

Letter from Robert James Byers to Anne Jane Toppin.

Cathryn Warren writes:

This particular letter is from Robert Byers sen.'s grandson, Robert James Byers, to his mother, Anne Jane Toppin (married to William Byers).

Robert James Byers fought in the Boer War and was a prisoner of war in early 1900.

The 'Belle' mentioned in the letter is Isabelle, Robert sen.'s daughter.

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## **Transcription**

Pretoria

18 August 1900

My Dear Mother,

We are still in Pretoria, and as far as we know yet, we are not likely to be going home yet awhile. It seems they can't do without the Australians and Canadians, who have already done most of the dirty and most dangerous work. The Boers cannot make us out; one Boer (a prisoner) asked me the other day, if we Australians value our lives at all. I said why? He said it does not seem like it.

He also said that the Boers can generally tell when they are fighting Australians, as the bullets whistle ever so much closer than the Tommie's bullets do. And also when our troops are advancing, he says the Australians ride like wildfire (or words to that effect). The Boers reckon that they would rather meet 100 Tommies than 20 Australians. I overheard a good argument between two Tommies in Pretoria. One wanted to know why the Horsetralians were called Horsetralians; and the only conclusion they could come to, was, that it was because they were all so used to horses. I do not know what part they came from, but they did not know very much.

I am still in the Head Qrs Stores of the 1st Mounted Infantry Brigade, which is commanded by Gen Hutton. Sergeant Major Paul is here too, but he very seldom comes near me, he leaves me alone pretty well, as he knows I can manage everything alright. I suppose you will be glad to hear that I have got the three stripes up now; dating from the 15th inst.

I am getting quite an adept at Quartermaster Sergeant's work, and as I dine with S.M. Paul and Sgt. Barnes of Tasmania, Sgt. Gifford of W.A. and Mr Cameron who is a war correspondent, we do very well as far as tucker goes, and I am making up some of the weight I lost while I was a prisoner of war. I have not had a letter or paper since the one I got from you and Belle dated early in March.

I met a Sgt. Major and Q.M.S. of the 3rd Victorian Contingent in Pretoria yesterday, and they told me that their contingent was about 17 miles out west from Pretoria. I hope they come in, for my chum from V.R.R.A.A. Nat Kennedy is their Regimental Sgt. Major and I would like to see him.

I have never seen a paper, or list of the names of the 3rd contingent; so I expect I would be surprised to meet some chaps, who I least expected to see; like the first time I met the 2nd contingent. The Canadians have a great dislike to the Boers. They took a few prisoners one day, and what did they do but took their lassos off their saddles, and hung six of them before their Officer could stop them. Another day the New Zealanders had 13 Boers prisoners, and they met some

Canadians, who asked them if they wanted to hand over their prisoners; well the N.Z.s were glad to get rid of them; so they handed them over to the Canadians who took them away to a quiet place, and shot the 13 of them. When asked what became of them, the Canadians said that the Boers escaped.

I think that is about all the news at present, so I will conclude; with best love to all at home,

I remain,  
Your loving son,  
Bob