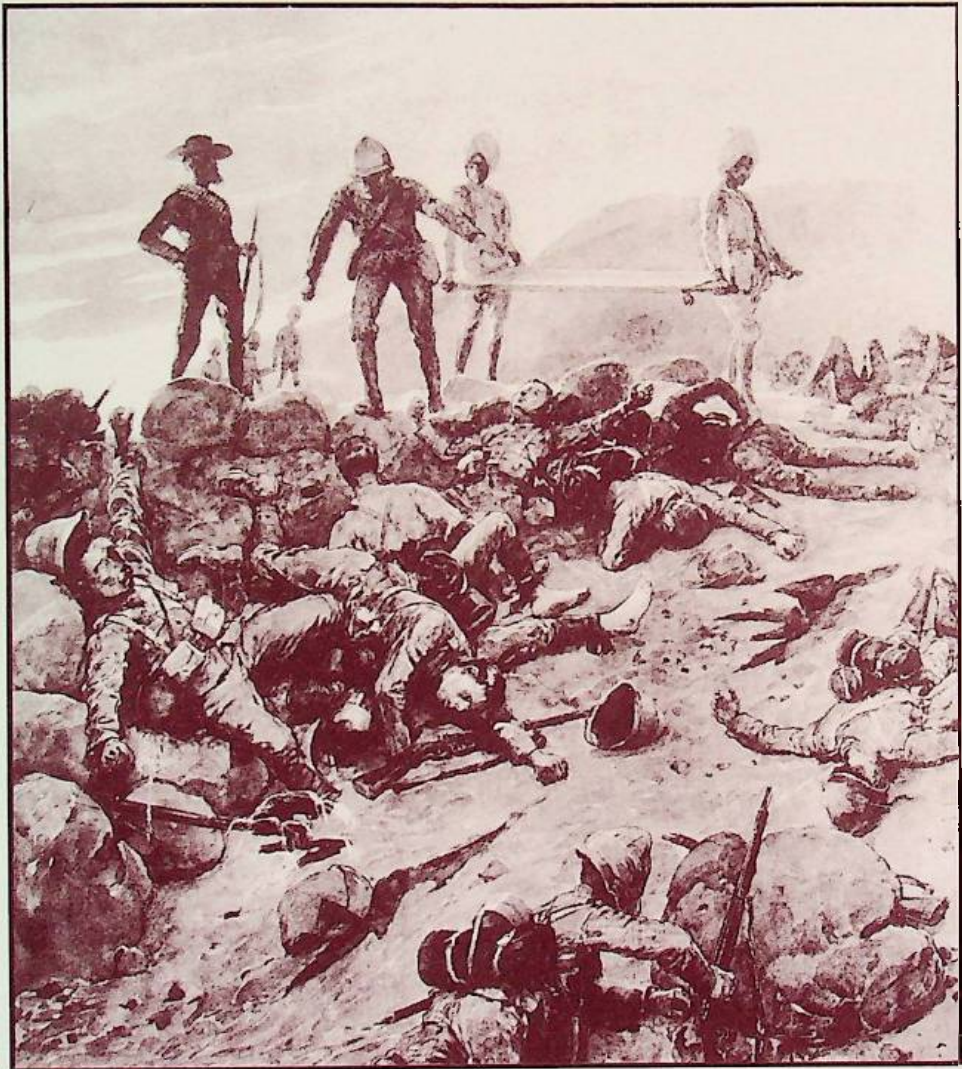


# THE DEVIL'S HILL

LOCAL MEN AT THE  
BATTLE OF SPION KOP, 1900



FRED HOLCROFT

Wigan Heritage Service Publications: 3

Football and rugby supporters are familiar with the name Spion Kop, or the Kop — a particular area of the terraces in a number of famous grounds, including, of course, Anfield, Liverpool and Central Park, Wigan. But how many realise the derivation of the name?

The original Spion Kop is, in fact, a hill in South Africa. A battle was fought there on 24 January 1900, between the British and the Boers. Although the British were to win the war two years later — they lost this battle, and 1185 men (over 10 times the number of Boer dead) in what must rank as one of the biggest blunders in the long history of the British Army.

Nor is it common knowledge that the Lancashire Fusiliers led the British assault, that they included many men from the Wigan area, and that they suffered the greatest losses of all the British regiments who fought on that fateful day.

Some left the hill wounded, but alive to tell the tale; nearly 100 Fusiliers died — tragically, in vain, as no lessons were learned before the ensuing carnage of the Great War.

Small wonder that the men of Lancashire described this far-off hill in evocative terms — "the fatal hill", "slaughter hill" . . . "the Hill of the Devil".

**Front cover illustration:**

*'Sorting the Living from the Dead'. Dawn on Spion Kop, 25 January (Illustrated London News, 3 March 1900).*

# The Devil's Hill

Local Men at the  
Battle of Spion Kop, 1900

by  
Fred Holcroft



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To my father Fred Holcroft (1913-75)

# Introduction

**I** FIRST heard the name Spion Kop when, as a small boy in the fifties I was taken by my father to Central Park to watch Wigan Rugby League Club play. I stood at the top of the bare, steep corner terracing called Spion Kop, with its perfect view of the match far below.

The name intrigued me, so I looked it up and discovered that it was a hill in South Africa where a battle had been fought during the Boer War over 50 years previously on 24 January 1900. Further reading revealed the terrible events which took place during that battle and the suffering of the British soldiers, drawn mainly from the Lancashire Fusiliers, the Royal Lancasters and the South Lancashires.

I realised that, because many men from the Wigan area must have served in these regiments and fought at Spion Kop, when Central Park was built shortly afterwards, the spectators nicknamed part of the new football ground after that high, rock-strewn 'kopje' thousands of miles away, where so many of their friends and fellow townsmen had fought and died.

This is the story of those events, told as far as possible in the words of the local soldiers who took part.

\* \* \* \*

In 1899 the two tiny Boer republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, with a combined population of 300,000, declared war on Great Britain, with a population of 30,000,000 and the ability to call on the resources of the British Empire, which numbered 300,000,000 more! There could only be one result, and after three years of fighting there was, but not before the part-time Boer soldiers had inflicted a series of humiliating defeats on the most experienced regular army of the day.

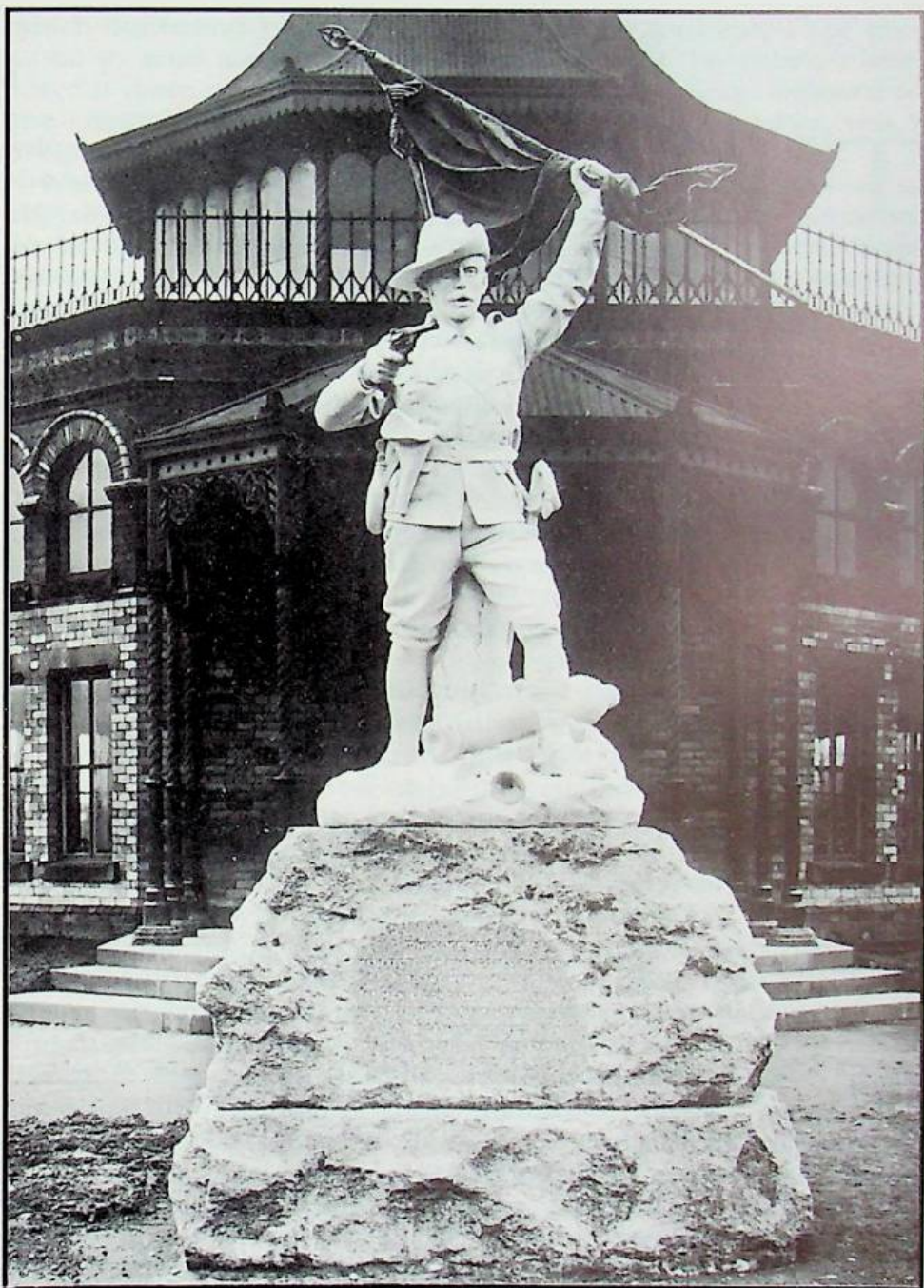
When hostilities commenced in October 1899 Boer armies poured over the frontier into the Natal and Cape colonies, soon surrounding the two border towns of Ladysmith and Kimberley which had to be hastily fortified and gallantly defended by British and South African forces. Thinking it necessary to relieve both towns at once the British Commander-in-Chief Sir Redvers Buller needlessly divided his troops. With 20,000 men Buller himself ad-

vanced on Ladysmith, while with a force only half as large, Lord Methuen moved towards Kimberley. General Gatacre was sent to Stormberg to be the link between the two British armies.

