



SUPPLEMENT
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War Office, March 10, 1881.

THE following Despatch has been received from the General Officer Commanding, Natal and Transvaal, to the Secretary of State for War.

(Received 8th March, 1881.)

SIR,
*Army Head-Quarters, Mount Prospect,
Natal, February 1, 1881.*

1. I HAVE already, from time to time, forwarded to you all information that has reached me regarding the Boer outbreak, which, commencing with acts of resistance to the Civil Power, culminated in the Proclamation of the South African Republic on the 16th December, 1880, and the attack on the detachment of the 94th Regiment on the 20th of that month. I have also reported to you the measures taken to organize and concentrate a force with which to attempt the relief of the besieged garrisons of the Transvaal, and the re-establishment of Her Majesty's authority in that province.

2. On the 10th January, I left Maritzburg for Newcastle to personally supervise the formation and equipment of the columns collecting for this purpose under the command of Colonel Deane; and on the 19th and 20th the last detachments, consisting of drafts just landed from England, 2 field guns, manned by gunners from the Garrison Battery at Cape Town, and a Naval Detachment, kindly placed at my disposal by Commodore Richards, C.B., A.D.C., reached Newcastle.

3. The force then assembled at Newcastle consisted of—

2 guns N-5 R.A., properly horsed and equipped.

2 field guns, manned by a detachment, 10-7 R.A., Garrison Battery, and drawn partly by horses, partly by oxen.

2 7-pr. guns, drawn by mules, and manned by men of the 60th Rifles, under direction of Artillery non-commissioned officers.

1 mounted squadron, formed of details of King's Dragoon Guards, Army Service Corps, and men of the 58th and 60th Regiments.

Head-quarters and 5 Companies 58th Regiment.

Head-quarters and 5 Companies 60th Rifles.

A draft of 80 men of 2-21st Royal Scots Fusiliers.

A Naval Brigade of 120 men with 2 Gatlings and 3 rocket tubes.

A detachment Natal Mounted Police.

In all 1,146 infantry, 191 cavalry, 6 guns and 2 Gatlings.

4. The column thus formed was small in numbers, and somewhat heterogeneous in composition. But no further reinforcements could reach me for at least three weeks; and having regard to the effect of such delay on Pretoria, where the loyal population has had to take refuge in the camp, and is undergoing all the miseries of a close siege, and on Potchefstroom, where the garrison is scantily supplied, and can scarcely hold out much longer, I decided to move forward at once with the force at my disposal.

5. Regarding the Boer forces opposed to me, it was difficult to get reliable information. Captain Lambert, 2-21st Royal Scots Fusiliers, who had been for some time a prisoner at the Boer Head-quarters at Heidelberg, estimated their numbers at 16,000; and similar estimates were current in Natal and the Free State. From other, and what appeared to me more accurate information, however, I was inclined to estimate their forces at between 5,000 and 7,000, of whom about 2,000 were directly opposed to me on the border, under their Commandant-General P. J. Joubert. These numbers were necessarily liable to considerable fluctuation, as, day by day, fresh men arrived, or others went to their homes. The Boers were without artillery, but all mounted and armed, amply supplied with ammunition, and generally excellent shots.

6. From Newcastle three roads lead into the Transvaal—one to the right going to Utrecht (with a branch to Wakkerstroom), one in the centre to Wakkerstroom direct, and thence to Standerton or Lydenburg, and one on the left direct to Standerton, joining the Wakkerstroom-Standerton road at a place called Meek's. Utrecht lies to the east of and below the Drakensberg range and plateau; but the roads to Wakkerstroom and Standerton both cross this range at elevations of from 5,000 to 6,000 feet. The pass