

2nd Lieutenant Cecil Sherman Platt

1st August 1877 – 5th January 1900



Cecil Sherman Platt was born on 1st August 1877 in Sutton on Forest in Yorkshire. His older brother was Algernon John Frederick Platt born on 11th June 1875, and younger sister was Brenda Jeanette Platt born on 7th May 1880. His father was Frederick Platt and mother was Florence Eliza Bedwell . His grandfather was John Platt who had been MP for Oldham and chairman of Platt Bros which was the largest textile machinery company in the world.

By 1891 he was living at Barnby Manor, Newark in Nottinghamshire, with his parents, brother, sister and 15 servants.

1891 Census:

Frederic Platt 41 (Head)

Florence E Platt 40 (Wife)

Algernon Platt 15 (Son)

Cecil S Platt 13 (Son)

Brenda J Platt 10 (Daughter)

Annie Fennie 46 – Housekeeper

Lucy Gwynne 38 - Lady's Maid

Emma Cobb 28 - Head Housemaid

Mary Brown 21 - Second Housemaid

Emma Chesterton 21 - Third Housemaid

Sarah J Wesley 27 – Cook

Annie Sims 22 - Dairy Maid

Margaret Fergurson 17 - Scullery Maid

Frank Searle 17 – Footman

Walter Kennet 29 – Groom

Ernest Laban 24 – Coachman

Joseph Challand 24 – Groom

William Batty 23 – Groom

Arthur Taylor 20 – Groom

William Eston 18 - Groom

Cecil was educated at Eton, and at the age of eighteen, became a Second Lieutenant on the 4th December 1895 of the 4th Battalion, the Sherwood Foresters (Derbyshire Regiment). He entered the 5th Dragoon Guards from the Militia in 1898 and accompanied his Regiment to Natal in South Africa from India in September 1899 just before the Boer War broke out with the Boers invading Natal on the 12th October 1899.

Boer War

The 5th Dragoon Guards were posted to Ladysmith, the first arrivals being C and D Squadrons, arriving on 12th October. The remaining two squadrons arrived on 26th October making a total of 18 officers and 476 other ranks. The commanding officer was Lt-Col Robert Baden-Powell but he was occupied at Mafeking. Major St John Gore was the actual commander. The journey from Bombay had been a difficult one because of storms, and the three trains that they had to take from Durban were even worse because wet weather caused the horses to slip around in their open carriages resulting in several horses being injured in this way.

Battle of Elandslaagte - 21st Oct 1899

The role of the 5th Dragoon Guards at Elandslaagte was that of pursuing the defeated Boers at the end of the battle. Elandslaagte, situated northeast of Ladysmith was occupied by 1,200 Boers under the aged General Kock. Major-General French was sent out with a force from Ladysmith to clear the Boers from the area. This force was made up of Imperial Light Horse, half a battalion of the Manchester Regiment plus gunners and sappers. But the force was too small and French called for reinforcements. These included the Devons, Gordon Highlanders, two squadrons of the 5th Lancers and two squadrons of the 5th Dragoon Guards. The mounted troops had the task of riding alongside the train that transported the infantry to Elandslaagte and driving large numbers of Boers away from the track.

