



Anglo Boer War 1899—1902

## **BUT WE GOT THE GUN!**

Siege of Ladysmith  
ROBIN SMITH

The raid on Surprise Hill by the 2nd Battalion of The Rifle Brigade  
on 10/11 December 1899 and their ambush by the Pretoria Commando.

Quite soon after the outbreak of the Anglo Boer War in October 1899, Ladysmith was surrounded and besieged by Boer forces from the Transvaal and Orange Free State. For a time, there was very little action as the Boers sat down in their laagers around the dusty little town, resolving to bombard the British garrison into submission with their heavy guns.

The British soldiers and the townsfolk waited for relief by General Redvers Buller's Imperial forces massing to the south beyond the Tugela River. However, the tangle of hills and koppies between Ladysmith and the river was a formidable barrier and relief was nearly three months away in December 1899.

The garrison, in spite of its commander, Lieutenant General Sir George White, VC, taking the view that sorties outside the lines would serve no purpose, nevertheless took such initiatives on several occasions. A raid by the Colonial regiments on the night of 7th December 1899 succeeded in destroying two Boer guns on Gun Hill east of the town.

British regular troops of the Rifle Brigade undertook another attack three nights later on Surprise Hill on the northern side of Ladysmith. They reached the summit undetected, skirmished with a few defenders and laid charges in the barrel of the Boer Krupp howitzer and blew it up. The Boers of the Pretoria Commando including a young man named Deneys Reitz and some friends intercepted the British soldiers as they descended the hill to return to Ladysmith.

This is the story of that raid and its consequences.

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# *But We Got the Gun*

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