1902', MR 3/23/69. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

6.5 CONCLUSION

The Manchesters were fighting a war, and war was and still is dangerous. They could and did suffer harm or even death at a moment's notice and with little to no warning. It is also worth noting that their combat experience was an amalgamation of challenges: the terrain which concealed both the enemy and contained diseases, the enemy who knew the terrain and fought differently, and the impact of modern weapons. The Manchesters perceived combat and the threat of danger in different ways. Many who had not seen any 'action' were eagerly anticipating their first fight. Others, after experiencing combat, claimed that they enjoyed it and looked forward to their next encounter with the Boers, just as one would expect from 'Tommy Atkins'. Other men, however, found combat unpleasant, if not outright terrifying. For some, the experience did not improve the more they went through it. Some confessed that they would rather just avoid it. What is evident is that even though Victorian society had certain ideas about how its soldiers should act and feel several Manchesters portrayed the experience of combat as something that was, at best, unpleasant, and at worst, downright terrifying. They did not advance upright and fearless into combat like the stereotypical Tommy Atkins.

The Manchester experience of combat varied considerably. It was also heavily influenced by the type of war they were fighting at the time. The 1st Manchesters were involved in two notable battles during the set-piece battle phase of the war: the Battle of Elandslaagte and the Battle of Platrand. At Elandslaagte they experienced their baptism of fire, and despite being an inexperienced unit, they performed well despite suffering heavy casualties. However, not everyone enjoyed the experience. Nor was the battle a simple, neat affair. Furthermore, the enemy was difficult to see and did not act the way the men expected them to. Still, this battle was significant for the 1st Manchesters, since it was their first engagement with the Boers, and moreover, it was a British victory, which was a rarity during this phase of the war. Consequently, the men wrote considerably more letters about Elandslaagte than any other combat encounter. These letters displayed a range of emotions and experiences, ranging from dread, confusion, elation, sadness, hatred, and compassion.

The Battle of Platrand, outside Ladysmith, was an entirely different affair. This was a brutal, close-ranged encounter against an attacking force of Boers. The Manchesters suffered heavy casualties but managed to hold the line long enough for reinforcements to repel the assault. There were significantly fewer accounts of this battle, yet this was where the Manchesters truly earned their reputation as the 'Fighting First'. It is possible that there are fewer detailed letters about this battle, because the siege of Ladysmith was long and exhausting, and the men simply could not decide what was worse, the fighting, boredom, or hunger. Another possible reason was lack of writing materials, especially paper. And when they were finally relieved,

the men were in a bad condition, and writing detailed accounts of Platrand was maybe beyond their strength.

With regard to the Boer artillery, only a few men became used to it. Even though artillery normally caused fewer casualties than rifles, it remained a potent psychological weapon, which few Manchesters would willingly face without a good hole for cover. Consequently, coming under Boer bombardment was usually an uncomfortable sensation, especially when fired on by the pom-pom.

As the war progressed, it transformed into a long guerrilla war, just as the 2nd Manchesters arrived in South Africa in April 1900. As a result, they had a very different baptism of fire, suffering no casualties at Wakkerstroom, although it was certainly unpleasant to endure nearly 50 hours of Boer shelling and long-range fire. The nature of the fighting was changing, and Boer surprise attacks on marching columns increased, as did sniping. Still, being fired on the first time was just as exciting, confusing, or terrifying as in a large battle, and again evoked various responses. Some men quickly got used to coming under fire. Others, though, never seemed to lose that sense of unpleasant discomfort they felt. Both Manchester battalions endured the guerrilla phase, although the number of letters detailing combat encounters decreased notably. There were now mostly small skirmishes, long-range sniping, and the occasional surprise attack. It was a very different war to the one most expected, both at home and in South Africa.

The effects of combat did not just end when the last shot was fired. Each fight had its grim aftermath. Men searched the field for the wounded and the dead. Others tried to rest on the field while surrounded by the dark, the cold, and the sounds of the wounded and the dying. Seeing the corpses of friend, foe, and animal evoked revulsion, horror, pity, and sometimes even satisfaction when the dead were the enemy. Those who were wounded suffered a variety of minor to serious wounds, some of them ultimately fatal. Modern weapons could cause terrible harm to the body, a fact which many men commented on. Some men had to see comrades and friends die in front of their eyes. However, there was sometimes happiness to be found, such as two brothers reunited after the Battle of Elandsplaagte, and the loot the men plundered from the defeated enemy.

Danger did not just come from the enemy, but a more insidious threat was disease, which claimed far more lives than the Boers ever did with their Mausers. The Manchesters seemed mostly resigned to this fact, since there was very little they could really do about it. Just as getting hit in combat was a matter of luck, so was getting seriously ill. A lucky few did get to go home to recuperate, a fact which left a bitter taste for some, such as Captain Trueman, but there was little he could do but grumble. In the end, although the war was mostly boredom

and periods of hard work and suffering, it was still a war. And in wars, people suffer harm, sometimes fatally. This was a reality that the Manchesters had to live with every day during the campaign, and the emotional toll it demanded was mostly hinted at, but all the same, it was certainly present.

7. CONCLUDING THE WAR

The battalion has had experience of every phase of warfare, and while the good fortune has fallen to it to lead the way to victory, it has never participated in defeat, nor from first to last is there any regrettable incident to note. Even in the British Army so good a record stands out, and Manchester may well glory in the gallant deeds of such a Corps. A special word of acknowledgement is due to the Reservists (including the Militia) and to the Volunteers for their share in the gallant deeds of the campaign.¹

An extract from Lt Col Curran's farewell message to the 1st
Manchesters on 31 May 1902.

Some fortunate Manchesters, primarily the Volunteers, returned home after serving a few months in South Africa. The regulars, though, had to continue their service, even after the war was concluded, unless their active duty period, usually five years, was completed and they were not needed for further duty. These then entered into the Reserves for a period of seven years. The Volunteers, however, served only a few months and could return home, feted as heroes. The Mancunian public eagerly anticipated the return of 'their' Volunteers. *The Manchester Evening News* reported on 9 May 1901 that 90 Volunteers of the 1st VBMR were on their way home. It lamented the fact that the people 'only' had about two to three weeks to prepare for their arrival. But plans were already in place. It was known that the men would arrive at London Road Station, and that they would then march to the cathedral. Other Volunteer units, those who had returned earlier, and those who were not chosen for service, would line the route in their honour. It was also rumoured that they would then be entertained by the Lord Mayor.²

A group of 85 Volunteers were met with much fanfare on the night of 23 May 1901 in Ashton. The route from the Ashton Barracks to the train station for Manchester was lined with banners, bannerettes, and bunting. The crowd started assembling hours before the procession started. They cheered the men all the way to the station and the cheers continued after that. The station itself was decorated with streamers and banners saying 'Welcome Home to our Volunteers'. The cheering continued as the train left the station. During the short trip to Manchester, workmen at factories next to the railway line came out to cheer the train as it

¹ 'Records of Service, 63rd and 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, 1758-1910', MR 1/1/2/3. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.

