



SUPPLEMENT
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War Office, May 2, 1879.

A DESPATCH, of which the following is a copy, has been received by the Secretary of State for War from the Lieutenant-General commanding Her Majesty's Forces in South Africa:—

*Head Quarter Camp, Lower Tugela,
March 25, 1879.*

SIR,

THANKS to the prompt despatch of reinforcements from England, I shall, in three days' time, be able to advance with the strong column, (strength as per margin, A), to relieve the garrison of Ekowe, which has now been holding that post for upwards of ten weeks.

As none of the Major-Generals ordered out have yet arrived, and Colonel Pearson who at first commanded the column on this line is shut up in Ekowe, and as there is no other senior officer available for the duty, I have decided to take command of the relieving column myself, assisted by Colonel Pemberton, 60th Rifles, and Lieutenant-Colonel Law, Royal Artillery.

The column will not advance by the road which Colonel Pearson's column took, but by one which runs nearly parallel to it, but nearer to the coast: the advantage of this line is that the road runs through an easy, open country for three-quarters of the distance, whereas by the other line the road runs through bush country nearly the whole way.

The force will advance without tents, and with only a blanket and waterproof sheet for each man.

Notwithstanding, however, this reduction of weight, the convoy, carrying one month's provision for the garrison and ten days' supplies (without groceries) for the relieving column, will consist of 44 carts and about 100 wagons (enclosure B).

With such a length of train, the greater portion of which is drawn by oxen, it will be impossible to do more than about 11 miles in the day; and even this distance, according to the calculation of the colonial transport conductors, will require nearly all the hours of daylight to accomplish, if due regard be paid to the interests of the oxen, who will not work well in the heat of the day, and who require at least three hours for feeding.

I am desirous of bringing the transport difficulties prominently to your notice, as, unless they

are fully realised, it will be difficult to understand the apparent slowness which must characterise the movements of the relieving column.

It is probable that the column will be attacked when moving along the last 10 miles of the road between this place and Ekowe.

The track, according to the information of those who know the country, runs along a narrow but open ridge, with deep ravines on each side, and is only wide enough for one wagon: it twists and turns considerably, and is reported as being favourable for the attack of an enterprising enemy.

I have suggested to Colonel Pearson, by sun-signal, that he should be prepared to make a diversion in support of the relieving column with every available fighting man that can be spared from the defence of the post.

I should feel no doubt about being able successfully to convey the convoy and fresh garrison into Ekowe, and to bring out the present garrison with its train of empty wagons, were the transport of different quality.

A force moving, however, with ox transport through a difficult country is heavily hampered, if attacked determinedly by large numbers; and whilst feeling every confidence in the ability, courage, and determination of those under my command, I trust that, should our efforts fall short of what is no doubt expected of us, this circumstance may be duly taken into consideration.

I have, &c.,

CHELMSFORD,

Lieutenant-General.

A.—Ekowe Relieving Column.

1st Division of the Column. Lieutenant-Colonel Law, R.A., Commanding.

Naval Brigade of H.M.S. "Shah" and "Tenedos," except the Royal Marines of the "Shah," 350 men; 57th Regiment, 640; 2 companies the Buffs, 140; 5 companies 99th Regiment, 430; 5 battalions of Natal Native Contingent, 1,200; mounted infantry, 70; mounted volunteers, 30; mounted natives, 130; native foot scouts, 150; Commissariat and Transport Department; Medical Department; total, 1,660 whites, 1,480 Native Contingent: grand total, 3,140 fighting men.