

A FINE CASUALTIES B.S.A.C. 1890 TO A TROOPER OF SALISBURY FIELD FORCE WHO TOOK PART IN THE EPIC 23 DAY SIEGE OF THE ABERCORN STORE DURING THE 1896 MATABELE UPRISING



BRITISH SOUTH AFRICA COMPANY MEDAL 1890-97, REVERSE RHODESIA 1896, 1 CLASP, MASHONALAND 1897 'TROOPR J. F. DEANE. S.F.F.'

Joseph Francis Deane, a prospector and volunteer Trooper in the Salisbury field force during the 1896 rebellion, later served as a Corporal in the Umtali Volunteer Corps during the 1897 operations in Mashonaland.

On June 20, 1896 news of the spreading war with the Matabele, the panicked residents of Abercorn built a temporary laager at Deary's Store, where they remained besieged for 23 days, virtually without water. Deane, a prospector, was one of those who whilst making his way to Deary's, was wounded but would survive the siege, along with 5 other Europeans.

THE SIEGE OF DEARY'S STORE

"Even before the siege of Deary's Store began, a party of four prospectors who had taken the track through Mazoe and continued down the Mazoe Valley, were fired upon whilst passing Chipadzi's kraal; Joseph Francis Deane and James Stroyan were wounded, with John Fletcher and George Holman unhurt, and they brought news of the uprising to the scattered mining community when they reached Deary's Store at Abercorn on the evening of Saturday 20 June. Deary's Store had not been designed for defence; it was in a bad position on the level; with rising ground on every side, particularly the lower slopes of Tafuna Hill, but there was no other choice. Only 180 metres to the

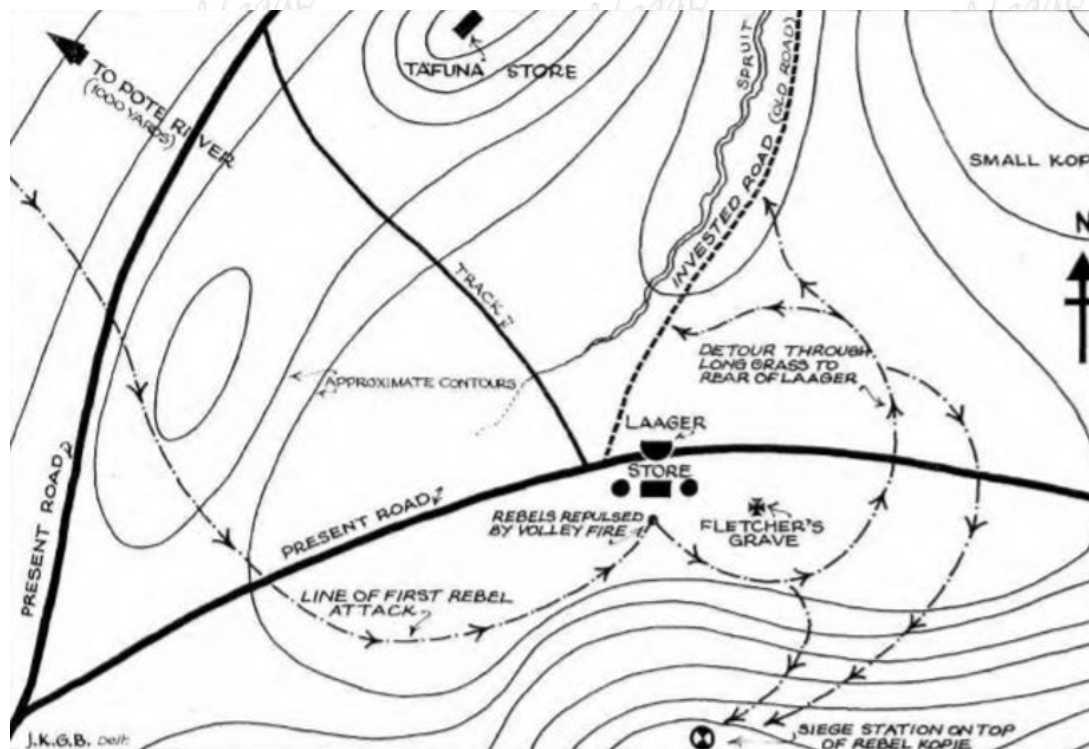
north was the future site of the old Tafuna Hotel and Store, which would have made a much better defensive site, but there was neither the time, nor resources to locate their laager at this site.