At first Lord Methuen's advance seemed to be going well. In a series of battles — Belmont, Graspan and Modder River — he drove the Boers back. Then within the space of a week disaster struck. First General Gatacre, instead of staying where he was, attempted to surprise the Boers by a night attack and was himself taken unawares and defeated. One day later Lord Methuen was defeated at Magersfontein and before 'Black Week', as it became known, was over, Buller himself had been completely outwitted at Colenso, leaving the bewildered British forces no nearer the two besieged towns than before.

Three defeats in five days stunned Victorian Britain. The British public could take no more, nor could the Government. Buller was replaced as Commander-in-Chief by Lord Roberts, but while his successor was still aboard his transport sailing towards South Africa, Buller made another attempt to reach Ladysmith. This led to the Battle of Spion Kop, which must rank as one of the biggest blunders in the long history of the British army.





*Memorial to those who died in the Boer War, which once stood in Mesnes Park, Wigan. (Wigan Heritage Service)*

# Spion Kop

**T**HE Spion Kop campaign was dominated by the geography of South Africa. At right angles across the front of the advancing British army ran the River Tugela; behind that, parallel to the river rose the Tabanyama range, a mountain barrier of high, steep 'kopjes' (hills). The river had few drifts (crossing places), while the limited number of through roads reduced the scope of the options available to the British commander.

So far in the war every battle had been fought in the same way. The British had attacked frontally against the Boers entrenched in prepared positions. Where they felt there was a chance that they might be outflanked, the Boers mounted their horses and rode off. Where they felt safe, however, the Boers stayed put and their accurate rifle-fire inflicted heavy casualties on the British advancing towards them in the open. The British had persisted in these tactics, knowing that they lacked the mobility to manoeuvre round behind their dug-in opponents and that the Boers disliked hand-to-hand bayonet charges.

For once, Buller tried something different. Leaving a force in front of the Boers at Colenso he sent a division under General Warren on a march round the Boer right flank to force them to fall back. At first the plan seemed to be working. The advance guard reached Acton Homes; it looked as if the Boers had been out-maneuvred and would have to retreat without a shot being fired. Then Warren lost his nerve and recalled his advance units, just when the Boers had decided to get out while they could.

For two days Buller and Warren dithered about what to do; eventually they decided that a frontal attack to capture Spion Kop, obviously the key to the entire position, would do just as well. Not for nothing had the highest peak in the Tabanyama Range been named Spion Kop (Scout Hill) by the early Boer settlers. Some of the finest views in South Africa could be had from the summit, giving clear vision in all directions, especially to the south where the British army trudged up the road to Acton Homes, and to the north where the Boer positions could be clearly seen, dug in on every hill.

Spion Kop had such natural strength that it was only weakly defended by some 70 Boers of the Vryheid Commando; the rest were needed for their other defences. But to attack it in the way

which Buller and Warren intended was sheer madness. Their proposal to send a small force into the centre of the enemy's line, leave it there on its own without support or artillery, exposed to the enemy's crossfire and trusting in hastily-dug trenches, was a recipe for disaster.

Warren put General Woodgate in charge of 1700 men, comprising all eight companies of the 2nd battalion Lancashire Fusiliers; six companies of the Royal Lancaster Regiment; C and D companies of the South Lancashire Regiment; half of 17th Company Royal Engineers and 200 men from Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry (dismounted of course) — a regiment raised at his own expense, comprising Natal citizens and Transvaal exiles.

Woodgate, 54 years old, was an experienced soldier, having been commissioned as an ensign in the Royal Lancaster Regiment back in 1865, but most of his fighting had been against natives — Abyssinia (1868), Ashanti (1874), Zululand (1879) — and had not equipped him to face an enemy like the Boers. To be fair, very few other officers in the British Army at that time were sufficiently equipped.

It is surprising that the Lancashire Fusiliers were chosen for the assault, as they had led the attack in the crossing of the River Tugela at Venter's Spruit only four days earlier and suffered over 140 casualties. At five o'clock in the morning they had advanced on Venter's Spruit, in skirmishing order, with such style that General Hart called out to them as they passed that they looked "just like on parade". Exposed in the open the advancing British were cut down in swathes by the rifle-fire of the well-concealed Boers. It took 14 hours to secure the crossing in an action where Drummer Hilton from Wigan took part:

'It was an awful sight to see some of the men. Sergeant Cox of Wigan was killed and all the men greatly regretted his death for he was so well respected in the regiment for being a very smart and upright soldier'.[i]

One of the first to be hit was Private Michael Cassidy, Lancashire Fusiliers, from Shaw's Yard in Scholes, who had a harrowing experience:

'I had a very wonderful escape from being killed outright. The bullet went straight through my left thigh and I was right in front of the enemy's position who was strongly entrenched around the hills. After I got hit I went about five yards. Then down I came a cropper and there I remained under heavy fire for four hours. I was right in the open. I had not the slightest bit of cover at all. The nearest place of

safety was about fifty yards away. I can tell you I thought it was a wash out with me. The bullets were flying around in showers, a good many letting within a foot of me. There was no stretcher bearers knocking about at all. Of course it was not safe for them to come to me because the Boers did not care who they shot at. Lots of wounded men got shot while being attended to. I tried to bandage myself up but could not so I had to watch and bleed freely. I was in a nice state and covered with blood. A private of the Borderers carried me away and bandaged me up'.[ii]

Another local man in the attack on Venter's Spruit was Private Hart of Bank Street, Golborne:

'We had to cross the fire of the enemy at the double and I can assure you that the bullets whistled around us. As we got from under cover commencing the attack down went three men of my regiment and then for about ten hours we were in a warm corner. I jumped out and picked up a fellow of my company from under a terrific hail of bullets. I fully expected to get hit in the attempt but I got him back. Poor fellow! He was shot clean in the back. I bandaged him up and with the assistance of another fellow we carried him back, having again run the gauntlet, or rather walk it for we couldn't run very well with his weight in our arms'.[iii]

Nevertheless, despite their losses, the Lancashire Fusiliers were to form the bulk of the attacking force. Although for some it was their first taste of action, the battalion contained many experienced men, including some veterans who had fought in the Battle of Omdurman only two years previously.

As Thorneycroft was getting his men ready for the attack a smart young man rode into his camp and asked to enlist in his infantry regiment. He was Hugh Stewart McCorquodale, the only son of the second wife of the late George McCorquodale, owner of the Newton-le-Willows printers McCorquodale & Co. Ltd. Just 25 years old, McCorquodale had joined the family firm after an early education at Harrow and Oxford. Impressed with his experience in the school cadet corps and subsequently as a lieutenant in the Newton detachment of the volunteer battalion of the King's Liverpool Regiment, Thorneycroft had given him a commission as second-lieutenant. On the previous day, McCorquodale had met Winston Churchill, who had been at Harrow at the same time, and was now a war correspondent. The two chatted together briefly; McCorquodale told Churchill that he had just arrived in South Africa and had made his way to the front hoping to 'get a job'. Churchill considered him 'just the material for irregular horse' and recommended Thorneycroft's outfit.

# The Assault on Spion Kop

**A**T 11 o'clock on the night of Tuesday 23 January 1900 Thorneycroft, a native of Natal, who knew the area better than the other officers, led the climb up the hill.

The night was intensely black and a thick mist covered the top of the hill, necessitating frequent halts while Thorneycroft and a few of his men went ahead to make sure of the way.

As they got near to the top, the soldiers left the path, formed a line and fixed bayonets. When a sentry challenged, the soldiers threw themselves to the ground as the Boers emptied their rifles into the dark. Thorneycroft jumped to his feet and gave the order to charge. The small force swept up to the top of the hill; one Boer was killed with a bayonet thrust while the rest ran down the hillside, some still in their stockinged feet, to warn the main body.

The engineers quickly traced out a line of trenches along what

*The attack on Spion Kop (Illustrated London News, 24 February 1900)*



they thought was the main crest of the hill and the men began to dig in. The soil was thin and they soon came to solid rock, so that after half an hour, only a shallow ditch just over a foot deep had been dug, with a few stones and rocks placed in front. Sandbags had been stockpiled at the foot of the hill but someone had forgotten to issue the order to bring them along. Sergeant James Hartley of the Lancashire Fusiliers, formerly a constable in the Wigan Borough Police, described the attack in a letter home:

'On the night of the 23rd we had orders to take Spion Kop. We started off very cheerfully — our regiment, six companies of the 4th Lancasters, two companies South Lancashires, one company engineers and Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry. We were in front and after a tedious march we arrived at the bottom of the hill. Then we commenced to climb silently up until we reached the top, when all at once ping, ping, the bullets flew over our heads. Our colonel shouted "Fusiliers Charge" and we did. We cleared the hill before the other regiments had time to get up. Then we gave three cheers and the Royal Engineers came up to make trenches. The Boers kept firing on us from the adjoining hill during the time they were making the trenches and someone fell almost every shot because we were all in groups in the dark'.[iv]

Private Sankey of the Lancashire Fusiliers, from Mill Street, Ashton-in-Makerfield, also describes the capture in a letter home:

'We gained the hill in grand style and shifted the Boers out of the position. I only saw one Boer who was killed by our men. He looked as if he had been on tramp for about a month. No socks on his feet and half-starved to death, and I think by the look of him it was a happy release for him when he got a bayonet through him. There were not many shots fired on either side as it was dark and we could not see very far in front of us. I think the Boers must have got the tip we were coming and took all their belongings with them except a few blankets. . . . They came in very handy for our troops to roll in and get an hour's rest which was much needed having been on the move since Saturday'.[v]

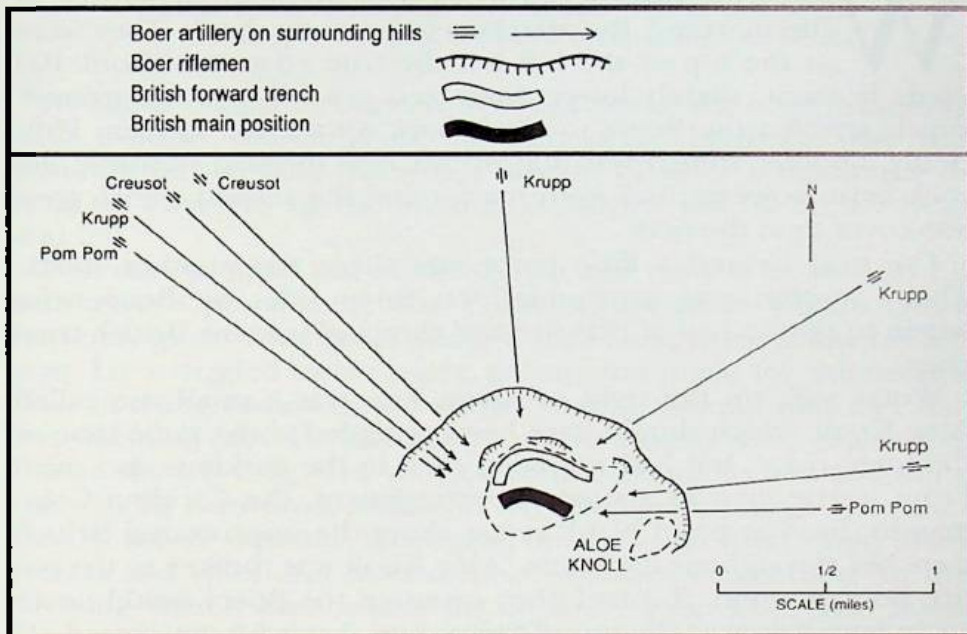
Drummer Hilton, who had survived the charge at Venter's Spruit, was one of the first up Spion Kop:

