

This kraal was a large stone affair, divided in the centre by a wall, making really a double kraal with two entrances. Chalmers contended that he and McNee rode up to the kraal more out of curiosity than anything else. They rode in at one end and were immediately held up by sixteen burghers who were hidden behind the dividing wall.

They were disarmed and stripped of everything they had on them, losing horses, arms and clothing. Sergt. Jones, who occupied a small fort on a hill, about two miles from camp, which was used as an observation post, contended on the other hand, that in sweeping the surrounding country with his binoculars, he had witnessed the whole affair and that Chalmers and McNee had been held up by two dismounted Boers. You can see great distances in the Transvaal, even with the naked eye; in fact, the atmosphere conditions is very much similar to that found in Alberta.

Chalmers and McNee did not get into camp until late that afternoon, and by that time the men were all acquainted with the Jones' version.

When the two unfortunates appeared they were a pitiful sight, and to make it worse, almost the whole camp turned out and hissed them from the gate to their quarters. I guess it almost broke poor Chalmers' heart, but Capt. Bennett chose to believe his story, and for the few days he lived, he continued his duties as Sergt.-Major. However, his usefulness was gone. Once an officer or N.C.O. loses the respect of his men, especially from a suspicion of cowardice, he is finished, absolutely finished. His men simply won't follow him and you can't blame them.

Of course, Chalmers was sent to Coventry. In fact, I never heard him speak again except on duty.

About a week after the above occurred a scheme was promoted by which we hoped to bag a bunch of Boers who had been altogether too impudent the last week or so. They were continually appearing on the skyline, keeping out of range, and just troublesome enough to be a perpetual nuisance. As I look back at it now, I can see they were used simply as a decoy.

The plan was to this effect: No. 17 (my troop), was to leave camp at 6 a.m., was to make a circuitous march south and then east. No. 10 troop was to leave at 7 o'clock and march directly to the rendezvous. No. 15 troop was to circle the other way, the whole sweeping quite a stretch of country, and the idea being to drive any Boers toward the river which was held at the drift by our people. This piece of brainwork looked good on paper. Yes; it was a very fine piece of work except for one thing. It didn't work!

My troop started out as per schedule, taking with us an old field gun, a seven-pounder. It was worthless except for the noise it made. After riding about an hour we went through a wire gate into a large farm belonging to Lewis Marks. We rode parallel with the fence for about ten miles. This is important; we didn't have a pair of wire cutters in the outfit. Two scouts ahead of us rode over a small rise on the skyline and had only disappeared a moment when shots rang out and one came back towards us.

He did not signal and appeared to be leaning over his horse's neck. He was shot through the lower part of the body. We immediately dismounted and took what cover we could, which was practically none, consisting of some small ant hills. They won't stop a rifle bullet as they are of a honeycomb formation inside. We had bumped into a bunch of about 600 Boers under Grobler, a Free State commandant.

Our 80 men were virtually galloped down. The horses, some of them driven crazy with wounds, stampeded and left the whole outfit stranded. It was practically every man for himself.

Sergt.-Major Chalmers and five men were in a group by themselves, lying down behind their ant hills. Chalmers stood up and said: "Boys, I was captured the other day and I won't be captured again. Although you didn't believe me, I told the truth about it. I'm going to stay here and fight it out." And stay there he did, and the five men with him. We found them about 6 o'clock that evening.

Chalmers was shot through the head and twice through the body. Young Sproule, of Winnipeg, was also dead. The other four, Gravely, Curtis, McIntyre and Larry Herkimer, were alive, but all seriously wounded. Theodore (Larry) Herkimer was a nephew of the late Col. Herkimer, of the N.W.M.P. He commanded the 1st Canadian Mounted Rifles in South Africa.

Larry recovered and is now manager of a copper mine in Peru. Poor Chalmers! He lost what every soldier worth his salt values most—and to regain it he was willing to make the Great Sacrifice. He and a dozen of his troop are buried on a lonely farm in the Transvaal, but as long as any of the old men are alive he won't be forgotten.



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Every Canadian soldier who fell in that campaign has had a neat red granite monument erected over his grave with his name, rank and regiment; the whole surmounted by a scroll of maple leaves. I don't know who was responsible, whether the government or some of the various patriotic societies. Anyhow it was a graceful act of recognition and was appreciated by all the Canadian community then resident there.

Jack Gravely, one of the men who stopped with Chalmers, is now a resident of Victoria. Another Victorian who was in that scrap is Mr. Dobie, of The Canadian Explosives, Ltd.

Capt. Bennett, of Vancouver, had a peculiar experience that day. He remounted, and in trying to round up the stampeded horses, undertook to jump his horse over the barb-wire fence; the horse's forefeet caught and the captain was thrown over its head, taking the bridle with him. He was also captured and stripped, but he remained with his wounded and did what he could for them until relief came. Good old chap! He is still doing his bit. He is now Lt.-Col. C. C. Bennett, 21st Battalion, in the trenches.

In closing, I might tell you that during the last eighteen months of the war the Boers did not trouble to retain their prisoners. They could not feed them; so after taking anything of value, they simply turned them loose.