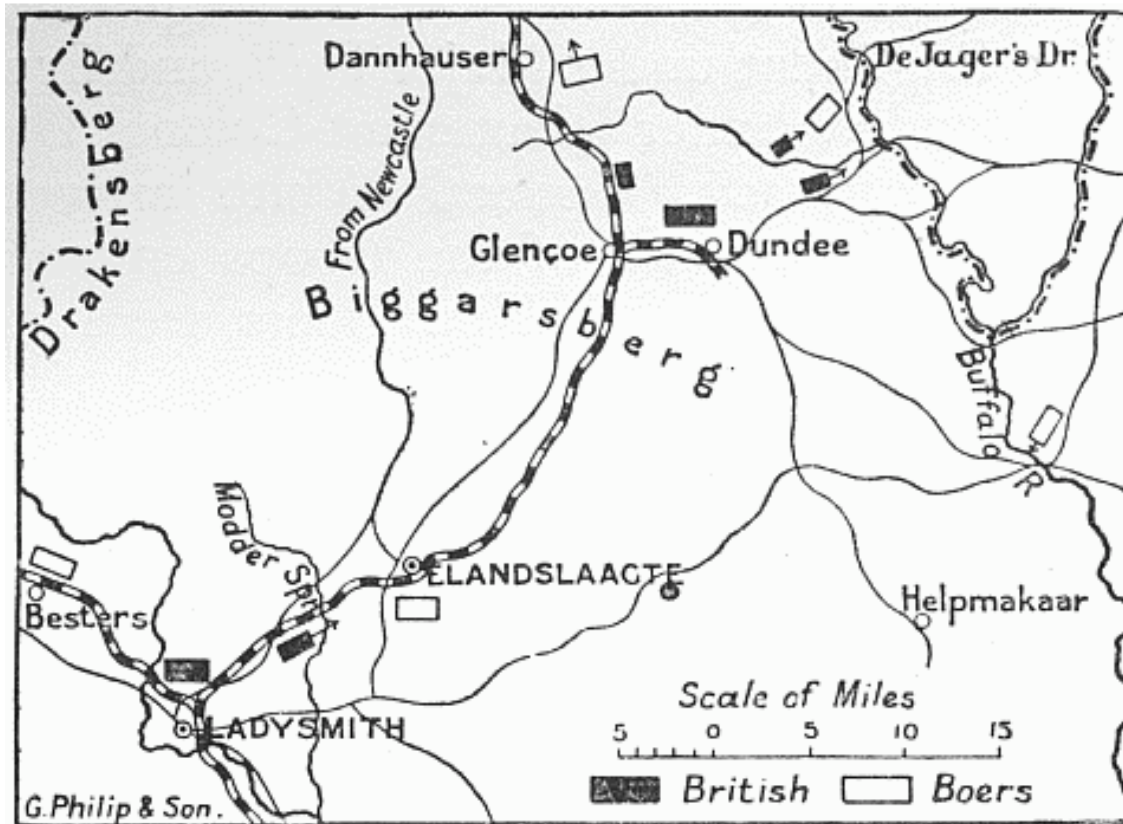
The Boers entrenched on the heights were subjected to an assault by the infantry which turned into a severe ordeal for the Manchesters, Gordons and the dismounted Imperial Light Horse who were pinned down by accurate rifle fire and were also soaked in a thunderstorm. There was a flanking attack which was intended to distract the Boers from a frontal assault made by the Devons who went in vigorously and achieved success but the Boers regained the heights again in a desperate fight. More hand-to-hand fighting took place and the British finally forced the retreat of the Boers who took to their horses and fled as the light of day began to fade. It was here that the Lancers and Dragoon Guards began their pursuit of the enemy. The ground was difficult for the cavalry at first, as St John Gore their commander relates:

'At last I saw the Boers apparently coming down...by twos and threes: great uncertainty in the bad light as to what they were doing. Then "They're off!" "No they're not!" "Yes they ARE!" I sent back word to my two squadrons to "advance in line at extended files" [i.e. 4 yards interval between each horse]. After half a mile our heads rose over a fold in the ground, and showed us a long stream of Boers going leisurely away from the position at right angles to my line of advance, and about 300 yards off. I gave the word "gallop". When they saw us, the Boers broke in every direction and galloped away. The ground was very stony in most parts, but there were some good grassy bits along which I was able to pick my way (being one single man), while most of the men had to go over the bad places as they happened to come to them in their line.'



