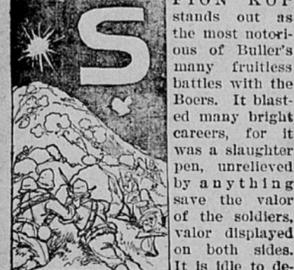


THE SPION KOP FIGHT

A BATTLE FOR GENERALS TO WRANGLE OVER.

The Stealthy British Attack—A Quick Victory and a Sudden Reverse—Botha's Band of Boers on the Summit. Col. Thorneycroft, Hero and Victim.

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SPION KOP stands out as the most notorious of Buller's many fruitless battles with the Boers. It blasted many bright careers, for it was a slaughter pen, unrelieved by anything save the valor of the soldiers, valor displayed on both sides. It is idle to describe the part the hill played in the Boer line of defense covering Ladysmith. The British could not pass the range in which it was a conspicuous height so long as the Boers were there. Therefore long before light on the fifth day of the fighting along the range a column of British set out through the darkness on the march along the deep valley and in single file, using their hands and knees like Alpine climbers, crawled up the native trail to the plateau of Spion Kop.

By means of Buller's dispatch of Jan. 23, saying that Warren would storm Spion Kop, the key to the Boer position, that night the whole world except the Boers was aware of the attempt. The Boers had pickets on the hill, but nothing able to stem the British rushes. The first trench was carried, and the victors sounded a yell which penetrated to the British reserve, and again the cable wires told the world of the capture of Spion Kop. But at 10 o'clock that morning, when the fog lifted, the Boer artillery opened from three points, and the British were forced to retreat from the trenches to the shelter of the southern edge of the plateau out of range.

Not until this repulse did Warren provide supports for the storming party, and then he sent but three regiments without artillery. These three regiments, the Dorsets, the Middlesex and the Imperial light, climbed the same narrow pathway to the plateau, charged the trench and pressed on in the face of the artillery fire to a trench at the north edge of the plateau. The Boers had placed two Maxims in position and hurled this column back to the shelter of the first trench. Twice this second or daylight charge was repeated with the same result. Meanwhile General Woodgate had been shot through the head and taken from the field, leaving Lieutenant Colonel Thorneycroft of Thorneycroft's horse in chief command. It is one of the peculiarities of the British army that in a column of some thousand troops there may be no brigadier and possibly no full colonel. Woodgate was a major general and the next in rank a battalion commander.

While Woodgate was fighting the King's Royal rifles and the Scottish rifles were sent forward in support. The Royal rifles attacked another spur of the range, but the Scots climbed Spion Kop just in time to meet a countercharge of the Boers. This first charge was defeated, so the British correspondents declare, but still the hill was not taken. The hour must have been long past noon, and the situation for the British was terrible in the extreme. None of the men had had food or water or an hour's sleep since the previous night. The little water found on the crest was required for the wounded. All through the afternoon the Boer shells were hurled upon the occupants of the southern edge of the plateau, where in a narrow space the troops lay huddled so thickly that every shell plowed the ranks of the living and the rows of wounded and corpses. Only the Scottish rifles were on the firing line, and there a man couldn't raise his head above the stone capping of the trench without getting punctured. The Boer trench was but 70 yards away, and as usual the Mauser shooting from there was extremely accurate. If a man stood up to help a wounded comrade, he was shot through the head, and even when a stone was removed to make a loophole for firing the Boers saw it and sent bullets through with deadly effect.

Just when the crisis came for the British by the main Boer rush, as described by the Boer commander, General Louis Botha, is not clear from his narrative nor the British accounts. General Botha says that before the fog lifted he started with 350 men to drive the British from the hill. Even in the ascent, he says, while the mist was so thick that the British could not be seen, his men kept falling from various kinds of missiles, and when the summit was reached the combatants of both armies ran against each other. In spite of the losses his men went ahead and soon closed with the enemy, actually tearing the muskets out of their hands in a score of instances. One statement of Botha's is significant. "Finally," he says, "after severe fighting, we gained the day, and as darkness came on over the scene we had taken 200 prisoners." Botha is a man of few words, and it may be that his first descriptions apply to the British outpost on the flank, for, according to his account, the severe fighting must have occurred after the hand to hand tussles he mentions when his men first reached the summit.

In describing the field Botha says that there were 600 British dead "scattered around the hill," that there were 800 British wounded left "on the hill all night" and that "on the other side of the hill no less than 150 British were killed." The "all night" refers to the

night the British retreated or the second night of the attack.

One of Botha's soldiers said that his general was among the very first Boers to reach the summit of Spion Kop. He also confirmed Botha's account of the hand to hand struggle, for he had himself taken two rifles from the hands of the enemy, braining one man with a revolver before he would yield.

Another account by an eyewitness is that of Weston Churchill, who says that he went to Spion Kop about 4 o'clock the afternoon of the 24th, the day of the battle. He speaks of fighting still going on and of the carnage caused by Mauser and Maxim, still he could say that of the situation after the charges were over, for the Boers kept firing until dark. Churchill says he went back to the rear, and the possibility of having guns to the hill was discussed at headquarters. He returned to the hill, meeting on the way a stream of stragglers, weaklings and wounded men. Only one solid British battalion remained on the hill, he said. The other troops were intermingled, the battalion leaders surrounded by but few of their own men. Colonel Thorneycroft was at the top of the mountain and had decided to retreat. His explanation was, "Better six good battalions safely down the hill than a mop up here in the morning."

