



SECOND SUPPLEMENT
TO
The London Gazette
Of FRIDAY, the 28th of FEBRUARY.

Published by Authority.

SATURDAY, MARCH 1, 1879.

War Office, March 1, 1879.

THE Secretary of State for War has received the following Despatch from Lord Chelmsford, K.C.B., Commanding the Forces in South Africa:—

From Lieutenant-General Lord Chelmsford, K.C.B., to the Right Honourable the Secretary of State for War.

*Pietermaritzburg, Natal,
January 27, 1879.*

SIR,
THE Telegram I sent you to-day will have conveyed the sad intelligence of the misfortune which has occurred to a portion of the force under my command.

The Court of Inquiry which is about to assemble will, I trust, be able to collect sufficient evidence to explain what at present appears to me almost incomprehensible; but, from the account of the few who escaped, I am able to give you a narrative which, though perhaps not absolutely accurate as to facts, will convey to you a fair idea of the events of that melancholy day. On the 20th January, No. 3 Column, under Colonel Glyn, broke up from its camp on the left bank of the Buffalo River, and marched about ten miles along the wagon track which leads from Rorke's Drift to the Indeni Forest, and encamped with its back to an isolated, precipitous-sided hill of peculiar appearance, called Insalwana.

On the 20th, I myself made a reconnaissance about ten miles farther on the same wagon track, which skirts the Inhlazaty Mountain as far as a place called Matyana's stronghold—a deep valley, full of caves, with three precipitous sides, over one of which a small river falls, and, flowing along its bottom, enters the Buffalo River at a distance of about twelve or fifteen miles.

Not having time to properly examine the country round this peculiar stronghold, into which I had been told the enemy would very probably retire, I ordered that the next day two separate parties should move out from camp at an early hour, and bring me back a full description of it.

One, under Major Dartnell, consisting of the Mounted Police and Volunteers of which he is commandant, took the same road that I had taken, whilst another, consisting of two battalions Native Contingent under Commandant Lonsdale, worked round a flat-topped mountain, called Malakata, which is the southern part of the Inhlazaty range.

The orders given to the commanders of these two parties were that they were to effect a communication along the open ground on the Inhlazaty range, and then return to camp with the information they had been able to obtain. At about 3 P.M. one of my own staff officers, who had accompanied Major Dartnell, returned to camp and reported that the latter had been unable to effect a complete reconnaissance of the country beyond the small river alluded to, as he had found it occupied by the enemy in some force, that he had called up the two Battalions Native Contingent, and that if I sent him three companies of British Infantry to give them confidence he would be able to attack. I did not consider it advisable to comply with this request as the day was far advanced and the distance great. Biscuit was sent out to the force which bivouacked on the northern edge of the Inhlazaty range. At 2.30 A.M. on the 22nd January, Colonel Glyn, having received a despatch from Major Dartnell, saying that the enemy was in great force in front of him, sent his senior staff officer to enquire what I would wish done.

Feeling that the position was rather critical, I ordered Colonel Glyn to move to his assistance with all the available men of the 2nd Battalion 24th Regiment, consisting of six companies, and also to take four guns and the Mounted Infantry.

An express was sent off to Lieutenant-Colonel Durnford, Royal Engineers, who was at Rorke's Drift with 500 natives, half of whom were mounted and armed with breech-loaders, to move up to strengthen the force which were left to guard the camp.

The strength of this force was as follows:—

Royal Artillery, 2 officers, 78 men, 2 guns.
Two Rocket Tubes, 1 officer, 10 men (Lieutenant-Colonel Durnford's force).

First Battalion 24th Regiment, 15 officers, 334 men.

Second Battalion 24th Regiment, 5 officers, 90 men.

Mounted European Corps, 5 officers, 204 men.

Natal Native Contingent, 19 officers, 391 men.

Natal Pioneers, 1 officer, 10 men.

Lieutenant-Colonel Durnford's force, 18 officers, 450 men.

Total Natives, 851 men.

Total Europeans (including officers), 772.

Lieutenant-Colonel Pulleine, 1st Battalion 24th Regiment, was left in charge of the camp, and received strict instructions that he was left there to defend it.

The reinforcement under Colonel Glyn moved off at daybreak, and I accompanied it, pressing forward with a small escort of the Mounted Infantry. I reached Major Dartnell about 6.30 A.M., and at once ordered him to send out his mounted men to gain intelligence of the enemy, whose whereabouts did not appear to be very certain.

The enemy shortly after showed in considerable strength on some heights opposite to the Inhlatzaty range, but at some distance, and appeared to be advancing to take possession of a projecting spur which ran out into the plain beneath, and completely commanded it.

I at once ordered the two battalions Native Contingent to move across and occupy the spur in question, and sent word to Colonel Glyn to move with the guns and 2nd Battalion 24th Regiment up a valley which lay to the left of the spur in question.

The Mounted Infantry looked after the left flank, and the Mounted Police and Volunteers guarded the right.

