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Siege of Ladysmith - Birds-Eye View

Stock#: 50193
Map Maker: Bacon & Co.
Date: 1900 circa
Place: London
Color: Color
Condition: VG
Size: 28 x 20 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

Rare birdseye view of the Siege of Ladysmith in 1900.

The view depicts the action of January 5 and 6, 1900, during the second wave of the siege.

The Siege of Ladysmith from November 1899 to February 1900 was one of the major incidents of the Second Boer War.

When war became an imminent threat, the British Government sent 15,000 troops to the Natal region. Contrary to the advice of several British officials such as Sir Alfred Milner, the High Commissioner for Southern Africa, the Boer governments were not over-awed by the British troops. Instead, they regarded it as evidence of Britain's determination to seize control of the Boer republics. The Transvaal government under President Paul Kruger considered launching an attack in September, but President Steyn of the Orange Free State, who would later become the spiritual heart of the Boer resistance, dissuaded them for several weeks while he tried to act as intermediary. With the complete breakdown in negotiations, both republics declared war and attacked on 12 October, 1899.

A total of 21,000 Boers advanced into Natal from all sides. White had been advised to deploy his force far back, well clear of the area of northern Natal known as the "Natal Triangle", a wedge of land lying between the two Boer republics. Instead, White deployed his forces around the garrison town of Ladysmith, with a detachment even further forward at Dundee. The entire British force could concentrate only after fighting two battles at Talana Hill and Elandslaagte. As the Boers surrounded Ladysmith, White ordered a sortie by his entire force to capture the Boer artillery. The result was the disastrous Battle of Ladysmith, in which the British were driven back into the town having lost 1,200 men killed, wounded or



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captured.

The Boers then proceeded to surround Ladysmith and cut the railway link to Durban. Major General French and his Chief of Staff, Major Douglas Haig escaped on the last train to leave, which was riddled with bullets.

This town was then besieged for 118 days. White knew that large reinforcements were arriving, and could communicate with British units south of the Tugela River by searchlight and heliograph. He expected relief soon. Meanwhile, his troops carried out several raids and sorties to sabotage Boer artillery.

Louis Botha commanded the Boer detachment which first raided Southern Natal, and then dug in north of the Tugela to hold off the relief force. On December 15, the first relief attempt was defeated at the Battle of Colenso. Temporarily unnerved, the relief force commander, General Redvers Henry Buller, suggested that White either break out or destroy his stores and ammunition and surrender. White could not break out because his horses and draught animals were weak from lack of grazing and forage, but also refused to surrender.

On Christmas Day 1899, the Boers fired into Ladysmith a carrier shell without fuze, which contained a Christmas pudding, two Union Flags and the message "compliments of the season".

The Boers around Ladysmith were also growing weak from lack of food. Eventually, with the Tugela River flooding, preventing Buller from giving any support, some younger leaders persuaded Joubert to order a storming attempt on the night of January 5, 1900, before another relief attempt could be made.

The British line south of Ladysmith ran along a ridge known as the Platrand. The occupying British troops had named its features Wagon Hill to the west and to the east Caesar's Camp (after features near Aldershot, well known to much of the British army). Under Ian Hamilton, they had constructed a line of forts, sangars and entrenchments on the reverse slope of the Platrand, of which the Boers were unaware.

In the early hours of January 6, 1900, Boer storming parties under General C.J. de Villiers began climbing Wagon Hill and Caesar's Camp. They were spotted and engaged by British working parties who were emplacing some guns. The Boers captured the edge of both features, but could not advance further. British counter-attacks also failed.

At noon, de Villiers made another attack on Wagon Hill. Some exhausted defenders panicked and fled, but Hamilton led reserves to the spot and recaptured some empty gun pits. Late in the afternoon, a terrific rainstorm broke, and the Boers withdrew under cover of it.



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The British suffered 175 killed and 249 wounded. 52 dead Boers were left in the British positions, but their total casualties were not recorded.

While Buller made repeated attempts to fight his way across the Tugela, the defenders of Ladysmith suffered increasingly from shortage of food and other supplies, and from disease, mainly enteric fever or typhoid, which claimed among many others, the life of noted war correspondent G.W. Steevens. The Boers had long before captured Ladysmith's water supply, and the defenders could use only the muddy Klip River.

Towards the end of the siege, the garrison and townsfolk were living largely on their remaining draught oxen and horses (mainly in the form of "chevril", a meat paste named after the commercial beef extract "Bovril").

Eventually, Buller broke through the Boer positions on February 27, 1900. Following their succession of reverses, his troops had developed effective tactics based on close cooperation between the infantry and artillery. After the protracted struggle, the morale of Botha's men at last broke and they and the besiegers retreated, covered by another huge thunderstorm. Buller did not pursue, and White's men were too weak to do so.

The first party of the relief column, under Major Hubert Gough and of which Winston Churchill was a part, rode in on the evening of February 28. White reportedly greeted them saying, "Thank God we kept the flag flying".

Detailed Condition:

Top, Left and right margins extended.