

Eadie Diary 10 January 1900 – 27 February 1900 and 20 December 1900 – 18 April 1901

10-1-1900

On patrol last night 10 – 12 2-4. Nothing to report. Two big guns fired from No. 1 redoubt at 3.20 am. Boers said to be very active over Carter's Way. Rumoured to bring some more guns to shell us. Few shells fired to and from the town during mng [morning]. Brisk rifle fire between cattle guard and Co at Carters. Breakfasted on white mealies and ox liver. Horse & ox flesh for dinner. About 200 grain bags left at redt [redoubt] by engineers this aftn [afternoon]. What for not known. Some rifle volleys apparently out Alexnfntn [Alexanderfountain?] way about 8.30 tonight.

12th Jan. 1900 - New order + 50% of our Coy [company] to stand to arms 3.30 am and remain on the qui vive [?] until well after sunrise. Order took effect from this morning. A little after 3 this mng, 60 or 70 of the Lancs marched off from their camp and took up a position behind us, remaining there until about 5.30. There are persistent rumours & the Boers intend shelling the town again – this time with some of the guns taken from the British at Natal. Whether there is truth or not in the rumour we know not, but something is apparently expected as the Engineers have been busy the last day or two constructing shell splinter shelters all round the place. A very comfortable shelter has been put up in our redoubt. A breast-work is now in course of construction.

13th Jan. - The news that 76 of the Suffolk Regt. have been killed, wounded or taken prisoner down Colesberg way, and that an unsuccessful sortie had been made from Mafeking, resulting in the death of 21 of the Gallant party and more than that wounded has saddened us all. Very hearty expressions of sympathy with the brave defenders of Mafikeng are heard on all sides. The position here is unchanged. Luxuries are rapidly rising in price. Potatoes 3/- per lb. Eggs 15/- per dozen. Horseflesh 9d. and beef 1/- per lb. We have had no vegetables served out to us ~~for~~ since the beginning of the month. Small quantity of lime juice has been issued instead. Was offered ~~the~~ a Lieutenancy in L.

Kenilworth force today. Should Chief not object to transfer from C. O. Coy [company] will accept. No news from outside.

14th Jan. – Sunday. Very hot all the morning and no rain wh. is badly wanted. Miserable afternoon. Blowing clouds of dust until after sundown. Blankets etc. in tents partly buried in sand. This is no uncommon experience. Saw Chief this morning. He has no objection to me transferring to Kenilworth force – ~~wrote gra~~ provided I do my civil work. Wrote Grant accordingly.

15th Jan. – Stood to arms at 3.30 am. Lancs with one Maxim [gun] already in their usual position – i.e. lying on the ground beside their piled arms ready for any emergency. It was a lovely morning. ~~In~~ The eastern sky was covered with masses of black clouds while in the West the ~~bright moon the bright~~ was shining sailing brightly across a sky speckled with fleecy white clouds. Later when the sun ~~began to wake~~ woke up and began his day's journey the result of the battle for ascendance between the shafts of bright gold and the sombre clouds was very beautiful. The usual sniping was indulged in between the enemy and our cattle guards.

Saw Capt. White at the hospital this afternoon. He and the other wounded CP men are doing well and all very cheerful. A few shells were sent into town today. No harm done.

16th Jan. – Went out on patrol last night 8 – 10 and this mng 12 – 2. Nothing to report. Turned in at 2.15 am dreadfully tired – been on the move since 3.15 yesterday morning. More than the usual number of shells sent in this morning. Several dropped around the redbt [redoubt] but none very close. I've heard the roar of big guns down Spyfontein way about 6.30 this morning. The cannonfire did not last long. The man I was to succeed in the Kenilworth Force having withdrawn his resignation, I am not going to that Force.

17th Jan 1900 – Stood to arms at 3.30 am. No signs of enemy. The mounted troops went out early – for what purpose don't know. They did not stay away very long. They were

shelled but no casualties. Sport held in the Artillery camp this afternoon. Looking at the well contested items, watching the large crowd of prettily dressed ladies, and listening to the music discoursed by the band it was difficult to realize we had been under siege for three months. The lack of news is most irritating. The military authorities disclose nothing.