A general advance was then made, and the enemy retired without firing; on the extreme right, however, the Natal Carabinéers, under Captain Shepstone, managed to cut off about 300, who took refuge on a difficult hill and in some caves. These were finally dislodged with the assistance of some of the Native Contingents, and fifty were killed.

The main force of the enemy retired to Isipisi Hill, which was about six miles off, on their flanks being threatened by the advance of the Mounted Corps.

Whilst these operations were going on, Colonel Glyn received, about 9 A.M., a short note from Lieutenant-Colonel Pulleine, saying that firing was heard to the left front of the camp, but giving no further particulars.

I sent Lieutenant Milne, R.N., my A.D.C., at once to the top of a high hill from which the camp could be seen, and he remained there for at least an hour with a very powerful telescope, but could detect nothing unusual in that direction.

Having no cause, therefore, to feel any anxiety about the safety of the camp, I ordered Lieutenant-Colonel Russell to make a sweep round with the Mounted Infantry to the main wagon track, whilst a portion of the Infantry went over the hill top to the same point, and the guns with an escort retraced their steps.

I, myself, proceeded with Colonel Glyn to fix upon a site for our new camp, which I had determined to shift the next day to ground near the Mangeni River, which runs into Matyana's stronghold.

One battalion of the Native Contingent was ordered to march back to camp across country, and to examine en route the different deep dongas,

or water cuttings, which intersect the plain, and which might very possibly conceal some of the enemy.

Having fixed upon the situation for the camp, and having ordered the troops then on the ground to bivouac there that night, I started to return to camp with the Mounted Infantry under Lieutenant-Colonel Russell as my escort, when within about six miles of the camp I found the 1st Battalion Native Contingent halted, and shortly after Commandant Lonsdale rode up to report that he had ridden into camp, and found it in possession of the Zulus.

I at once sent word to Colonel Glyn to bring back all the troops, and I myself advanced with the Mounted Infantry and the Native Contingent battalion for about two miles, when I halted to await the arrival of the rest of the force.

Lieutenant-Colonel Russell went forward to reconnoitre the camp, and fully confirmed all that Commandant Lonsdale had reported.

On the arrival of Colonel Glyn and his force, I at once formed them up into fighting order; guns in the centre, on the road with three companies 2nd Battalion 24th Regiment on each flank in fours: Native Contingent battalions, one on each flank of the 2nd Battalion 24th Regiment in line, Europeans and natives, armed with guns, forming a third rank in front: Mounted Infantry on the extreme right, Natal Mounted Volunteers on the extreme left, Mounted Police in reserve.

We advanced in this order across the plain with great speed and in excellent order, but could not reach the neighbourhood of our camp until after dark.

The Artillery came into action on the road, and shelled the crest of the narrow neck over which our line of retreat lay, whilst the left wing under Major Black, 2nd Battalion 24th Regiment, moved forward to seize a small stony hill on the left of this neck, the occupation of which would secure our left flank.

Major Black seized the position without opposition, and the right wing then advanced and occupied the neck in question, the right flank being protected by the precipitous sides of the Insilwana Hill.

The whole force lay down amidst the debris of the plundered camp, and the corpses of dead men, horses, and oxen, fully expecting to be attacked in front, and most probably in rear also.

A few alarms occurred during the night, but it passed, however, without a shot being fired at us.

At early dawn the following morning I ordered the troops to move off with all speed to Rorke's Drift, about which post I was in some anxiety.

The troops had no spare ammunition and only a few biscuits, a large portion of them had had no other food for 48 hours. All had marched at least 30 miles the day before, and had passed an almost sleepless night on the stony ground. No one, therefore, was fit for any prolonged exertion, and it was certain that daylight would reveal a sight which could not but have a demoralizing effect upon the whole force.

I determined, therefore, to reach our nearest supply depôt at Rorke's Drift, as quickly as possible, and, as I have already said, moved off before it was fairly light.

On sighting the post at Rorke's Drift, heavy smoke was seen to be rising from the house, and the Zulus were seen retiring from it.

It appeared as if our supplies at that post were lost to us, and I felt that those at Helpmakaar, some 12 miles further off, must have shared the same fate.

To our intense relief, however, on nearing the Buffalo River the waving of hats was seen from the inside of a hastily erected entrenchment, and information soon reached me that the gallant garrison of this post, some 60 of the 2nd Battalion 24th Regiment, under Lieutenant Bromhead, and a few Volunteers and Departmental Officers, the whole under Lieutenant Chard, R.E., had for 12 hours made the most gallant resistance I have ever heard of against the determined attacks of some 3,000 Zulus, 370 of whose dead bodies surrounded the post.

The loss of the garrison was 13 killed and 9 wounded.

On reaching Rorke's Drift, I, for the first time, heard some particulars of the attack upon the Insalwana Camp, and am thus able to furnish the following narrative, the absolute accuracy of which, however, I cannot vouch for:—

Shortly before the arrival of Lieutenant-Colonel Durnford in camp with his 450 natives, information had reached Lieutenant-Colonel Pulleine from the left picquets that a number of Zulus had been seen on that flank.