'On the night of the 23rd January we received orders to advance and to attack Spion Kop by night, and it was about 7.30 p.m. when we marched off to attack this position. We reached the foot of the hill about 1 a.m. and heard no sound of the enemy so we advanced up the hill with bayonets fixed and after about two hours hard climbing and struggling we were challenged in Dutch by the enemy's sentry who was answered with a bayonet through his body by Lieutenant Awdry just as the Boer fired his mauser which escaped hitting the officer. The shot aroused the Boers who instantly took flight leaving everything behind them'.[vi]

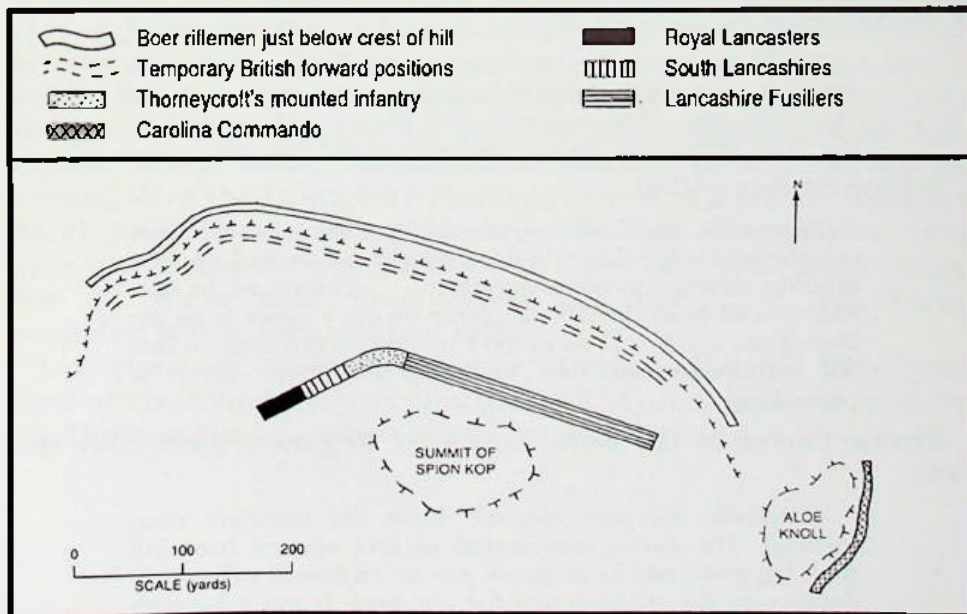
# Battle Positions, Spion Kop

A overview, B detail

A



B



# Counter-Attack

**W**HEN the mist began to clear at about eight o'clock in the morning, the attackers got a nasty shock. They were at the top of the hill but the true edge was about 100 yards in front, slightly lower down and providing 'dead ground' which enabled the Boers to climb back up the hill unseen. Hurriedly, another trench was dug in this new forward position; the rock here, however, was even harder and the second trench gave less cover than the first.

The mist cleared a little more and there was another shock. Their position was surrounded on three sides by Boers who began to pour a hail of rifle-fire and shrapnel into the British trenches.

Worse still, on the right of Spion Kop was a small rise called Aloe Knoll, which should have been occupied at the same time as the main ridge, but had not been seen in the darkness and mist. From it, the men of a single Boer regiment, the Carolina Commando, fired at point blank range along the unprotected British trenches throughout the battle. Aloe Knoll was the key to the entire Boer position. If it had been captured the Boers would never again have got near the top of Spion Kop, having been chased off it. As Sergeant Hartley put it:

'Dawn came and the fun commenced. Well, murder was not in it, as from dawn until dark the enemy kept up a fire like hailstones. Our regiment and Thorneycroft's were in the front line and we caught the brunt of the fire'.[vii]

Private Sankey added:

'Before the mist had time to rise from the hills the Boers commenced snipe-shooting on our right. So we had no time to make trenches to cover ourselves. . . . As soon as the mist had cleared from the hill altogether we got a salute from the Boer guns which told us to buck up and all the men on that hill will remember that buck up for many years to come'.[viii]

Private Parker of the Royal Lancaster Regiment gave more details:

'Gradually the mist cleared. Then the butchery commenced. The Boers surrounded us and opened fire with their big guns, and I can assure you we all fought gallantly in defence of the position and for our lives. It was a horrible



sight to see men's legs, arms and heads being blown off at every shot, men were being shot down six at a time, and when the hospital men came up to look after the wounded and carry them away, they were also blown to pieces. . . . I had the heel of my boot clean shot away. I can assure you I felt a bit shaky at the time. My comrade who lay next to me was smashed by a shell. I expected every minute to be my last'. [ix]

At about 8.45 a.m. General Woodgate was wounded. Standing with Colonel Blomfield of the Lancashire Fusiliers, who was pointing out to him the steady stream of Boer reinforcements working their way up the hillside, Woodgate was hit on the head and fell.

Five men jumped out of the trench and rushed forward to his assistance. One of these was Private Quirk from Wigan. Quirk had only gone three paces when a shell-burst carried away his left arm. He struggled to his knees, got up and made for the nearest field dressing station, more shells bursting around him and bullets whistling past. He had almost reached cover when one struck him in the left lung. The medical staff attended to him and miraculously he recovered, minus his left arm and left lung. The other four reached General Woodgate, made a stretcher from their jackets and rifles and carried their wounded commander to the dressing station just behind the crest of Spion Kop. The Boers seemed to have taken the range of this temporary hospital, probably sighting on the red cross which had been placed on the ground near it, as shells began to burst all around. Captain Lynch of the South Lancashire Regiment asked for volunteers to carry the general back down to the field hospital at the base of the hill. Private George White, Sergeant Tom Farrell, Private Lowe and an officer, all of the Lancashire Fusiliers, as well as a private from the South Lancashires, sprang forward. The first threequarters of a mile was across the open hillside in plain view and under heavy fire the whole time. One soldier was killed and the officer wounded before they reached safety.

Unfortunately, their efforts were in vain — General Woodgate died of his wounds shortly afterwards. They did, however, receive the Distinguished Conduct Medal for their heroic act.

# The Mix-up in Command

FIRST Warren, then Buller, received the news of Woodgate's death. Realising that the critical situation needed firm, even courageous, leadership, Buller recommended that Thorneycroft should take command, even though both Blomfield and Colonel Crofton of the Royal Lancaster Regiment were senior to him. It was a sensible idea, but unfortunately nobody told Crofton, and with Blomfield also wounded, he took command. When General Coke arrived at the head of reinforcements, he thought Crofton was in command; when Crofton too was wounded he took command himself. Further reinforcements arrived in the form of the Middlesex Regiment; on learning of Crofton's wound its commander, Colonel Hill, assumed command. Then the Scottish Rifles arrived with their commander Colonel Cooke who, refusing to believe that Thorneycroft was in command, went back down the hill to see Coke. The outcome of this farce was that for most of the afternoon four officers, unknown to each other, each thought that he was in command of the defenders on Spion Kop.

The heliograph had broken and it was too dangerous to signal by flags, so a runner was sent to tell Thorneycroft of his promotion. Incredibly the messenger was shot as he was about to speak. A second runner told Thorneycroft that he was in supreme command of all the troops on the hill and was to assume the rank of Major General. Thorneycroft was amazed. "Is there no-one senior to me?" he enquired. The orderly's reply is not known. "Where are the reinforcements?" asked Thorneycroft; he was told that they were on the way. Private W. Kindley from Frederick Street, Lower Ince survived the battle and later wrote home to his mother:

'The officer asked Thorneycroft what he intended to do, whether to surrender or to fight on. Thorneycroft shouted: "Boys! What shall we do? Surrender or fight to the last man?" and we shouted: "Fight to the last man!" and we stuck there till more troops arrived and drove back the Boers'.[x]

A similar version was given by Private Sankey:

'It was then that Major Thorneycroft said: "Shall we make a stand for it boys?" and we replied: "We will" and we did'.[xi]

# Hangin<sup>g</sup> On

**A**BOUT nine o'clock the Boers began their first attempt to recapture Spion Kop, crawling and dodging up the hill while their comrades on the surrounding hills provided a murderous covering fire. Throughout the day the Boers made eight desperate attempts to retake the top of the hill but each time they were thrown back after hand-to-hand fighting, some of the most fierce and courageous in the history of the British Army. The Boer fire was causing horrendous casualties. Sharpshooters were picking off the British soldiers one by one, but even worse was the effect of the Boer artillery as their shells exploded in the British trenches with deadly accuracy. Drummer Hilton endured the whole day:

'Our men took possession of the hill and thought that they had done the easiest piece of work imaginable in only having to walk into their trenches, but daylight dawned and it left a mist hanging around the top of the hill and I am sure that the enemy took advantage of the mist and advanced about half way up the hill and hid amongst the rocks. At last the mist rose and to the dismay of our troops they could almost see that they were in a tight place for their big guns came pouring in shells amongst our troops scattering them left and right and then Hotchkiss or 'pom pom' as our men called it would put about ten shells in them without a stop and the Boers on the hills picked every man off who showed himself. One man named Streets had his head blown clean off. Some men who were in a trench who were wounded and could not help themselves were set on fire with the bursting of a shell and in fact it was too horrible to relate. No-one can hardly imagine how terrible war is until they see it in reality'.<sup>[xii]</sup>

Private Kindley brought home to the readers of his letter the true horror of war:

'It's allright for men at home to say they wished they were going to fight the Boers. If they had been where I was on the 24th January they would wish they were back again at home. It was not a pleasant thing to be in trenches and hear bullets whistling over your head and shells bursting. It was horrible to see the dead and wounded lying next to one another'.<sup>[xiii]</sup>

British troops had not been trained for this type of warfare. There was no volley-firing, no advance at the regulation five paces