'The Charge of the 5th Dragoon Guards at Elandslaagte, October 21, 1899'

The accounts written by men of the 5th Dragoon Guards all talk of taking prisoners. Troop Sergeant Savage said, *'The pace increased, on and on, until we could see and pick out our man. After this I no longer tried to follow my Troop leader, but rode as hard as I could for that one man. As I approached him, he dropped off his pony (a grey) and fired at someone to the right. I overtook him and rode on for another who was some little distance in front. This fellow, by the time I got up to him, was laid on his back, and looked so helpless and so much like a civilian, that I took his arms and ammunition, and as by this time the troops were rallying, I marched him up a prisoner and handed him over to Corporal Howard, who was taking over the prisoners. This man, whilst I had my lance to his breast, asked for no mercy, but handed over his arms like a soldier who could do no more. I took the precaution to make him hand me the butt first. There was nothing of the coward about him.'*



Map showing location of Ladysmith and Elands-laagte, and troop deployments.

The Battle of Ladysmith - Lombard's Kop - 30th Oct 1899

Although the battle of Elands-laagte was successful for the British, the British troops returned to the town of Ladysmith, and a few days later the Boers gradually began to surround the town. The battle of Ladysmith, or Lombard's Kop was General White's attempt to take the offensive against the combined forces of General Joubert's Boers, General Lucas Meyer's force, and a commando from the Free State. The British were outnumbered and the Boers had powerful artillery building up to besiege Ladysmith, especially their Long Tom positioned on Pepworth Hill. White's forces were split into three and concentrated their attacks on the hills ranging around Pepworth in the north and Lombard's Kop 5 miles east of the town. The cavalry were made up of the 5th Dragoon Guards, 5th Lancers, 18th and 19th Hussars and the Natal Carbineers. They were all jammed into a nullah one and a half miles long and 10 or 20 yards wide and came under heavy fire from the Boers who had out-manoeuvred the British. They were forced to retreat in a disorderly manner described by an infantry officer as 'very nearly a stampede'. It was only the brave and efficient actions of 53rd Battery RA under Major Abdy that saved the cavalry from serious casualties. As it was, they came off lightly compared to the infantry who had many men taken prisoner, 954 in all, and 320 casualties.

It was during the scramble to get away from Lombard's Kop that a fellow Dragoon officer of Cecil Platt, 2nd Lt John Norwood won the Victoria Cross. Below is the citation:

On the 30th October, 1899, this officer went out from Ladysmith in charge of a small patrol of the 5th Dragoon Guards. They came under a heavy fire from the enemy who were posted on a ridge in great force. The patrol, which had arrived within about 600 yards of the ridge, then retired at full speed. One man dropped, and Second Lieutenant Norwood galloped back about 300 yards through heavy fire, dismounted, and picking up the fallen trooper, carried him out of fire on his back, at the same time leading his horse with one hand. The enemy kept up an incessant fire during the whole time that Second Lieutenant Norwood was carrying the man until he was quite out of range.

The V.C. was presented to Lieutenant Norwood on 25 Oct 1900 by Lord Roberts at Pretoria

Siege of Ladysmith and death of Cecil Platt

After the Battle of Ladysmith, in which the British were driven back into the town having lost 1,200 men, 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.

Ladysmith was then besieged from the 2nd November 1899. The Boers also captured Ladysmith's water supply, and the defenders could use only the muddy Klip River, resulting in many suffering from enteric (typhoid) fever as well as a shortage of food and other supplies.



Officers of the 5th Dragoon Guards, Green Horse Valley, Ladysmith. (Taken from the book by St John Gore the CO and probably in the centre of the photograph)

Below are extracts from the diary of Major St John Gore, who was Cecil Platts's Commanding Officer of the 5th Dragoon Guards, describing the shelling (one of which entered Cecil's tent), the high morale of the men, until the lack of food and the gradual loss due to shelling and especially enteric fever took its toll:

November 18th 1899

This morning some of our Field Artillery guns were in action about 300 yards the other side of Cove Hill. Surprise Hill fired a shot at them. When the shell pitched, it went off just like a soda-water bottle, and we could see a stream of white smoke, and a thing like a cork flying out of it ! The shell did not burst at all, but ricocheted right over the hill into our camp. At this moment the commanding officer was going towards this hill, but hearing the 'whizzing' coming closer and closer, he took a seat. The shell pitched for its second bound about 25 yards over his head, then got up again hurriedly, and flew at Major Hilliard, R.A.M.C., fortunately missing him, but not by more than a yard. The shell then subsided into Second Lieutenant Platt's tent, when it broke his bed and his servant's carbine. This shell was claimed by Major Gore, for the officers' mess.

