



Military Matters Boer War

Return of the Wilts Volunteer Active Service Company

Late on Sunday evening the transport *Tagus* arrived at Southampton with the volunteer service corps of the Wiltshire Regiment on board. They were under the command of Lieut. Kendle, at Wilton, the only officer left on the field at the finish and their return journey had been keenly followed from point to point.

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At Wilton

A big crowd awaited the arrival of the train. The Mayor (Alderman R. Beckett), and the Corporation resplendent in their new gowns attended to the carriages, those present in addition to His worship being the Deputy-Mayor (councillor J.W. Ward), Alderman E. Slow, Alderman W. V. Moore, sen., councillors J. Moore, G. R. Kendle, J. White, C. Mitchell, J. Marks, S. H. Beckett, J. Fry, W. V. Moore, jun., and the town Clerk (Mr. H. J. King), the Wilton Company of Volunteers under Captain Tynedale Powell and Lieut. C. Kendle, were present to welcome their comrades, while a strong commando of members of the Veterans Club with a couple of fine Union Jacks completed the list of official welcomers. As the men detrained there was a fine outburst of cheering.

The Mayor advancing shook hands with the returned warriors, and in the name of the inhabitants of Wilton said he gave them a hearty welcome and congratulated them on their safe return.

Lieut. Kendle expressed his thanks to the Mayor for the welcome, and said he and the company had been treated very kindly up and down the line, but the Wilton men were right glad to be home once more. Brown as berries, hard as nails, and fit as fiddles, looked the little company as they fell into their appointed places at the head of the procession. There was:

Lieut. Kendle (with a crape badge upon his arm, in token of military mourning for the late queen).
Sergt. E. Hibberd
Private C.T. Smith
Private J. Cousins
Private F. Petty (Wishford)
Trooper John Fleming of The 1st Company Wilts Imperial Yeomanry, and
Trooper Maxfield of The 41st Company Imperial Yeomanry, who were mounted, and therefore bore a conspicuous part in the procession.

The Honours Too Were Shared By
Private G. Brown, and
Private W. Bryant.

The latter had arrived a few days before, while the former was invalided home a few months ago, and was wearing a tunic which had been punctured through the right sleeve by a Boer bullet, which also inflicted a severe wound in the breast, which happily was not quite near enough to permanently detain the Wiltonian in South Africa, and so break the company's record of being one of the few to remuster en bloc in the old country. For all are back again in Wilton, and are now safe and sound, the most conspicuous testimony to their campaign's adventures being a ruddy glow on their cheeks which men almost envy, and women admire.

To the strains of the fife and drum band the heroes and hero worshippers stepped off down the hill into the old borough. The inmates of the Workhouse turned out to give them a preliminary residential cheer. In the streets flags were protruded from many a window. Some of them, it is true, had not "borne the battle and the breeze" for more than a few hours, but their very newness was a fine compliment. At the deputy-mayor's (Mr. Ward's) premises the front bore a handsome scroll, "HONOUR THE BRAVE." At Mr. Fry's premises were the words "Well done Comrades, Pluck – Honour." Through the streets the men were accompanied by an enthusiastic crowd. Eventually however they marched through the gates of Wilton Park and all but the invited guests remained outside. The remainder proceeded to the manage, where five long tables were filled with the guests of the Corporation, and may we add the Earl of Pembroke, although his Lordship very modestly kept his name in the background. It was a fine gathering and was looked down upon from the stage by an interested company including the Countess of Pembroke, Lord Herbert, Lady Beatrix Herbert, Mrs. and Misses Kendle, Mrs. Tyndale Powell, etc.

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The Mayor then gave the toast of "The Member of the H Company who have returned from the War" and endorsed the sentiment of pride which had been expressed by the previous speakers.

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Lieut. Kendle, who was received with tremendous applause, said he felt it a very great honour indeed to answer the toast. They went out from Wilton 15 or 16 months ago, and they had seen a great deal in that time. Their reception on their return, however, was an honour they would always remember. The I Company of the Wiltshire regiment which he had the honour of commanding was as fine a body of men as he ever wished to meet. They were known as the "Galloping I's" from their ability to cover the ground. They had seen much service, and he hoped had done their duty as members of the Wiltshire Regiment and as Wiltshiremen. The reception they had up and down the line since they came home had been almost too much for them. On behalf of the I Company he thanked the mayor and Corporation for their hospitality. He supposed that now he had returned to H Company, he must say he should have liked to have had more of the H Company with him in South Africa. They stuck fairly well together, and "could not get sick" somehow. During June, July and August they had had a pretty rough time of it, but they took the rough with the smooth and made the best of it. They were familiar with the music of the shrapnel shell and the "pip-pip" of the Mauser, in fact, they had been "fed up with it" (applause). He thanked the company for their cordial reception, and as a parting shot he hoped that the Wilton Company would soon obtain the hundred members of its ambition (applause).

Sergt. Hibberd, who met with an ovation, also responded, remarking that the reception was quite unexpected until they were coming home in the train. He was pleased to congratulate the service members of the H Company, that they had come back *en bloc* (applause), and he regretted that he could not say the same for the Salisbury Company, which had lost two by death. He only wished that all his comrades had been at the front with them, and personally said he would much prefer a "trek" of 16 or 20 miles to having to get up and make a speech (laughter). He then related the movements of the Company since they left Cape Town. From Nacuwport they took an ox convoy five miles long up to Bloemfontein, and he thought that enterprise showed the pluck of their company to undertake such a duty single handed. At Bloemfontein they became attached to the Wiltshire Regiment, and after five weeks stay were glad to leave, for the disease was terrible there. They then saw service under General Clements, and had "hard do's" at Senekal where they were practically cut off from everybody and existed for days on a couple of biscuits and a quarter pound of flour. They were in the thick of the fight at Bethlehem. De Wet got through though (laughter) but not n that part of the filed immediately under the supervision of the Wiltshire who held on tight to General Prinsloo on the Bastutoland border, and the F. and I. Companies

with four Irish companies finally caused him to surrender. Then they went on to Kroonstadt, found a train there and a bit of bread, of which they had not tasted for 80 days or more. From Kroonstadt they would remember that Col. Pepper's son sent home his realistic letter (it was published in the Times). At Elandsfontein they were put in charge of a gold mine, but they did not find much gold (laughter). At Pretoria they expected a quiet time but they had to "trek" off and do some bush fighting, which was more than Baden-Powell's men could do. They succeeded in knocking the Boers out of the bush, and then went on to Wambath and Watervaal, and had enjoyed remarkable health all this time, no physic having been required. He thought the reception they had received was more than they deserved for they had only been doing their duty. They had had hard times but now it seemed as if the soft times were coming (applause).

Lieut. Kendle, rising again, said he wished to state that he had been ably backed up by his non-commissioned officers, without whom he could not have got on at all. The non-coms of the Wiltshires were some of the best in the Army, and Sergt. Hibberd was one of the best in the regiment. He felt that he ought not to omit this testimony to his gallant comrades.

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Procession was then reformed and marched back to the Town Hall, where the proceedings terminated with the National Anthem.

In the evening there was a torchlight procession.

Salisbury Times, Friday, 3 May 1901