*Group of Boer soldiers, with typical equipment and 'uniforms', c.1900  
[courtesy of the Director, National Army Museum, London]*

interval and little opportunity for the bayonet charge at which they excelled. They found it difficult to perform the kind of snap-shooting from behind cover at which the Boers were good and which was so graphically described by Private Kindley:

'Every time men fired the Boers would wait with their rifles fixed on the spot and the next time they fired they would fall back either dead or wounded'. [xiv]

Private J. Brooks, an army reservist who, before being recalled to the Colours, had been employed at Horwich Locomotive Works, gave more gruesome details in a letter to Mr. Omerod, one of the company's managers:

'To tell you the miraculous escapes I had on that day would require volumes. I noticed in one of our trenches a corporal named Allen. The poor fellow had both legs blown off by one of the Boer shells and he asked for a cigarette. He had only a short smoke when he started crying and asked would somebody put him out of his misery by blowing his brains out. I felt sorry for the poor fellow when he died. I saw some very pitiful deaths. Some were talking of their

parents in dear old England, some talking of mothers, sweet-hearts, children and wives. It was shocking and terrible in the extreme and, as the old song says, strong men wept like women'. [xv]

Private E. Burgess had similar experiences:

'I shall never forget Wednesday's battle when arms and legs were flying in all directions. All our officers were shot before we got half a chance. My company captain said "Get up Burgess" and before I could say "Yes" he was shot through the brains. I had to find another place as the bullets and shells were pouring over me like rain. I had no water in my bottle for 38 hours and had not a bite of food for two days. I saw Walsh (Private Walsh of Holt Street, Woodhouse Lane), being carried down on a stretcher. I went towards him to speak, but he could not speak. As I was crossing the hillside a bit of shell from the enemy's guns cut the water bottle clean off my back so I think I had a near shave'. [xvi]

Private Dickinson from Duke's Row, Aspull was also moved:

'It is almost impossible for me to describe the fighting in this letter. It makes my blood run cold when I think about it. Everywhere I looked there were heaps of killed and wounded. The whole field of battle was a mass of blood. I shall never forget it. You had either to kill or be killed. All I can say is "Lucky is the man who came out of it unhurt!" I had an uncomfortably narrow squeak. A bullet passed through my helmet and my officer when he saw it said I was a lucky man'. [xvii]

Private Humphreys of the South Lancashire Regiment, aged 26, from Hall Street, Leigh was even luckier. He was hit, but the mauser bullet struck his tin box containing the chocolates presented to each soldier by Queen Victoria, and he survived to tell the story. Private Higgins, Lancashire Fusiliers, of Little Lane, Pemberton wrote that he would never forget the scenes on the top of Spion Kop as long as he lived and added:

'It was a sickening sight to see the dying and dead as they were shot down in the trenches. It is nothing but murder what the British troops have had to face but thank God I escaped being wounded'. [xviii]

Private R. Stead was a veteran of Omdurman where the Lancashire Fusiliers had dished it out but he had never seen his regiment take casualties like this:

'We have lost plenty of men. It is hard to see them on the field wounded, groaning and asking for water'. [xix]

# The Crisis

**S**ERGEANT Hartley was in the thick of things:  
'As many as 40 shells struck within 20 yards of where I was and I was only covered with dust'.[xx]

But the shells were taking their toll, causing casualties and a catastrophic drop in morale. At about one o'clock in the afternoon came the turning point of the battle. The dead lay in heaps in the trenches, almost all the officers had been shot, there was no water on the hilltop as the hot tropical sun blazed vertically down. No reinforcements arrived. For five hours men had suffered, unable to hit back, until they could stand no more. In ones and twos white handkerchiefs started to flutter; soon there were scores. The Boers came out from behind their rocks also waving handkerchiefs and began marching their prisoners down the slope. Thorneycroft ran out of his trench and tried to stop this unauthorised surrender. With the first of the reinforcements from the Middlesex Regiment who had just reached the top, he dashed forward, but although he successfully retook all the abandoned trenches he was unable to stop over 150 men being taken off down the hill into captivity. Private Thomas Glover from Newtown, Pemberton had been hit in the leg and escaped capture:

'It was a good job I could not walk or I should have been a prisoner too. Those who could not walk the Boers left behind so I escaped'.[xxi]

Sergeant Hartley was in the trenches at the time of this incident:

'Our fellows fought like lions. Time after time the Boers tried to rush our trenches and every time we drove them back with heavy losses. Our general was shot down, our staff officers, our colonel, our own officers, we had no-one to command us; our ammunition nearly gone, we sent a message for reinforcements and the answer was "Hold hill at all costs; reinforcements coming". We stood in our trenches at bay, no ammunition, and taunted the Boers to come and take us. About fifty of them came up with a white flag and told us to surrender. We shot nearly all of them. All this time their shells were raking our trenches, legs, arms, and heads flying in all directions. The Boers worked round us again and asked us to surrender. The bloke in charge of the Boers told us to put our arms down and no harm would come to us. About fifty put them down. Then Thorneycroft jumped on the top of the trench and shouted "Are we going



*British dead in the trenches at Spion Kop [courtesy of the Director, National Army Museum, London]*

to give in lads?" and we all answered "No!". He next cried "Fire on those Boers taking our men away" and we fired so only a few got away. Of course if we hit our own men we could not help it'.[xxii]

At the end of the battle only 23 men were left alive in Hartley's company which before dawn had numbered a hundred. The reinforcements had arrived only just in time. The Boers had lost their only chance to recapture the hill but now it was the turn of fresh regiments — Middlesex, Dorsets, Scottish Rifles and Imperial Light Infantry — to endure the murderous rifle and artillery fire on top.

# Defeat

**I**NCREDIBLY, the Boers did not realise how well they were doing. Deneys Reitz of the Pretoria Commando, then only a 17 year old boy wrote:

'The English troops lay so near that one could have tossed a biscuit among them, and whilst the losses which they were causing us were only too evident, we, on our side, did not know that we were inflicting even greater damage on them. .

We were hungry, thirsty and tired. . . we believed they were easily holding their own, so discouragement spread as the shadows lengthened. . . Darkness fell swiftly; the firing died away, and there was silence. . . For a long time I remained at my post. Afterwards my nerve began to go and I thought I saw figures with bayonets stealing forward. . . Almost in panic I left my place and hastened along the fringe of the rocks in search of company, and to my immense relief, heard a gruff "wer da". It was Commandant Opperman, still in his place . . . He told me to stay beside him, and he remained here until ten o'clock, listening to the enemy who were talking and stumbling about in the darkness beyond. At last Opperman decided to retreat, and we descended the hill by the way which he had climbed up nearly sixteen hours before'.[xxiii]

The Boers had failed to recapture Spion Kop. Shortly after sunset Thorneycroft assembled the surviving senior officers for a meeting where they voted to evacuate the hill-top. By midnight the last troops had gone, leaving only the dead and those too badly wounded to be moved. Thorneycroft was not to know that there were only 50 Boers left and that they were preparing to retreat — that he had, in fact, won the Battle of Spion Kop.

Louis Botha, the Boer general commanding the Ladysmith front, arrived at the foot of the hill and spent the night riding from commando to commando, pleading, cajoling, threatening and bullying men to return to the hill-top. Reitz continues:

'Gradually the dawn came and still there was no movement. Then to our utter surprise we saw two men on the top triumphantly waving their hats and holding their rifles aloft. They were Boers and their presence there was proof that almost unbelievably, defeat had turned to victory, the English were gone and the hill was still ours'.[xxiv]

Just before dawn, several Boers had returned to the silent hill-top to search for their friends' bodies and had found it deserted.



Hurriedly they called for reinforcements to join them. And so it was that the Boers reoccupied the summit of Spion Kop.

The Boers had won, but they too had paid a price. Although their casualties were lighter – only about 100 killed out of 300 hit – such losses were relatively large in proportion to their small numbers. During the fierce Boer counter-attack, Deneys Reitz climbed Spion Kop to join his commando:

‘Dead and dying men lay all along the way. . . I soon came on the body of John Malherbe, our Corporal’s brother, with a bullet between his eyes; a few paces further lay two more dead men of our commando. Further on I found my tent-mate poor Robert Reinecke, shot through the head, and not far off L. de Villiers of our corporalship lay dead. Yet higher up was Krige . . . with a bullet through both lungs, still alive, and beyond him Walter de Vos of my tent shot through the chest. . . [xxxv]

Ample testimony to the accuracy of British shooting.

The Boers allowed British stretcher-bearers to carry away their wounded, and fatigue parties to bury the dead. Altogether 243

*Boer dead at Spion Kop (courtesy Regimental Museum of the XX Lancashire Fusiliers)*



men were buried in the trenches where they lay. The ground they had so stubbornly defended became their grave. When they saw the British dead lying sometimes two or three deep in the trenches some Boers cried openly.

As Winston Churchill climbed up the hill he stepped off the narrow path to allow the stretcher-bearers to pass. Some bearers were volunteers from the Indian Community in Natal. One was Mahatma Gandhi. As the stretcher-bearers moved among the bodies they found one dead soldier leaning forward on a boulder, still holding his rifle. Beside him, shattered by the same shell that had killed their owner, were some broken field glasses; on the inside of their leather case was the name 'McCorquodale'. It was the young volunteer who had only joined up the previous evening.

Private Charles Bunting wrote to his wife at 25 Lemon Street, Tyldesley:

'We had a great fight on January 24th and I got shot through the right shoulder and in the face but it has not disfigured me much. I lost a lot of blood, indeed I thought it was never going to give over bleeding. I am getting all right now, and it will take a good bullet to kill me. You see some awful sights on the battlefield. You can see men with their arms and legs off and in some cases heads off too but we have to stand it'. [xxvi]

A few doors away at 18 Lemon Street lived the sister of Frank Waddington, also of the Lancashire Fusiliers, who wrote to her:

'I am a lucky man to be alive after what I have gone through. We have lost 500 of our regiment since we came here but we have done some good work and got a good name. That however will not bring the poor fellows back.

Dick Barlow was killed by a shell . . . Charlie Bunting was wounded and that fellow of the South Lancs called Quillin from down Squires Lane is also wounded . . . After the battle P. Lord of Tyldesley and of the 14th Hussars was looking all over the place to see if I was alright . . . Bullets and shells were coming all round us and fellows were falling on all sides. Being a stretcher-bearer I saw some pitiful sights. There were tears in many men's eyes the night after the Spion Kop fight. There were some noble deeds done but some of the men who did them never lived to get a reward . . .

The Boers were firing on the hospital and if we went to put a wounded man on a stretcher we were fired on from all sides. They don't take any notice of the Red Cross.