December 10th 1899.

4.30 a.m. On this Sunday morning found the regiment 'standing to' in its lines in Cove camp ready to turn out if required. As nothing occurred, at 5 a.m. the officers and men were allowed to turn into their tents, and continue their disturbed sleep, still leaving the horses saddled in readiness. "Stables" from 6.30 to 7 a.m., at which hour 'breakfasts' were sent up. It now appeared as though the Boers would keep to their Sunday arrangements, and let us have a day of rest. One of the officers now decided it might be safe to get out of his clothes, and was enjoying a luxurious tub : the remainder, however, began breakfasting. Five minutes afterwards, a puff of smoke rose from Bulwana Hill, and with the now familiar rush and roar, the big gun landed a shell about a hundred yards beyond our camp! (This again was very odd. I had been told that this gun would not fire at us even on a week-day !)

The order to "turn out" was instantly given and, according to previously arranged plans, the three squadrons were filing out of their lines within five minutes, but not before two more shells (which burst not ten yards beyond our flank squadron without damage) had been fired at us ! The men led

their horses with the greatest coolness over about 400 yards of open ground, still in full view of the gun, which followed them with shells, until they were sheltered from view by Convent Hill. The gun still continued firing, and the house of the Commander-in-Chief, Sir George White, near which we had to pass, had a narrow escape ! The regiment reached Green Horse Valley without casualty, having had some very close shaves on the way down.

The above morning incident is thus given in detail, as an example of the annoyances a cavalry regiment may be subjected to during a state of siege : annoyances borne by officers and men uncomplainingly, and with the greatest cheeriness and steadiness, and an entire lack of grumbling.

The new commanding officer writes these words with the greatest pride, testifying as they do to the good feeling and good fellowship that now exist, and, within his twenty-one years of service in it, always have existed, between all ranks, in the 5th Dragoon Guards.

However a week later the first casualty of enteric fever is recorded: No. 4560 Private Harry Ashlin died at Intombi camp this day (December 17th), from enteric fever.

Dec. 25, Christmas Day

At 4.30 am. two shells screaming over Cove camp, and heavy firing from musketry and Maxims, ushered in the day of Peace and Goodwill ! All went to Green Horse Valley as usual. It was not possible to do anything for the men in the way of extras for dinner, except a pudding, for which materials were served out. The officers, by paying longish prices, managed to secure what under present circumstances were looked upon as extremely fine dinners ! In one squadron, the cook-house in the town, where their bit of beef was being cooked, was actually struck by a shell, the house-people ran away, and part of the meat was burnt . In spite of minor drawbacks of this sort, all were as jolly as possible, and the animated scenes would no doubt have vastly astonished the Boers, had they been able to look on !

1900. Jan. 1st. — Welcome the new year ! Blaaubank

sends four shells which burst in our camp about 4.40 a.m. A Happy New Year ! We begin it in Green Horse Valley, and trust that ere long it may indeed prove a happy and prosperous new year to the dear old regiment !

Great dinners were again the order of the day in the three squadron officers' messes, and certainly the most was made of the fare obtainable.

After dinner a flash was seen in the dark sky which was thought to be lightning : a dull boom, however, succeeded it, and stop-watches having been produced, it was found to be firing from big guns directly over Caesar's camp. From the flash to the report was 81 seconds, making the distance about 16 miles. This went on for about half an hour or so, and then ceased — suddenly as it had begun.

It is indeed tantalizing not to know anything of what is going on ! We imagine that these are British guns, but cannot be sure they do not belong to the Boers. It makes you appreciate the sound of a noble distant " boom " in widely different moods, whether you know the gun causing it is dealing death to friend or to foe ; whether it is the voice of a friend bringing the long-deferred relief, or the voice of an enemy still prepared to bar the way. In short (to drop from halting poetry to prose), let me anonymously confess that I should like some jam, and a few potatoes! (Eggs are now selling at 11s. per dozen !)

