

ON ACTIVE SERVICE.

LETTERS FROM THE FRONT.

MOVEMENTS OF SOME OF THE WARRAGUL BOYS.

THE WILMANSRUST DISASTER.

Letters from the front are being received by the relatives of those who were in the recent action at Wilmansrust when the Victorians of the fifth Contingent suffered so disastrously. Private Valpied is the son of Mr. W. Valpied, Bloomfield, and in a letter just received by his brother, the soldier writes as follows :—

“ Middleburg, June 25th, 1901.

Dear Brother,—Just a line or two to let you know that I am still in the land of the living, although I am very lucky to be able to say so, for I suppose you saw by the papers about the cutting up we got the other night at Wilmansrust. It was a sight I shall never forget. The Boers marched up in single file between our pickets, and then extended in a half-circle around the camp. We had four companies in a camp about an acre square, and about 380 men and two pom-poms. The Boers got so close that they heard the orders given out. We had to start next morning at 2.30, and were not to light a fire or even strike a match. They intended to attack us at 12 o'clock, when we would be asleep, but one of our chaps stepped out of the lines about 8 o'clock, and the Boers, thinking they were discovered, fired a volley at about 20 yards distance. Thunder! You should have heard the bullets ring. Fancy, 600 or 700 magazine rifles going at once. We had 76 horses in F Company, and they went down flop at the first volley. Half the Boers rushed the guns, while the rest peppered away at us. We were in a terrible pickle, could not get at our rifles, and those who did were shot down at once. I popped down behind a row of saddles, and the bullets whistled overhead like hail. I didn't stop there long, for half-a-dozen Boers

stop there long, for half-a-dozen Boers came running up and shouted “ hands up, you kharki wretches.” I grasped the situation, slung my hands up at once, but the chap next to me, a corporal named Harrison, seemed to be dazed and hesitated too long, so one of the Boers put his rifle against his chest and shot him dead. They were all through the camp in about five minutes, blazing away at every blanket and sheet they saw on the ground, in case there was a man under it. You should have heard them yell when they got the pom-poms. They even brought in their own horses to pull the guns away, so they were pretty certain about surprising and capturing us. It was an awful sight in the morning to see the dead horses and men lying about. The wounded suffered terribly that night with the cold, as the Boers took away our blankets. We had 16 killed and 3 more died the next day, and we sent 47 wounded into Middleburg. The only one that you know that was killed was Archie Mack. He was shot in both legs and through the chest. He died of his wounds 3 days after. There were some very narrow escapes fellows had holes drilled through their clothes and hats and yet escaped unhurt. Our Sergeant Major was shot in the elbow and had his arm amputated and another private had his leg taken off at the knee. I saw most of the injured in Middleburg. They are doing pretty well. The general was terribly wild about the loss of the guns and swore he would have them back again before 2 days were over even if he lost 200 men. He sent 300 of the V.M.R. and a company of Lancers after them next day. I am not sure whether they have them or not although it is rumoured they have. Most people reckoned the war would be over before we could get a crack at them but I think we are getting a good taste of it. We have lost more men already than any of the other contingents, but I think we are keeping the name up alright, although they got home on us the other night) but it was not our fault. I reckon the general was to blame for sending out such a small party when he knew there were two commandors (Mueller and Ben Vil Vilgoen) with 600

he knew there were two commandos (Mueller and Ben Vil Vilgoen) with 600 or 700 men within 20 miles of us. The Boers saw their chance and took it. If we had only two minutes to get our rifles and bayonets we could have told a different tale even though outnumbered but it was not our luck. I am orderly for Captain Christie he is an allright fellow. Les Stainsby is all right he is with Jack Salmon. Jack is Quarter-master for G. company and Les is his assistant. J. Salmon had a narrow escape, a spent bullet hitting him in the leg but only penetrated an inch or two. We are going down to the Swazi border to morrow, so if you do not get a letter you will know it is because we are not near a railway and can't post them. I am writing this on the back of my saddle while the horses are having a spell. This is all the news for this time. Remember me to all inquiring friends.—Your affectionate brother.

E. VALPIED.