Nearly all the women . . . who are married to the sergeants and colour-sergeants are widows now . . . We only

have thirty men in our company out of 100 and out of thirty-two officers we have only six left'.[xxvii]

The parents of the Richard Barlow mentioned in the letter lived in Elliott Street; he was 26 years old when he was killed. He had joined the regulars in 1893 after three years in the militia and was a member of the battalion rugby team.

When he got back to Leigh, Corporal John Lewis of 10 Coal Pit Lane, Westleigh was interviewed by the Leigh Journal. Although only 25 years old, he had fought the hill tribes in India in 1897 and a year later was at the Battle of Omdurman facing the charging Dervishes. He told of his experiences:

'The hill [Spion Kop] looked impossible to take. It was 5,000 high and very steep . . . We found out afterwards we ought to have gone round on one of the side hills and driven the enemy off that way. The bullets came whining round our heads from all directions and the men bobbed their heads about to avoid them. One struck the can on my back and knocked it round to my side. A good many men were hit and we did not see a Boer until we got near to the trenches when they scrambled out and ran for their lives as we charged with the bayonets . . .

Some of us got to digging trenches while others sheltered in the Boer trenches returning the deadly cross-fire which was poured into us. The din of the bursting shells, the pom poms, the big guns, and the rifles, was deafening and soon the whole top of the hill was like a slaughter house. Ammunition ran out and we had to stay the night through with fixed bayonets . . . I never saw such horrible sights. One man whilst running . . . from one place to another at the double had his head clean blown off by a shell and the headless body kept on its way for a few yards until one of the men pushed it over . . .'[xxviii]

Corporal Lewis was hit in the leg by a Nordenfeldt shell, but managed to get to the field hospital by scrambling over the mutilated bodies of his comrades. He commented that he did not know whether it was "blood or water he was splashing through".

One of the most thoughtful letters home was to Mr. J.W. Ely of Dean Villa by Private Gething of 11 Wesley Street, Tyldesley, serving in the Royal Lancaster Regiment. Aged 28 he had enlisted 10 years previously; at the end of his seven years with the colours he got a job at the St. George Pit of the Astley & Tyldesley Coal Company. As a reservist, he was called up when the regiment needed more men. Married with one child he was a teacher at Tyldesley and Westhoughton Sunday School:

'Just a few lines to let you know how I am getting on. Our

hardships are so great here that we sometimes say that death would be welcome but when I think about my wife and child whom I have left behind it cheers me.

The way we have been served up to now has severely tried our patience and is almost past endurance. I have placed myself in God's hands and He gives me strength to bear it all, but my comrades round about me do many things they would not do if they were served right.

No doubt you will have heard of our great battle . . . It was a terrible experience. It is impossible for me to forget it so how long I live. I am sure God's protecting hand has been over me and that my prayers were answered those five awful days.

You will have some idea of our life in the midst of this war when I tell you that we have been without bread since the 9th January and biscuits are very hard indeed. We have never shaved and have to go two to three days even without a wash. Sometimes it is very hard to get any water to drink. In the day time the sun is so hot that we can scarcely bear the heat and it goes suddenly cold and chilly at night . . . Give my best wishes to all my friends and remember me to my Sunday School class'. [xxix]

Corporal Jack Taylor of the 1st Battalion York and Lancaster Regiment gave some realistic home truths in a letter home to a friend:

'Of course it is all right for people to sit at home and say this and that but to realise the hardships and anxieties that we have to go through they ought to come here and face the music for themselves for a week or two. I think they would sing a new song'. [xxx]

Corporal Taylor from Westhoughton, although not actually present at the battle, crossed over to the Lancashire Fusiliers' encampment the next day to look for his friend John Heyes, but was unable to find him. There were two or three of that surname in the regiment and all were missing. Later 2967 Private J. Heyes was listed as killed.

Poignantly, his last letters home to his wife were published in the 'Wigan Observer':

'Dear Alice — I must wish you a happy New Year. I was ordered out yesterday morning scouting on outpost duty, and we were in a very dangerous position with something like 25,000 Boers round the hill and we had to keep our weather-eye open as the Boers were expected to make a charge upon us. I expect before you receive this we shall be on our way to Pretoria. I was very near shooting one of our men last night through not knowing the right countersign or password but I recognised the tone of his voice and recognised it as that of one of the corporals — Jack.

Dear Alice – I was watching the New Year come in as we all promised to do you know when we were all talking about last year among ourselves, but mine was watching the enemy's position and thinking of all the dear ones at home; and darling you cannot for a moment think what solace it brings to the lonely soul at dead of night, with the beautiful bright stars keeping sentinel over our heads with our hearts full of joy and sorrow for the dear ones we love more than life and we feel at this season the love or loss of those we hold dear – Jack.

Dear Alice – I could fill books with what I hear and see every day but it is not for your ears as you would think we were more put upon than we are. I only pray that you are keeping up your brave spirits as I don't think the war will last long after we have relieved Ladysmith, but unfortunately many a brave heart will cease breathing ere this is accomplished. My own, it steels my arms and quickens my blood as I think of you and our little Jack. I can see you in my mind's eye tenderly bending over him as he sleeps and imprinting a kiss on his little chubby face. May our Heavenly Father keep and guard you until I return – Jack.[xxxix]

Private Heyes left a widow and a four month old baby son. He was a reservist in the Lancashire Fusiliers, having spent five of his seven years with the colours in India. He had left his job as a collier to rejoin his regiment.

After the battle Private Sam Greenhalgh from Poolstock, Wigan was one of many soldiers who wrote home to tell their relatives that they were safe:

'We have lost between four and five hundred killed, wounded and missing and a lot of wounded have since died. There is another man in the regiment with the same name as me. He got wounded and has since died in hospital. I hope you do not think it was me. They called the hill Spion Kop but I call it the fatal hill'.[xxxix]

Private John Ryder of the South Lancashires wrote with feeling to Mr. Grundy at the Grapes Inn, Astley:

'I have only been in one engagement but I don't want to go into another like it. Spion Kop – it should be re-named "Slaughter Hill". Every man that came off the hill that night alive may thank God'.[xxxix]

Private Madden from Higham Street, Wigan, also of the South Lancashire Regiment, put it even more strongly in a letter home to his wife. He called it:

'The Hill of the Devil'.[xxxix]



H. C. SEPPING'S ILLUSTRATION

# Postscript

**M**OST of the local men who fought at Spion Kop belonged to the 2nd Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers, with a few in the South Lancashire Regiment and the Royal Lancaster. Many were from Scholes, the vast majority were Roman Catholics and nearly all were coal miners. We know very little about them, other than the few details contained in their army records.

On the outbreak of the Boer War, all leave was cancelled and men who had served their enlistment period, but were held on reserve, were recalled to their units. Their experiences in the hectic days before they left were quite contrasting.

Constable James Hartley of the Wigan Borough Police had only just left the Lancashire Fusiliers in September 1899 when he was recalled. The burly six-footer was very popular with his colleagues and was given a rousing send off. Having seen service in India, Crete and Egypt, he was an experienced soldier. He was discharged in November 1908.

William Bowman, another reservist, was recalled just as he was about to be married. The ceremony was brought forward to Sunday 29 November 1899. The day after, he reported for duty to the Lancashire Fusiliers depot in Preston. He was one of the fortunate ones who survived Spion Kop, and was discharged on 7 July 1902.

Less fortunate was Isaac Pratt, a coal miner from Scholes, who joined up with three friends, served his time and was recalled in December 1899, only to die at Spion Kop.

The Lancashire Fusiliers suffered the greatest losses of all the British regiments who fought at Spion Kop, losing 30% of their combat strength, including 63% of their officers. An indication of the intensity of these losses can be gained by comparing the Spion Kop casualties with those for the rest of the war.

	OFFICERS		OTHER RANKS	
	killed	wounded	killed	wounded
SPION KOP				
<i>(including Venter's Spruit)</i>	5	16	86	247
REST OF WAR	1	1	24	19

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Opposite: *The retreat over the Tugela after Spion Kop (Illustrated London News, 3 March 1900)*

Other regiments also took heavy losses. For example, out of only two companies present, the South Lancashire Regiment lost two officers and ten other ranks killed and 24 other ranks wounded, amounting to almost 25% of their men engaged. Similar figures illustrate the losses of the Royal Lancasters (25%), and Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry (35% including 55% of the officers). Altogether the British losses totalled 1,185.

On the Boer side the heroic conduct of the Carolina Commando, which had held Aloe Knoll throughout the fighting, stands out. Its casualties — 55 killed out of the 88 who had started the battle — were the heaviest (62%) suffered by any unit on either side in the entire war. An interesting comparison with the British figures shows that only one Boer officer, Field-Cornet Badenhorst of the Vryheid Commando, was killed, despite the fact that the Boer officers shared the dangers of their men in exactly the same way as their British counterparts.

\* \* \* \*

From a British point of view it had all been for nothing. This should have been a fast mobile campaign won by movement and strategy, but it became bogged down by incompetence and stupidity. It was a terrible forecast of the carnage to come a few years later in the Great War of 1914-18.

Tragically, the British military leaders appeared to have learned nothing from the events at Spion Kop. In 1907 a British Officer, who would be a corps commander at the outbreak of the Great War and rise to Commander-in-Chief before it ended, wrote a book on the future of cavalry, based on his experiences in India, South Africa and the Sudan. He claimed that "the role of cavalry has an importance which can hardly be overestimated. The role of the cavalry, far from having diminished, has increased in importance." Given the negligible role of mounted troops in most theatres of the Great War, such prophecies could hardly have been further from reality; more blundering would send another generation of Lancashire men to their needless deaths at Gallipoli.

\* \* \* \*

Did the Lancashire lads die in vain on Spion Kop? Perhaps, but they did not die forgotten.