The Boers fired at us during the night, and we fired back at them more than they gave us !

"The subject then dropped."

A Happy New Year !

January 4th 1900

Unfortunately, we have today 103 men actually in hospital — in Ladysmith and in the neutral camp at Intombi ; in addition to these, there are 13 men "attending." On this account, more than any other, we should all be glad to welcome the relieving column, and get proper food for the men sick with dysentery and enteric, and also a change for them to a higher and more healthy spot. Death reports of the following two men have just been received this day : —

No. 4517 Private James Jones — 2nd January:
enteric

No. 4069 Private Alfred Milton — 3rd January :
enteric

The latter was a band boy.

January 5th. — Green Horse Valley. This day was
saddened by the following death reports from Intombi
camp: —

Second Lieutenant C. S. Platt : enteric fever.

No. 4427 Private William Bray : enteric fever.

No. 3818 Private Charles Butler: dysentery.

Enteric fever — that scourge of India and South
Africa — has taken a heavy toll from the Ladysmith
garrison already. We have hitherto been almost as
fortunate as any regiment here — the 19th Hussars
being the worst sufferers amongst the cavalry regiments.

Poor young Platt had only just completed his first
year's service when he fell a victim, greatly regretted
by all. He was always keen in the performance of
his troop duties, and his kindly and unselfish disposition
had won for him the esteem and affection of his
brother officers. He was buried in the cemetery
near the Intombi camp : a telegram of sympathy was
sent to his father, at Barnby Manor, Newark.

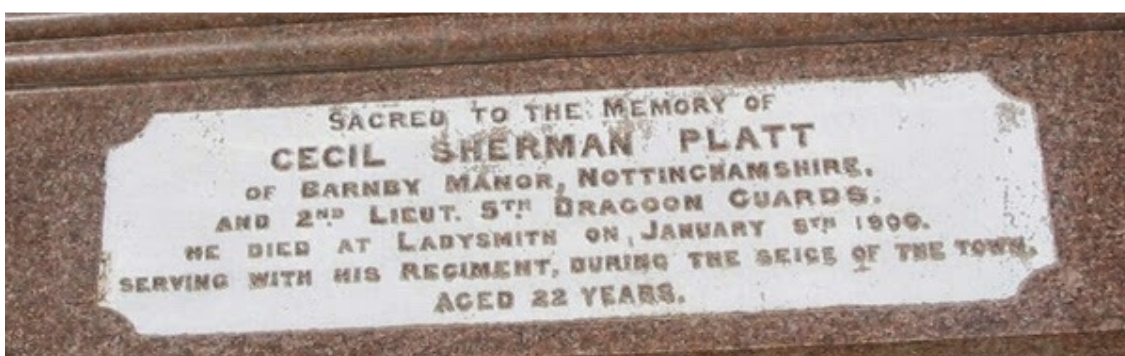
Cecil Platt was one of the 382 who died of enteric fever at the Intombi Hospital Camp in Ladysmith,
until the siege was finally lifted on the 28th February 1900 with Winston Churchill being part of the
relieving force.

Cecil Platt died on the 5th January 1900, aged 22, and is buried at Intombi Camp Cemetery.

