

Regiment, which had started from the Lower Tugela on the 22nd en route for Ekowe.

I also, on the morning of the 25th, sent back to the Tugela 48 empty wagons for further supplies under escort of 2 Companies 2nd Battalion, the Buffs, 2 Companies 99th Regiment, 2 Companies Native Contingent, and a few mounted men, the whole under command of Major Coates, 99th Regiment.

By the 27th January, the day on which we first heard of the disaster at Isandhlana by a telegram from Sir Bartle Frere (no details however being given), the entrenchments had made considerable progress, all available men having been employed on them.

Major Barrow with his mounted men had also reconnoitred towards the Umhlatosi River and Intumeni, the Norwegian Mission Station, some 12 miles N.W. of us, which was to be the immediate destination of the 2nd Column.

About 9 A.M. on the 28th January, I received by special messenger a telegram from Lord Chelmsford, confirming the news sent me by Sir Bartle Frere. His Lordship was pleased to give me full liberty to act as I thought best in the interests of my column under the circumstances, and sanctioned my retiring, if I thought fit, either to some position nearer the Tugela, or even to the left bank of that river. I was to be prepared, however, if I held my position at Ekowe, to have the whole Zulu army down on me.

I at once assembled all my Staff and Company Officers and laid the position of affairs before them, and requested them to give me their opinions unreservedly. Some were for retiring, whilst others most strongly opposed any retrograde movement.

Personally I was in favour of retiring at first, as I believed, until further reinforcements could arrive from home, that the presence of every available soldier would be necessary in Natal to protect the colony from wholesale raids by the Zulus; but, on further reflection, I judged that if we continued to hold our forward position in the country—nearly 40 miles from the frontier—it might have a good moral effect and even afford protection to that part of the colony immediately behind us; at any rate we should be keeping a certain force of the enemy watching us, which could not therefore be available elsewhere.

Having satisfied myself that we were sufficiently supplied with ammunition for our present wants, it was finally decided to remain at Ekowe, and to fortify ourselves as strongly as possible.

The question of our food supply had of course been duly considered. The troops had started with 15 days' provisions, and most fortunately Colonel Ely's Column was now in sight, about 7 miles distant. I lost no time in acquainting that officer with the state of affairs, and I sent him several extra spans of oxen to help his wagons over the hilly road before him. Such was the state of the roads, however, after the constant rain which had fallen during many weeks past, that, notwithstanding the additional assistance, the last of Colonel Ely's wagons did not arrive until 12 o'clock that night, and he had to abandon eight. I sent oxen to bring them on the following morning, but meantime the contents had been looted by the Zulus.

In order still further to increase our food supply, and to add to the defensive power of the colony, I had already decided on sending back the whole of the mounted troops attached to my column, together with the remaining companies of the 2 Battalions Native Contingent. These troops left Ekowe about noon on the 28th, with wagons of course, and, as we afterwards learnt,

reached the Lower Tugela that night by cross country paths.

Our next care was to laager some of the wagons along the parapets in such a manner as to protect the men from the reverse and inflade fire to which in many places they would be exposed; all the other wagons were afterwards formed into a laager for the oxen under the fire of the Fort.

Pending the result of the stock taking of our food supply, which I had ordered, I now placed the garrison upon a reduced bread and grocery ration; but as a large number of slaughter cattle had been driven up with Colonel Ely's convoy, I increased the meat ration by $\frac{1}{2}$ lb.

Having reason to believe that the troops whom I had sent away had brought a certain quantity of private supplies with them, I had their wagons officially searched, and a quantity of food, medicines, and medical comforts were thus added to our stock, the two latter subsequently proving of the utmost value to us.

All articles of luxury, tobacco, matches, &c., I caused to be handed over to the Commissariat Department to be dealt with as I might afterwards determine; they were eventually sold by auction and fetched fabulous prices—matches were sold for 4s. a box, bottles of pickles for 15s., tobacco for 30s. per lb., in fact about £7 worth of things realized upwards of £100.

When I received the Commissariat report about our food, I found that we could not safely calculate upon our supplies lasting beyond the latter end of March, it having been found advisable, owing to the discovery of a large quantity of rotten biscuit and flour, to make a large deduction—10 per cent—in anticipation.

Fortunately the loss of these articles never reached this amount, and not only, as time went on, did we find our supplies holding out far better than we ever expected, but I felt enabled for a time to comply with the recommendation of my Senior Medical Officer to increase the bread ration if only temporarily. I did so for about ten days, and yet, nevertheless, such was the care exercised by the Commissariat Department to avoid waste, that with the reduced ration on which the troops were again placed, we should have been able to hold out till 10th April; a few things only, sugar, pepper, and preserved vegetables having run out.

With medicines we were not so fortunate, and long before we were relieved many of those most required were exhausted.

Our defences meantime were being perfected, and long before the end of February we were quite secure, and I feel sure could have repelled an attack by any number of Zulus.

For the description of Fort Ekowe I beg to refer to the paper by Captain Courtney, R.E., attached to this letter. Our sanitary arrangements were placed in the hands of the Quartermaster of the Buffs, and 99th Regiment. The former looked after the interior and the latter the exterior of the Fort and its immediate surroundings.

The water supply was fortunately excellent both in quality and quantity. The upper part of the stream gave us an abundant supply of drinking and cooking water, and along the lower portion of it Quartermaster Bateman, 99th Regiment, constructed excellent bathing places both for officers and men, which I am convinced contributed in no small degree to the preservation of our health.

The horses and cattle were watered in a separate stream.

An Infantry water picquet, assisted by a