

# SAM STEELE



SIR SAMUEL STEELE COLLECTION

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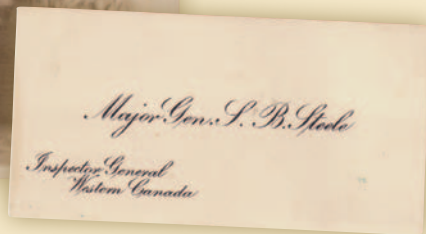
# SIR SAMUEL BENFIELD STEELE

(1848–1919)



**SIR SAM STEELE IS AN ICON IN THE HISTORY OF WESTERN CANADA.** As both a Mounted Policeman and military leader he participated in many of the seminal events and campaigns in the West, the far North, and abroad that forged Canada as a tri-coastal nation and as a major factor in the military history of the British Empire. Steele was also a keen observer of his surroundings, particularly of the First Nations as they adjusted to ever-encroaching settlement.

The Steele Collection contains a wealth of primary sources for research and scholarship that will illuminate and enrich the Canadian historical tapestry. In addition to uniforms, medals, and military accoutrements, the Collection includes thousands of pages of his letters, manuscript memoirs, pocket-diaries, journals, notebooks, staff diaries, standing order books, official reports, scrapbooks, printed papers, and photographs that document his career as a militiaman, Mounted Policeman, and soldier.




The extensive correspondence between Steele and his wife, Marie Elizabeth de Lotbinière Harwood, began before their marriage in 1890, and continued almost daily during lengthy separations. The Collection also contains the personal papers of their son, Harwood Steele (1897–1978), a soldier, arctic explorer, journalist, and author, as well as significant documents and correspondence from Steele’s many friends and associates in the North-West Mounted Police and military, including the papers, journals, diaries, letters, and publications of longtime Steele family friend Capt. Roger Pocock (1865–1941).

This historic collection of legendary Canadian Sir Samuel Benfield Steele was acquired from his descendants. A dedicated effort enabled the University of Alberta Libraries, with the help of government, corporate, and individual supporters, to repatriate this national treasure. There remains, however, much to be done to ensure the preservation of the Steele Collection, and we encourage your continued interest and support in this endeavour. 🌸







*Inspector M. Baker,  
Superintendent Alexander R.  
Macdonell, Inspector J.V. Begin,  
Superintendent Samuel B. Steele,  
Inspector Cortlandt Starnes,  
and Inspector Zachary  
Taylor Wood*