18th Jan. – After being on guard only until 4 this morning I was up and led out at 6.30 to stand to arms. I thought it was a real alarm at first. I soon learned it was only the Colonel come round to see how we did it. Been suffering from a slight cold and toothache the last day or two – feel miserable in consequence. Today the Union Jack was hauled up on the Conning tower for the first time since the siege began. Until today a red flag has been flying continuously. It was the signal that we were in danger and had to be ready to stand to arms at a moment's notice. The change has given rise to a deal of speculation. Everybody is asking what is the meaning of the change. I hope it means that relief is coming speedily. I am tired of filling in the redoubt.

28th Jan. – The position of affairs is unchanged. On the 22nd and 23rd, the Boers bombarded the town very vigorously with 9 guns, keeping it up after dark and at intervals during the night. It is a cruel mode of warfare shelling a town containing practically only women and children. It does not speak well for the pluck of the Boers around us that they have shut us up completely since the 15th Octr., yet not once since then come within rifle range of our redoubts. De Beers have surpassed their feat of shell making by actually making a big gun capable of throwing a 28 lb. shell. It was tried last week and turned out a great success. The Boers must have been a bit surprised to find shells dropping into them at distances our guns hitherto could not reach. Although the position generally has not altered, our lot is not improving. From tomorrow our bread ration will be 10½ oz. per diem. Scurvey is making itself felt amongst both natives and Europeans.

The bombardment of the 22nd & 23rd resulted in very little damage to property but unfortunately a few women and children were killed and wounded. The number of close shaves was great as usual. The vicinity of our redoubt got a fair peppering. The Boers appear to use shrapnel and "ring" shell indiscriminately and apparently don't mind where their shells drop so long as they drop within the area of the township. We were served out with bayonets yesterday. Whether we are to be given an opportunity to use them outside the barriers or merely ~~have them~~ use them ~~to~~ in connection with receiving Boer visitors, we know not. Most of us have taken very kindly to horse flesh fare. I like it as well as ox beef.

Yesterday afternoon was a gala in our little camp. We challenged a ladies cricket XI under the captaincy of Mrs. T-, and invited a number of friends to come up on the occasion of the match. Previous to y'day we were shelled daily. Luckily the Boers left us in peace and quietness yesterday, the weather was superb, and our little afternoon passed off swimmingly – much better than the most [accomplished?] expected. Col F- took us entirely by surprise by sending the band to our redoubt. The ladies proved worthy opponents. They went in first and were not disposed of until they had knocked up 61 runs. We had to use our left hand only in fielding and bowling, and had ~~batting~~ to bat left-handed. The ladies won by a few runs. Four of my old Barkly friends were in the team. Altogether there must have been about a hundred friends present including one or two Imperial Officers, CP officers & officers of other Defence forces –

One rarely hears the Relief Column mentioned now-a-days and we have given up speculating ~~upon~~ as to when we will be relieved. Very little news [h]as filtered in lately. We heard last week that Gen. Buller had crossed the Tugela. It is rumoured today that Ladysmith has been relieved. We all hope this is true. We have not had real good news since the war broke out. Occasionally we hear the roar of big guns down Spysfontein way. But we know absolutely nothing about what has or is taking place down there. It was with great regret I read of the death of Mr. Stevens in Natal. I had quite looked forward to his version of this war. Everyone who has read his "With Kitchener to

Khartoum" must have been equally anxious to read what he had to say about this troubled land.

15/- a piece is now asked for fowls and eggs are sold readily at 18/- per doz. Our Coy [company] has not indulged in any of those luxuries. We are faring fairly well on the rations served out to us plus a little jam now and again. Mealies, dry bread and black tea or coffee makes a fairly satisfying meal, but a dreadfully uninteresting one. We console ourselves at meal times by talking about the meals we will have when the siege is over, and the meals we had in days gone by. It's rather a poor substitute for a good square meal but the anticipation and chatter affords us a good deal of fun.

I had a look at the "Daily Mail", dated the 24th of Nov. y'day. The paper showed its age very clearly by its tattered and soiled appearance. Besides running the gauntlet of the enemy it must have been well fingered in camp. It was queer to read in a Ldn. Daily short accounts of the events which took place here early in Novr. It would be a Godsend if we could get papers and letters in regularly. Rumour has it that the shelling will be heavier than ever tomorrow. It's close on midnight now, if the rumour proves to be true we should hear the now all too familiar sounds of the Boer big guns in four or five hours time. They usually send us their good morning salutations at daybreak.