² 'The Return of Manchester Volunteers: Prospective Arrangements', *The Manchester Evening News*, 9 May 1901, 5.

passed. Once at London Road Station in Manchester, another large crowd awaited the men, led by the city notables, such as the Lord Mayor. The men, dressed in their khaki uniforms, did a short drill for the still cheering crowd, and then marched with an escort of 20 mounted policemen and the city officials, all led by an artillery band in blue uniforms, starting down Piccadilly Road. The route via Piccadilly, Market Street, and then Victoria Street was lined with thousands of people cheering and waving the Union Jack and bunting. Teams of photographers lined the route. The destination was the cathedral, and as the Volunteers entered, the bells rang cheerfully.³ The next day, 24 May 1901, the homecoming fanfare continued. The Lord Mayor of Manchester entertained 120 returned Volunteers with a lunch in the Banqueting Hall, Town Hall. As the men made their way to the station to return to Ashton Barracks, the Lord Mayor and others escorted them, and a large crowd at the station cheered them goodbye.⁴

Smaller groups of Volunteers local to a particular town or neighbourhood were similarly feted. On the evening of 27 May 1901, the members of the Oldham Volunteers, Captain Percy Bamford and eight men were invited to a military play, "On Her Majesty's Service", at the Colosseum in Oldham. Between the third and fourth acts, the actor who played the role of General Fairway, welcomed the nine men, after which the audience gave them three cheers. The audience convinced Bamford to give a short speech. He thanked the manager for organising this welcome, and proudly complimented the people of Oldham for their welcome, which he considered the best of all welcomes thus far. The audience cheered in pleasure at this.⁵ Bamford and his men were honoured a few days later on the evening of 7 June 1901 by the mayor of Oldham. The mayor organised a reception in the Town Hall for the nine Oldham Volunteers, in addition to 70 Oldham Volunteer stretcher bearers. It was a large event with about 450 guests.⁶ On 19 June 1901, Colonel Higgins and other officers treated Wigan members of the 1st VBMR to a dinner and a smoking concert. They also marched through the streets, which was attended by a few thousand people, despite the rain.⁷

Even individual Volunteers enjoyed an enthusiastic homecoming. On 23 May 1901, Volunteer Private Gregory was greeted at Romiley Station by a band and a cheering crowd. Gregory was the son of Mr T. Gregory, a butcher of Hill Top. Private Gregory was a bank clerk in Manchester before he was selected as one of the Volunteers to join the Manchester Regiment

³ 'Volunteers' Return: To-Day's Demonstration', *The Manchester Evening Chronicle*, 24 May 1901.

⁴ 'The Luncheon', *The Manchester Evening Chronicle*, 24 May 1901.

⁵ 'The Returned Volunteers at Oldham', *The Manchester Evening News*, 28 May 1901, 3.

⁶ 'Returned Volunteers at Oldham: The Mayor's Reception', *The Manchester Evening News*, 8 June 1901, 2.

⁷ 'The Return of the Volunteers: Wigan Men Entertained', *The Manchester Evening News*, 20 June 1901, 3.

in South Africa. The journalist describing his homecoming wrote how “ringing cheers greeted his arrival at Romiley, and the band played popular airs as the local soldier was escorted home by a large crowd. Surely a prophet is sometimes honoured in his own country!”⁸

Overall, the experiences of the British soldier during the war have only been partially explored by historians within the realm of new military history. Aspects of their wartime experiences are briefly touched on in a few secondary sources, but for various reasons, these aspects are not pursued in a deeper and more systematic manner. This thesis has addressed this gap in the literature by employing a systematic and thematic-chronological approach to the British soldier’s experience of war, specifically using the Manchester Regiment as case study. Focusing on the Manchesters, it brought forth an intimacy to their experiences which is hard to capture in a study which relies on a broader sample base of soldiers who served in various regiments scattered over different parts of the country. In addition, to reconstruct the Manchesters’ experiences to this degree, an important yet under-utilised primary source: soldiers’ correspondence published in local and national newspapers, was used. Without these letters, this study would not have been possible, since the number of primary sources regarding the war preserved in the Manchester Regiment Archive, though excellent, are limited. Based on the material preserved in the archive, in combination with the published correspondence, I identified and discussed several Manchester experiences during the war.

For many Manchesters, their experience began before they even left Manchester or its surrounding villages and towns. This first chapter of their experience, the send-off and journey by ship, forms the foundation, because it discusses their backgrounds and gives a glimpse of the society and environment they came from. These men, almost all of them from a developed urban environment, would soon find themselves in a largely rural and undeveloped land. Before they left, though, many of them, mostly the reservists, Militia, and Volunteers, were the centre of attention. Family, friends, and co-workers were eager to say their goodbyes, and during many of these events, the men were praised for their patriotism and were treated to food, music, dancing, gifts, and lengthy speeches. On the day of their departure to the front, many of them experienced the attention of crowds, sometimes huge crowds, of cheering, singing, and flag-waving people wishing them well and sending them off to war. These men were clearly valued and admired for going to war by their closest acquaintances, but also by members of the Mancunian public. The men’s emotions can only be guessed at, but they must have felt a combination of pleasure, excitement, gratitude, and sorrow for leaving family and friends. For some, this would tragically be the last time they saw their loved ones.

⁸ ‘Home from the War: A Soldier’s Welcome’, *The North Cheshire Herald*, 30 May 1901, 7.

Their trains then departed for the ports, and once their ships steamed away, their 'adventure' began. The journey by sea was largely uneventful. The Bay of Biscay was usually rough, but survivable. There was not much to do, but the Manchesters did not complain much. They were subjected to some drills and training, but they had a lot of free time, which they wiled away through various means, such as reading, holding concerts, a special ceremony for crossing the equator, or simply staring out to sea and hoping to see a marine animal. The food was generally satisfactory. The trip was not as bad as some historians have made it out to be, but there were a few occasions when death visited the ship and the men had to see the sad burial at sea of their comrades. Despite some unpleasantness, the journey to South Africa was by far the easiest part of the war.

Once the Manchesters reached South Africa, they were confronted by a strange land, and many chose to write about it. One can argue that their perceptions of the land and its people revealed a dichotomy of appreciation and attraction versus apprehension and disdain. Some men, coming from a strong urban background, admired the pretty towns, majestic hills, and mountains, while others found the landscape monotonous, uncomfortable (especially the weather), and the terrain was perceived as an ally to the enemy. The Manchesters also commented about the animals, both wild and domestic. Here a dichotomy emerged too. On one hand, some men admired the strange new animals they saw, and some even adopted pets, an aspect which is not commonly mentioned in the secondary literature. On the other hand, animals were also food or trophies, and the officers especially tried their best to hunt, although the pickings were rather slim. A similar dichotomy was observed where the people were concerned. The Manchesters appreciated the warm welcome given to them by English-speaking civilians, they found Africans interesting, some even admired the Boer enemy for their tactical skills, and sometimes saw them as fellow human-beings, while many men enjoyed seeing or interacting with both English, Boer, and African women. However, the prevailing racist attitudes of British society also guaranteed a disdainful opinion of Africans. The Boer commandos too were perceived in a negative light and they were often accused of cowardice. Even Boer civilians, especially the women and children, were not spared condemnation and ridicule. The Manchesters' perception of the land was important, because in a sense, they would not only be at war with the Boer commandos, but also with the environment.

To fight a war, the Manchesters needed supplies, and this part of their experience of the war was challenging. This is another aspect in the secondary literature which is often only alluded to or briefly mentioned, but again there is no in-depth systematic exploration of this topic. Unsurprisingly, the 1st Manchesters, cut off during the siege of Ladysmith, suffered all manner of shortages, especially food and clothing. When not in a siege, the environment again

presented numerous challenges to supply columns. The country had a limited railway network and military operations conducted far from the railway had to be supplied by oxen and mule wagons. But this was an undeveloped country, so the few roads there were, were barely more than dirt tracks. In addition, the Boers did not stay on the roads, but crossed the veld, so the wagons followed, but at snail's pace. The Manchesters thus had to chase and fight the Boers, while waiting for their supplies to catch up. They suffered numerous shortages as a result, such as clothing and boots, and many men were reduced to tatters and bare feet. Worst of all, though, was the food situation. When in pursuit of the Boers, the men often marched on reduced rations. But even if they received their full ration, it was nutritionally deficient for men at war. The Manchesters were hungry, but looting the countryside for food was a common, if dangerous option, and one which several resorted to almost from the start of the war, officers and privates alike. Not a single Manchester expressed doubt about looting, or "foraging", as some euphemistically referred to it. At first it was individuals looting for food, but as the war progressed and the scorched-earth policy, begun by Lord Roberts in mid-1900, began to expand in scope, the Manchesters organised larger and more systematic looting forays. The food situation would have been significantly worse without the Manchesters looting the countryside. Another unexpected insight exposed by the methodology was the importance of blankets. The humble blanket turned out to be one of those underappreciated items which made an enormous difference to the Manchesters' experience, especially when spending the night without shelter on the veld.