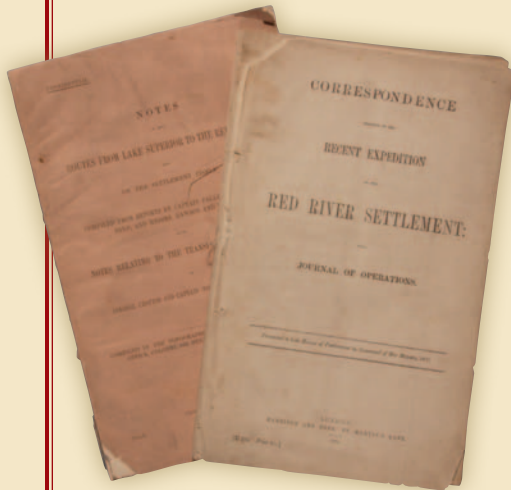
THE JOURNEY OF A CANADIAN HERO

# THE RED RIVER EXPEDITION

## SAM STEELE WAS INTRODUCED TO THE WEST

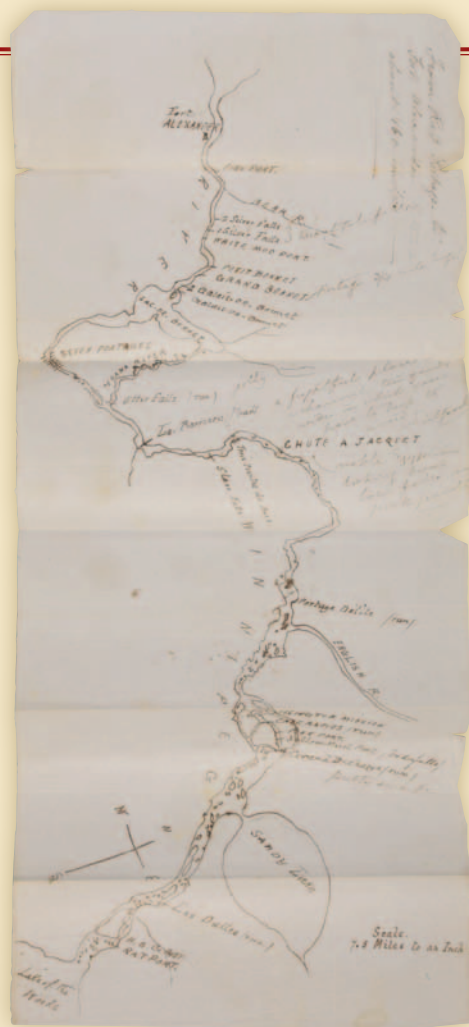
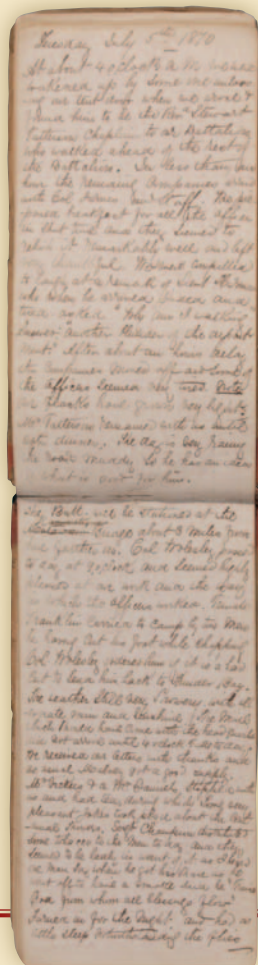
during the first major crisis to erupt after Canadian confederation in 1867. When the Hudson's Bay Company completed the sale of Rupert's Land to the Dominion government in 1870, William McDougall (1822–1905) was appointed governor, but never established authority because Louis Riel (1844–1885) and his Métis formed a provisional government and arrested many Red River settlers. Thomas Scott (1842–1870), one of the men

imprisoned at Upper Fort Garry, was put on trial and executed by firing squad, an act of summary justice that incited the government of Ontario to offer a substantial reward for the capture of Riel.



The Canadian government sent an armed expedition of Canadian militia and British regular soldiers, led by Colonel Garnet Wolseley (1833–1913), to enforce federal authority in the province of Manitoba. Captain Daniel Hunter McMillan (1846–1933) of the First Ontario Rifles recruited Steele for the expeditionary force, and offered him an officer's commission. Steele chose instead to serve as an enlisted man to share the hardships faced by regular

army soldiers. They had a difficult journey from Toronto to Fort Garry, but Steele took every opportunity to learn about life on the prairies and the rigours of military duty. When the expedition finally reached Fort Garry, it was deserted; Riel and his men had fled. Steele remained only briefly in Fort Garry, where he was promoted to corporal, before returning to Ontario. The Steele Collection is rich in documentation for the Red River Expedition, including two extensive diaries of militia officers who served under Wolseley's command. 🌸



Left: Red River Campaign diary of Captain D.H. McMillan, Commander, No. 4 Company, 1st Ontario Rifles

Above: From Rat Portage to Fort Alexander (Distance of about 160 Miles), manuscript map annotated with halting places, compass rose, and scale, accompanies the Red River Campaign diary of Major Griffiths Wainwright, 1st Ontario Rifles