On receiving this information, Lieutenant-Colonel Durnford asked Lieutenant-Colonel Pulleine to give him two companies of British Infantry, in order that he might move up the heights on the left and attack them. Lieutenant-Colonel Pulleine at once stated that his orders were to defend the camp, and that without a positive order he could not allow the companies to leave.

Lieutenant-Colonel Durnford then took his 450 natives up the heights, and went, so far as I can learn, about five miles from camp, when he found himself in front of a very large army of Zulus.

He at once sent back word to Lieutenant-Colonel Pulleine, and with his Mounted Basutos retired slowly before the Zulus, who advanced to attack him.

The Mounted Basutos, I hear from many quarters, behaved remarkably well, and delayed the advances of the enemy for a considerable time.

Their ammunition, however, began to run short, and they were, at last, obliged to retire quickly on the camp.

Being unable to find a fresh supply of ammunition, it appears they disbanded themselves and made the best of their way to the Buffalo, where they swam the river and recrossed into Natal, assisting, however, as far as they could, many of our fugitives from the camp to escape.

As regards the proceedings of the six companies of British Infantry, two guns, and two rocket tubes, the garrison of the camp, I can obtain but little information.

One company went off to the extreme left and has never been heard of since, and the other five, I understand, engaged the enemy about a mile to the left front of the camp, and made there a most stubborn and gallant resistance.

So long as they kept their faces to the enemy the Zulus were, I am told, quite unable to drive them back, and fell in heaps before the deadly fire poured into them.

An officer who visited this part of the field of battle on the following morning reported that the loss of the Zulus in killed could not be less than 2,000.

When, however, the Zulus got round the left flank of these brave men they appear to have lost their presence of mind, and to have retired hastily through the tents which had never been struck.

Immediately the whole Zulu force surrounded them, they were overpowered by numbers, and the camp was lost.

Those who were mounted, ran the gauntlet and some small portion managed to reach the river, which, however, at the point of crossing was deep and rapid.

Many were shot or assegaid, and many were swept away by the current, and it is presumed have been drowned.

Had the force in question but taken up a defensive position in the camp itself, and utilized there the materials for a hasty entrenchment which lay near to hand, I feel absolutely confident, that the whole Zulu army would not have been able to dislodge them.

It appears that the oxen were yoked to the wagons three hours before the attack took place, so that there was ample time to construct that wagon laager which the Dutch in former days understood so well.

Had, however, even the tents been struck and the British troops placed with their backs to the precipitous Insalwana Hill, I feel sure that they could have made a successful resistance.

Rumours reached me, however, that the troops were deceived by a simulated retreat, and in their eagerness to close with the enemy allowed themselves to be drawn away from their line of defence.

Our actual loss cannot as yet be correctly ascertained, but I fear that it cannot be less than 30 officers and about 500 non-commissioned officers, rank and file, belonging to the Imperial troops, and 21 officers and 70 non-commissioned officers, rank and file of the Colonial forces.

The effect of this disaster throughout the Colony has already shown itself, and the European colonists generally are in great alarm.

The result of this has been to produce a similar effect upon the native mind, and our Native Contingents are beginning to lose heavily by desertion.

This will, I trust, be checked with a firm hand by the Natal Government, as the natives were ordered out by their supreme chief, the Lieutenant-Governor of Natal, and have no right to leave their corps until released by his order.

The fact remains, however, that the Natal native allies are no longer to be depended upon, and additional British reinforcements must be sent out if the operations against the Zulus are to be carried to a successful issue.

The country is far more difficult than I had been led to expect, and the labour of advancing with a long train of wagons is enormous.

It took seven days' hard work, by one half of No. 3 Column, to make the ten miles of road between Rorke's Drift and Insalwana Hill practicable, and even then had it rained hard I feel sure that the convoy could not have got on.

The line of communication is very much exposed, and would require a party of mounted men always patrolling, and fixed intrenched posts of infantry at intervals of about ten miles.

Under these circumstances I feel obliged to ask for the following reinforcements, viz.:—three British Infantry Regiments, two Cavalry Regiments, and one Company Royal Engineers.

The cavalry must be prepared to act as mounted infantry, and should have their swords fastened to their saddles, and their carbines slung, muzzle downwards, by a strap across the shoulder. The swords should, if possible, be somewhat shorter than the present regulation pattern.

At least 100 artillerymen, with farrier, shoeing smith, and collar maker, must be sent out at once

to replace casualties in N-5th, Lieutenant-Colonel
Harness' battery. A dozen farriers or good
shoeing smiths are urgently required for the
several columns, and two additional veterinary
surgeons for depôt duty would be very valuable.
If the reinforcements asked for are sent out at
once they will arrive at the most favourable time
for campaigning, namely, at the end of the rainy
season.

I have, &c.,
(Signed) CHELMSFORD,
Lieutenant-General.