

We looked down upon the whole position of Laing's Nek, and saw three large Boer wagon laagers in rear of it, at 2,000 to 3,000 yards to north-west; and a fourth about 1,500 yards to west of us. Shortly after 6 A.M., the Boers began a desultory fire. They inspanned their oxen in laagers, and stood ready to go. At the same time, reinforcements, mounted and on foot, kept coming up. We counted 160 men in one party alone. These all worked up skilfully under cover till within 600 yards from the brow, and then kept up a rapid fire on us. Our men fired very slowly and steadily, to save ammunition. About 10.15 A.M., Colonel Stewart and I went with the General to (11), where Commander Romilly stood, to arrange to start the sailors on an intrenchment at (1). Commander Romilly was shot between us by men from below, firing from the south-west. Finding the ground so exposed, the General did not give the order to intrench. The fire somewhat slackened till 11.30 A.M. By this time the Boers had advanced up the steep slopes, which were unseen from our shooting line. They were massed under cover, and then moved up rapidly. Some 15 or 20 of our men were now sent up the rocky peak (6) on our extreme left, and a few sailors were sent to (1) to guard out rear there. Colonel Stewart and myself, and others took the rest of the reserves and reinforced the shooting line about 12 noon, but not finding room for these supports whence they could shoot down the brow, we withdrew and posted them on a second ridge (7, 4) about 12.15 to 12.30 P.M. The sailors at (1) now came running down, saying they were attacked from the east. We sent them back to do the best they could. As the Boers closed General Colley was at (9), Colonel Stewart next him, and I was on the left, towards (7); all in the shooting line. We had succeeded in getting the men to fix bayonets. The attack advanced, firing so rapidly we could only see their rifles through the smoke as they crept up. Ours fired repeatedly, and fell fast. They began to retreat and make for the last ridge (12) about 12.45 P.M. Colonel Stewart ran back to rally them, and failing to do so was returning to General Colley when the latter fell. As the Boers came up to the rocky ridge the remainder of our men fell back after the others.

I now went after our retreating men, walking from the Hollow towards the point (11), feeling too exhausted to catch up the men; as I was near the hollow I saw General Colley, with a few men, moving back near the wells. He turned round to face the enemy, and fell shot through the head by fire from the rocky ridge which we had just left. When I got between (11 and 1) our men were passing over the ridge (1 and 2).

Fresh firing parties now opened on me from below (6), and in seeking shelter I went down the precipitous hill side, 200 or 300 feet.

About midnight of the 26th-27th, a 3rd Company of the 60th, with a small ammunition column, destined by General Colley to come up to us on the afternoon of the 27th, joined the Company at "Y"; there they intrenched. An order was sent from camp about 2 P.M. on the 27th for these companies to retire; after leaving their intrenchments, about 3 P.M.; they were attacked by Boers advancing from Majuba; but were in part covered by the two companies of the 60th under Imguela, and by a troop of dismounted Hussars (15th) sent up from camp; all these troops retreated without much loss.

About 1.30 to 2 P.M.; when our retreat was ascertained, 2 guns, and 2 companies of the 92nd

were sent out about a mile north of the camp, so as to check pursuit.

By these means the retreat was partly covered.

I am informed the "assembly" sounded in camp at 3 P.M., and the garrison went into intrenchments.

Throughout the movement, and during the whole of the action, Colonel Stewart seconded the General with great activity and coolness. Commander Romilly, R.N., Major Hay, 92nd Regiment, and Captain Morris, 58th Regiment, all gave him unremitting support.

The following were conspicuous for gallant conduct, viz. :—

Lieutenant Hamilton, 92nd Regiment, and Lieutenant Lucy, 58th Regiment; both were exposed to severe fire during seven hours. Lieutenants Wright and McDonald, 92nd Regiment, behaved with the greatest coolness and courage, and to the last made every effort to turn the course of events. Captain McGregor, 92nd Regiment, exposed himself constantly with the men of his regiment, in addition to performing his duties as Aide-de-Camp. Corporal Farmer, of the Army Hospital Corps, held a white flag over the wounded as the Boers closed near the wells, when he was shot through the arm; he called out he had "another," and held up the flag with his other arm till shot through that also.

Nothing could exceed the devotion of Drs. Landon and Cornish, both of whom lost their lives in the discharge of their duties.

The conduct of the 92nd was excellent throughout; many whose names I cannot recall, or did not know, behaved with coolness, and their shooting was uniformly steady.

I venture to submit that the causes that led to our failure were the following, as regards the fight :—

- (1.) The slopes below the brow of the plateau were too steep to be searched by our fire, and cover existed up to the brow.
- (2.) The rocky ridge we occupied in second line, though the best we had time to hold, did not cover more than 50 yards to its front, as the plateau rolled continuously to the brow.
- (2A.) The men were too exhausted to intrench and hardly fit to fight.
- (3.) When the Boers gained the last ridge ours had to descend almost impassable slopes, and many were shot in doing so.

It is only right I should mention that owing, I presume, to its being constantly patrolled by Boer scouts, the Majuba had not been reconnoitred beforehand. I must also add, that although I saw a few men very short of ammunition, my belief is that many had 20 to 40 rounds remaining before the final attack.

I have, &c.,

T. FRASER, Major, R.E.,
D.A.Q.M.G.

P.S.—I was unable to rejoin at camp till 2 A.M. on the morning of Tuesday, having come in over Laing's Nek.

The following sketches are attached :—

- (1.) A general plan 2" = 1 mile.
- (2.) A sketch of hill top.
- (3.) Sketch by Lieut. Hamilton, 92nd Regiment, after his wound.
- (4.) Outline of Majuba.
- (5.) Outline of ground facing camp, including Laing's Nek.