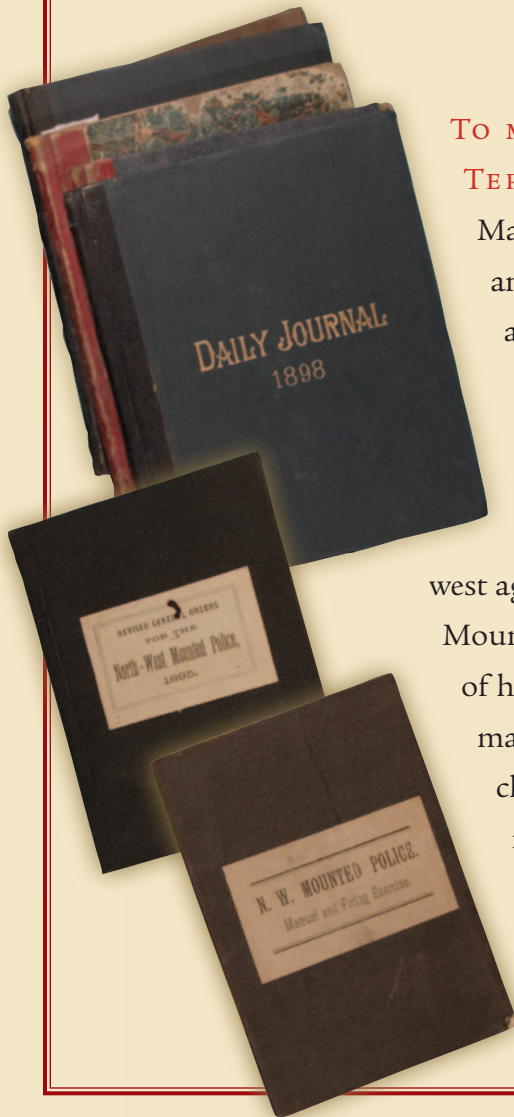
# THE NORTH-WEST MOUNTED POLICE AND THE MARCH WEST



TO MAINTAIN LAW AND ORDER IN THE NORTH-WEST  
TERRITORIES, the government of Prime Minister Sir John A.

Macdonald (1815–1891) passed  
an Act of Parliament in 1873  
authorizing the creation of  
a mounted police force.

Steele, then an instructor in  
the Canadian Permanent  
Artillery, was eager to head  
west again, seeking adventure. The  
Mounties welcomed Steele because  
of his military experience. They  
made him a Sargeant-Major, and  
charged him with instructing  
new recruits in horsemanship,  
marksmanship, and general  
police duties. His reputation





as a disciplinarian unnerved many recruits, but his men came to respect him for his integrity and strength of character.

After training hundreds of men in Toronto and Fort Garry, Manitoba, the Mounties began the “Long March” west in the summer of 1874, seeking to control the whisky trade. A decade later, the Canadian Pacific Railway was being built at a furious pace, but the labour camps were rife with drinking and gambling. The Mounties enforced prohibition along the rail line, but the task was exceedingly difficult.

In makeshift courtrooms Steele frequently served as judge and jury to decide the fate of hundreds of men. He secured a reputation as a tough and fearless dispenser of justice.

Steele was temporarily detached from his duties with the Mounted Police when Louis Riel returned from the United States to lead another rebellion. Appointed a Major in the Alberta Field Force, Steele played a significant role in suppressing the rebellion as commander of Steele’s Scouts. ❀



Chief Sitting Bull



# SAM AND MARIE

## AN ENDURING LOVE AFFAIR



CONSIDERING THE HEAVY DEMANDS OF STEELE'S CAREER, it is perhaps surprising that he found time for romance. Yet when Marie Elizabeth de Lotbinière Harwood (1859–1951) came to NWMP headquarters at Fort Macleod to visit her aunt, she captivated Steele and they fell deeply in love. Steele's command at Fort Macleod afforded him little leisure, but, during a romantic courtship over the summer of 1889, they discovered many shared interests, including their affection for horses.

When he proposed to Marie, she readily accepted; to please her family they were wed in Quebec on 15 January 1890. Her francophone, Roman Catholic background was in stark contrast

to Steele's upbringing in an Anglican family on a rural Ontario homestead. Marie was the eldest daughter of

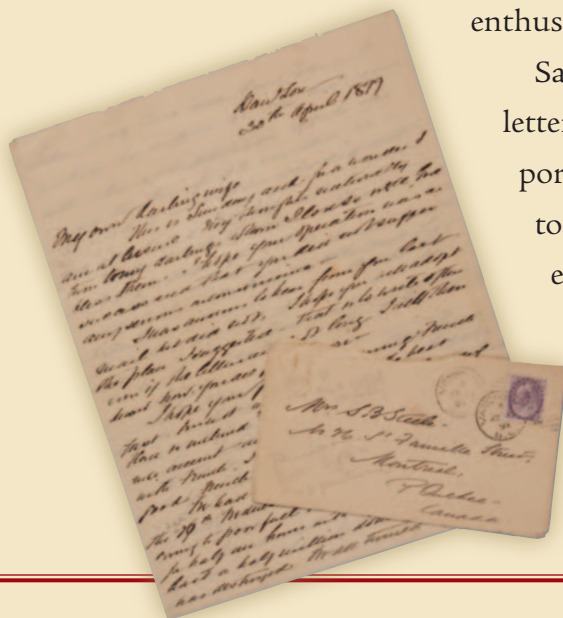




Robert William  
Harwood  
(1826–1897),  
a seigneur of the  
county and Member  
of Parliament from

Vaudreuil. Thus Steele gained both a wife and an influential political connection. After their wedding, the couple travelled to New York and toured the United States, where his celebrity elicited warm hospitality. In his autobiography Steele recalled that the New York Fire Department greeted them with a parade of 60 engines; numerous police departments also received them with

enthusiasm.