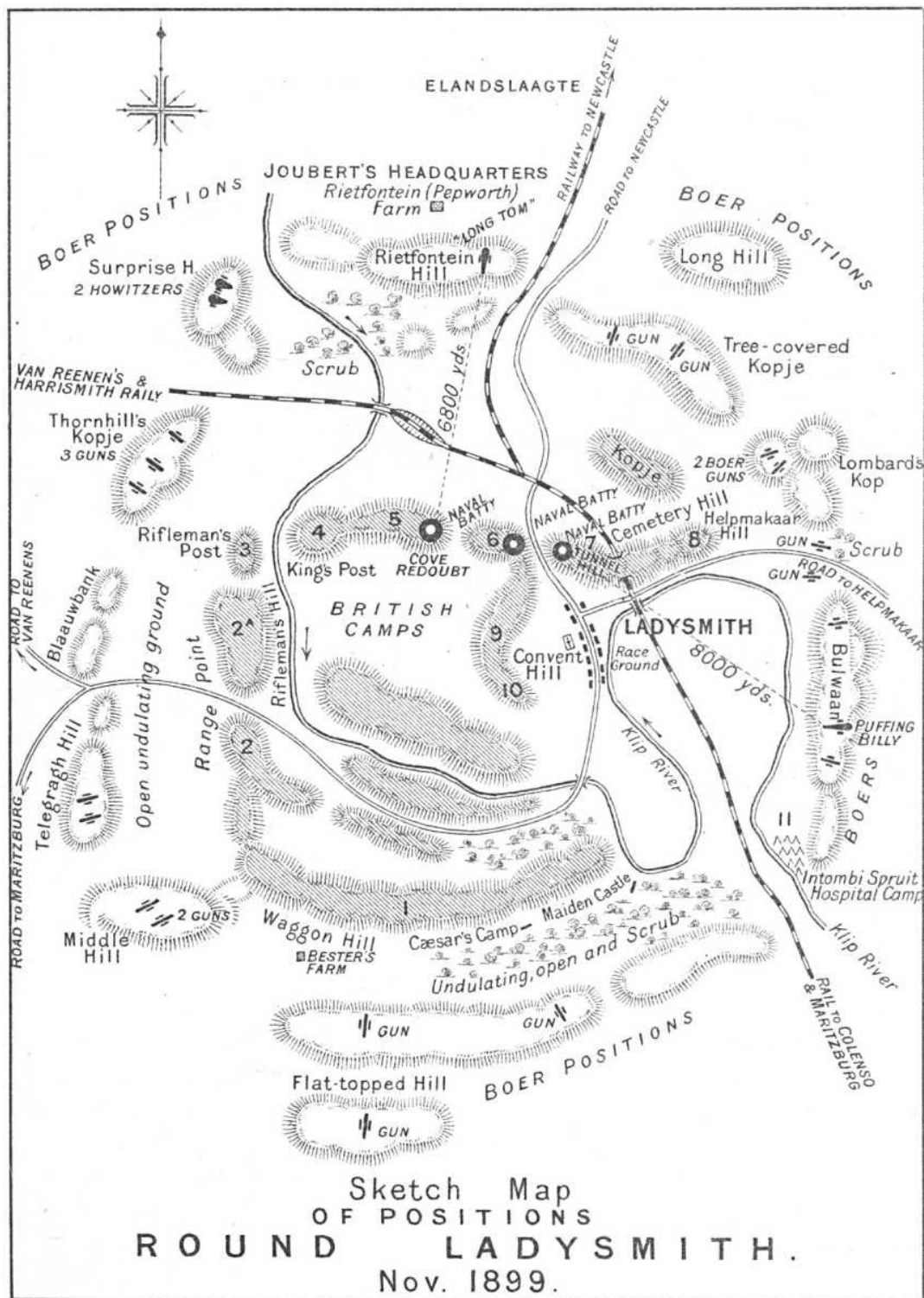
He left Effects of £306 0s 4d to his father Frederick Platt. He is commemorated on the memorial in
School Hall at Eton College. In 1999, a clasp awarded to 'Lieut. C.S. Platt, 5/Drgn. Gds' for the
Defence of Ladysmith, was sold by Christies for £805. In the compilation of award of medals in 1901
he was marked for the 'Defence of Ladysmith' but not for the 'Battle of Elandsplaagte' so it is
probable that he was a part of the two divisions who was delayed in India due to Glanders, and so
therefore reached Ladysmith immediately after the battle of Elandsplaagte.