While struggling with supply shortages, the Manchesters had to conduct various non-combat duties, under generally uncomfortable circumstances and in a challenging environment, although they at least had some time to distract themselves from the realities of war. The reality was that war was not just a series of glorious battles, as some members of the Victorian public believed. Combat was instead uncommon and life on campaign was mostly monotonous and uncomfortable. Most duties, ranging from picketing, outpost, sentry, and convoy escorts were unglamorous and uninteresting, unless the Boers made a sudden appearance. There was one duty, however, which the Manchesters did not seem to mind, and that was scorched-earth operations. Unlike the material quoted in other studies, I did not find one Manchester who displayed moral concern about devastating the countryside. In fact, it appears that the Manchesters welcomed their scorched-earth duties, because it was an essential way to supplement their limited food supply.

The existing literature, like with other topics, did sometimes touch on the humdrum nature of daily life for Tommy Atkins, but this study's approach highlights several Manchester experiences which, based on how much they wrote about it, emphasised three notable insights into how they perceived their experiences. Marching was one of these, and dominated the

men's lives for significant periods of time, especially the 2nd Manchesters, who earned the nickname 'Rundle's Hounds', and for good reason. It is remarkable how far the Manchesters marched, most of them on foot, in rough terrain, and the pace of marching at times was remarkably fast and brutal. It is thus unsurprising that their boots and clothes deteriorated so quickly with such hard use. Sleep, or the lack of it, was another topic the Manchesters wrote about extensively. This is another experience of life on campaign which is underappreciated in the history of the war. Hygiene was naturally a challenge and would be an important contributing factor to the high incidence of diseases. It was notable, though, how often the Manchesters wrote about this aspect. It was clearly uncomfortable for many of them to operate in unhygienic conditions and although mentioned in other studies, the men's perceptions about hygiene has been largely unexplored. Fortunately for the Manchesters, there were numerous ways to distract themselves from the monotony and discomforts of campaigning, of which various sports, such as football and cricket, played an essential role, and were recognised and encouraged by the officers for its positive morale effect.

The adage that war is "months of boredom punctuated by moments of terror"⁹ would have rung true in the ears of the Manchesters. Campaigning in South Africa involved long periods of monotony, but death and danger were always lurking somewhere in the veld, its hills, its mountains, and even in its water. Shooting could start with barely a moment's notice, and comrades frequently contracted potentially fatal diseases. As with most existing studies about the experiences of the British soldier during the war, the men's experiences of death and danger do exist in the existing literature, albeit often too briefly.

Even though combat formed only a small part of their experiences during the war, the Manchesters wrote extensively about it. In fact, disproportionately so. Not only was combat a life-changing and truly unique experience, but it was also exactly what both the soldiers and the people back home thought war was, or ought to be about. Combat was clearly an important experience and deserves a deeper and more systematic exploration. It also highlighted that the Manchesters were constantly in danger, even though combat encounters were relatively uncommon. The way the men reacted to and perceived combat also varied considerably. Despite influential cultural influences such as the 'Tommy Atkins' stereotype, the men displayed a wide range of perceptions about their experiences, often contradicting societal expectations. The Manchesters did not just march boldly into enemy fire, but many did the most 'un-Tommy' like thing and used cover to advance, among many other sensible, but

⁹ The exact origin of this phrase remains unknown. It first appeared in several publications on the First World War, but the authors did not identify who said it, and it may even be a saying that predated the war. One such book was *The New York Times, Current History, A Monthly Magazine, The European War, From the Beginning to March, 1915*, Volume 1, The New York Times Company: New York, 1915, 979.

somewhat less glorious actions. Arguably worse than injury from a Mauser bullet was being felled by disease, especially typhoid. In general, the Manchesters were rather fatalistic about disease, since there was little they could do about it. In the end, even though combat was relatively rare, the Manchesters lived constantly with the possibility of death and danger, and their thoughts dwelt on it, especially when they had to bury one of their comrades.

The experience of war is a field of study which is far from exhausted, especially for the South African War. This thesis explored the experiences of a single British regiment, the Manchesters. Yet, thanks to the rich content of the primary sources, particularly soldiers' correspondence published in contemporary British newspapers, it has been possible to reconstruct a wide range of wartime experiences. The same can be done for other regiments. Due to the aims and methodology of this thesis, a wide variety of topics were covered. However, there was not sufficient space or time to devote to various fascinating themes which arose during this study. One such research topic is a historical literary analysis of the letters themselves, to explore how the background of the writers, their audience, and various other cultural and writing conventions of the times influenced their tone and content. There are a multitude of other promising avenues to explore based on the various themes I categorised and discussed. Of particular interest is a more in-depth analysis of how British soldiers perceived death and the prospect of death as revealed in their letters. Another promising avenue is a musical history of the war, focusing on the songs which the soldiers wrote about in their letters. These are but only a few possibilities. The South African War still has much to offer, especially from the perspectives of the British soldiers as contained in the largely under-utilised treasure trove of letters published in British newspapers.

To conclude, this thesis attempted to fill a significant gap in the new military history of the South African War by conducting a detailed, systematic, and thematic historical investigation of the lived experiences of the soldiers in the Manchester Regiment. Reconstructing their experiences would have been impossible without the surprisingly underexploited source of published 'letters from the front' in newspapers. Due to this approach and the rich variety of sources, this thesis highlighted several new insights into the experiences of the Manchesters, as discussed in each chapter and summarised above in this conclusion. This was, ultimately, an incredibly taxing war, or 'total' war for the Manchesters, which assaulted body, mind, and emotions. This research argues that what the Manchesters were doing, in terms of their duties, was just as important a factor in the men's experiences as where they were, their rank, and 'when' they were. Furthermore, almost every aspect of the Manchester experience was underpinned by the environment, which presented a variety of challenges and greatly influenced their experiences. Due to some of these challenges, the Manchesters had to adapt, which ironically caused them to sometimes act less like a professional army, and more like

the militia-based enemy they were fighting. An unexpected, but welcome benefit of the methodology and focus was how much more intimate the discussion of the Manchesters' experiences were, which is missing from roughly similar studies which tend to draw their sources from various different regiments which served in different theatres of the war. The same names appear regularly, and one eventually develops a certain empathy with the Manchesters. This reinforces the fact that these were flesh-and-blood individuals, with both flaws and virtues, who experienced and perceived in various different ways an extraordinary, violent, dehumanising, and oftentimes uncomfortable event.

8. LIST OF SOURCES

Primary sources

Archives

Manchester Regiment Archives, Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre, Ashton-under-Lyne, Manchester.

- Abbot-Anderson, J.H. 'Diary, Major J. H. Abbot-Anderson (2nd Battalion), Apr-Jun 1900', MR 1/3/2/1.
- Bramwell, T. 'Letter, Corporal T Bramwell, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Caesar's Camp, Ladysmith to His Wife, Describing Conditions during the Siege', 18 January 1900. MR 1/17/29.
- Charlie. 'Letter, From "Charlie" to Sophy and Charles from the Garrison at Bethlehem, South Africa', 29 January 1901. MR 3/16/74.
- Chittenden, G. 'Letter, Captain G Chittenden, Hammonia, Describing Sickness in the Battalion, Improved Conditions in Camp, Boer Movements, Shortage of Provisions. 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment', 14 July 1900. MR 1/16/5/11.
- Emmott, William. 'Diary, Extracts from the Diary of Private William Emmott, Oldham Active Service Section. May to June 1900', MR 1/3/2/2.
- Hobson, Williams. 'Personal Papers, 7113 Sergeant William Hobson, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Letters [to His Brother] about the Boer War (with Transcripts), Service Programs, 1901-1988', MR 3/17/104.
- Lupton, P. 'Diary, Captain P. Lupton, Volunteer Company, 2nd Battalion, 1901-1902', MR 1/3/2/3.
- Paton, Donald. 'Letter, From Captain Donald Paton, Officer's Hospital, Wynberg, Concerning Officer Casualties; Major Melville's Return to England; the Aftermath of the Battle at Elandslaagte. 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, 14-29 November 1899', MR 1/16/5/3.
- Paton, Donald. 'Letter, Captain Paton, Dalmanutha, Describing the Move of Headquarters and 5 Companies to Helvetia; the Officers' Occupation of the Station Master's House; the Prospect of Being Sent to Garrison Ladysmith; Recent Fighting – Relatively Small Losses since the Beginning of the Year; Battle on 27 August; Battalion's Lack of Popularity with Brigadier General Kitchener; Forthcoming March to Machadadorp and Schoemans Kloof. 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment', 13 September 1900. MR 1/16/5/16.
- Pierce, W.K. 'Letter, Lieutenant W K Pierce, Ficksburg, Describing the March from Senekal; Setting up Camp; Recent Skirmishes. 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment', 13 June 1900. MR 1/16/5/7.
- Reay, 'Letter, Lieutenant Colonel Reay, Hammonia, Expressing Regret at the Major's Return Home; Describes the Position of Other Brigades and Officer Casualties. 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment', 27 June 1900. MR 1/16/5/8.
- Reay, Charles. 'Letter, Lieutenant Colonel Reay, Hammonia, Describing Recent Boer Attacks; Officer's Postings; the Cold Weather. 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment', 11 July 1900. MR 1/16/5/10.