29th Jan. – The Boers did not shell us today. So once again rumour is at fault. The AOC, who took over the food supplies for the town some time back, appears to be pressed for meat to keep the inhabitants going. Y'day morning's paper contains an advert in large type offering to the effect that good prices will be paid for horses and mules suitable for slaughter purposes. We have more horses and mules in town than we can afford to feed. This I think must be the reason for making them into an article of food for us, because there are still a number of cattle grazing on the circumscribed veldt round the town - these cattle are sent out to graze under a guard. The poor brutes are not getting too much to eat. The grazing area is necessarily limited and the little there is of it is dry and patchy. Our cattle guards and the Boers exchange shots daily.

30th Jan. 1900 – Everything quiet today. We had our first drill with bayonets this morning.

7th Feby. – Until yesterday no fresh developments took place. Daily we have had a few shells, little or no damage being done. Yesterday however our friends outside used 100 lb. shells against us for the first time.

I was in office when the first came shrieking overhead. We wondered what on earth had happened. We were not left long in doubt. Two or three of these murderous missiles passed overhead in quick succession, striking into different parts of the town. One scraped along the brickwork of the Police Barracks behind my office and continued its flight into town. Another one hit the ordnance store behind our offices. It did very little damage fortunately. ~~This particular shell was 1???~~ ~~contained both heads~~ Considering the enormous size and weight of the projectile the damage to property was astonishingly small and once again we have reason to be thankful. There was no loss of life, tho ~~some~~ one or two people were injured.

A young fellow sitting writing in an office had his vest blown or torn - I don't know which - from his back. The back of the vest was torn to shreds and quite separated from the front portion. A watch in one of the pockets was uninjured. The wearer received some cuts. He was able to walk off and have them dressed. Our food supplies are not improving as time goes on, but they are not getting worse. Very nice soup is being made by the authorities and sold at 3d. per pint. A pint is given to those who deserve to have it instead of half their meat ration. We get in less news than ever now. Genl. Buller appears to have shut down the supply from Natal side. The last we had - that Gen. Warren had to evacuate his position and recross the Tugela - was not encouraging.

Every morning we hear an occasional boom from the big guns down the Relief Column way. As I write I can hear them rumbling like distant thunder. We hear absolutely nothing about the progress made by the relief forces. It is to be hoped the Boers won't continue peppering the town with 100 lb. shells. It gets on everyone's nerves, particularly the nerves of the women. Most people have made shelter places for

themselves and families with sand bags. These were a sufficient protection against the 15 lb. shell used up to now, but they will be useless should one of the big shells plump up against them.

98th – Nothing of note took place until about 4 in the afternoon when the boom of the 100 pr [pounder] announced that the Boers had renewed operations with that weapon. I was in the Mia. [Military?] Camp when the first shells came tearing and shrieking townwards. The shells seemed to drop well into the centre of the town. About 6 ock [o'clock] a boot store was struck, ten mins. later a dense column of black smoke rose from the premises. Soon the whole place was ablaze. The fire brigade aided by police soldiers and volunteers worked hard to confine the fire to the premises in which it started. In this they were successful. One of the roof of the adjoining bldgs did get alight, but it was put out before it got a fair hold. I lent a hand in moving furniture from the threatened bldg – a two storey block, hall upstairs shop below. It was a bit smoky and warm upstairs, the ceiling boards were blazing merrily when I was up but we succeeded in getting everything movable, including a piano, outside and into a place of safety. We put the piano on a roof of a lower bldg behind. After the fire broke out a shell or two tumbled close to us, but did no damage. A lot of damage was done to property in various parts of the town. One or two persons were injured and one young fellow killed. Went on patrol at midnight: Told not to go too far out as a patrol had been fired upon earlier in the evening. Saw nothing suspicious during patrol. Turned in at 2.40 am.