Sam and Marie exchanged hundreds of affectionate letters throughout their 29-year marriage. A significant portion of the Steele Collection, their correspondence touches on both personal affairs and historical events, and reveals a fascinating, if largely unexplored, area of Steele's life. 🌸



# THE YUKON AND THE KLONDIKE GOLD RUSH

WHEN GOLD WAS DISCOVERED IN THE YUKON IN 1896,  
the news quickly prompted a stampede to Dawson City and points  
along the Klondike River. The Dominion government was faced



with the threat of lawlessness,  
famine, and social unrest  
as steamboats brought  
thousands of prospectors  
to Alaska from the ports of San Francisco,  
Seattle, and Vancouver. Then they had to make their way  
across the notorious Chilkoot Pass to reach the Yukon  
goldfields. Many were ill prepared for this journey on  
which travellers were prey to robbers and con artists,  
among other hazards. The Canadian government  
established a police presence in the Yukon in 1895.  
In January 1898 Sam Steele was ordered north, and  
established his first headquarters at Lake Bennett,  
at the headwaters of the Yukon River.





Steele and his men were kept busy administering the laws of Canada, as well as arranging supplies and transport, offering medical care, supervising marine traffic, collecting duties and fines, and providing mail service. Steele patrolled the tent city relentlessly, to avert trouble, settle disputes, and keep the peace.

As a reward for his success, Steele was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in 1898 with full command of the Mounted Police in the Yukon. He moved to Dawson City and expanded the force and improved the facilities. Steele confronted serious problems policing a city with nearly 14,000 residents, many of them suffering from typhoid, scurvy, and other serious ailments. He established sanitation services and the digging of drainage ditches to prevent further typhoid outbreaks. Fines extracted from lawbreakers were used to pay for these community services. The citizens of Dawson were thus sorry to see Steele leave in the fall of 1899, but understood that after almost two years of separation, he was eager to join his wife and children in Montreal. ❀



# THE BOER WAR AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONSTABULARY

WHEN THE SECOND ANGLO-BOER WAR ERUPTED (1899-1902), Canada mobilized troops to join British forces in South Africa. Britain was at war with the Boer republics; newspapers throughout the Empire urged able-bodied men to serve in the imperial forces. A proud

farming people descended from Dutch colonists, the Boer militiamen organised in mounted commandos and waged a fierce guerrilla war against Queen Victoria's armies. When the British suffered a series of defeats, renewed calls were made for recruits, and heightened patriotism inspired many to answer the call.