Edward Charles Broadbent says the local people had been very friendly and the uprising caught them by surprise. However, he stated that for some time before these events there had been a big demand for powder and caps for muskets, but that just before the Hartley murders, trade had suddenly stopped.

The settlers quickly prepared for their defence and fortified Deary's Store from Sunday 21 June and remained in a state of siege for 23 days until relieved by a patrol from Salisbury.^[i] Broadbent, their leader, is described as a prospector working between the Mazoe and Pote rivers and seems to have taken charge of the besieged group and later wrote an article for the Rhodesia Herald after their rescue.

At that time, Deary's store buildings consisted of two store huts with a kitchen and mess huts in line on either side, and the group decided to set up the laager about 15 yards to the north. It was in the form of a half-circle with the flat side to the north, furthest from the store. The men burned down the store hut to the south east as the long grass came up close and provided cover for any attackers. "The foundations of the laager were made from sacks of mealies; cases of corned beef, liquor, and pickles were used for the breastwork. We loopholed it as well as we could, and filled up surplus holes with limbo, bundles of socks, clothing, etc.," said Broadbent.

The inside measurements of the laager were about fourteen square metres (150 square feet) and the initial occupants consisted of nineteen persons comprising nine European men, five Zambezi men, one woman, a girl, and three young boys, together with six dogs that later proved most useful in their warnings of the rebels approach. Twenty-five other Zambezi employees deserted when the first shots were fired.



Louis Hermann had a horse and volunteered to ride to Salisbury to report on their situation. He left early the next day, Sunday 21 June, but was overpowered and murdered at Makombe's kraal. Three of the Zambezi men were also sent with notes to Salisbury, but they may have deserted as they were never heard of again.

Work on a laager began early that morning Sunday 21 June, but before it had been completed, Mashona fighters came in force from the Pote River side on the west and opened fire at 9:30am. They were driven off by volley fire and moved through the long grass south of the store and also blocked the road to the north. Edward Broadbent was injured with a dislocated shoulder in this first exchange of shots, and several Mashona were shot dead, including their leader. The remainder swore vengeance before retiring into a kopje overlooking the store to the southeast where a noisy council-of-war was held, during which time the defenders hurriedly completed their makeshift laager.

The Mashona shouted that they wanted to parley, but no notice was taken of them, except by John Fletcher, who against orders and advice, walked to the edge of the long grass, held up his arms to show he was without firearms, and was immediately shot dead. His body lay where it fell and is buried at the same spot where his grave may be seen to this day about 70 metres east of the laager site on the farm "The Carse."

From then onwards there would be no respite for the besieged. On the 24 / 25 June, very determined attacks were made with Broadbent estimating between 70 – 80 attackers armed with guns and battle-axes and assegais. Late on 25 June, the majority of the rebels left, leaving sufficient men to maintain the siege and keep up a harassing fire on the laager. When the rebels crept up close through the long grass to the south and southwest, the defenders threw out plugs of dynamite with short fuses.

The defenders had plenty of tinned foods and made bread using beer; but had only whisky, gin, beer and sweet red dessert wine to drink. The most serious problem was the lack of water as they were about 900 metres from the Pote River to the west. The first trip to get water was successful, but in the second, none of the four Zambezi men ever came back to the laager. However, one of them, January, decided that it was impossible to return to the laager alive and made his way back to Salisbury and reported on 10 July 1896 that the survivors at Deary's Store were in mortal danger.

For the third trip, the remaining Zambezi man, a boy and the girl went out. The man returned with bad assegai wounds and subsequently died, the boy returned the next day and the girl was not seen again. On the fourth trip, the unwounded Europeans, Pickering, Ragusin and Rowland and a young boy successfully managed to bring water from the Pote River; but their footprints were discovered and the besiegers: "built a cordon of scherms (bush fences) around us, and pretty effectively cut off any chance of egress on our part."