9th – Hoped to have got at least four hours sleep but the bally great 100 pr roused me before 6 am. The shelling was very brisk for a time. Went down town at 9 ock [o'clock]. Shells dropping in various parts of the town in quick succession. One burst in the roadway about 30 yards from my room. A perfect hail of road-metal fell on the roof. I thought at first it was pieces of the shell. Luckily for me and the others in the house it didn't turn out to be so. On getting down to the office I learned a shell at struck right alongside the staff offices. A splinter slightly damaged the roof of my office. Everybody

more or less is at high nervous tension. The shells strike about the town indiscriminately. The noise of the impact and report is enough in itself to get on the nerves of a person, apart from the feeling of danger from the flying missiles. The shells are 19 inches long and 6 inches in diameter. We heard the rumbling of big guns as usual this morning, down Spyfontein way. It continued longer than it usually does. I hope it means the Column is pushing through at last. Ordinary flesh and blood cannot long stand 100 lb. shells careening above or [our] heads and crashing into buildings all over the place. If we only had a stronger garrison and so be in a position to go out and worry the Boers, if we could clear them off a bit, it wouldn't be so bad. It's the inaction and feeling of helplessness that is so trying. Even a vigorous attack by the Boers would be preferable to being shelled from a Kopje about 5 miles away. Long Cecil (De Beers made gun) replies only very occasionally. I hear ~~th~~ it goes out of order very frequently. During the afternoon a number of shells were thrown into town. One entered the upper storey of the Grand Hotel, wrecking a couple of rooms and killing Mr. Labram the designer of "Long Cecil". Doubtless when the Boers heard of his death they put his death down to a dispersal of providence – the death of Labram caused profound sorrow in every quarter of the town.

10th Feby. – Still being shelled by the 100 pr. Its unholy boom and shriek roused us a little after sunrise. There is a sort of panic in town. The women folk look scared and haggard. One child was killed and its mother horribly injured. She died later. One of the Lanc's had a foot taken off. Marvellous escapes continue to be recorded. One woman sat up in bed to give some instruction to her servant girl. When in that posture a shell tore through the roof, passed through the bed behind her, through the floor and buried itself in a cellar beneath. Fortunately it did not burst. 25% of the men were allowed off to attend poor Labram's funeral, which took place at 8 o'clock. Sitting on the earthworks I could hear the melancholy music of the band when the procession moved off from the hospital. It was a beautiful moonlight night, calm, peaceful and very restful after the "wearing out" time we all had during the day. While thinking thus and feeling thankful

that we would have respite until daylight, the 100 pr boomed ~~loud~~ its discordant voice forth and sent a shell not far from the funeral party. It was soon followed by another. It took us some time to realize that the Boers really intended shelling the town after dark. It seemed so inhuman. However shell us they did with but short intervals until 11.30 pm. One 9 pr shell passed close over our redoubt and burst not far off. A 100 pr too burst uncomfortably near. We were truly thankful when midnight arrived, feeling certain our Christian friends outside would not jeopardize their souls by continuing the shelling into Sunday morning. ~~For once~~

11th. Sunday 1900 – For once we were not disappointed in the Boers, they did not fire again today. The women folks have been given an opportunity to go down the mines for safety. I was informed this evg [evening] that hundreds were waiting their turn to go down. Large groups of “boys” have been busy all day making shell protections at various places in town. Rhodes is rumoured to have read a tgm [telegram] from Lord Roberts to the effect that we will be relieved soon. This indefinite scap of news has cheered everyone up wonderfully.

12th Feby. – The town looks like a plague stricken city today. Places of business are closed and the streets are all but deserted.

Kenilworth recd [received] most of the attention from the big gun this morning. Three houses there were burnt down. The rest of the town recd attention at intervals.

Since the beginning of the year 831 deaths have been registered. A frightfully high percentage. The population of the place is about 38,000. The local paper suspended business this morning. It did not contain much news at any time since the siege, we miss the little it did contain. It's last leading article was a sort of indictment against the manner in which the campaign is being conducted so far as the relief of Kimberley is concerned. To my mind an ill-timed article. So far as I can make out its only result will be to encourage the grumblers and breed more of these undesirables. It is stated, I don't

know with what truth, that Col. Kekewich has compelled them to stop publishing the paper.

13th Feb. 1900 – The Boers began their ponderous and noisy attentions about 6 o'clock this morning and kept it up at intervals all day.