## REFERENCES

### *Abbreviations:*

LC	Leigh Chronicle
LJ	Leigh Journal
WE	Wigan Examiner
WO	Wigan Observer

- i WO 17 March 1900 p.3  
ii WO 3 March 1900 p.7  
iii WO 3 March 1900 p.7  
iv WO 3 March 1900  
v WO 7 March 1900 p.35  
vi WO 17 March 1900 p.3  
vii WO 3 March 1900 p.7  
viii WO 7 March 1900 p.35  
ix WE 10 March 1900 p.5  
x WO 3 March 1900 p.7  
xi WE 10 March 1900 p.6  
xii WO 17 March 1900 p.3  
xiii WO 3 March 1900 p.7  
xiv WO 3 March 1900 p.7  
xv WE 10 March 1900 p.5  
xvi WE 2 March 1900 p.5  
xvii WO 3 March 1900 p.7  
xviii WO 17 March 1900 p.3  
xix WO 17 March 1900 p.3  
xx WO 17 March 1900 p.3  
xxi WE 17 March 1900  
xxii WO 3 March 1900 p.7  
xxiii Quoted in Griffith K. *Thank God We Kept the Flag Flying. The Siege and Relief of Ladysmith 1899-1900.* (Hutchinson 1974)  
xxiv Griffith op. cit.  
xxv Griffith op. cit.  
xxvi LJ March 1900 p.5  
xxvii LJ 28 March 1900  
xxviii LJ 18 May 1900 p.8  
xxix LC 16 March 1900 p.5  
xxx WE 28 March 1900 p.3  
xxxi WO 7 March 1900 p.5  
xxxii WO 3 March 1900 p.7  
xxxiii LJ 16 March 1900 p.5  
xxxiv WO 3 March 1900 p.7

# Those Who Fought

Roman numerals in brackets refer to soldiers' letters quoted in text

- ALLEN, Joseph, Private 3321, Lancashire Fusiliers. 12, Westwell Street, Leigh. Coal Miner. Enlisted 2 July 1890 aged 18 years 5 months. To Reserve 23 November 1897. Rejoined. Discharged 2 March 1907. Sudan Medal; South Africa Medal. Wounded at Spion Kop.
- ASHURST, Edward, Private 2325, Lancashire Fusiliers. Upholland. Coal Miner. Enlisted 17 October 1895 aged 20 years 2 months. Discharged 16 October 1911. South Africa Medal.
- ASHURST, William, Private 3910, Lancashire Fusiliers. 16 Byrom Street, Poolstock, Wigan. Coal Miner. Enlisted 5 January 1892 aged 18 years 9 months. To reserve 18 September 1899. Rejoined 11 November 1899. Discharged 4 November 1904. Sudan Medal; South Africa Medal. Wounded at Venter's Spruit.
- ASTLEY, Joseph, Lance Corporal 4431, Lancashire Fusiliers. Back Lane, Appley Bridge. Clerk. Enlisted 8 March 1893 aged 19 years 6 months. Died at Middleburg, South Africa 2 March 1903. Sudan Medal; South Africa Medal. Wounded at Venter's Spruit 20 January 1900.
- ATKINSON, Joseph, Private 3302, Lancashire Fusiliers. Wigan. Coal Miner. Enlisted 19 June 1890 aged 22 years 2 months. To reserve 23 November 1897. Rejoined 10 November 1899. Discharged 27 July 1902. South Africa Medal.
- BANKS, James, Private 3861, Lancashire Fusiliers. 30 Bridgewater Street, Leigh. Labourer. Enlisted 14 October 1895. Discharged 9 February 1918. Born in Tyldesley. South Africa Medal. Wounded at Spion Kop.
- BARLOW, Richard, Private 4999, Lancashire Fusiliers. 38 Aldred Street, Tyldesley. Labourer. Enlisted 6 October 1893 aged 18 years 1 month. Sudan Medal; South Africa Medal. Killed at Spion Kop 24 January 1900.
- BECKFORD, William, Lance Corporal 3431, Lancashire Fusiliers. Leigh. Farm Labourer. Enlisted 6 January 1890 aged 18 years 1 month. Born at Hitchin in Hertfordshire. Sudan Medal; South Africa Medal. Died of wounds received at Spion Kop 3 February 1900.
- BIRKS, William, Private 3848, Lancashire Fusiliers. Estate Yard Winstanley. Farm Labourer. Enlisted 10 November 1891 aged 18 years 1 month. To Reserve 25 September 1899. Rejoined 11 November 1899. Discharged 5 November 1907 character exemplary. Born in Warwickshire. South Africa Medal. Wounded at Venter's Spruit.
- BOUGHTON, Thomas, Private 2879, Lancashire Fusiliers. Ince. Labourer. Enlisted 14 January 1889 aged 19 years. To reserve 31 November 1896. Rejoined 27 November 1899. Discharged 13 January 1902. South Africa Medal.
- BOWMAN, William, Private 3280, Lancashire Fusiliers. Scholes. Coal Miner. Enlisted 3 June 1890 aged 18 years 5 months. To reserve 23 November 1897. Rejoined November 1899. Discharged 7 July 1902. South Africa Medal.
- BRINDLEY, William, Private 6190, Lancashire Fusiliers. Ince. Coal Miner. enlisted 28 November 1892 aged 19 years. Discharged 27 November 1908. Sudan Medal; South Africa Medal.
- BROGAN, W., Private, Royal Lancaster Regiment. 3 South View, Bryn, Ashton-

- in-Makerfield. Killed at Spion Kop 24 January 1900.
- BUNTING, Charles, Private 4958, Lancashire Fusiliers. 3 Red Street, Valley, Atherton. Labourer. Enlisted 18 September 1894 aged 19 years. Discharged 13 August 1901. Wounded at Spion Kop. [xxvi]
- BURGESS, Edward, Private 4884, Lancashire Fusiliers, Scholes, Wigan. Coal Miner. Enlisted 3 May 1894 aged 19 years 6 months. Discharged 2 August 1906. Sudan Medal [xvi]
- BURNS, Henry, Private 4546, Lancashire Fusilier. Scholes. Coal Miner. Enlisted 15 August 1893 aged 18 years 4 months. Discharged 14 August 1905. Wounded at Spion Kop.
- BURNS, Patrick, Private 4705, Lancashire Fusiliers. 81 Billinge Road, Pemberton, Wigan. Labourer. Enlisted 10 January 1894 aged 18 years 4 months. Discharged 9 January 1906. Born Kildare, Ireland. Wounded at Spion Kop.
- CASSIDY, Michael, Private 5234, Lancashire Fusiliers. 10 Shaw's Yard, Scholes, Wigan. Coal Miner. Enlisted 16 October 1895 aged 18 years 3 months. Discharged medically unfit for duty 1 December 1900. Wounded at Venter's Spruit. [ii]
- CLEWORTH, John, Private 5299, Lancashire Fusiliers. 9 Mill Lane, Bedford, Leigh. Coal Miner. Enlisted 18 September 1895. Discharged 17 September 1907 character bad. Wounded at Venter's Spruit.
- COCKLEIN, Joseph, Sergeant 4564, Lancashire Fusiliers. Wigan. Coal Miner. Enlisted 11 September 1893 aged 18 years 4 months. Discharged medically unfit for duty 28 February 1901.
- COX, James, (alias MASSEY, James), Private 4128, Lancashire Fusiliers. Wigan. Coal Miner. Enlisted 28 July 1893 aged 18 years 6 months. To Reserve 16 September 1899. Rejoined 11 November 1899. Discharged medically unfit for duty 1 July 1901 with a pension of 1/3d. per day. South Africa Medal.
- COX, John, Sergeant 3426, Lancashire Fusiliers, 12 Wellington Street, Scholes, Wigan. Coal Miner. Enlisted 19 September 1890 aged 18 years. Sudan Medal; South Africa Medal. Killed at Venter's Spruit 20 January, 1900.
- CROWE, Martin, Private 3832, Lancashire Fusiliers. Enlisted 28 October 1891 aged 19. To Reserve 11 December 1897. Rejoined 7 January 1899. Discharged with pension for life 28 December 1909. South Africa Medal.
- DANIEL, Peter, Private 3161, Lancashire Fusiliers. Pemberton. Coal Miner. Enlisted 28 February 1890 aged 19. To Reserve 23 November 1897. Rejoined 7 March 1898. Discharged 26 September 1902. South Africa Medal.
- DELANEY, Dennis, Private 4435, Lancashire Fusiliers. 18 Anderton Street, Wigan. Shoemaker. Enlisted 6 March 1893 aged 18 years 4 months. Killed at Spion Kop 24 January 1900.
- DERMOTT, George, Private 3414, Lancashire Fusiliers. 11 Bridge Street, Chapel Lane, Wigan. Coal Miner. Enlisted 14 September 1890 aged 18 years 4 months. Deserted 25 November 1891. Rejoined (date unknown) 1892. Discharged character very good. South Africa Medal. Captured at Spion Kop.
- FARRELL, John Thomas, Sergeant 5001, Lancashire Fusiliers. Horwich (born Ashton Under Lyne). Baker. Enlisted 12 October 1894 aged 18 years 2 months. Discharged conduct very good with pension of 2/6d. per day on 26 September 1912. South Africa Medal, won the Distinguished Conduct Medal at Spion Kop.
- FAIRCLOUGH, James, Private 4988, Lancashire Fusiliers. Hindley. Warehouseman. Enlisted 26 August 1889 aged 18 years 2 months. Discharged 9

- April 1902. Wounded at Spion Kop.
- FOLEY, Francis, Private 4552, Lancashire Fusiliers. Wigan. Coal Miner. Enlisted 23 August 1893 aged 18 years. Discharged 23 March 1905. Sudan Medal; South Africa Medal.
- GARVIN, John, Private 5263, Lancashire Fusiliers. 2 Gordon Place, Bedford, Leigh. Coal Miner. Enlisted 23 July 1895 aged 18 years 1 month. Absent from Reserve 1 January 1907. Sudan Medal, South Africa Medal. Wounded at Spion Kop.
- GEITIN,\* Edward, Private, Royal Lancaster Regiment, Wesley Street, Tyldesley. [xxix]
- GLOVER Thomas, Private 4330, Lancashire Fusiliers. 15 Douglas Street, Newtown, Wigan. Coal Miner. Enlisted 5 December 1892 aged 20 years 8 months. Discharged 4 December 1908. Sudan Medal; South Africa Medal. Wounded at Venter's Spruit. [xxi]
- GREEN, Michael, Private 4449, Lancashire Fusiliers. 41 Victoria Street, Wigan. Coal Miner. Enlisted 24 April 1893 aged 21 years 9 months. Killed at Spion Kop 24 January 1900. South Africa Medal.
- GREENHALGH, Henry, Private 7174, Lancashire Fusiliers. Wigan. Venetian blindmaker. Enlisted 24 February 1899 aged 19. Commissioned 11 January 1917. South Africa Medal.
- GREENHALGH, Samuel, Private 3282, Lancashire Fusiliers. Wigan. Coal Miner. Enlisted 31 May 1890 aged 18 years 2 months. To Reserve 23 November 1897. Rejoined Colours November 1899. Discharged 27 July 1902, pension 1/-, character good. Born Burslem Stoke on Trent, moved to Wigan. [xxxii]
- GREENALL, James, (alias LUNN, John) Corporal 3125, Lancashire Fusiliers. 80 Plank Lane, Leigh. Coal Miner. Enlisted 25 November 1889 aged 18 years 2 months. To Reserve 23 November 1897. Rejoined November 1899. South Africa Medal. Killed at Spion Kop 24 January 1900.
- HART, John, Private 3468, Lancashire Fusiliers. Bank Street, Golborne. Labourer. Enlisted 20 October 1890 aged 18 years 3 months. Deserted 27 February 1892. Rejoined 15 May 1892. Discharged 18 March 1903 character good. [iii]
- HART, Richard, Private 4668, Lancashire Fusiliers. 7 Boyswell Lane, Wigan. Coal Miner. Enlisted 3 July 1893 aged 18 years 11 months. Killed at Venter's Spruit 20 January 1900.
- HARTLEY, James, 4153, Lance-Sergeant, Lancashire Fusiliers. Wigan. Police Constable. Enlisted 8 September 1892 aged 18. To reserve 16 September 1899. Rejoined November 1899. Discharged 9 August 1904. Sudan Medal, South Africa Medal. Elder brother in the regiment. Application for pension refused. [iv, vii, xx, xxxii]
- HESKETH, William, Private 5194, Lancashire Fusiliers. 55 Greenough Street, Wigan. Carter. Enlisted 6 March 1890. Discharged 5 March 1907. Wounded at Venter's Spruit. Sudan Medal, South Africa Medal.
- HEYES, John, Private 2967, Lancashire Fusiliers. 15 Church Lane, Wingates, Westhoughton. Coal Miner. Enlisted 2 April 1889 aged 18 years. To Reserve 1 April 1897. Rejoined 11 November 1899. Killed at Spion Kop 24 January 1900. [xxxi]
- HIGGINS, Martin, Private 4256, Lancashire Fusiliers. Little Lane, Pemberton,

