

The Medical Staff under Major Faskally, although heavily taxed, worked splendidly.

I have, &c.,

E. H. DALGETY, Lieut.-Colonel,
Commanding Cape Mounted Riflemen.
Assistant Adjutant-General, 3rd Division,
Dewetsdorp, Forwarded.

E. G. BRABANT, Brigadier-General,
Colonial Division.
Jammersberg Drift,
29th April, 1900.

No. 12.

From Field Marshal Lord Roberts to the
Secretary of State for War.
Army Head-quarters, Pretoria,
19th June, 1900.

MY LORD,

I HAVE the honour to submit for your Lordship's information a report, dated 20th April, 1900, from Brigadier-General R. G. Broadwood, Commanding 2nd Cavalry Brigade, describing his withdrawal from Thabanchu and the engagement at Sannah's Post on the 30th and 31st March, 1900.

2. The reverse which occurred on the latter date, resulting in heavy casualties as well as the capture by the enemy of seven 12-pounder guns, the personnel of an entire battery of Royal Horse Artillery, and the convoy of the baggage and supplies accompanying Brigadier-General Broadwood's column, was most unfortunate, and it seems necessary to examine and weigh carefully the reasons to which it may be attributed.

It will be observed that when Brigadier-General Broadwood found his position at Thabanchu seriously threatened he directed his baggage to proceed to Sannah's Post, a distance of some 24 miles, and after successfully warding off the attack of the enemy on the Nek, he withdrew his troops from their positions and reached Sannah's Post at 3.30 A.M. During the night a party of Boers succeeded in establishing themselves, undetected, in a dry watercourse called the Koorra Spruit, some 2,000 yards west of Sannah's Post, at a point where the road to Bloemfontein crosses the watercourse. It was at this point that the disaster occurred.

3. I have thought it desirable to call on Lieutenant-Colonel Pilcher, commanding the 3rd Mounted Infantry Corps, who escorted the baggage from Thabanchu to Sannah's Post, to report what steps he took for the security of his bivouac on his arrival in camp. This Officer's report is appended, and I consider that, in view of the fact of his finding a body of our troops, equal in strength to the force under his own command, already in occupation of the Waterworks, he was not called upon to make special arrangements for the security of his camp, other than those which he might reasonably expect to find in existence on his arrival there. In addition to the guard on the camp, an Officer's patrol left camp before daylight, and proceeded some 10 miles to the east, towards Thabanchu. Two small patrols were despatched at the same time north and south of the camp, while a patrol of four men left the Waterworks about sunset for Boesman's Kop, a hill some distance from Sannah's Post on the Bloemfontein road, where a party of Mounted Infantry were stationed with orders to return between 3 A.M. and 5 A.M. the following day. On the morning of the 31st March this patrol was unable to reach Sannah's Post, owing to the Boers having occupied the Koorra Spruit watercourse during the night and it does not appear that the men composing

it made any attempt to give the alarm by firing their rifles or by any other means, on discovering the presence of the Boers in ambush.

4. After fighting for 10 hours on the previous day, and after a trying night march of 24 miles and a rest of only 2½ hours, Brigadier-General Broadwood found himself at daylight on the 31st March under the fire of the enemy's guns from the hills to the east of Sannah's Post, at a range to which his Horse Artillery guns could not reply. He thereupon, very judiciously, arranged to withdraw his force out of fire. Theoretically speaking, he should unquestionably have detained his transport until he had detailed a suitable advance guard, or thrown out scouts in front and on the flanks of the column, but my experience leads me to believe that it was impossible for him to restrain the followers and baggage from streaming away to the rear when they unexpectedly found themselves exposed to a heavy shell fire.

This is precisely what occurred. The fugitives and the leading wagons pressed on so rapidly that they outstripped the scouts of the advanced guard, and they had entered the watercourse, and had been permitted by the Boers to cross to the other side of the Koorra Spruit, before the Mounted Infantry had been able to get in front of the column and take its proper place.

5. In my telegram No. 363, dated 31st March, 1900, I stated that the Boers had concealed themselves so well in the spruit that our leading scouts passed over the drift without discovering them. Subsequent investigation has proved, however, that such was not the case, but that the sequence of events was as indicated as above.

6. As regards the point raised in paragraph 9 of the accompanying report, I consider that Lieutenant-General Sir H. Colville would have done better if, on his arrival with the 9th Division at Boesman's Kop, he had proceeded at once to the scene of the engagement, and ascertained personally how matters stood, before deciding on the flank movement towards Waterval Drift.

7. After a very careful consideration of the circumstances, I am of opinion that the disaster is mainly due to the failure of the patrol from Boesman's Kop to warn their comrades of the ambush which had been prepared during the night, and that no specific blame can be attributed to the General Officer Commanding the force.

I am further of opinion that Brigadier-General Broadwood displayed presence of mind and gallantry in his endeavours to retrieve the disaster and extricate his troops. In the example he set to his comrades under peculiarly trying circumstances he acted up to the high reputation he had already gained in the Sudan, and in command of a Cavalry Brigade in South Africa, and that reputation has been added to by the distinguished and admirable manner in which he has subsequently exercised his command during the advance from Bloemfontein to Pretoria.

8. The submission of this despatch has been considerably delayed, but the delay has been an unavoidable one, as I considered it undesirable to submit it until I had had an opportunity of personally enquiring into the case from the principal actors in it. Owing to the manner in which the Cavalry has been employed on detached duties this has not been possible till the Army reached Pretoria.

9. In conclusion I am glad to say that on