So Thorneycroft abandoned the hill to save the inevitable annihilation of the command, and now he is paying the penalty for what Lord Roberts calls "the unwarrantable and needless assumption of authority by a subordinate officer." But it appears that Thorneycroft was the man for the place. Buller learned that the British troops were giving way before General Warren, the division commander, who was not one moment during the fight on the hill, knew of it. He telegraphed to Warren: "Unless you put a really good fighting man in command on top you'll lose the hill. I suggest Thorneycroft."

The bullet which put General Woodgate out of the fight had already anticipated Buller's wishes, and Thorneycroft was even then fighting like a lion for the defense of Spion Kop against Botha's Boers.

One British account describes a scene that must have taken place when Botha's men rushed the trenches. About 20 Britons at one place stopped fighting, threw up their hands and called out to the Boers that they would surrender. Thorneycroft saw the act and as the Boers advanced to take the prisoners shouted to them: "I command this hill and will allow no surrender! Go on with your firing!"

Colonel Thorneycroft's command, the Thorneycroft mounted infantry, had been in the first column which climbed the hill and had suffered heavily. Churchill says that on his second trip to Spion Kop he found the hero surrounded by the few survivors of his battalion. He had no time to send messages or get instructions because the fight had been too hot, too close to do anything but send support to a company here, clear a rock there or a bit of trench yonder. That is the picture of a fighting man in a crisis like that on Spion Kop. Now it transpires that artillery and infantry were on the way to support the line holding the hill, but Thorneycroft didn't know it, and no officer who did had the sense to go forward and see to it that the height was not abandoned in haste.

Thorneycroft's battalion are "irregulars" and not given to military show. One day an officer of the regulars complained to the colonel that his men failed to pay the proper respect due to him as an imperial officer. "What," exclaimed Thorneycroft, "they don't salute you? That's nothing. They don't salute me. But they are demons to fight, and that's all I want of them." These rough irregulars captured the only Boer flag taken on Spion Kop. The battalion lost 11 officers on the hill.

Spion Kop is being fought over again on paper like the battle of Shiloh here.



COLONEL A. W. THORNEYCROFT, [Commander at Spion Kop.]

The Boers have already convicted the British of neglecting to bury their dead. After sending in a fourth letter and finally offering to bury the dead if the British would cease firing shells at the hill the reply came from the British commander, "Bury the dead and send us an account of the expenses." General Botha said that he saw the bodies of six decapitated soldiers on Spion Kop, and as the Boers have no swords or bayonets it is supposed the work was done by British officers for an example against surrendering. The decapitation appeared to have been done by a very sharp instrument.

To military men it is a cause for wonder that the attack was made with so light a force if the position was a key to the Boer line and that after it was taken the chiefs, Buller and Warren, did not see to it that the captors of the hill were properly supported.

THE SERGEANT'S GOLD.

It Never Reached the "Old Folks at Home."

Surgeon General Sternberg told a good story once of an experience he had in the civil war. He said that when he was going into the battle of Bull Run the Irish sergeant major of his regiment came to him with a big bag of gold coin weighing three or four pounds and said:

"Doctor, I know that I'm to be killed entirely, an I want you to take care of this money an see that it gets to the old folks at home."

There was no time to remonstrate or to make any other arrangement, and, dropping the bag into the surgeon's lap, the Irishman hurried away to his place at the head of the column. All through two bloody days Dr. Sternberg carried that bag of gold with his surgical instruments, and it was a burden and an embarrassment to him. He tried to get rid of it, but couldn't find any one willing to accept or even to share the responsibility, and he couldn't throw it away for the sake of the "old folks at home."

Toward the close of the second day the surgeon was taken prisoner. He lost his surgical instruments and his medicine case, but clung to the gold, and, making a belt of his necktie and handkerchief, tied it around his waist next to his skin to prevent its confiscation by his captors. During the long, hot and weary march that followed the goldpieces chafed his flesh, and his waist became so sore and blistered as to cause him intense suffering, but he was bound that the "old folks at home" should have the benefit of that money and by the exercise of great caution and patience managed to keep it until he was exchanged with other prisoners and got back to Washington. There he found his regiment in camp, and one of the first men to welcome him was the Irish sergeant major, who was so delighted to learn that the doctor had saved his money that he got drunk and gambled it all away the first night.—Chicago Record.

IN RIP VAN WINKLE'S LAND.

The Portuguese Colonies in Africa in a Backward State.

The Portuguese colonies in Africa are the Rip Van Winkle's land of reality. After three centuries of white dominion they remain pretty much in the condition in which Da Gama and his bold successors left them.

Here is a picture of what trade means in the favored region of Cabinda bay, where there is a single white trader who occupies a house of three rooms, with a "shop" 20 feet by 8 attached. The place is stocked with puncheons of some vile stuff called "rum" which are exchanged for palm kernels.