\*The Leigh Chronicle lists this soldier as Gething.

- Wigan. Coal Miner. Enlisted 24 October 1894 aged 18 years 2 months. Discharged to pension 12 January 1910. [xviii]
- HILTON, Thomas, Drummer 3734, Lancashire Fusiliers. Upholland. Coal Miner. Enlisted 13 June 1897 aged 18 years. Discharged 14 June 1903. [i, vi, xii]
- HOLT, James, Private 3696, Lancashire Fusiliers. Standish. Butcher. Enlisted 15 May 1891 aged 22 years. Discharged medically unfit for duty 1 October 1901. Pension 1/6 per day. Sudan Medal; South Africa Medal.
- HOWE, William, Private 4382, Lancashire Fusiliers. Wigan. Coal Miner. Enlisted 16 January 1893 aged 18 years 11 months. Discharged with bad character 15 January 1905. Sudan Medal; South Africa Medal.
- HUMPHREYS Private, South Lancashire Regiment. 2 Holt Street, Leigh. Aged 26 years. South Africa Medal.
- JOHNSON, John, Private 3630, Lancashire Fusiliers. Wigan. Coal Miner. Enlisted 23 March 1891 aged 19 years 1 month. Discharged 22 March 1913. Sudan Medal; South Africa Medal.
- JONES, Walter, Private 4909, Lancashire Fusiliers. 19 Margaret Street, Lower Ince. Cotton Piecer. Enlisted 1 September 1894 aged 20 years 5 months. Discharge date unknown. Sudan Medal; South Africa Medal. Captured at Spion Kop.
- KELLY, John, Private 4954, Lancashire Fusiliers. Ashton-in-Makerfield. Enlisted 14 September 1894 aged 18 years 5 months. Discharged 13 September 1906. Sudan Medal; South Africa Medal. Wounded at Venter's Spruit.
- KINDLEY, Walter, Private 4312, Lancashire Fusiliers. Frederick Street, Ince. Coal Miner. Enlisted 23 November 1893 aged 18 years 7 months. Discharge date unknown (page torn). Sudan Medal, South Africa Medal. [x, xiii, xiv]
- LEWIS, John, Private 5203, Lancashire Fusiliers. 2 Kenyon Street, Westleigh. Coal Miner. Enlisted 19 March 1895 aged 21 years 7 months. Discharged 18 March 1907. Sudan Medal. Wounded at Venter's Spruit.
- MARSH, William, Private 5284, Lancashire Fusiliers. Hindley Green. Coal Miner. Enlisted 29 August 1895 aged 18 years 4 months. Discharged 21 February 1916 conduct exemplary. Sudan Medal; South Africa Medal; Good Conduct Medal; Long Service Medal.
- MILLER, John, Lance Corporal 2762, Lancashire Fusiliers. 62 Atherton Road, Hindley. Coal Miner. Enlisted 13 September 1888 aged 19 years 8 months. To Reserve 3 April 1896. Rejoined — Discharged 3 November 1912. South Africa Medal.
- MORRIS, Henry, Private 3500, Lancashire Fusiliers. Wigan. Labourer. Enlisted 4 November 1890 aged 20 years 3 months. Rejoined 10 November 1899. Discharged 3 November 1912. South Africa Medal.
- MYERS, Matthew, Private 5072, Lancashire Fusiliers. Wigan. Coal Miner. Enlisted 7 December 1894 aged 18 years 8 months. Discharged 6 December 1906. Sudan Medal; South Africa Medal.
- McKAY—, Private 5072, Lancashire Fusiliers. 3 Forge Street, Ince. Although named in the casualty list printed in the Wigan Observer not found in the regimental enlistment book nor the medal lists. Wounded at Venter's Spruit.
- McCORQUODALE, Hugh Steward, 2nd Lieutenant, Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry. Newton-le-Willows. University Graduate. Enlisted 23 January 1900 aged 25 years. Killed at Spion Kop 24 January 1900.
- NAYLOR, William, Private 4328, Lancashire Fusiliers. Newton-le-Willows. La-

- bourer. Enlisted 1 December 1892 aged 18 years 6 months. Discharged 30 November 1904. Sudan Medal; South Africa Medal.
- O'SHEA, Thomas, Private 5328, Lancashire Fusiliers. 56 Silver Street, Scholes, Wigan. Coal Miner. Enlisted 22 October 1895 aged 18 years 4 months. Discharged 21 October 1907 TEB. Sudan Medal; South Africa Medal. Captured at Spion Kop.
- PEPPER, Phillip, Lance Sergeant 2645, Lancashire Fusiliers, Wigan. (born Newcastle-U-Lyne). Coal Miner. Enlisted 14 July 1888 aged 19 years 7 months. Discharged 13 July 1901 and re-enlisted in the Irish Guards. Wounded at Venter's Spruit.
- PRATT, Isaac, Private 2912, Lancashire Fusiliers. 48 Bolton Street, Chorley. (born Wigan). Coal Miner. Enlisted 4 February 1889 aged 19 years 8 months. To Reserve 17 December 1896. Rejoined 13 November 1899. Killed at Spion Kop 24 January 1900.
- RATCHFORD, William, Private 2809, Lancashire Fusiliers. 73 Moss Lane, Platt Bridge. Coal Miner. Enlisted 5 December 1888. To Reserve 30 November 1896. Rejoined November 1899. Died at Pretoria South Africa 1900.
- REGENT, Joseph, Private 3172, Lancashire Fusiliers. Wigan. Labourer. Enlisted 14 March 1890 aged 18 years 1 month. Discharged 14 July 1909 with a pension of 1/3d. per day. Sudan Medal; South Africa Medal.
- SANKEY, William, Private 2729, Lancashire Fusiliers. Ashton-in-Makerfield. Coal Miner. Enlisted 17 September 1888 aged 19 years 9 months. To Reserve 4 April 1896. Rejoined. Discharged 16 September 1901. South Africa Medal. [v, viii, xi].
- STEAD, Richard, Private 3605, Lancashire Fusiliers. Newtown, Pemberton. Coal Miner. Enlisted 4 March 1891 aged 19 years 10 months. Discharged 3 March 1903 character good. Sudan Medal; South Africa Medal.
- SUTHERS, Robert, Private 4934, Lancashire Fusiliers. Castle Street, Tyldesley. Fitter. Enlisted 10 September 1894 aged 18 years 4 months. Discharged. Sudan Medal; South Africa Medal.
- THOMPSON, James, Private 3070, Lancashire Fusiliers. Wigan. Coal Miner. Enlisted 9 September 1889 aged 20 years. To Reserve 21 March 1897. Rejoined. South Africa Medal. Captured at Spion Kop.
- TOWNLEY, John, Private 5032, Lancashire Fusiliers. 1 Foundry Street, Wigan. Labourer. Enlisted 2 November 1894 aged 18 years 1 months. Discharged medically unfit for duty 1 March 1902 with a pension of 1/- per day. Sudan Medal; South Africa Medal. Captured at Spion Kop.
- WADDINGTON, Frank, Private 5102, Lancashire Fusiliers. Lemon Street, Tyldesley. Coal Miner. Enlisted 5 January 1895 aged 19 years 1 month. Discharged 4 February 1907. Sudan Medal; South Africa Medal. [xxvii].
- WHITE, George, Private 5116, Lancashire Fusiliers. Enlisted 15 January 1895 aged 19 years 2 months. Discharged 14 January 1907.
- WALSH, Michael, Private 4342, Lancashire Fusiliers. Wigan. Coal Miner. Enlisted 13 December 1892 aged 19 years 7 months. Discharged an exemplary soldier 12 December 1908. Sudan Medal; South Africa Medal.
- WALSH, Richard, Private 4500, Lancashire Fusiliers. 11 Holt Street, Woodhouse Lane, Wigan. Coal Miner. Enlisted 11 February 1893 aged 19 years. Discharged 11 July 1901. Sudan Medal; South Africa Medal. Wounded at Spion Kop.
- WICHALL, Albert, Lance Corporal 3622, Lancashire Fusiliers. Meadow Street,

Adlington. Storekeeper. Enlisted 14 March 1891 aged 19 years 1 month. Discharged medically unfit for duty 31 August 1900 with a pension of 1/- per day. Wounded at Spion Kop.

Other local men were with the regiments involved at the battles of Venter's Spruit and Spion Kop but because of the unexplained gaps in the official records it is difficult to verify their actual presence.