- Reay, Charles. 'Letter, Lieutenant Colonel Reay, Klip River, Transvaal, to Colonel Gwatkin, Describing the Movement of a Convoy from Vrede to Standerton; Improved Supplies and Conditions at Standerton; the Proposed March towards Reitz. 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment', 2 September 1900. MR 1/16/5/13.
- Reay, Charles. 'Letter, Lieutenant Colonel Reay, Vrede, to Colonel Gwatkin, Concerning the Proposed Move to Bethlehem; the Fine Weather. 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment', 4 September 1900. MR 1/16/5/14.
- Reay, Charles. 'Letter, Lieutenant Colonel Reay, Senekal and Bethlehem, to Colonel Gethin Concerning Officer Casualties; Recent Fighting; a Draft of Officers to the Battalion; the Capture of 26 Guns from the Boers on the 17 September. 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment', 22 September 1900. MR 1/16/5/17.
- Tilland. 'Letter, Captain Tilland, Badfontein, to Colonel Hardcastle, 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, Describing Recent Fighting; Boer Peace Delegate's Visit; Conditions in Camp', 20 January 1901. MR1/16/7.
- Trueman, Charles Hamilton. 'Correspondence, Bound Volume of Transcripts of Letters and Diary Entries from Captain Charles Hamilton Trueman, 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, Describing His Time and Service in South Africa during the South African (Boer) War. The Volume Also Contains Photocopied Newscuttings Relating to John Francis William Fitzgerald to Whom the Volume Belonged and Who Later Willed It to the Depositor. A Newscutting Relating to the Death of a Pte Lionel Parminter Is Pasted onto the End Papers, 1900-1901', MR 4/16/75.
- Winter, G.R. 'Letter, Sergeant G R Winter, Natal, Describing His Company's Arrival in Durban; Christmas Day in Camp; Attacks on the Boer Trenches; Company's Attachment to the Royal Engineers. 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment', 1 February 1900. MR 1/16/5/4.
- 'History, The Return from Camp, a Record of the South African War Commemorating the Return of the 1st Volunteer Battalion Manchester Regiment and the 4th LRV to Wigan, 1899-1900', MR 1/3/1/27.
- 'Photograph Album, 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, Harrismith, Liddles Farm, 1901-1902', n.d. MR 3/23/69.
- 'Records of Service, 63rd and 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, 1758-1910', MR 1/1/2/3.
- 'Records of Service, 63rd and 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment, 1758-1910', MR 1/1/2/1.
- 'Records of Service: 96th Regt and 2nd Bttn Manchester Regiment, 1824-1914', MR 1/1/2/6.
- 'Roll of Honour, Casualty Return, "F" Company, 2nd Battalion, 1900-1901', MR 1/5/1/3.
- 'Training Booklets, Volunteer Force Regulations, Infantry Training, Frontier Warfare and Bush Fighting, Musketry and Field Service Regulations, 1898-1910', MR 1/13/2/10.
- 'Nominal Roll, Squad Roll of "G" Coy., 1st Battalion (Captain Marsden's)', 1899. MR 1/8/3.
- 'History, Diary of the Siege of Ladysmith Reprinted from the Records of Service', 1900. MR 1/3/1/2.
- 'Photograph Album, 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, South Africa', c 1900. MR 1/23/24.
- 'Photograph Album, South Africa, Local View; Scenes in Camp; Informal Groups; on the March', c 1900. MR 1/23/20.
- 'Photograph Album, South Africa, Local View; Scenes in Camp; Informal Groups; on the March', c 1900. MR 1/23/21.
- 'Photograph Album, South Africa, Local View; Scenes in Camp; Informal Groups; on the March', c 1900. MR 1/23/19.
- 'Nominal Roll, Squad Roll of "F" Coy., 2nd Battalion (Major Anderson's)', March 1900. MR 1/8/4.
- 'Bookie's Card, Manchester Regiment Race Meeting, Harrismith', 1901. MR 1/27/2/6.

The National Archives, Kew, London.

'Boer War: Imposition and Administration of Martial Law: Ladysmith Staff Diary during Siege', 28 February 1900. WO 32/8136.

Newspapers

Daily Mail

Anderson, W.M. 'The Day's March: Through Dust and Toil and Hunger after de Wet'.
1 May 1901.

Manchester Evening Chronicle

Haddon. 'The Manchesters in Natal'. 29 November 1899.
Reay, Charles. 'The Second Manchesters in South Africa: Hard Work and Long Marches'.
3 December 1900.
Reay, Charles. 'Manchester Soldiers at the Front: What the 2nd Battalion Has Been
Doing'. 23 March 1901.
Reay, Charles. 'More about the Manchesters: Garrison Life at Bethlehem'. 26 March 1901.
Reay, Charles. 'Manchesters at the Front: Doings of the 2nd Battalion'. 29 July 1901.
Reay, Charles and Noble. 'More about the Manchesters. Garrison Life at Bethlehem: A
Letter Which Ran the Blockade'. 26 March 1901.
'The Luncheon'. 24 May 1901.
'Volunteers' Return: To-Day's Demonstration'. 24 May 1901.

Pearson's Weekly

John Willie, and Albert. 'The War from Tommy's Point of View: From One Who Was
Wounded at Elandslaagte'. 13 January 1900.
'The War from Tommy's Point of View: A Lieutenant Who Went through Elandslaagte'.
27 January 1900.

Reading Mercury, Oxford Gazette, Newbury Herald, and Berks County Paper

'A Soldier's Tale of the Battle of Elandslaagte'. 30 December 1899.

The Aberdeen Weekly Journal

Toomey, Charles. 'Elandslaagte: Story of the Drummer Boy Who Sounded the Charge'.
29 November 1899.

The Ashton Reporter

Barratt, Sam. 'Interesting Letter from a Chapel Soldier at Ladysmith: Wounded in the
Legs'. 14 April 1900.

