

Letter written during the Boer War by Ernest Neale (age 22 years)  
to his brother Henry.

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Bloemfontein March 28, 1900

Dear Brother

Just a few lines to let you know I am still in the land of the living. I received your welcome letter on the 25th March. I can tell you I was as pleased when I got your letter as if I was going home. I was getting very anxious for a bit of news from home. I got mothers and the boy's letters a few days after I got yours. Henry you have often told me a little about roughing it but I think if I get through this lot I will be able to tell you a little tale on that subject.

I was in the relief of Kimberly with most of our other men. I was in the biggest record march ever known of. There were 43 thousand mounted troops. We had pretty tough fighting for about five days, our loss altogether in the relief of Kimberly was about 1200, the boer shells were flying among us pretty thick, we call their shells jam pots. The 2MI got 8 shells among us fast as they could come but they only knocked one horse over. We are that used to shells now we only laugh at them and say another pot of jam coming. It is terrible to horses some get blown to pieces with the shells. I saw one shell kill five men and four horses at one of the big guns. I was about 100 yards away when it happened, it cut three legs clean off one horse. It is a good job for us the enemy have no lyddite or they would play up with us.

We had three days rest at Kimberly and then 80 of us marched on to Koodoesvandrif and the rest of the men stayed back in town. So you see I was in the capture of General Krongu. I will never forget that camp as long as I live, there were storms nearly every night and very little tucker to eat. It was nothing new to go all one day and night and only have a little bit of meat and nothing else, next day we might get about 2½ biscuits to last us another day. We went for about five weeks and had to camp out in the open with just an overcoat, wet and dry all the same.

Henry I have not missed a thing as yet, I have been in every march and fight that the 2MI have been in so I think I have stuck to it well. It is nearly all the big strong men that are getting sick. Four of us Toowoomba men are in the one group and we get on well together. I have been in two battles since we left Kronqus Cadager, our group had a very close shave with a shell, it went about 2 feet above our heads and landed about 8 feet the other side of us; it is time to bob heads when they come that close.



At Kronqus Cadager there were 90 boers pulled out of the river with stones tied to their necks. There were about 2000 horses killed there, they were lying in pieces from the lyddite. We are having a few weeks spell now and then I think our next move will be to Pretoria.

There is very good grass here now as we are having plenty of rain. It rains nearly every other night, it is very nice weather for camping out. I am getting corns on my hips from lying on the hard ground. A flat stone with a handkerchief on it makes a very good pillow. There are very few of the Queensland horses left now. Old Star hung out till about 9th March, he stood up to it very well but he was rather big for fast work. If you hear that we are coming home any time keep your eye on two or three good hacks about 15½ hands, something the stamp of the chestnut, he would do fine if you wanted to sell him.

Tell Alf I think he did a wise thing by staying at home, but I think if the third contingent gets over they will not see very much of the war. The second lot were wishing they had never come before they were here a month. Tell Alf if he was over here he would not have the strength to win a race on the bike. Tell Alf he ought to get another seat on his bike and then it would be very handy for the girls. Tell him to remember me to the Hermitage people.

I have such a great beard all I have to do is sleep without covering my face and I have enough dew on my wiskers to wash it. There are plenty of hares and deer over here and some good greyhounds. I will try and fetch some deer horns back with me if I come. Theres lots of little things I would like to fetch back with me if I could. I don't see any work for carpenters over here, all the houses are built of stone and brick, there is not enough wood to get posts for a fence, they use all stone posts.

I think this is all I have to say this time. Remember me to all out there and tell the girls they can have a lock of my beard.

Good Bye I remain

Your Affectionate Brother

E W Neale

The same address will do.