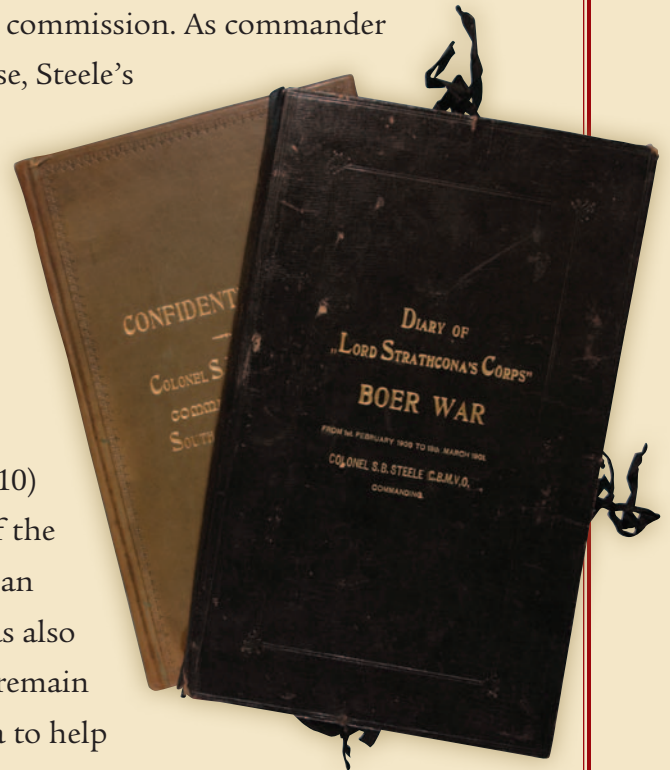


Donald Alexander Smith (1820–1914), 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Strathcona and Mount Royal, invited Sam Steele to command a cavalry unit being raised to fight in South Africa. Ever a man of determined action, Steele immediately accepted the commission. As commander of Lord Strathcona's Horse, Steele's experience recruiting, training, and leading men served him well; his

reputation attracted many volunteers from the NWMP.

Steele and his regiment showed courage and ingenuity in their pursuit of the enemy; when the war concluded, Steele had become a national hero. For his extraordinary service, Steele was decorated by King Edward VII (1841–1910) and was made a Commander of the Bath and a Member of the

Royal Victorian Order. He was also persuaded to remain in South Africa to help organise the newly formed South African Constabulary. 🌸



*Pennants of Lord Strathcona's Horse: Troops A, B, C, & Commanding Officer, with mascot "Peterborough Ben"*

