

*New York Tribune*  
August 5, 1900

***R. H. Davis On Boer War***

***Correspondent Couldn't Stand English Censorship.***

***Thinks The British Still Have Their Hands Full—A Story About "Poisoned" Bullets,  
In Which Consul Hay Figures***

Richard Harding Davis returned yesterday from the Transvaal, where for two months he was in the midst of hostilities as a newspaper correspondent. He made the return trip on the American liner New-York. When he came ashore he said to a Tribune reporter:

Some of the British say that I am a renegade. Well, whatever they may say, it is true that I went over to the Boers after I had endured English censorship as long as I could.

The reason I left the British is best given in the following bit of history: In one of the engagements which took place on the march of the British to Pretoria, a detachment of English soldiers became separated from the main force. There was a slight fog afloat, and when these men returned to the main column their comrades mistook them for Boers and firing into them killed several. It was simply the result of bad generalship. Accordingly, I wrote the account of the engagement just as it occurred. I said that the English troops had through mistake shot down their own kinsmen. The military censor read the dispatch and said that he could not pass it.

"Why not?" I asked. "Is it not true?"

"True, yes," was the answer, "but I cannot pass it. You must say instead that the bullets came dangerously near these men." Well, I had a teeth-to-teeth talk with the man, and finally got the dispatch through.

This was only one instance. And, for a fact, as long as I stayed with the British I could not get my dispatches through without either having them haggled or wholly cut to pieces.

***Those "Poisoned" Bullets.***

There was a funny story running through the British lines one day about Boer barbarism, and our young Consul, Adelbert S. Hay, played a picturesque, as well as a diplomatic role in it. Now, the Boers were wont to coat the ends of their bullets with a kind of grease to prevent them splitting in the gun barrel; after a certain time this grease took on an emerald color. It appears that some British soldiers chanced to find a few bullets from the Boer rifles, without using a surgeon's instrument, and on sight of the green grease they thought that the bullets were poisoned. With remarkable rapidity it was noised about that the Boers were such barbarians as to use poisoned bullets.

Mr. Hay, our new consul at Pretoria, happened to come into one of the British tents when such a bullet was on exhibition. Having looked at the projectile a long time and smelled it carefully, he said:

“Why, these fell by mistake into a pudding. They are only flavoured with wintergreen,” and, so saying, he licked off the green with apparent relish. That disposed of that story of Boer barbarism.

I have no fault to find with the English hospital system, of which, I believe, there has been considerable complaint. On the contrary, I thought that the organization of the English Army, especially in respect to its caring for the wounded, was exceptionally good. As soon as a man dropped he was picked up by an ambulance corps and whisked off to a hospital in only a few minutes.

As for the organization of the Boer army, why, there was no such thing. They only fought when they felt like it, and then it was only bravery that won the victories. As a matter of course, when they were opposed by several times their own number, they were simply overpowered. With the removal of Cronje by capture and exile, and that of Joubert by death, the Boer army was pruned of a good deal of deadwood. These men were all right for times of peace, but they were too old, too slow footed and slow minded for war. The commanders who followed them were of a different timber. I speak now of De Wet and Botha. General De Wet is a man of remarkable force and has the power to inspire his troops with his own courage. Botha is also an excellent general.

Nevertheless, even at the present time there is considerable jealousy between the officers, which militates greatly against the success of the army. It is not true that the Boer army is officered throughout by Europeans. There are a few Frenchmen and Germans in positions of command, but their presence there was of no great importance. The Boers under them do not half the time obey their orders.

### *Says English Have Plenty To Do*

The English at the present time have all they can do to hold their own in the Transvaal. General Roberts is now at Pretoria with eight thousand men and it takes most of his waking hours to keep his lines of communication open with the ocean. The whole situation closely resembles what would happen if the English should take Albany with a few thousand troops and all the people of New York, having taken refuge in the Adirondacks, should make daily sorties to the southward and tear up the tracks of the New-York Central and West Shore railroads.

It is my humble opinion that the Boers are better fixed today than they were in the beginning. They have provisions to last them for the next two years, and plenty of fresh air and exercise. They can keep the British guessing all the time in the mean while. Yes, sir, England needs all the troops she has in Africa for the squabble there. She is afraid to transfer a single soldier from the Transvaal to China.

I am sorry my English friends have taken such an aversion to me: very sorry. Consequently I have made no attempt to try to solicit a return of their favour. In this connection I might say that my name was once proposed for membership in the Garrick Club, of London. The friend who had submitted my name, however, came to me and said that there had been some unpleasant talk about me among the members, and perhaps I would not find my new surroundings among them excessively congenial. Accordingly, I asked that my name be dropped, and it was.

I left South Africa June 4 and landed at Naples. As a consequence of the exposure I endured while in South Africa, I found myself suffering severely with sciatica. In order to obtain relief I went to the bath at Aix-les-Bains. From there I went to Paris and took the ship at Cherbourg. Now, I didn't avoid going to London because I feared criticism or the cold shoulder or a wet blanket. If I had left an old coat in London I would have gone over and got it. As it was, there was no need for me to go to London, and I didn't.

Mr. Davis started on the Fall River Line last night for Marion, Mass. He said he might go later to China, but what he wanted at present was a rest. He was accompanied by his wife and his father.

*(Source: Library of Congress, "Chronicling America,"*  
*<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030214/1900-08-05/ed-1/seq-10/>)*