

Several other gallant drivers tried, but were all killed, and I cannot get their names.

I have, &c.,
REDVERS BULLER,
 General.

From the General Commanding-in-Chief the Forces in South Africa to the Secretary of State for War.

Chieveley Camp,
 December 17, 1899.

SIR,
 I HAVE the honour to report that I moved off from Chieveley and Dornkop Spruit Camps at 4 A.M. on the 15th instant.

Force as in attached list.

I attach a copy of the orders that were by my direction issued by the General Officer Commanding Natal Field Force.

I enclose a reconnaissance sketch of the Colenso position.*

Colenso Bridge is the centre of a semicircle surrounded by hills, the crests of which dominate it by about 1,400 feet at a distance of about four and a half miles.

Near the bridge are four small lozenge-shaped, steep-sided, hog-backed, hills, each, as it is further from the river, being higher and longer than the next inner one. These hills, the first of which is known as Fort Wylie, were very strongly entrenched with well-built, rough, stone walls along every crest line that offered; in some cases there were as many as three tiers. It was a very awkward position to attack, but I thought that if I could effect a lodgment under cover of Fort Wylie, the other hills would to a great extent mask each other, and shell fire and want of water would clear them out in time.

All visible defences had been heavily shelled by eight Naval guns on the 13th and 14th, but though some of the defences were damaged and accurate ranges obtained, we failed to induce the enemy to disclose his own position, or to reply in any way to our fire.

My idea was to try and cross the Bridle Drift first; if we got over, the troops would move down the river and help the crossing at the main drift; if we did not get over, the troops there would contain all the enemy on the western side, and would so cover the flank of the attack on the main drift by the bridge.

General Hart advanced to the attack of the Bridle Drift, but did not find it. (I heard afterwards that a dam had been thrown below it, and the water made deep.) Watching his advance, I saw his troops pressing on into the salient loop of the river. I saw at once that if he got there he would be under a severe cross fire, and sent to tell him to recall them. In the interval, he had become heavily engaged, and I sent two battalions of General Lyttelton's Brigade and Colonel Parsons' Brigade Division, Royal Field Artillery (two batteries), to help extricate him.

This they did, and subsequently, as ordered, came to the right to support the main advance. At the same time General Hildyard was advancing on the bridge, and as I was proceeding in that direction to superintend the attack, and also to ascertain what Colonel Long's Brigade Division, which was very heavily engaged on the right, was doing, I received a message that he had been driven from his guns by superior Infantry fire.

I believed at the moment that the six Naval had shared the same fate, and I at once decided

that without guns it would be impossible for me to force the passage.

I directed General Hildyard to divert the right of his two leading battalions to the east of the railway and direct it upon the guns, his left battalion to advance on Colenso, but not to become too hotly engaged.

These orders were admirably carried out by the Royal West Surrey and the Devonshire Regiments, but Fort Wylie, which had been silenced by the fire of the 14th and 66th Batteries, was reoccupied, and the fire was so heavy that no troops could live in the open by the guns. At the first attempt to withdraw them, Captain Schofield, Royal Artillery, Captain Congreve, Rifle Brigade, and Lieutenant the Honourable F. Roberts, King's Royal Rifles, with Corporal Nurse, and Drivers H. Taylor, Young, Petts, Rockall, Lucas, and Williams, all of the 66th Battery, brought off two guns, but the enemy then found out what was being done, and such a deadly fire was kept up that although several attempts were made to cover the fatal 500 yards either horses or men, or both, were killed before they got to the guns.

A final most gallant attempt was made by Captain H. L. Reed, of the 7th Field Battery, who came down with three teams to see if he could help. He and five of the 13 men were wounded, and one killed, and 13 horses killed out of 22 before they got half-way up to the guns. After that I would not allow another attempt and the guns were abandoned.

I am making another representation regarding the Officers and men concerned in these attempts.

Fortunately the Naval guns had not reached the position taken up by the 14th and 66th Batteries when fire was opened; their drivers however bolted, and their oxen were stampeded, or killed; but by dint of hard work all the guns and the ammunition wagons were hauled out of range. All worked well, and Lieutenant Ogilvy, Her Majesty's ship "Tartar," and Gunner Wright, Her Majesty's ship "Terrible," particularly rendered excellent service. These guns, however, had been rendered immobile for the day.

During all this time, and throughout the day, the two 4.7-inch and four 12-pounder Naval guns of the Naval Brigade, and Durban Naval Volunteers, under Captain E. P. Jones, Royal Navy, were being admirably served and succeeded in silencing every one of the enemy's guns they could locate.

Colonel Long, Royal Artillery, has been dangerously wounded, and I am unable to obtain his explanations. His orders were to come into action covered by the 6th Brigade, which Brigade was not, as he knew, intended to advance on Colenso. I had personally explained to him where I wished him to come into action, and with the Naval guns only, as the position was not within effective range for his field guns. Instead of this he advanced with his batteries so fast that he left both his Infantry escort and his oxen-drawn Naval guns behind, and came into action under Fort Wylie, a commanding trebly entrenched hill, at a range of 1,200 yards and I believe within 300 yards of the enemy's rifle pits.

The men fought their guns like heroes and silenced Fort Wylie, but the issue could never have been in doubt, and gradually they were all shot down. I am told that Second Lieutenant Holford, 14th Field Battery, displayed particular gallantry when all were good.

After this, I directed a withdrawal to our camps. It was accomplished in good order. There was no pursuit, and the shell fire was

* Not printed.