- Barron, William. 'Letter from a Dukinfield Soldier in Natal: Still Living and like to Remain So'. 10 March 1900.
- Barron, William. 'A Local Man at Ladysmith'. 5 May 1900.
- Barron, William. 'Letter from Private Wm. Barron'. 23 June 1900.
- Bates, W. 'Letter from an Ashton Soldier'. 7 April 1900.
- Bumby, George. 'An Ashtonian at the Front: Not Satisfied with the Food'. 2 December 1899.
- Bumby, George. 'Letters from Ladysmith'. 7 April 1900.
- Chadderton, George. 'An Ashton Volunteer's Letter to the Ashton P.S.A. Society'. 23 June 1900.
- Clarke, James. 'Letter from a Soldier: In a Collision at Sea'. 21 July 1900.
- Coffey, Wilfred. 'Letters from the Front: Letter from Bugler Coffey'. 12 May 1900.
- Darlington, E. 'Letters from Stalybridge Men at the War'. 21 April 1900.
- Fisher, Jack. 'Letters from the Front'. 24 March 1900.
- Fisher, Jack. 'With the Ladysmith Relief Column'. 21 April 1900.
- Fitton, F. 'Letters from Ladysmith'. 7 April 1900.
- Gregory, W.F. 'The South African War. Interesting Letter from a Romiley Gentleman'. 1 September 1900.
- Hall, Tom. 'Letters from Ladysmith'. 7 April 1900.
- Hardman, Jack. 'With the 2nd Manchesters at the Battle of Dewetsdorp'. 9 June 1900.
- Hawkins, Walter. 'Letter from an Ashton Volunteer at the Front'. 21 April 1900.
- Hawkins, Walter. 'Letter from a Dukinfield Soldier'. 2 June 1900.
- Hawkins, Walter. 'Letter from Private W. Hawkins'. 1 September 1900.
- Hawkins, Walter. 'Letters from the Front'. 3 November 1900.
- Heywood, B.C.P. 'Letters from the Front: Manchester Volunteers in Battle'. 15 September 1900.
- Hodkinson, A. 'Interesting Letter from the Seat of War'. 2 June 1900.
- Howe. 'Letter from Captain Howe to Colonel Eaton'. 10 March 1900.
- Hunt, Walter. 'Letter from a Hooley Hill Lad in South Africa'. 23 June 1900.
- Kershaw, Ernest. 'After the Siege of Ladysmith'. 12 May 1900.
- Lake, David. 'Letters from the Front'. 14 April 1900.
- Lees, Samuel. 'Letter from Corporal Lees, of Ashton'. 28 April 1900.
- Little, M. 'An Ashtonian at Elands Laagte: Sad Death of Poor Old Ned Dewhurst'. 2 December 1899.
- Makin. 'Letters from South Africa'. 14 April 1900.
- Mannion, T. 'Interesting Impression of Cape Town'. 24 March 1900.
- Mills, A. 'Letter from A. Mills'. 26 May 1900.
- Molineux, John. 'Letter from a Dukinfield Man at Dewdorp'. 28 April 1900.
- Nelson. 'To the Editor of the Reporter'. 27 January 1900.
- Newton, Harry. 'The War. The Ashton Volunteers in Natal. Letter to the Sergeants' Mess'. 21 April 1900.
- Ollerenshaw. 'Interesting Letter from the Front'. 9 June 1900.
- Parr, E. 'En Route for the War: A Hyde Man's Experience on a Transport'. 23 December 1899.
- Parr, E. 'A Hyde Man's Experience: The Occupation of a Stretcher Bearer'. 27 January 1900.
- Parry, W.A. "'Send-off" Gifts for the Manchester Reservists'. 13 January 1900.
- Powell, William. 'An Ashtonian in the Battle of Elandslaagte'. 25 November 1899.
- Reay, Charles. 'Letter from Colonel Reay'. 16 June 1900.
- Riley, Harry. 'With the Ashton Volunteers'. 7 April 1900.
- Riley, Harry. 'Another Letter from an Ashton Volunteer at the Front'. 28 April 1900.
- Sim, R. 'Letter from a Dukinfield Man at the Front'. 5 May 1900.
- Smith, Orlando. 'Letter from Another Ashton Volunteer'. 21 April 1900.
- Smith, Orlando. 'Letter from an Ashton Volunteer'. 23 June 1900.
- Turner, Alfred. 'Letter from Private Alfred Turner: Life on a Transport'. 12 May 1900.

Turner, Alfred. 'Another Letter from Private A. Turner'. 19 May 1900.
Turner, Alfred. 'Letter from Alfred Turner'. 23 June 1900.
Williams, R. 'Letters from Stalybridge Men at the War'. 21 April 1900.
'The Fighting at Elandslaagte'. 28 October 1899.
'A Visit to the Ashton Barracks'. 25 November 1899.
'Departure of Reservists from Ashton'. 25 November 1899.
'Departure of the Reservists: Exciting and Enthusiastic Scenes'. 2 December 1899.
'Send-off to an Ashton Reservist'. 27 January 1900.
'Presentation to a Volunteer at Hurst'. 17 February 1900.
'Ashton-under-Lyne, Workhouse: Send-off to Private Turner'. 10 March 1900.

The Ashton Herald

Howe, E.S., Harry Newton, and B.C.P. Heywood. 'Local Volunteers at Sea. Experiences on Board the Greek: Letters from Ashton and Manchester Men'. 10 March 1900.
Mayer, Ben. 'A Gorton Soldier Killed by the Boers'. 28 October 1899.
Wall, Michael. 'A Gorton Man at the Battle of Elandslaagte'. 2 December 1899.
'A Tame Valley Man for the Front'. 27 January 1900.
'Send-off at Wellington Mills Ashton'. 10 February 1900.
'Departure of the Volunteers from Ashton'. 17 February 1900.
'Farewell Party at Ashton'. 17 February 1900.
'Send-off of Reservists from Droylsden'. 17 March 1900.
'A Droylsden Volunteer's Send-Off'. 23 February 1901.
'Departure of Local Volunteers'. 23 March 1901.
'Volunteers for the Front: Departure of the Ashton Contingent'. 30 March 1901.
'Ashton Active Service Volunteer: An Enthusiastic Send-off, Stirring Scenes'. 22 March 1902.

The Gorton Reporter

Brown, W. 'Serving with the Field Forces'. 30 November 1901.
Martin, R. 'Letter from the Front'. 29 June 1901.
Scott, W. 'Letters from the Front'. 19 January 1901.
'"Send-off" for a Local Volunteer'. 23 February 1901.
'Departure of the Ashton Volunteers for the Front: Enthusiastic Scenes'. 30 March 1901.
'Ashton P.S.A. Ambulance Men for the Front'. 13 April 1901.
'Ashton Volunteers Hold a Birthday Party at Van Reenan's Pass'. 13 July 1901.

The Hampshire Advertiser County Newspaper

'The Transvaal War: Arrival of Wounded at Southampton'. 27 December 1899.

The Leicester Chronicle

Stokes. 'Thurmiston Man Describes the Battle of Elandslaagte'. 25 November 1899.

The Manchester Evening News

- Andrew, F.W. 'Letters from the Front: The Manchester Volunteers at the Front'. 10 October 1900.
- Andrew, F.W. 'Letters from the Front: With the Manchester Volunteers. An Interesting Diary'. 14 November 1900.
- Caun, W. 'Letters from the Front: A Manchester Soldier's Experience'. 27 December 1900.
- Evans, G.W. 'Letter from the Front: With the Manchester Mounted Infantry'. 27 November 1900.
- Evans, J.W. 'Letter from a Wounded Manchester Soldier'. 21 November 1899.
- Evans, J.W. 'A Manchester Private's Description of Elands Laagte'. 27 November 1899.
- Parr, E. 'The Discomforts of a Transport'. 22 December 1899.
- Woods, C.H. 'Christmas Day with the 2nd Manchesters'. 26 March 1901.
- 'The Second Manchester Regiment: A Route March'. 24 November 1899.
- 'A Manchester Reservist's Grievance'. 16 January 1901.
- 'Local Reinforcements, Departure of the 5th Manchester Reservists'. 11 February 1901.
- 'Lancashire Engineers'. 4 March 1901.
- 'The Return of Manchester Volunteers: Prospective Arrangements'. 9 May 1901.
- 'The Returned Volunteers at Oldham'. 28 May 1901.
- 'Returned Volunteers at Oldham: The Mayor's Reception'. 8 June 1901.
- 'The Return of the Volunteers: Wigan Men Entertained'. 20 June 1901.

The Manchester Guardian

- 'Letter from an Officer of the First Manchester'. 14 December 1899.
- 'Departure of Manchester Volunteers'. 10 February 1900.
- 'Troops for the Front: Departure of Four Transports'. 15 February 1900.
- 'The Splendid Defence of Caesar's Camp: Details of the Fight. Interview with the Two Survivors.' 18 May 1900.
- 'Cheshire Men for the Front'. 19 February 1901.

