

Total 33,809.

Colonial troops—

Cape Colony, mounted, 2,000.

Over sea, mounted, 1,385.

Total 3,385.

Cape Colony, Infantry Volunteers, 2,960.

Grand total 51,900 men and 150 guns.

To above may be added—

Royal Engineers, 2,000.

Army Service and other departmental corps, 4,278.

Sick, 2,118.

Grand total, including above, 60,296 men and 150 guns.

No. 2.

From Field-Marshal Lord Roberts to the Secretary of State for War.

Army Head-Quarters, South Africa,
Camp Jacobsdal,

My LORD, 16th February, 1900.

IN continuation of my letter No. 1, dated 6th February, 1900, I have the honour to report, for your Lordship's information, that I left Cape Town for the Modder River on the evening of that date, arriving at Lord Methuen's camp on the morning of the 8th. Before quitting the seat of Government I received a memorandum from the High Commissioner, in which Sir Alfred Milner reviewed the political and military situation, and laid stress on the possibility of a general rising among the disaffected Dutch population, should the Cape Colony be denuded of troops for the purpose of carrying on offensive operations in the Orange Free State. In reply I expressed the opinion that the military requirements of the case demanded an early advance into the enemy's country; that such an advance, if successful, would lessen the hostile pressure both on the northern frontier of the Colony and in Natal, that the relief of Kimberley had to be effected before the end of February,* and would set free most of the troops encamped on the Modder River, and that the arrival of considerable reinforcements from home, especially of Field Artillery, by the 19th February, would enable those points along the frontier which were weakly held to be materially strengthened. I trusted, therefore, that his Excellency's apprehensions would prove groundless. No doubt a certain amount of risk had to be run, but protracted inaction seemed to me to involve more serious dangers than the bolder course which I have decided to adopt.

Since the date of my former letter important events have occurred in Natal. As your Lordship is aware, Sir Redvers Buller telegraphed on the 29th January to the effect that he had discovered a new drift to the east of the Spion Kop, and that in view of the objections to further delay in relieving Ladysmith he proposed to make a fresh attempt by that route as soon as a battery of Horse Artillery had reached him from India, without waiting to see what effect my intended operations in the Orange Free State might produce on the force opposed to him.

On the 6th February I received a telegram from Sir Redvers Buller reporting that he had pierced the enemy's line, and could hold the hill which divided their position, but that to drive back the enemy on either flank, and thus give his own artillery access to the Ladysmith plain, 10 miles from Sir George White's position,

* I had enquired by heliograph and been informed by Lieutenant-Colonel Kekewich that Kimberley could not hold out longer than the end of February.

would cost him from 2,000 to 3,000 men, and success was doubtful. General Buller enquired if I thought that the chance of relieving Ladysmith was worth such a risk. On the same day I replied that Ladysmith must be relieved even at the cost anticipated. I urged Sir Redvers Buller to persevere, and desired him to point out to his troops that the honour of the Empire was in their hands, and to assure them that I had no doubt whatever of their being successful.

On the 9th February General Buller reported that he found himself not strong enough to relieve Ladysmith without reinforcements, and that, with the force at his disposal, he regarded the operation upon which he was engaged as impracticable.

As Sir Charles Warren confirms the views of Sir Redvers Buller, I have informed the latter that, though I have no wish to interfere with his dispositions, or to stop his harassing the Boers as much as possible, my original instructions must hold good.

I received reports on the 2nd February that parties of the enemy had been observed some 8 miles to the west of the railway between the Orange and Modder Rivers, their object apparently being either to injure the line or to get grazing for their horses and oxen. I therefore gave orders on the 3rd February for Major-General MacDonald with the Highland Brigade, two squadrons of the 9th Lancers, the 62nd Field Battery and No. 7 Field Company, Royal Engineers, to move from the Modder camp down the left bank of the Modder River and make a show of constructing a small field redoubt commanding the Koodoosberg Drift, distant about 17 miles from the camp. The object I had in view was to threaten the enemy's line of communication from the west of the railway to their position at Magersfontein, and also to lead the Boers to believe that I intended to turn their entrenchments from the left of the Modder River camp.

The troops marched early on the 4th, bivouacked for the night at Fraser's Drift, and reached Koodoosberg Drift at 2 p.m. on the 5th, the enemy's scouts being met with as soon as the cavalry approached the drift. The position was reconnoitred that afternoon, and on the morning of the 6th February work was begun on the redoubt, a site for which was chosen on the north or right bank of the stream in close proximity to the drift. The enemy, however, had now occupied in some strength a kopje to the north of the drift, whence the site of the redoubt was within artillery range, and it became necessary to dislodge them. After some desultory fighting the southern portion of the kopje was occupied by the Highland Brigade, and fighting continued throughout the day, both on the summit of the hill and between it and the river. As the number of the enemy was manifestly increasing, Major-General MacDonald thought it desirable to ask for the reinforcement which had been held in readiness to support him. This, consisting of two batteries of Horse Artillery and a Brigade of Cavalry, under Major-General Babington, marched from the camp at Modder to Koodoosberg along the northern bank of the river, and arrived at about 3 p.m. on the 7th. The fight which had recommenced at daybreak continued until nightfall, the enemy gradually falling back, and being followed up by the Horse Artillery and Cavalry.

It being evident that permanently to hold the Koodoosberg Drift would require a larger