14th Feb. – We did not receive the usual Co. morning salute today nor as the morning advanced did we hear anything of the big guns. When it got on for 10 o'clock without a shell coming in we began to think the Boers were letting us have a day off. We were disillusioned about 11 ~~when~~ by the 100 pr. For some unknown reason the Boers evacuated Alexnrfntn - a place about 6 miles out - during the night. Our troops went out this morning and verified the position. Apparently the Boers had gone off in a hurry as food stuffs were left behind. While our men were there some Boers returned to take away the food etc. They appeared not to know our fellows were already ~~in from~~ on the spot. Five of them were taken prisoners. 40 head of cattle and a wagon were captured and brought into town. Four of the prisoners were typical looking Boers, two were smart looking young fellows. In the afternoon our ambulance wagon brought in a couple of young women who had been injured. They were accompanied by two woman and five or six little children. The whole ~~place~~ town is on the tiptoe of expectation. Most persistent rumours that the relief column is within sight are being circulated. Our Coy. together with other Coys. of the T.G. and the volunteers went ~~outside th~~ out towards Carter's Ridge about 5.30 pm ~~last~~ & returned about 9. The object appeared to be to feint an attack on the Boers investing the ridge and so stop them from coming over to Alxfntn.

I was not in camp when the Coy. went out so was not with them ~~others~~. I felt very sick at missing this the first opportunity of going out. I was a bit mollified when the men all returned without firing a shot.

About 10 pm the Boers fired quite a fusillade. What they were up to we did not know. Apparently they thought our men were still outside. Whatever they thought they only expended a lot of their ammunition uselessly.

15th Feby. – Probably the Boers felt tired after their exertions of last night as they left us alone today until ~~breakfast time~~ about 11 o'clock. They only fired a few shells doing the usual damage to property but again fortunately without ~~damage to life~~ killing anyone. I had a short conversation with the Boer women and children brought in yesterday. The husband of one was killed yesterday and the husband of the other we took prisoner. Naturally the women did not look very happy. I happened to have a few sweets which I gave to the youngsters. One of the women had a baby three months old in her arms - They were Free Staters - ~~Why~~ It's a queer custom sort of thing for women and children to be allowed in the laagers. The Boers don't appear to be able to remain away from them long. At 4.30 this afternoon we heard that the relief column could be seen 7 or 8 miles away. We didn't credit it at first - we heard the same thing so often before. Looking out in the direction indicated we certainly could see lots of dust - whether raised by British or Boer we could not say. The news got down town very quickly and soon people came up in carts & on bicycles to the fence. About 5 o'clock all doubt was set at rest. I met the Col. galloping along. He pulled up his horse and told me General French's Cavalry Column was below Alexnrfntn and was coming in. It can be imagined how glad we all were. About 7 o'clock we could hear [hear] tremendous cheering down town apparently welcoming the entry of the troops. I've not been able to get down town but from reports brought [brought] up it appears 5000 men arrived this evening and more are expected tomorrow. ~~I am seriously thankful some troops have come~~

16th Feby. 1900 – The town presents a very animated appearance today. The shops and places of business, which have been closed since the big shelling began, are all open, flags and bunting are displayed all over the place and the streets are thronged with happy people. "Relief" is written large on the faces of all. The women folks look

particularly joyful. And no wonders. Theirs has been perhaps the most trying time of any since the siege began. We men folks had a monotonous enough time of it, but not nearly so ~~more~~ wearisome as it must have been for the women folk. We had the coy. of each other in the redoubts, spending many an hour in song and story and had variations in the shape of patrolling, sentry go, drill etc. Then, ~~no~~ we had no bother about food – such as it is. The orderly for the day drew rations for us, the cook cooked them and we did the rest. Down town it was very different. The women folks were left pretty much to themselves – nearly all the men being in the various earthworks. The food for their various households must have given them endless trouble. As before mentioned the A.D.C. took over the control of all the food stuffs in the place and everyone, man, woman and child, while [white] black and yellow ~~got~~ recd [received] rations according to prescribed scales. Declarations as to no. of persons comprising each household were made, on these the military authorities issued food orders. On presentation of these orders ~~had~~ at certain central depots at certain hours – a different depot for different classes of food, the rations were handed out. The plan looks simple on paper but it does not disclose the worry, vexation and trial on the nerves – especially when shells were ~~thumping~~ crashed into buildings all round the town. What this plan arrangement entailed.