The Manchester Weekly Times

- Hardicre. 'Sidelights on the War: From the Soldier's Point of View'. 24 November 1899.
- Kelly, W. 'Sidelights on the War: From the Soldier's Point of View'. 24 November 1899.

The North Cheshire Herald

- Lees, Samuel. 'Letter from the Front'. 7 July 1900.
- Private 7148. 'Another Local Man at the Seat of War'. 6 July 1901.
- 'Home from the War: A Soldier's Welcome'. 30 May 1901.

The Stalybridge Reporter

- Bumby, George. 'An Ashtonian at the Front: Not Satisfied with the Food'. 2 December 1899.
- Clarke, James. 'Letter from a Soldier: In a Collision at Sea'. 21 July 1900.
- Darlington, E. 'Letters from Stalybridge Men at the War'. 21 April 1900.
- Fern, William. 'Letter from South Africa: A Contradiction'. 15 March 1902.
- Lees, Samuel. 'Letter from Corporal Lees, of Ashton'. 28 April 1900.

- Little, M. 'An Ashtonian at Elandsplaagte: Sad Death of Poor Old Ned Dewhurst'. 2 December 1899.
- Nelson. 'To the Editor of the Reporter'. 27 January 1900.
- Newton, Harry. 'The War: The Ashton Volunteers in Natal. Letter to the Sergeants' Mess'. 21 April 1900.
- Powell, William. 'An Ashtonian in the Battle of Elandsplaagte'. 25 November 1899.
- Riley, Harry. 'With the Ashton Volunteers: The Voyage to South Africa. Letter from Private H. Riley'. 7 April 1900.
- Smith, John. 'Letter from Sergeant Smith'. 2 June 1900.
- Turner, Alfred. 'Letters from the Front: Letter from Private Alfred Turner. Life on a Transport'. 12 May 1900.
- Williams, R. 'Letters from Stalybridge Men at the War'. 21 April 1900.
- 'Departure of Reservists from Ashton'. 25 November 1899.
- 'Departure of the Reservists: Exciting and Enthusiastic Scenes'. 2 December 1899.
- 'Presentations to Another Hyde Reservist'. 20 January 1900.
- 'Departure of Troops from Ashton'. 27 January 1900.
- 'Departure of Ashton Volunteers for the Front'. 30 March 1901.
- 'Death of an Ashton Soldier in South Africa'. 11 January 1902.
- 'Off to the Front: Departure from Ashton of the Sixth Battalion Manchester Regiment'. 11 January 1902.
- 'Ashton Volunteers for South Africa'. 15 March 1902.
- 'Departure of Ashton Volunteers for the Front: Enthusiastic "Send-Off"'. 22 March 1902.

The Wrexham Advertiser

- Toomey, Charles. 'The Fight at Elandsplaagte: An inside View'. 25 November 1899.

The Yorkshire Evening Post

- 'War Notes'. 24 October 1899.

Secondary sources

Books, articles, book chapters

- Attridge, S. *Nationalism, Imperialism and Identity in Late Victorian Culture: Civil and Military Worlds*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- Black, Jeremy. *Rethinking Military History*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2004.
- Bogacz, T. 'Review – Wartime: Understanding and Behaviour in the Second World War by P. Fussell'. *The Journal of American History* 78, no. 1 (June 1991): 378–79.
- Boje, J. 'Sexual Relations between British Soldiers and Boer Women: A Methodological Approach'. *South African Historical Journal* 68, no. 2 (2016): 195–212.
- Bonner, Robert. *Volunteer Infantry of Ashton-under-Lyne 1859-1971: Including the Biography of William Thomas Forshaw VC*. Knutsford, Cheshire: Fleur de Lys Publishers, 2005.

- Bonner, Robert. *The Manchester Regiment and Its Volunteer Service Companies in the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902*. Fleur de Lys Publishers, 2007.
- Bonner, Robert. 'Hulme Cavalry Barracks, Manchester'. *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 91, no. 367 (2013): 206–25.
- Botha, H.J. 'Die Moord Op Derdepoort, 25 November 1899. Nie-Blankes in Oorlogsdien'. *Militaria* 1, no. 1 (1969).
- Bourke, J. *An Intimate History of Killing*. London: Granta, 2000.
- Brereton, J.M. *The British Soldier: A Social History from 1661 to the Present Day*. London: Bodley Head, 1986.
- Breytenbach, J.H. *Geskiedenis van Die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog 1899-1902: I Die Boere-Offensief*. Vol. 1. Pretoria: Die Staatsdrukker, 1969.
- Breytenbach, J.H. *Geskiedenis van Die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog 1899-1902: II Die Eerste Britse Offensief*. Vol. 2. Pretoria: Die Staatsdrukker, 1971.
- Breytenbach, J.H. *Geskiedenis van Die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog 1899-1902: III Die Stryd in Natal*. Vol. 3. Pretoria: Die Staatsdrukker, 1973.
- Campbell, G.L. *The Manchesters: A History of the Regular Militia, Special Reserve, Territorial, and New Army Battalions since Their Formation; with a Record of the Officers Now Serving, and the Honours and Casualties of the War of 1914-16*. London: Picture Advertising Co., 1916.
- Chetty, S. 'All the News That's Fit to Print: The Print Media of the Second World War and Its Portrayal of the Gendered and Racial Identities of the War's Participants'. *South African Historical Journal* 54, no. 1 (2005): 30–53.
- Clayton, Anthony. *Battlefield Rations: The Food Given to the British Soldier for Marching and Fighting 1900-2011*. Havertown: Helion and Company, 2013.
- Cuthbertson, Gregor, A.M. Grundlingh, and Mary-Lynn Suttie, eds. *Writing a Wider War: Rethinking Gender, Race, and Identity in the South African War, 1899-1902*. Athens & Cape Town: Ohio University Press & David Philip, 2002.
- Danchev, A. 'Review – Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War by P. Fussell'. *The Journal of Military History* 54, no. 2 (April 1990): 243–45.
- Darwin, John. *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain*. London: Penguin Books, 2013.
- Dawson, Graham. *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities*. Abingdon: Routledge, 1994.
- Downham, John. *Red Roses on the Veldt - Lancashire Regiments in the Boer War, 1899-1902*. Lancaster: Carnegie Publishing, 2000.
- Emery, Frank. *The Red Soldier: Letters from the Zulu War, 1879*. Johannesburg: Jonothan Ball, 1983.
- Emery, Frank. *Marching over Africa: Letters from Victorian Soldiers*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1986.

- Fuller, John F.C. *The Last of the Gentleman's Wars: A Subaltern's Journal of the War in South Africa 1899-1902*. London: Faber & Faber, 1937.
- Farwell, Byron. *For Queen and Country*. London: Allen Lane, 1981.
- Fussel, Paul. *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Genis, Gerhard. *Poetic Bodies and Corpses of War: South African Great War Poetry*. Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2018.
- Goodman, Jordan. *Tobacco in History: The Cultures of Dependence*. London and New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Grundlingh, A.M. *Dynamics of Treason. Boer Collaboration in the South African War*. Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2006.
- Harris-Jenkins, Gwyn. *The Army in Victorian Society*. London: Routledge, 1977.
- Hattingh, Johan, and André Wessels. 'Life in British Blockhouses during the Anglo-Boer War, 1887-1902'. *South African Journal of Cultural History* 13, no. 2 (November 1999): 39–55.
- Holmes, Richard. *Firing Line*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987.
- Hunt, L. 'Introduction: History, Culture, and Text'. In *The New Cultural History: Essays*, edited by L. Hunt. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.
- James, T. 'Gunshot Wounds of the South African War'. *South African Medical Journal* 45, no. 39 (October 1971): 1089–94.
- Jeffery, K. 'The Irish Soldier at War'. In *The Boer War: Direction, Experience and Image*, edited by J. Gooche. London: Frank Cass, 2000.
- Jones, D.J.V. 'The Poacher: A Study in Victorian Crime and Protest'. *The Historical Journal* 22, no. 4 (December 1979): 825–60.
- Karsten, P. 'Demilitarizing Military History: Servants of Power or Agents of Understanding?' *Military Affairs* 36, no. 3 (October 1972): 88–92.
- Keegan, John. *A History of Warfare*. London: Hutchinson, 1993.
- Keegan, John. *The Face of Battle: A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo, and the Somme*. London: Johathan Cape Ltd, 1976.
- Laband, John. 'The British Way of War in South Africa, 1837-1902'. In *Victorians at War: New Perspectives*, edited by Ian F.W. Beckett, 12–22. London: Society for Army Historical Research, 2007.
- Labuschagne, Pieter. *Ghostriders of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902): The Role and Contribution of Agterryers*. Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1999.
- Laffin, John. *Tommy Atkins. The Story of an English Soldier*. London: Cassel, 1966.
- Lynn, J.A. 'Breaching the Walls of Academe: The Purposes, Problems, and Prospects of Military History'. *Academic Quest* 21 (2008): 18–36.
- Marden, Arthur W., and William P.E. Newbigging. *Rough Diary of the Doings of the 1st Battn. Manchester Regt. During the South African War, 1899 to 1902*. Manchester and London: John Heywood, 1902.

