

THE WAR COUNTRY IN SOUTH AFRICA.

TRAVELLING WITH REMOUNTS

Mr Wallace Anderson (a son of Mr W. B. Anderson, of Riverside, Kiwaka), now in South Africa acting as a conductor of the Commissariat Department in Capetown) writes home as follows :—

Remount Camp, Stellenbosch,
Cape Colony, 10th Feb., 1901.

This is a military camp for horses and mules, and I am here as "conductor," that is, to take the animals to and from the various depots and to attend to them at the camp here when not so engaged. Three of my best friends were here, Waites, Hings, and Morrisby, so I was very glad to come, especially as the pay is a good deal better than what I was getting at the Docks. I came out here a fortnight ago yesterday (Saturday), and the same night I was ordered off to Ceres Road, Kimberley, and Mafeking with a train load of 212 mules, 12, 100, and 100 for each place respectively, so I have been away just a fortnight, having arrived here again last night in charge of 132 worn-out horses from Kimberley. I think it has been the most rough and terrible fortnight I ever spent—a great deal of worry and trouble and working day and night on and off, watering and feeding and attending to the animals, for which purpose I had 15 natives with me, taking rations for ourselves and forage for the animals with us for each journey there and back. I travelled in the guard-van, and when not in the train slept anywhere; but I have not had all my clothes off all the time. Of course the journey was very interesting, but the conditions were not favourable for enjoying it. I saw most of the ground where the fighting in the early part of the war took place—Belmont, Graspan, Magersfontein, Modder River, and so on, as it mostly occurred near the railway line. What I saw was mostly from the train, as I had no opportunity of going over any of the ground except at Mafeking. From De Aar to Mafeking four trains went, keeping close together, with an armoured train in front and armoured trucks with troops behind, and travelling only in the day time. At Windsorton we passed the wreckage of the train that the Boers had captured and burned a few days previously, and it was still smouldering when I returned a

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was still smouldering when I returned a few days later.

I stayed two nights at Mafeking waiting for a train to bring me back. While there I lived in a tent at the Remount Depôt. The station was draped in black for the Queen's death, and 81 shots were fired from one of the guns at the Artillery camp. Mafeking is a very small town, in the midst of a vast plain. There is not much evidence of damage done by the siege. The people there seem to think that it is quite possible that they may be besieged again; but if so it could not last long with so many troops in the country now. It (Mafeking), is really little more than a large military camp now.

At Victoria West we had a little excitement. The natives complained that soldiers had been stealing their things, and the commandant lined up the soldiers to inquire into it. It appeared that the engine-driver had had a hand in it. The soldiers got very excited, and nothing would do but one of them must fight the engine-driver, which was done, and the engine-driver was knocked out in about two rounds. The soldiers were delighted and yelled and jumped around him like Red Indians. The engine-driver was then half led and half carried off to his engine, and we were allowed to proceed.

From Mafeking to Kimberley was the best part of the journey. It is very fine country. There had been fighting in the neighbourhood of Warrenton a day or two before we passed through. The train was fired on from a hill near the line when we were a little south of Vryburg and we were brought to a stop and the Maxim turned on from the armoured train but got no reply, and the trains moved on again. They travel with great care in that part of the country. Every now and then all up the line we come upon camps and entrenchments, and the old entrenchments and fortified places that the Boers had made were visible also from the railway; also here and there the graves of soldiers.

I had the most trouble coming back from Kimberley with the horses as they have to be kept on their feet, as, if they lie down they are liable to get trampled on by the others, and are often too weak to get up again. I lost nine horses on the way, which I had to put off at the various stations; two had to be put off before I left Kimberley; at Worcester (the place where the Dutch conference was

held), I put one dead one out; and another got crippled and I had to get a soldier to shoot it, and I left them on the station platform. It was very early in the morning, in daylight; and at a station where one can get assistance it is not so bad; but at night when travelling or at wayside stations it is very awkward and trying. Stellenbosch is a very pretty Dutch village - a fruit - growing district. The camp is about five miles from the village, and is situated on a farm belonging to Mr Rhodes. Soldiers come and camp here to get provided with horses before going to the front. There are about 5000 animals here now. It is about 35 miles from Capetown, so I shall not be able to get into Town very often.

I have been brought in contact with military people very much lately, and some are very nice fellows and others just the opposite. Young upstart subalterns who put on airs are very much disliked. At the principal stations men are sadly overworked, and that naturally affects their tempers a good deal.

I daresay you would like to know what rations consist of. I forget the exact quantities, but it is so much bread (or biscuit), beef (tinned Australian or American), coffee (or tea), and sugar per day. I cannot do with much of the beef, so I buy a good deal and go to restaurants. When we are in camp we have a "conductors' mess," and plenty of good plain food, but cooked and served by natives or Indians, and pretty rough, as they are not over particular as to cleanliness.

We are not in khaki, though solely under military control, with rifles and bandoliers ready for use for defensive purposes, and with entrenchments about the camp. I am glad we are not obliged to wear khaki, as then we should be liable to be humbugged about and salute every officer who comes along, whilst in civilian dress we are as good as they are.

Now, having inflicted this screed upon you, I will release you for the present. You see, I can only write you a long letter when something turns up for me to write about; but there is really only one topic - the war, and matters appertaining to the war are necessarily the chief concern with folks here. I am afraid that it is still far from being at an end, but let us hope that that is nearer than it appears to be.