The General did not rest long after his wonderful ride. He got in last night at 7 ock. Shortly after 3 this morning he and all the available men he brot [brought] with him together with the garrison troops were outside the town chivvying the Boers who had been sitting on the kopjes these past four months. The Boers didn't wait for our men. They appear to have got on the move during the night – Kamfersdam where the 100 pr. was posted was evacuated during the night. Our men got there early in the morning. They found evidence all round that the enemy had gone off in a big hurry. They got a hold of a lot of ammntn [ammunition] including big gun shells, but the big gun itself, much to their disgust had been removed. Most of the men returned to town in the evening, men and horses dead beat.

17th Jany. [Feb.] 1900 – Today the streets are filled with travelled stained troops. The crack regts in the British Army Cavalry are represented, but it is impossible to tell one Corp from the other. All are dressed in khaki. A lot of the troops are out today again in various directions. Rumour is very busy – a transport train, consisting of hundreds of wagons and, it is said, stretching over ten miles in length, is reported to be on its way up from Modder River. Lord Kitchener is said to be with the transport train. Rumour puts the escort variously at 10 to 20 thousand men.

18th Jany. [Feb.] 1900 – Sunday – Last Sunday was perhaps the most miserable day of the siege for the townspeople since the ever memorable Sunday 15th Oct. last when the hooters screamed forth the alarm and everyone was rushing hither and thither hardly knowing what to do and thinking the Boers to march into the town at any moment. Last Sunday was quiet, but the town had not got over the terrorizing effect of the previous night's shelling and. Everyone was depressed and gloomy. We had hardly any news from outside for over [a] month, and the little we got was not inspiring. For the past previous week hundreds of women and children had practically lived in holes and sand bag sheltered. Hundreds more, having no holes or shelters to creep into, lived in a state of constant terror. So bad and widespread was the terror that close on 3000 women and children took advantage of Mr. Rhodes' offer and went to go down the mine last Sunday night. They were lowered to the different levels – Some were sent down to the 1500 ft level. Today all is changed. Everybody is moving about freely and cheerfully. The surrounding hills are clear of Boers. The town barriers For the first time since the siege started people are allowed free to go outside the barriers. We are still in camp, but 50% are allowed off duty during the day and 25% during the night. The last concession will enable some of us to sleep in our bed under a roof if we feel so disposed. Not one of us, ex one or two who fell sick, have slept in a bed since 18th of Octr. We slept on or [our] rugs in the tents. We expect that our disbandment is only a matter of days now. Most of us will not be sorry to give up soldiering. The siege has been trying for us all. The course of a few days.

27th Feby. 1900 – ~~Comp~~ C. O. Coy. disbanded this morning. ~~Slept in my room toni~~ Glad to get chance to sleep in my room tonight. Not slept in a bed since 15 October last.

[Page is neatly torn here and the remainder of the diary is blank, apart from two lines of morse code on the reverse of the torn page.]

Between “It can be imagined how glad” and “We all were” on page 11, there are two blank pages in the diary, on one of which is written the following:

Permit

Johannes Steenekamp to proceed to the farm Bloemsemond and to return to Keimoes on the 25th instant.

Keimoes D. Eadie

23/2/1901 Actg RU [?]

The following newspaper clipping is loose inside the diary:

16/11/1966 STAR

Mafeking Letter

To the Editor of The Star

Sir, - I was interested to read in the report from London in The Star on October 27, "New Look at Siege of Mafeking," that 66 years after the event Mr. Brian Gardner comes up with some strange ideas about the siege.

He refers in his book to a period when the Whites were enjoying a ration of meat three times a week, fresh vegetables, tinned milk, bread, sugar, coffee and cocoa.

I quote from a letter lying in front of me now, written by my father, Staff-Sgt. Signaller R. T. Davie of the Diamond Fields Horse, a member of the relief column from Kimberley, to my mother.

In a letter dated at Mafeking on February 16, 1900, he wrote, among other things: "We entered Mafeking on the eighth and have been here ever since, watching our horses die and very nearly starving ourselves.

"The position here regarding food is very much worse than it ever was in Kimberley during our siege."

It is an accepted fact that it was my father's heliograph that flashed the news to the world that Mafeking had been relieved.

E. DAVIE.

Primrose Hill.

68 Dentzia Road

Primrose

58-1179