- Matikkala, Mira. *Empire and Imperial Ambition: Liberty, Englishness and Anti-Imperialism in Late-Victorian Britain*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2011.
- Mileham, Patrick. *Difficulties Be Damned: The King's Regiment 8th, 63rd, 96th - a History of the City Regiment of Manchester & Liverpool*. Fleur de Lys Publications, 2000.
- Miller, Stephen M. *Volunteers on the Veld: Britain's Citizen-Soldiers and the South African War, 1899-1902*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007.
- Mitchinson, K.W. *Amateur Soldiers: A History of Oldham's Volunteers and Territorials, 1859-1938*. Oldham: Jade, 1999.
- Morgan, K.O. 'The Boer War and the Media (1899-1902)'. *Twentieth Century British History* 13, no. 1 (2002): 1–16.
- Morillo, Stephen, and Michael F. Pavkovic. *What Is Military History?* Cambridge, UK; Malden, Massachusetts: Polity, 2006.
- Moyar, M. 'The Current State of Military History'. *The Historical Journal* 50, no. 1 (2007): 225–40.
- Mundy, J. 'The Face of Battle by John Keegan'. *The Journal of Modern History* 49, no. 5 (December 1977): 678–80.
- Nasson, Bill. 'Tommy Atkins in South Africa'. In *The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902*, edited by Peter Warwick and S.B. Spies, 123–38. Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1980.
- Nasson, Bill. *The War for South Africa [the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902]*. Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2010.
- Nasson, Bill. *WW I and the People of South Africa*. Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2014.
- Pakenham, Thomas. *The Boer War*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1979.
- Parfitt, G. 'Review: Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies'. *The Review of English Studies* 44, no. 175 (August 1993): 448–49.
- Pretorius, Fransjohan. *Die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902*. Cape Town: Struik Uitgewers (Edms) Ltd, 1998.
- Pretorius, Fransjohan. *Historical Dictionary of the Anglo-Boer War*. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2009.
- Pretorius, Fransjohan. *Kommandolewe Tydens Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*. Cape Town & Johannesburg: Human & Rousseau, 1991.
- Price, Richard. *An Imperial War and the British Working Class: Working-Class Attitudes and Reactions to the Boer War, 1899-1902*. London: Routledge, 1972.
- Ramamurthy, Anandi. *Imperial Persuaders: Images of Africa and Asia in British Advertising*. Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2003.
- Rawlinson-Mills, Elizabeth. "'That Far-off Southern Tomb": Visions and Versions of South Africa in British Newspaper Poetry of the 1899-1902 South African War'. In *Crossing Borders in Victorian Travel: Spaces, Nations and Empires*, edited by Barbara Franchi and Elvan Mutlu, 106–31. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018.

- Rawlinson-Mills, Elizabeth. 'Soldiers of the Queen: Reading Newspaper Fiction of the South African War (1899-1902)'. *Journal of Victorian Culture* 23, no. 3 (2018): 381–404.
- Rosenberg, Scott. 'Who Determines a Chief? Motsoene Molapo and Succession Disputes in Lesotho, 1867–1940'. *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 55, no. 2 (2022): 259–80.
- Ross Roy, G. 'Auld Lang Syne'. In *Selected Essays on Robert Burns by G. Ross Roy*, 77–83. University of South Carolina: Scholar Commons, 2018.
- Scott, Derek B. *The Singing Bourgeois: Songs of the Victorian Drawing Room and Parlour*. 2nd Edition; E-Book. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001.
- Shafer, Robert J. *A Guide to Historical Method*. 3rd ed. Homewood, Illinois: Dorsey Press, 1980.
- Sheppard, Alan. *The King's Regiment*. Reading: Osprey Publishing, 1973.
- Snape, Michael F. *The Redcoat and Religion: The Forgotten History of the British Soldier from the Age of Marlborough to the Eve of the First World War*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2005.
- Spiers, Edward M. 'Military Correspondence in the Late Nineteenth-Century Press'. *Archives XXXII*, no. 116 (April 2007): 28–40.
- Spiers, Edward M. 'The Scottish Soldier at War'. In *The Boer War: Direction, Experience and Image*, edited by J. Gooche. London: Frank Cass, 2000.
- Spiers, Edward M. 'War'. In *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Culture*, edited by Francis O' Gorman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Spiers, Edward M. *The Late Victorian Army 1868-1902*. Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1992.
- Spiers, Edward M. *The Scottish Soldier and Empire, 1854-1902*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006.
- Spiers, Edward M. *The Victorian Soldier in Africa*. Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2004.
- Steinbach, Susie L. *Understanding the Victorians: Politics, Culture and Society in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. London: Routledge, 2017.
- Swart, Sandra. *Riding High: Horses, Humans and History in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2010.
- Todd, Pamela, and David Fordham. *Private Tucker's Boer War Diary: The Transvaal War of 1899, 1900, 1901 & 1902 with the Natal Field Forces*. London: Elm Tree Books, 1980.
- Tosh, John. *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New*. Revised 3rd ed. London: Longman, 2002.
- Travers, T.H.E. 'Technology, Tactics, and Morale: Jean de Bloch, the Boer War, and British Military Theory, 1900-1914'. *The Journal of Modern History* 51, no. 2 (June 1979): 264–86.

- Van Creveld, M. 'Thoughts on Military History'. *Journal of Contemporary History* 18, no. 4 (October 1983): 549–66.
- Venter, Louis, and André Wessels. 'British Soldiers' Anglo-Boer War Experiences as Recorded in Their Diaries'. *South African Journal of Cultural History* 36, no. 2 (December 2022): 63–83.
- Verdin, Richard. *The Cheshire (Earl of Chester's) Yeomanry 1898-1967*. Chester: Cheshire Yeomanry Association, 1971.
- Visser, D. 'Military History at the South African Military Academy'. *Historia* 49, no. 2 (November 2004): 129–46.
- Visser, D., A. Jacobs, and H. Smit. 'Water for Saldanha: War as an Agent of Change'. *Historia* 53, no. 1 (May 2008): 130–61.
- Visser, D. 'Civilian-Military Interaction on the Matie Campus: The "Battle of Wilgenhof", 1957'. *Scientia Militaria - South African Journal of Military Studies* 37, no. 2 (August 2011): 82–106.
- Wallace, Jim. *Knowing No Fear: The Canadian Scouts in South Africa 1900-1902*. Victoria, British Columbia: Trafford, 2008.
- Warwick, Peter. *Black People and the South African War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Weigley, R.F. 'Introduction'. In *New Dimensions in Military History: An Anthology*, edited by R.F. Weigley. San Rafael: Presidio Press, 1975.
- Wiley, Bell Irvin. *The Life of Johnny Reb: The Common Soldier of the Confederacy*. Updated edition, E-Book. Indianapolis: Louisiana State University Press, 2008.
- Winter, D. *Death's Men: Soldiers of the Great War*. London: Penguin Books, 2014.
- Winter, J.M. 'Review: Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies'. *The Journal of Modern History* 64, no. 3 (September 1992): 525–32.
- Wylly, Harold C. *History of the Manchester Regiment (Late the 63rd and 96th Foot)*. Vol. 2. London: Forster Groom & Co. Ltd, 1925.
- Wylly, Harold C. *A Short History of the Manchester Regiment (Regular Battalions)*. 3rd ed. Aldershot: Gale and Polden, 1933.