- ATKINS, James, Private, Lancashire Fusiliers. 8 Bridgewater Street, Leigh. Aged 26 years. According to the Leigh Chronicle present at Spion Kop but not in the regimental medal list.
- BARBER, G., Bandsman, Lancashire Fusiliers. 43 Lingard Street, Leigh. Aged 21 years. According to the Leigh Chronicle present at Spion Kop but not in the regimental medal list.
- BROOKS, John Henry, Private 3557, Lancashire Fusiliers. Horwich. Labourer. Enlisted 20 January 1891 aged 18 years 1 month. Discharged 2 February 1907 character good.[xv]
- BURROWS, John, Private 4868, Lancashire Fusiliers. Scholes, Wigan. Coal Miner. Enlisted 21 July 1894 aged 19 years 2 months. Discharged 19 February 1912.
- CONNOR, William, Private 2932, Lancashire Fusiliers. Scholes, Wigan. Coal Miner. Enlisted 5 March 1889 aged 18 years 2 months. Deserted 31 January 1891. Rejoined 2 March 1891. Deserted 4 April 1892. Rejoined 2 June 1892. Discharged 12 June 1904.
- DICKINSON, Richard, Private 1733, Lancashire Fusiliers. Aspull. Coal Miner. Enlisted 20 July 1886 aged 20 years 6 months. To Reserve 28 April 1894. Rejoined 19 September 1898. Discharged 6 February 1912. Letter from South Africa published in the Wigan Observer but missing from the regimental medal lists.[xvii]
- ELLIS, Edward, Private, Lancashire Fusiliers. 42 Wigan Road, Leigh. According to the Leigh Chronicle present at Spion Kop but not in the regimental medal list.
- GALVIN, Matthew, Private 3284, Lancashire Fusiliers. Wigan. Coal Miner. Enlisted 4 June 1890 aged 19 years 7 months. To Reserve 27 November 1897. Discharged 11 January 1902.
- HAMMOND, Robert, Private 5932, Lancashire Fusiliers. Wigan. Grocer. Enlisted 3 March 1898 aged 18 years 3 months. Died 23 June 1900 in Malta.
- HARPIN, Oswald, Private 3002, Lancashire Fusiliers. 9 Haslett Street, Leigh. Coal Miner. Enlisted 10 March 1889 aged 21 years 2 months. Discharged 5 April 1902.
- HOUSLEY, James, Private 3281, Lancashire fusiliers. Ince. Coal Miner. Enlisted 3 June 1890 aged 18 years 6 months. To Reserve 23 November 1897. Rejoined November 1899. Discharged 8 November 1908 with a pension of 1/- per day.
- HOWELLS, Lance Corporal, Royal Lancaster Regiment. Chaddock Road, Tyldesley.
- HURST, William, Private 2913, Lancashire Fusiliers. Wigan. Coal Miner. Enlisted 4 February 1889 aged 18 years 4 months. To Reserve 17 December

1896. Rejoined 13 November 1899. Discharged 12 February 1902.
- HYAM, James, Private 3911, Lancashire Fusiliers. Wigan. Cotton Piecer. Enlisted 7 January 1892 aged 18 years 7 months. Discharged 16 February 1913.
- HYNES, Thomas, Private 2810, Lancashire Fusiliers. Wigan. Coal Miner. Enlisted 5 December 1888 aged 20 years 8 months. To reserve 30 November 1896. Discharged 12 December 1911.
- KEELEY, James, Private 2415, Lancashire Fusiliers. Wigan. Coal Miner. Enlisted 29 October 1887. Discharged 25 October 1899. Rejoined Section D. Discharged 16 January 1904.
- KENNERLEY, Fred, Private 2902, Lancashire Fusiliers. 9 Kearsley Street, Leigh. Coal Miner. Enlisted 31 January 1889 aged 19 years 3 months. To Reserve 12 December 1896. Rejoined date unknown. Discharged 30 January 1907.
- LEWIS, William,\* Corporal 3293, Lancashire Fusiliers. Coal Pit Lane, Westleigh. Cotton Piecer. Enlisted 13 February 1895 aged 21 years 2 months. Discharged 12 February 1907. [xxviii]
- LUCAS, John, Private 5262, Lancashire Fusiliers. Wigan. Cotton Operative. Enlisted 23 July 1895 aged 18 years 6 months. Absent from Reserve 1 March 1906.
- MADDEN, Private, South Lancashire Regiment. No records. [xxxiv]
- MARSH, James, Private 5284, Lancashire Fusiliers. Wigan. Coal Miner. Enlisted 30 April 1898 aged 18 years 10 months. Discharged 29 April 1914.
- MILLER, James, Private 7070, Lancashire Fusiliers. Pemberton. Labourer. Enlisted 10 January 1899 aged 20. Discharged 9 January 1911.
- NOLAN, Thomas, Private 7118, Lancashire Fusiliers. Scholes, Wigan. Coal Miner. Enlisted 25 January 1899 aged 19 years 7 months. Died 29 August 1904. Not mentioned in regimental medal lists.
- ORRELL, Thomas, Private 2448, Lancashire Fusiliers. Pemberton. Coal Miner. Enlisted 23 November 1888 aged 19 years 5 months. Deserted 24 December 1888. Rejoined 16 January 1889. To Reserve 17 December 1896. Rejoined 11 November 1899. Discharged with very good character 22 October 1908.
- OWENS, James, Private 7470, Lancashire Fusiliers. Wigan. Coal Miner. Enlisted 21 August 1899 aged 22 years 2 months. Discharged incorrigible and worthless 14 September 1904.
- PALMER, George, Private 56411, Lancashire Fusiliers. Morley Street, Atherton. Coal Miner. Enlisted 12 December 1892 aged 18 years 11 months. Natal clasp only of South Africa Medal.
- PARKER, James, Private 4616, Lancashire Fusiliers. Top Lock, Aspull. Coal Miner. Enlisted 15 November 1893 aged 19. Discharged medically unfit for duty 3 September 1901. Sudan Medal.
- PARKER, Private, Royal Lancaster Regiment. No details in regimental or War Office records. [ix]
- PENDLEBURY, James William, Private 4821, Lancashire Fusiliers. Wigan. Baker. Enlisted 22 May 1894 aged 18. Discharged 20 May 1906. Sudan Medal.
- QUILLAN, Private, South Lancashire Regiment. 32 Nel Pan Lane, Leigh. Aged 38 years. According to Leigh Chronicle present at Spion Kop but not in regimental medal lists.

*\*There is some confusion over the identity of this letter writer. The Leigh Journal names him as John Lewis, but the only Lewis of that address found in regimental records is William.*



- QUINLAN, John, Private 5282, Lancashire Fusiliers. Wigan. Coal Miner. Enlisted 23 March 1895 aged 18 years 6 months. Discharged 27 August 1907. Sudan Medal.
- QUIRK, Private, Lancashire Fusiliers. No information found.
- RATCLIFFE, John, Private 5930, Lancashire Fusiliers. Scholes, Wigan. Coal Miner. Enlisted 1 March 1898 aged 21 years 11 months.
- RUDD, William, Private 4877, Lancashire Fusiliers. Incc. Coal Miner. Enlisted 31 July 1894 aged 21 years 6 months. Deserted 1 August 1894. Rejoined 24 November 1894. Discharged 30 July 1908. Sudan Medal.
- RUSSELL, Charles, Private 2457, Lancashire Fusiliers. Golborne (born in St. Helens). Coal Miner. Enlisted 25 November 1887 aged 19 years 6 months. Discharged 13 December 1907.
- RYDER, John, Private, South Lancashire Regiment. Astley. No information found.[xxxiii]
- SALMON, Thomas, Private 3917, Lancashire Fusiliers. Wigan. Coal Miner. Enlisted 19 January 1892 aged 19. Discharged to pension 6 January 1913. Awarded G.C. Medal 1910.
- SHERRINGTON, James, Private 6637, Lancashire Fusiliers. Scholes, Wigan. Labourer. Enlisted 22 August 1898. Discharged incorrigible and worthless 22 May 1903.
- WILCOCK, Charles, Private 3290, Lancashire Fusiliers. 3 O'Kell Street, Leigh, Coal Miner. Enlisted 13 June 1890 aged 20. To reserve 23 November 1897. Rejoined date unknown. Discharged 24 August 1902.
- WILSON, John, Private 6968, Lancashire Fusiliers. Wigan. Cotton Spinner. Enlisted 12 December 1898 aged 19 years 2 months. Discharged 1915.

## WIGAN HERITAGE SERVICE

The Metropolitan Wigan area has a long and rich history, and interest in our local heritage has never been higher. Wigan Heritage Service, comprising the Archives, Museums and Local History services, seeks to preserve this heritage and to interpret it to as wide an audience as possible. The Heritage Service has major public outlets in Wigan and Leigh.



### THE HISTORY SHOP

This new heritage development is located in the Old Library, Rodney Street, Wigan — a splendid Alfred Waterhouse building of 1878. The History Shop is, we believe, the first of its kind in Britain. It offers the following attractions:

- a state of the art display, telling the story of the Wigan area from the earliest times to the present day
- a temporary display area, in which the Service's art collection figures prominently
- a study/research centre, incorporating the Wigan Local History collection and a genealogical centre of excellence
- a small retail outlet, selling a range of heritage-related merchandise, including books, photographs and quality souvenirs
- a meeting/lecture room, with a programme of public lectures and displays; this room is also available for hire by local societies and groups.

The History Shop has something for everyone — young or old, local or non-local. For further information, please telephone (0942) 828128.

### THE ARCHIVES AND LOCAL HISTORY SERVICE, LEIGH

Original archival documents for the Metropolitan Wigan area can be consulted in the Archives Service searchroom in Leigh Town Hall. These include records of churches, schools, societies and businesses, official council archives, papers of local families, estates and individuals and copies of census returns. For further information, please telephone (0942) 672421 ext 266.

Leigh Local History Service operates from the Turnpike Centre, Leigh Library. The collection includes local books and pamphlets, maps, photographs, newspapers and copies of parish registers and census returns. To find out more, telephone (0942) 604131.

Other Heritage Service attractions include Astley Green Colliery, Hindley Museum and The Stables Centre, Haigh Country Park. For further details of these, telephone (0942) 828128.

**REMEMBER** — *You can be of service to the Heritage Service. If you have any items in which you think we might be interested, please do not hesitate to contact us, on (0942) 828128.*

## Further Information

Many readers will recognise relatives mentioned in this book. It is hoped that they will be prompted to pursue further research of their own. Advice and information on consulting military records can be obtained from:

*Regimental Museum of the XX Lancashire Fusiliers*

Wellington Barracks  
Bolton Road  
Bury BL8 2PL  
Tel: 061 764 2208

*South Lancashire Regimental Museum  
Peninsula Barracks*

O'Leary Street  
Orford  
Warrington  
Tel: 0925 33563

*The Loyal Regiment (North Lancshires)*

Fulwood Barracks  
Preston  
Lancashire PR2 4AA  
Tel: 0772 716543 ext 2362

Family details can be traced from the 1891 census returns, available in the History Shop and the Archives Service.

## Acknowledgements

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