

From Lord Kitchener to the Secretary of State
for War, War Office.

Pretoria,

Sir, 18th October, 1901.

In connection with my despatch, dated 8th October, 1901, I beg to forward herewith reports describing the defence of Itala and Fort Prospect on the 26th, and the repulse of the attack upon Colonel Kekewich's camp at Moedwill, on the 30th September, 1901.

I have, &c.,
KITCHENER, General,
Commanding-in-Chief, South Africa.

Report on the Action at Itala Mount, Zululand,
on the 26th September, 1901.

Forces.

1. Our force—
 - 2 guns, Royal Field Artillery, 69th Battery.
 - 3 companies, 5th Division, Mounted Infantry Battalion (300 rifles).
 - 1 Maxim.

Boer Forces.—Strength, 1,800 to 2,000, under the command of Commandant-General Louis Botha, Generals C. Botha, Opperman, and Emmett, Commandants Scholtz, H. J. Potgeiter, Danhausser and others.

Intelligence.

2. Information came in on the afternoon of the 25th that two large commandos had reinforced Danhausser, and that their intention was to attack my camp that night. About 8 p.m. further reports came in that a large force had left Babanango by the west road, and was marching on the Itala. Another large force was moving to cross at White's Drift, east of Babanango.

Disposition of our Forces.

3. Ours.—The garrison at once proceeded to take up their positions. I sent 80 Mounted Infantry, under Lieutenant Lefroy, 1st Bn. Royal Dublin Fusiliers, and Lieutenant Kane, 1st Bn. South Lancashire Regiment, to occupy the highest point of the Itala, about 1 mile from the camp.

Disposition of Boer Forces.

Boers.—About 800 men, under General C. Botha and Commandant Scholtz, attacked the Itala from the west; General Opperman, with about 500, attacked the camp from the south-east; Commandant Potgeiter, with 600, attacked camp from the north. A strong detached force of 200 men was sent along road to M'Kandhla to hold the ridge where the Mel-mouth and M'Kandhla roads cross; at the same time a force of about 500, under Commandant Grobelaar, proceeded to Prospect Post 15 miles east of Itala, and attacked it at 6 a.m. on the 26th inst.

Small parties of Boers searched all the surrounding country for stock.

The Action.

4. At 12 midnight, 25th and 26th, rapid fire was heard from the advance post on the top of the Itala, and continued for about 15 minutes, when it suddenly ceased for half hour. It then recommenced and continued for half hour, when all firing from the top ceased. A verbal report was received about 2 a.m. from this post that they had been surrounded by about 500, who rushed it, and that all were either killed or taken prisoners. This was true to a great degree, but many men refused to surrender, escaped down the south side of the mountain and fought it out the whole day, doing considerable execution from the number of dead Boers found on that side.

The action was now general all round the camp, the fire terrific, and continued without cessation till 4 a.m., the Boers during this phase charged close up to the trenches, many dead were picked up 2 and 3 yards from them; at 4 a.m. the fire suddenly ceased. At dawn, 6 a.m., thinking the Boers had cleared, the native scouts were ordered out to clear up the situation, and Lieutenant Fielding, Royal Army Medical Corps, proceeded up the hill to look for wounded, suddenly the fire broke out with increased energy and continued from that time till 7.30 p.m. (19 hours). Lieutenant Fielding could not return and was detained by the Boers. The whole area of the camp was swept by bullets from every direction, and our casualties became heavy, during the action the men were practically without food or water, and it became evident that it was a question of ammunition which would decide the day, officers and men had been ordered to regulate their fire by the Boers, and not to waste. When the action ceased there only remained about 100 rounds per man, all reserve was expended. The night was very bright, there being nearly a full moon, and the guns came into action during the first phase, making excellent practice on the kopjes 1,100 yards north and ridge 3,400 yards north, materially helped to keep down the fire. At dawn when the attack recommenced they continued to fire for half-hour, when they became the target for every rifle, so I ordered them to cease and the men to take cover. The fire from the guns and Maxim killed and wounded a great number; Kaffirs reported Boers commandeered them to carry away dead and wounded, and this they were doing all that night and next day. The officer in command of the guns, Lieutenant Herbert, Royal Field Artillery, and four men were severely wounded.

Reasons for my Decision to Evacuate Itala.

5. When the firing ceased at 7.30 p.m., I waited an hour, and then sent native scouts to reconnoitre, they reported that all Boers had cleared; from personal observation at dusk large bodies of the enemy were observed retiring across the border, all going north and north-east. I decided that owing to my heavy casualties in men and horses, the exhausted condition of the force, and want of ammunition, to retire to M'Kandhla. No information of assistance was received until 4.30 p.m. the 27th instant at M'Kandhla. The 10-mule wagons were loaded with as much as they could carry, and the force moved off at 12 midnight, arriving at M'Kandhla 4 a.m. unmolested. There were left at Itala Lieutenant Hyslop and 20 men unarmed, also Chief Veterinary-Surgeon Probyn to look after wounded, collect and bury dead. Sufficient tents to form a field hospital were also left. Lieutenant Fielding, Royal Army Medical Corps, was released, and came into camp shortly after the column had marched off.

General Remarks.

6. The Boers shot harmless natives, stripped and robbed the dead and wounded. They used explosive bullets, and some of the dangerous wounds are due to them.

No helio communication could be attempted, and native scouts could not get through.

The native scouts employed by me under Guide Collins, Intelligence Guide, brought in early, ample, and accurate information. During my stay in Zululand they have been constantly in the Boer laagers, and it is to their being able to so quickly transmit information that we were quite prepared when the attack began. I should