Their attackers shouted out that they knew there was no water in the laager, and that they would soon force them all out of it. They added that if they handed over the goods and guns, they would let them go; but when the small party took no notice of the offer, they added they would kill them all as they had killed their own leader.

Broadbent says their sanitary arrangements were "pretty well as defective as they possibly could be" as nobody could leave the laager; Holman and Rowland suffered from dysentery throughout the siege. This combined with the stench of dead bodies "made things horribly unpleasant" and they all suffered from fever and the lack of water.

As Col. Hickman says in his article it is amazing that they managed to keep up their morale in such awful circumstances. They were fortunate in having medical dressings and managed to keep their wounds healthy, also there was plenty of tinned food and ammunition from Deary's Store.

The occupants of the laager were now in a desperate situation with Fletcher dead and Broadbent, Deane, Stroyan and Holman wounded; only Pickering and Ragusin were not wounded; although they were all suffering from fever, and Rowland had acute dysentery. All the Zambezi men and the young girl had disappeared or were killed; the young boys and the woman had tried to escape but were prevented from doing so as Broadbent feared that if the attackers learned of their perilous state, they would rush the laager and overwhelm them. Four of the six dogs had been killed and one wounded.

Their attackers kept up a desultory fire throughout the siege and shouted over constantly that the amaNdebele had captured Salisbury and killed all the occupants and they would not be rescued. Broadbent said by the morning of the 13 July; "things were looking very gloomy indeed, it was our twenty-third day in laager; our water, wine and stout about finished, and just about enough beer left to bake one loaf. At about 10:30am we were all lying down in a semi-somnolent, exhausted condition, when we suddenly heard a clatter which we at first took for a rattle of shields, and thought the Matabele were on us. We sprang to our guns and beheld the never-to-be forgotten sight of the relief column cantering around the corner. Our delight can be better imagined than described. We set up a hysterical cheer which was answered by loud hurrahs by the advancing men."



THOUGHT TO BE THE 6 EUROPEAN SURVIVORS (INCLUDING DEANE)

THE RESCUE OF THE BESIEGED MEN

Jono Water's article In Heritage of Zimbabwe Publication No 39 on their rescue was from an account in The Rhodesian Times and Financial Times which was launched on 31 July 1896 – just a few weeks after the relief patrol had set out for Abercorn, now Shamva, on 11 July.

Marshall Hole comments that the military men at Salisbury had shown little inclination to mount a relief effort of the men at Deary's Store. It was only after Duncan came in from Charter on 10 July and heard the account from January of their plight that a rescue effort was launched.

THE ABERCORN PATROL

The patrol comprised forty mounted men of the Natal Troop and twenty-five men from the Salisbury Field Force under Captains Taylor and St. Hill, Lieutenants Snodgrass and Maclaren, Nesbitt and Campbell. After some opposition a Maxim gun on a travelling carriage and ambulance wagon were added to the patrol. They left at 8pm on Saturday 11 July.

The patrol travelled by a route close to the present Shamva Road, the next day Sunday 12 July they had a brief skirmish and travelled on. The journey of nearly 100 kilometres took just over 38 hours and as Broadbent's account above relates, they arrived at Deary's Store, to the great relief of the besieged in just in the nick of time on Monday 13 July at 10:30am.

The patrol together with the survivors wisely returned to Salisbury taking the route along the Mazoe river. The different route was probably chosen to avoid being ambushed, (accounts say a trap had indeed been laid along their outward route) but also to assess the military situation of as much of the countryside as they could. Kraals at Chipadzi's were burnt down and at Cass's farm at Mazoe the patrol was fired upon as they moved up the road alongside the Tatagura river. An outspan was made at the Gwebi river to give the men and horses some rest where a large contingent of Mashona assembled in the distance at about 1,200 yards before being driven away by Maxim gun fire. One of the siege survivors, John Rowland, died on the journey back on 14 July as a result of dysentery and pneumonia."

The above extracted from an extremely detailed narrative of the events can be viewed here:

<https://zimfieldguide.com/mashonaland-central/siege-deary%E2%80%99s-store-abercorn-june-21st-%E2%80%93-july-13th-1896>



Condition GVF. Sold with a digital PDF copy of Rodesiana Vol 9, 1963, that the website article is based on. A fine and most interesting medal