Dissertations

- Armstrong, Neil R. 'The Intimacy of Christmas: Festive Celebration in England c. 1750-1914'. University of York, 2004.
- Cuthbertson, Gregor. 'The Nonconformist Conscience and the South African War, 1899-1902'. University of South Africa, 1986.
- Jones, Spencer. 'The Influence of The Boer War (1899 – 1902) on the Tactical Development of the Regular British Army 1902 – 1914'. University of Wolverhampton, 2009.
- McLeod, A.J. 'The Psychological Impact of the Guerrilla War on the Boers during the Anglo-Boer War'. University of Pretoria, 2005.
- Milne, B. 'Case Studies of the British Soldiers' Experience of the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902'. MA History, University of Pretoria, 2000.
- Page, Andrew. 'Supply Services of the British Army in the South African War, 1899-1902'. University of Oxford, 1976.
- Stone, M.S. 'The Victorian Army: Health, Hospitals and Social Conditions as Encountered by British Troops during the South African War, 1899-1902'. University of London, 1992.
- SurrIDGE, Keith T. 'British Civil-Military Relations and the South African War (1899-1902)'. King's College London, 1994.

9. APPENDIX

The following table is of Captain Marden's¹ G Company, 1st Manchesters, totalling 107 men. This number represented all the men who served in G Company up to a certain point. The strength of the company would have changed constantly as some men became casualties, were discharged, or invalided. They would then be replaced by new men from the Reserves and Militia. Marden began this nominal roll in 1899, but it is unclear until what date he kept it updated, but it was still worked on until some point in 1900. It gives a sample of the social composition of the regular recruits, although some details are unclear due to Marden's handwriting:

Name	Date of enlistment	Trade	Age at enlistment
Arnitt, T.	1893	Labourer	18
Ashton, J.	1897	Hawker	19
Atherton, C.	1897	Labourer	18
Barniston, A.	1895	Glass Blower	19
Bradley, H.	1896	Grocer	18
Bradshaw, W.	1894	Labourer	21
Bradshaw, G.	1896	Gardener	18
Brennan, J.	1896	Labourer	20
Briesly?, S.	1895	Stone mason	21
Broadbent, J.	1896	Unclear	19
Bunke, J. (Sergeant)	1886	Labourer	18
Butler, S.	1895	Packer	20
Buxton, C.	1893	Labourer	18
Buxton, G.	1892	Collier	18
Clarke, J. (Lance-corporal)	1896	Farm labourer	19
Costello, J.H.	1895	Labourer	24

¹ Not Marsden, as incorrectly spelled in the Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre catalogue.

Name	Date of enlistment	Trade	Age at enlistment
Coyle, D. (Lance-corporal)	1896	Vocalist	18
Cope, V.	1896	Driver	18
Crinion?, T.	1896	Labourer	18
Cunningham, J.	1894	Labourer	20
Dennett, H.	1895	Clogger	18
Edwards, A. (Lance-corporal)	1896	Labourer	18
Farnell, J.	1896	Labourer	20
Farrow, T.	1895	Spinner	24
Finlay, J.	1895	Moulder	18
Fish, M. (Lance-corporal)	1897	Labourer	19
Gilder, G.	1895	Groom	20
Gibbs, W.	1895	Labourer	18
Gilligan, A.	1897	Hawker	18
Grundy, J.	1896	Collier	19
Guttery, J.W. (killed on 6 January 1900)	1896	Butcher	20
Hall, J.	1897	Weaver	19
Harrison, T.	1892	Labourer	18
Hollard, G.W.	1896	Factory operative	18
Hollard, J.W.	1895	Labourer	19
H???? Alfred	1894	Labourer	20
Hudson, C.	1896	Labourer	18
Hughes, M.	1895	Labourer	18
Hunt, R.	1896	None	14
Hunt, W.	1894	Hatter	18
Jackson, J.	1896	Labourer	19
Jarman?, H.W. (Corporal)	1894	Tanner	18

Name	Date of enlistment	Trade	Age at enlistment
Jermayn?, H.	1892	Guard	18
Johnson, F.	1896	Labourer	21
Lewis, J. (rank unclear - possibly a sergeant)	1894	Clerk	22
Lawley, J.	1894	Labourer	19
Lowe, J.	1895	Collier	19
Mannering?, J. (Lance-corporal)	1897	Banker	18
Marsland, W.	1896	Hooker	18
Martin, J.	1896	Labourer	18
Meekle?, J.W.	1895	Labourer	18
Mills, A.	1897	Shopman	18
Milner, A.	1894	Spinner	18
Mulcaster, G.C.	1893	Photographer	20
Murphy, P. (Sergeant)	1892	Labourer	18
Murray, J.T.	1895	Labourer	18
Navesey, J.E.	1896	Piecer	18
Newton, J.	1896	Carter	19
Paris (Corporal)	1894	Warehouseman	18
Parkinson, A.	1890	Piecer	18
Parsons, W.	1894	Metal sorter	18
Patrick, J.	1894	Labourer	18
Payne, W.	1896	Labourer	19
Pegg, J.W.	1893	Box maker	18
Perkinson, J.	1893	Boiler rivetter	22
Petch?, C.	1893	Labourer	18
Pomsey?, J.	1894	Carman	19
Pomsey?, J.H.	1894	Butcher	18

Name	Date of enlistment	Trade	Age at enlistment
Poysen, H. (Lance-corporal; killed at Elandslaagte, 21 October 1899)	1893	Packer	22
Price, R.	1894	Labourer	18
Pritchard, O.	1893	Painter	21
Purchase, J.	1893	Labourer	18
Procter, A. E. (Sergeant)	1895	Gunsmith	21
Ramsbottom, A.	1893	Carter	18
Ratcliffe, J.	1894	Butler	18
Ratcliffe, J.	1891	Labourer (but once a sailor too)	18
Redford, R.	1893	Brass turner	19
Ryan, J.	1895	Collier	18
Reid, T.	1894	Labourer	18
Reid, D.A.	1893	Carpenter	18
Reynolds, G.	1894	Labourer	18
Robinson, G.	1895	Groom	21
Rollinson, S.	1896	Core maker	19
Rogers, W.	1894	Labourer	18
Roper, J.	1896	Unclear	18
Rowbottom, J.	1894	Weaver	21
Royle, J.	1894	Warehouseman	21
Ryan, J.	1894	Labourer	19
Scanlan, J.	1893	Jailor	18
Scott, F.G. (Lance-corporal; Victoria Cross)	1894	Engineers labourer?	18
Scott, J. (Colour-sergeant)	1882	Weaver	19
Seedman, T.	1895	Labourer	18
Shackleton, W.	1893	Labourer	21

Name	Date of enlistment	Trade	Age at enlistment
Shaman, J.T.	1894	Labourer	18
Sharp, H. (Corporal)	1897	Clerk	19
Sim, G.	1896	Hatter	21
Simms, W.	1893	Labourer	18
Slater, J.	1893	Piecer	18
Smithurst? A.	1894	Labourer	19
Smith, J.	1887	Brickmaker	18
Smith, A.M.	1891	Labourer	18
Spencer, J.H.	1892	Carter	18
Stones, H.	1894	Spinner	19
Stride, C. (Lance-corporal)	1894	Labourer	18
Strattings?, F.L.	1898	None	15
Styles, H.D.	1894	Labourer	19
Captain Marden's G Company, 1 st Manchesters Source: 'Nominal Roll, Squad Roll of "G" Coy., 1st Battalion (Captain Marsden's)', 1899. MR 1/8/3. Tameside Archives and Local Studies Centre.			