Knots of natives from the interior villages with loads of kernels begin to present themselves at the shop by 6 a. m., and when the trader at last makes his appearance there is a noisy crowd of kernel sellers and thirsty hangers on.

The exchange of rum for kernels is quickly effected, and by 9 o'clock in the morning the entire population may be seen lying under the shelter of the cocoanut palms either stupidly drunk or noisily quarreling.

The mingled uproar and snoring lasts till about noon, when there is a sudden return to sobriety, and the crowd clears away to the village to collect the means for another carousal.

On a "good" day the trader at Cabinda bay gets rid of about 100 gallons of rum, and he avers that the scene described is repeated every day in the year.

Next to rum and "civilization" the greatest curses of West Africa are smallpox and the sleeping sickness. From this last no case of recovery has ever been known, and so contagious is it that in the native Christian community every communicant has a separate cup from which to partake of the sacramental wine.—London Leader.

Cheap Cats.

General Sir Herbert Chamberlain was formerly a consul in Asia Minor. Once, in a weak moment, he sent a couple of beautiful Angora cats as a present to a lady in Constantinople. The lady was so pleased that she asked him to send some more. Sir Herbert gave his native servant some money and told him to go and buy two or three. Then came a demand for more cats from the consul's friends, and he gave his servant more money with which to buy cats.

This went on for two or three months, and the native servant waxed exceedingly fat. One morning, however, the general, on coming out of the consulate, was surrounded by a host of infuriated veiled women, who besought Mohammed to curse him because he had stolen all their cats. It appears that the native servant had pocketed the money for himself and gone round with a sack and confiscated every cat in the place.

The Old Shipplasters.

Probably the greatest profit ever enjoyed by the government as a result of the destruction of money was in connection with the fractional currency or shipplasters issued during the civil war.

The total amount issued was \$368,724,079, of which \$6,880,558 has never been presented for redemption.

A large amount has been preserved as curios by collectors, and occasionally even now it is offered for redemption.—Indianapolis News.

Prompt Answer.

"My friend," said the long haired passenger to the young man in the seat opposite, "to what end has your life work been directed?"

"To both ends," was the reply. "I have the only first class hat and shoe store in our village."—Chicago News.

How Peary Retrieved Wild Ducks.

Lieutenant R. E. Peary, the arctic explorer, was born in Maine. He prepared himself for entering Bowdoin college at Fryeburg academy in Fryeburg, in the western part of the state. The following story of Peary's early days shows his method of overcoming obstacles:

One of his fellow townsmen while out hunting one day in November discovered a flock of ducks in a pond about two miles from the village. The man wanted the birds, but knew no way of getting them, even if he shot were effective, for he had no dog, and there was no boat in the pond. On his way home he met Peary and told him about the ducks and why he had not fired at them.

"Now," said Peary, "let's go back to the pond, and if the ducks are still there I promise to retrieve all you kill."

They returned to the pond; the ducks were undisturbed. The weather had been cold for several days, ice had formed around the shore of the pond, and the ducks were bunched out in open water, but within range. Merrill fired and killed two. Without more ado than if he were about to take a dip in the old swimming hole on a hot July day Peary removed his clothing, broke the ice with a heavy stick and swam out, picked up the dead birds and brought them to land.—Saturday Evening Post.

The Sign Painters.

The question has been asked of sign painters hundreds of times, "Which letter of the alphabet do you consider the hardest or most difficult to make?" It is but natural to make the inquiry, for to the novice some particular letters are more perplexing than others. It is most generally conceded by some experts that the Roman capital letter "R" is the most difficult. Others will say that an "S" is very hard to make, and many strongly contend that the character "&" is the hardest and most difficult of any in the entire alphabet. Practically speaking, all of these letters are somewhat difficult, and to the young beginner they are not easily mastered.

It has frequently been supposed that an artist of ability on account of his great talent in drawing would of course naturally make a good sign painter, but the experiment has been tried and given up with unsatisfactory results.

An artist may draw and paint a most beautiful picture, but when it comes to forming a perfect letter he is entirely out of the race. About 47 years ago there were five well known artists of this city who were also experts at lettering, they having learned and worked at this branch previously.—New York Times.

Venice Without Water.

Venice without water would hardly be Venice at all, but we are assured there is a possibility that the picturesque Venice of today may become a city of the past, and eventually Venice may be waterless.

According to Professor Marinelli, the regular increase in the delta of the river Po is such that in process of time the northern Adriatic will be dry, and Venice will no more be upon the sea. The annual surveys show that the mean annual increase of the delta during 70 years has been three-tenths of a square mile.

An encroachment upon the sea of three-tenths of a mile in a year means a large increase in a century. It appears that the total increase in six centuries has been about 198 square miles. The increase is continuing, and the gulf of Venice is doomed to disappear.

No immediate alarm need be felt, and it will not be necessary to hurry off to Venice to take a farewell look at the city in its present picturesqueness. Professor Marinelli calculates that between 100 and 120 centuries will elapse before the entire northern Adriatic will have become dry land.—Youth's Companion.

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