# WORLD WAR I

## THE FINAL CHAPTER

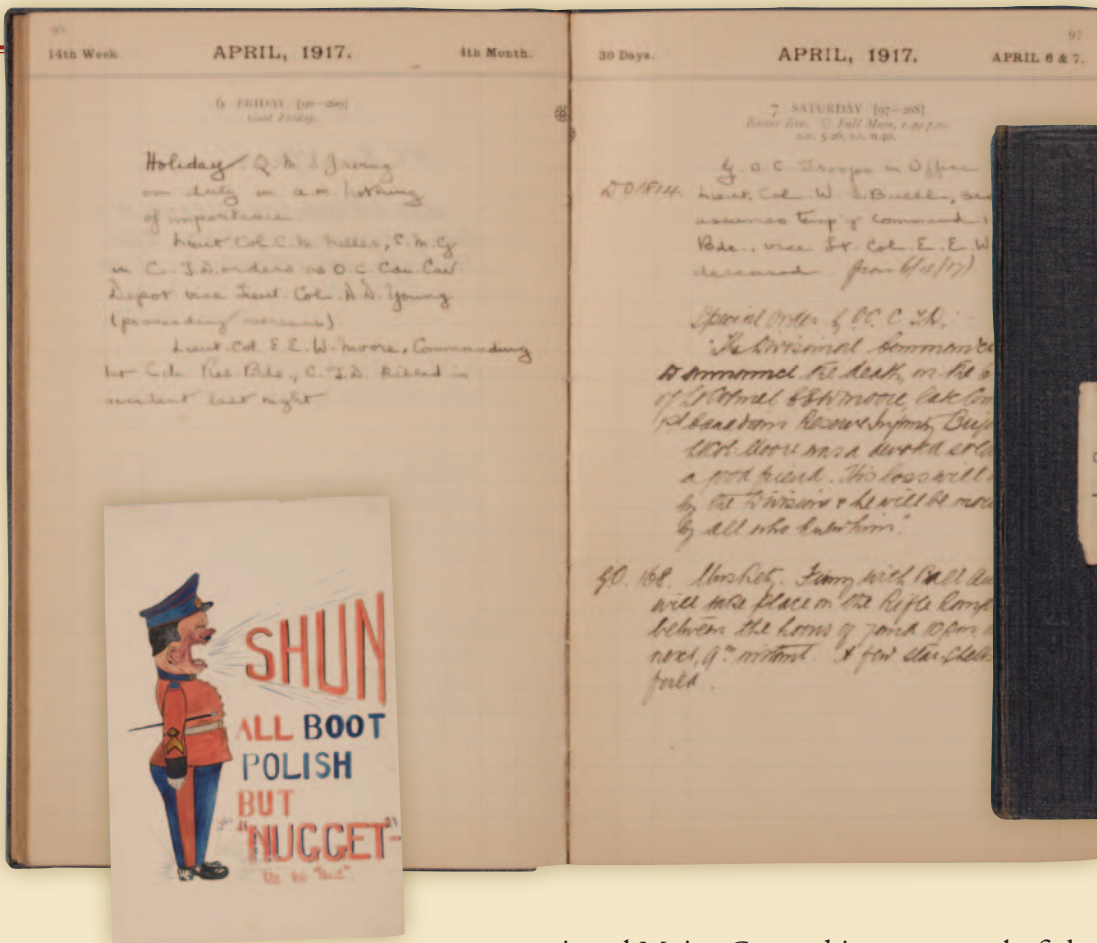


WHEN SAM STEELE FORMALLY RESIGNED FROM THE MOUNTED POLICE IN 1903, he ended a legendary 30-year career with the Police. After he returned to Canada in 1907 he assumed command of a military district, reconstituted Lord Strathcona's Horse as a permanent cavalry regiment, and settled down to write his memoirs, which were published in 1915 as *Forty Years in Canada: Reminiscences of the Great North-West*. He also found time to serve as president of the Canadian Club and Boy Scout Commissioner.

At the outbreak of war in 1914, he sought an expeditionary command, but the government hesitated because of his age. The public, astonished to see one of its

favourite sons ignored, believed Steele was just the man to inspire troops and lift the spirits of the nation. As a result of this pressure, Steele





was appointed Major-General in command of the Second Canadian Division, and embarked for England with 25,000 troops. Deemed too old for an active combat command in France, Steele, at the request of General Sir Herbert Kitchener (1850–1916), was appointed overall commander of the Southwestern District in England, including the Canadian training base at Shorncliffe, for which his administrative skills were so very well suited. Appointed Knight Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George on 1 January 1918, Steele relinquished his command two months later, and officially retired from military duty in July 1918. He succumbed to influenza at Putney, England, on 30 January 1919, and was buried in Winnipeg. ❁

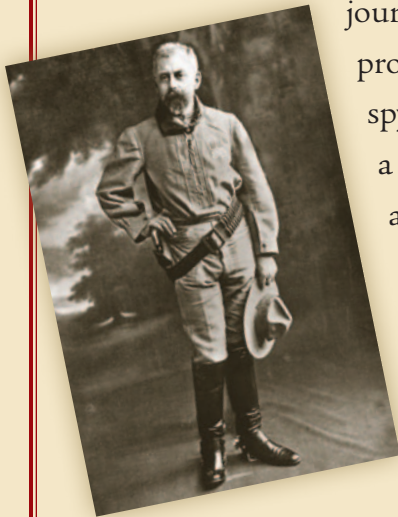


# HENRY ROGER ASHWELL POCOCK

(1865–1941)

ROGER POCOCK WAS A TRUE SON OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE – conceived in New Zealand, born in Wales, and raised in England and Canada (his “second native land”) – as well as an outstanding example of the people who built and sustained it. During a career that included service in three wars on as many continents, Pocock worked by turns as a North-West Mounted Policeman, peddler,

journalist, missionary, sailor, prospector, soldier, amateur spy, novelist, and artist. As a writer, Pocock celebrated and idolized Canada and the Mounted Police, yet he sharply criticized the government for its treatment of the First Nations.





His brief service in the NWMP during the North-West Rebellion of 1885 provided him with a wealth of inspiration for his writing and for his most significant contribution to the Empire, the founding of the Legion of Frontiersmen; the Legion continues to this day.

A longtime friend of Sam Steele and his family, Pocock's bequest of papers, journals, diaries, letters, photographs, and drawings to Harwood Steele is a significant adjunct to the Steele Collection. ❀





Ans Aug 29 to m.



North-West Mounted Police,

Lake Bonnet, 13.4, 1898

My darling Mags  
It is now one AM,  
and I have been  
writing for hours,  
but I must not  
retire until I  
write to my own  
darling wife -

B. Steele

St Famille St

St. Famille St.  
Montreal, Aug 26<sup>th</sup>

Although I have  
you my darling  
answered all  
your letters, I have

B. Steele.

Trasken's Horse:

live Service.

Boase Win.

South-Africa:

Lieut. Col. D. H.  
Bond, 18<sup>th</sup>  
on Dec

My dear Mags  
I have just  
received your  
letter of the 24<sup>th</sup>  
and I am  
glad to hear  
from you. I  
am well and  
hope this  
letter will  
find you the  
same. I have  
not much news  
to write at  
present, but  
I will write  
again soon.  
I am, my  
darling, ever  
your affectionate  
husband,  
B. Steele.