

From Brigadier-General T. D. Baker, C.B., Commanding 2nd Infantry Brigade, Kabul Field Force, to the Chief of the Staff, Kabul Field Force.

THE ENGAGEMENT ON THE HEIGHTS HELD BY THE ENEMY ON THE 6TH INSTANT COVERING KABUL.

SIR, *Kabul, October 10, 1879.*

I HAVE the honour to forward, for the information of the Major-General commanding the Kabul Expeditionary Force, a report of the military operations which by his orders were carried out under my command on the 6th instant.\*

As you are aware I was directed by the Major General commanding at 9 o'clock A.M. on that day to proceed that morning with the Force as per margin,† to occupy the Khurd Kabul or Sang-i-Nawishta Pass about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  miles in advance of our encampment that day on the south side of the village of Charasiab, as information had been received that there was a probability of the enemy occupying that position with a view of disputing our advance on Kabul. About half-an-hour subsequently I received further instructions from the Major-General Commanding to the effect that I was to move off, with all expedition, as soon as the troops were provided with transport for the conveyance of their reserve ammunition, a report having then reached Head Quarters that the Cavalry patrols of the 9th Lancers, 12th Bengal Cavalry, and 5th Punjab Cavalry, which were proceeding in the direction of the pass, had been checked by the enemy's fire, at a point about two miles from camp, and at about  $\frac{1}{2}$  a mile on the Charasiab side of the Kotal or height, named Khairabad, the exact position of which will be subsequently shown in illustrating the ground over which the troops advanced, and that of the position which was held by the enemy. It will suffice for me here to say that vast numbers of the enemy were at the time of the receipt of this report seen on the heights, and it was clearly evident that the position must have been occupied by them during the night, as field artillery was pushed forward through the pass, and occupied the Kotal about a mile in advance thereof, and two mountain batteries were in position on the heights.

That morning a party composed of half a battalion of the 92nd Highlanders, under the command of Major White, the 23rd Pioneers, under the command of Colonel Currie, and two guns of No. 2 Mountain Battery, had been detailed to proceed towards the pass, with a view of placing the road in a state of repair fit for wheels; but as soon as it was ascertained that the pass and the heights above were occupied in force by the enemy, these troops, when about a mile from camp, were halted and placed under my orders.

From the nature of the ground selected by the enemy as their position to oppose our advance on Kabul, and which was held by them in considerable strength, both as regards artillery and infantry, it was clearly evident that the only mode of successfully attacking the position with a minimum loss was by making an outflanking movement by my left over undulating ground, and so turning the heights held by them, which were otherwise almost unassailable in front. I accordingly disposed of my force; my object being to engage as far as feasible the enemy's attention on that flank, while carrying out that

movement; or in other words using my right as a pivot on which to swing round my left flank after beating back the enemy in my immediate front, and on my outer flank; and so taking the enemy's position in reverse and enfilade; which movement, as will appear hereafter, was most successfully carried out by the troops under my command.

The ground over which the troops had to advance represented a front of from two to three miles, and consisted of sandy, barren, undulating hills, forming a series of positions which could be held, and on the flanks were situated rugged rocky heights, varying from 1,000 to 1,800 feet in height above the plain which were most difficult of ascent; while the main position occupied by the enemy was about 2,200 feet in height, and commanded the whole front, and was, except at certain points, inaccessible.

In making the disposition of the troops,‡ I determined of course on retaining the main portion of the force on the left, and detailed for the right two squadrons of Cavalry composed of detachments of the 9th Lancers, 12th Bengal Cavalry, and 5th Punjab Cavalry, under the command of Major Hammond, of the latter regiment. One-half of G-3rd Battery Field Artillery, under the command of Major Sidney Parry, one-half of the 92nd Highlanders under the command of Major Hay, and 100 men of the 23rd Pioneers under the command of Captain Paterson, the whole of which details being under the command of Major White, 92nd Highlanders.

The first action taken by me was to direct the 92nd Highlanders to push forward with all expedition and to gain possession of the outskirts of the village of Charasiab on the north-east side, as news then reached me that the enemy were endeavouring to occupy that village, and the general instructions which I communicated with regard to their subsequent movements were that they were to advance if feasible to within artillery range of the enemy's main position, but were not to proceed further until the outflanking movement had thoroughly developed itself, and when the enemy was on the retreat the Cavalry was to push through the pass and pursue. These instructions were carried out in a most successful manner by Major White, and he moreover assisted me greatly by detaching two companies of the 92nd to his left, which, under the able command of Captain Oxley, succeeded in turning one of the hills, which was occupied by the enemy on my immediate right front; but of these movements I will enter more into detail in a subsequent part of my report.

The main body of the force under my own immediate command consisted of the following troops:—

4 Guns No. 2 Mountain Battery, under the command of Captain Swinley.§

2 Gatling guns, under the command of Captain Broadfoot.

1 Company of Sappers and Miners, under the command of Lieutenant Nugent, R.E.

The 72nd Highlanders, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Clarke.

The 23rd Pioneers, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Currie.

200 of the 5th Punjab Infantry, under the command of Captain Hall, which was subsequently supplemented by an additional 100 men of that

\* Sketch of ground herewith, executed by Lieutenant Spratt, R.E. Deputy Assistant Quartermaster-General.

† 72nd Highlanders; No. 2 Mountain Battery, 2 guns; Gatling, 2 guns; G-3 Royal Artillery, 2 guns; No. 7 Company Sappers and Miners;  $\frac{1}{2}$  Battalion 5th Goorkhas.

‡ Strength—Cavalry, 20 British, 120 Native; Royal Artillery, 84 British; 92nd Highlanders, 284 British; 23rd Pioneers, 100 Native. Total—388 British; 220 Native.

§ Fighting strength of this Force being 702 British soldiers, and 1293 Native soldiers.