

From: Lieutenant Colonel Neil C. Smith AM Retd

MOSTLY UNSUNG MILITARY HISTORY RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

All Correspondence to:
PO Box 7020, Brighton,
Vic, 3186, Australia
Phone: (03) 59715565
Web: mostlyunsung.com.au
E-mail milhis@alphalink.com.au
ABN: 28 031 740 832

RESEARCH NOTES

Name: **Andrew HENDRIE**

Rank: Private

Regimental Number: 12A

Date of Birth: 1876

Place of Birth: Williamstown, Victoria

Occupation: Engine Cleaner and later Fireman

Marital Status: Married Sarah Prior FOX in 1909

Address:

Parents: William and Jane (nee GOODIE) HENDRIE
Williamstown, Victoria

Later: Raglan Street,

Preston, Victoria

Later: 34 Illawarra Street,

Maribyrnong, Victoria

Religion: Church of England

Service Outline:

Served 1st Battalion, Infantry Regiment on Part Time Duty in Preston.

Enlisted with the 1st Victorian Mounted Infantry Contingent for South Africa 5th October 1899 and to camp South Melbourne.

Embarked Melbourne 28th October 1899 per Transport *Medic*.

Disembarked Cape Town 26th November 1899 and to camp Maitland.

Train to De Aar 1st December 1899 to join the Kimberley Relief Force.

To Enslin 16th December 1899.

Operations against the Boers commenced 1st January 1900.

To Naauwpoort then Rensburg 3rd February 1900 with several skirmishes on horse back.

Actions in mid February near Pink Hill and Hobkirks Farm.

To the Orange Free State 14th March 1900 near Norval's Pont.

To Bloemfontein 3rd April 1900 and the advance to Brandfort, Klip River, Zand River, Johannesburg, Pretoria, Diamond Hill and Belfast with actions in all areas. At Karee Kloof on 1st May 1900 there were heavy casualties.

Most men suffered from enteric around August 1900 near Belfast and Welverdiend.

Embarked Cape Town per Transport *Harlech Castle* 5th November 1900.

Disembarked Melbourne per Transport *Harlech Castle* 4th December 1900.

Discharged 12th December 1900.

Remarks:

Awarded Queen's South Africa medal with clasps Johannesburg, Diamond Hill, Belfast, Cape Colony and Orange Free State vide Medal Roll WO100/91 page 16. Copy attached.
Noted as witness to a fatal train accident in 1908.

Jane died 1892 so step-mother Amelia raised Andrew for much of his life.

Died Heidelberg, Victoria 30th September 1936.

Copy of soldier's letter attached.

Buried Preston General Cemetery, Victoria.

The subject served as Andrew HENDRIE although his second Christian name was Montgomerie.

Ten Australians with the first initial A and surname starting with H served in the Boer War 1899-1902. Only two, the above and Major (Doctor) Andrew HONMAN could have been at some or all of the year 1900 actions recorded on the weapon butt which initiated this research. HONMAN however, would not have been at Brandfort or Kroonstadt, plus he returned home early sick and as a senior medical officer is unlikely to have carved his initials etc on a weapon butt. He has therefore been discounted. The remaining eight men can be discounted by virtue of having many Christian names or being in South Africa at the wrong period.

Researched National Archives Australia and civil records.

[illegible]

1 2 3 4 5 6
1 2 3 4 5 6
W.O. 100 / 291
BE REPRODUCED WITHOUT THE
PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE, LONDON

Rensburg Drift

Charlie Patterson appears to have been correct when he said that it was difficult to get time to write - the next letters did not appear until 31 May, by which time the Victorian contingent had been in action for the first time around Rensburg Drift, a hotly-disputed railway siding and stores depot.

Twelve Australians, including the First Contingent's Second-Command Major George Eddy were killed in the action between 9 and 12 February, the last day seeing the depot overrun by a Boer force which, depending on the varying reports, outnumbered the Australian and a small detachment of British troops by over ten to one.

The heavily outnumbered forces were forced to abandon the camp, later re-captured in December, 1900. Most of the wounded were taken prisoner before British ambulances could arrive.

THE PRESTON BOYS IN SOUTH AFRICA

THEIR RENSBURG EXPERIENCES

"Writing to his mother from Arundel Camp under dates Feb 2 to 6, Private Hendrie after reporting that he was in good health says:-

"I received your letter at a place called Hobkirk's farm, a place that will be memorable to Victorians, as next day, we had to fight for our lives, with the odds of nearly 400 to 1 against us ... we had to go on to a place called Kloof Camp, about 6 miles away. On our way there, we passed Cole's Kop, about 400 ft. high, the highest hill we have yet seen. There were 2 British guns on top and it took 250 men to get them into position. When we passed the Kop, we were for the first time under fire, for we got 15 shells at us. The chaps took it very cool, they would stop and say "Look where this one will go"...

"On Saturday last very early in the morning we heard firing from the rear and about two hours later 42 of us were ordered to saddle our horses and get ready to go to the aid of the V.M. Rifles, who had been caught surprised ... while we proceeding up the kopje we found the bodies of Sergeant Grant and Private Wilson of the V.M.R. both dead. It seems that were on piquet⁵¹ duty and were surprised ... at the same time another piquet was surprised as a place called Bastard's Nek⁵² and they lost 3 killed, 3 wounded and 3 wounded prisoners ...

"I have been writing this letter for the last three days, putting a little bit in when I found time. Frank Hull was in the firing line and had a marvellous escape. Freddy Michel is wounded, but all the others are safe. They broke up the contingent when we got to Rensburg and sent us in all directions. In the retirement, I lost almost all my kit - shirt, drawers, towels and blankets all gone, I have only one shirt to my name. We have orders to go out with a day's provisions at 6 o'clock tonight, goodness only knows where ..."

In a much shorter letter to his mother and father, Fred Michel also referred to what the *Leader* called "the exaggerated accounts of the Rensburg affair which he knew were in circulation":-

"I suppose they have us all cut up. Well, the truth of the matter is that I am wounded, but very slightly. I am telling you the real truth because I know you would like to know the truth, and I am glad to say that I only got a flesh wound through the calf of the leg - only a little bit of a hole through the muscle. It's no pain at all, but I have to lie in bed and take it easy, but some of the poor fellows there have "copped out" properly, but such is the fortune of war".

Michel's wound was sufficiently serious to see him invalided back to Australia, arriving home 29 July - he was noted as being wounded in an arm and a leg, and like Francis Hull who returned as the same time was suffering from enteric fever.

Given he was by far the most prolific writer of letters, the obvious omission from the batch of 31 May was Charlie Patterson, although the *Leader* did allude to his part in the action in a brief paragraph of general news:-

"Details of the fighting as Rensburg now to hand show that under most trying conditions our men of the Victorian contingent fought as bravely and as chivalrously as could be expected of the best soldiers of the Empire. It is like a romance to read of young Sergeant "Charlie" Patterson of Preston, having to conduct the retirement from Pink Hill because every officer senior to him had been struck down by Boer bullets".

⁵¹ "piquet" = picket

⁵² Nek = valley or pass between two hills