

six months but there were some who wanted to be returned to East London. I remember there was quite a to do and they were threatened with being Court Martialled but the three I think there were, were sent back. The remainder of the volunteers told them what they thought of them - poor show it was. As the Col went down the ranks he stopped now and again to chat to someone he knew or had taught. When he came to me he said "And you here too Geoff, to do your duty". He told the adjutant to make a note of my name and that was as far as I got to promotion. Col Smedley Williams was a fine old soldier. He came out to South Africa in 1895 to join the staff of the old Diocesan Grammar School in East London and later went to Selborne and other schools in East London. He joined the Kaffrarian Rifles as a private in 1896 and went with the Regiment to the Langberg Campaign in Bechuanaland in 1897, being commissioned while on service there. He carried on with the Unit and fought with them during the Anglo Boer War 1899/1902 as a Captain and later as a Major.

To get on with my story. We carried on intensive training from the early part of August 1914 until we entrained for South West Africa early in September. The Regiment left East London in two trains and each evening stopped at some station for the night. The first night was Sterkstroom. On arrival at De Aar, however, the two trains were combined and we had twenty-three coaches which, for one engine was, I think, a bit too much. However, we carried on and at Touws River Station we were treated to a fine breakfast, porridge, sausages and mash and coffee. On approaching the Hex River Pass most of the chaps took up positions near the windows on the starboard side to see the snow on the mountains. According to the court finding the train was travelling above the regulation speed entering the pass and the result was that the engine driver trying his best to slow the train down when he found she was getting out of hand, probably applied the brakes too suddenly and the rails were spread and the engine left the rails pulling half the carriages with it. The carriages that broke loose rolled down the embankment and it was these that killed the ten men. More than a hundred were injured some of them severely. The most fortunate thing is that there was no fire as seems to happen in most train accidents. The badly injured were taken to the Worcester Hospital. The chaps worked splendidly rescuing chaps who were trapped beneath the wreckage and Dr Skinner who was the only medical man did yeoman service. One can never forget the smell of that crushed weed on the hillside and all the little fires burning through the night to keep warm and cook what little food we could find. The whole place looked a shambles and what a job collecting all the kit and sorting this out next morning.

A relief train arrived next morning and conveyed us as far as Worcester where some of the dead were buried. They were, however, later buried in their home towns. It was an impressive parade and the inhabitants of Worcester turned out in their hundreds. For many of the chaps it was the first time they had seen death. On arrival at Rondebosch station later we were met by many people to see if they could help in any way. We were to camp on the ground at Groote Schuur until we left later in the month. I was one of a party invited to a private residence for some dinner and later we had a game of snooker. Railway officials arrived at our camp a few days later to settle claims for small losses of private clothing etc. I lost a shirt for which I was paid straight away. One chap, a wild Irishman, Casey, told the men that he had lost his

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