Gravestone at Intombi Military Cemetery, Ladysmith, Natal



Intombi Hospital Camp in 1899-1900



References

1. 5th Dragoon Guards in the Boer War:
<http://www.britishempire.co.uk/forces/armyunits/britishcavalry/5dg.htm>
2. Intombi Military Hospital Camp:
<http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol056sw.html>
3. Siege of Ladysmith
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Ladysmith
4. The Green Horse in Ladysmith by Lieut-Colonel St John Gore. (5th Dragoon Guards Diary in Boer War up to Sept 1900)
<https://archive.org/details/greenhorseinlad00goregoog>
5. Christies' sale of Cecil Sherman Platt's Clasp for the Defence of Ladysmith:
<http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/LotDetailsPrintable.aspx?intObjectID=1550688>
6. Platt Family Tree:
<http://trees.ancestry.co.uk/tree/73076660/person/30267123317>
7. Family Tree by Joseph Platt Hall
8. Probate
<http://trees.ancestry.co.uk/tree/4414462/person/-283204335/photo/8da02543-f559-47c9-8a0d-34d9cd8dc09e?src=search>
9. Photograph of gravestone at Intombi Military Cemetery
http://molegenealogy.blogspot.co.uk/2015_01_01_archive.html
10. 4-7 Dragoon Guards 1899-1902, Campaign Medals South Africa.
National Archives, Kew. Ref WO 100/113

Appendix

Following list of officers taken From The Army List book for October, 1899, available at the National Archives, Kew:

Cavalry

5th (Princess Charlotte of Wales's) Dragoon Guards.

[Natal]

"Vestigia nulla retcorum."

"Blenheim." "Ramilles."

"Oudenarde," "Malpaquet,"

"Salamanca," "Vittoria,"

"Toulouse," "Peninsula,"

"Balaklava," "Sevastopol."

Uniform, scarlet

Facings, dark gree.

Plume, red and white.

Agents - Messrs. Cox & Co

Colonel

Galthorpe, Maj-Gen. (Hon. Lt-Gen) Hon. S.J.G . 24 Jan 92, 18 Nov 87

Lt.Colonel

Baden-Powell, R.S.S 25 Apr 97, bt. col. 8 May 97 (formed the scouts in 1907)

Major .[1]

(2nd in Command)

Gore, St. J. C. 31 May 99, 6 Sep 93 (Createde a CBE in 1918 and died in 1949 aged 89)

Majors [3]

Edwards, A.H.M. 22 Dec 97 (Commanding Imperial Light Horse)

Heneage, A.R. 22 Jan 98 (Sick list January-April)

Stobart, W.E. 31 May 99 (Invalided before siege)

Captains [5]

Hoare, H. 6 Sept 93 (Wounded 3rd Nov, Invalided home)

Eustace, F.A.D.G 15 Jan 95

Darbyshire, P.H. 11 Sep 95 (Invalided home)

Kennard, H.G.H. 9 Feb 98 (Invalided home)

Stuart, C.H. 4 Feb 99 ?

1 Oct 96

Glossop, B.R.M. 31 May 99 ?

Holden, E.F. 30 Aug 99 (Invalided home)

Lieutenants [9]

Garrard, J.R.L.	6 Sept 93	
Winwood, W.Q., adjt	24 Jan 94	(Became Lieut-Colonel in WW1)
Travers, H.P.	9 May 95	
Clay, B.G.	11 Sept 95	
Reynolds, P.G.	15 Apr 96	
Watson, G.H.	23 Dec 97	
Pomeroy, Hon. R.L.	16 Feb 98	(Invalided home)
Dunbar, L.M.	4 Jun 98	
Saunders, O.E.M.	4 Sept 98	
Home, G.A.S.	10 July 99	

2nd Lieutenants (7)

Melvill, J.L.	3 Aug 98	
Plattt, C.S.	2 Nov 98	(died during siege of Ladysmith 5 Jan 1900)
Norwood, J.	8 Feb 99	(V.C. Killed at the battle of the Marne 8 Sept 1914).
Kearsley, R.H.	20 May 99	
Kinnear, R.H.	20 May 99	(died just after siege of Ladysmith in March 1900)
Head, M.R.	12 Aug 99	

Adj. Winwood, W.Q., t. 16 Jul 99
R.M. Jackson, G., hon. Lt. 7 Sep 98
16 Mar 87
Q.M. Farbrother, C.H., hon. Lt. 10 July 95

Author

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