



SUPPLEMENT
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A DESPATCH, of which the following is a copy, has been received by the Secretary of State for War :—

From Major-General Sir G. Graham, Commanding Expeditionary Force, to the Secretary of State for War.

*Camp, Suakim,
March 15, 1884.*

MY LORD,
BY my last Despatch, posted on 11th March, the operations of this Army were related up to the morning of that day.

At six P.M. on the 11th instant, the Artillery and Infantry advanced to Baker's zeriba, about 8½ miles, reaching it about 10.30 P.M. There was a bright moon, and the night air soft and pleasant, so that the march did not distress the men, although it was hard work for the Naval Brigade.

The strength of the force was as follows :—

- Royal Artillery—
- 6th Batt. 1st Brig., Scottish Division, 7-pr. camel battery, under Major Lloyd—8 guns, 7 Officers, 100 non-commissioned officers and men, with 66 camels, carrying 90 rounds per gun.
- M Batt. 1st Brig., 9-pr. battery, under Major Holley—4 guns, 3 Officers, 66 non-commissioned officers and men, with 52 mules, carrying 86 rounds per gun.
- 1st Infantry Brigade, under Brigadier-General Buller, V.C., K.C.M.G., C.B. :—
- Royal Engineers, under Major Todd, R.E.—5 Officers, 57 non-commissioned officers and men.
- 3rd King's Royal Rifles—19 Officers, 546 non-commissioned officers and men.
- 1st Gordon Highlanders—23 Officers, 689 non-commissioned officers and men.
- 2nd Royal Irish Fusiliers—17 Officers, 326 non-commissioned officers and men.
- 2nd Infantry Brigade, under Major-General Davis :—
- 1st Royal Highlanders*—19 Officers, 604 non-commissioned officers and men.

* Already in zeriba.

1st York and Lancaster—14 Officers, 421 non-commissioned officers and men.

Royal Marine Artillery and Light Infantry—14 Officers, 464 non-commissioned officers and men.

General total of force of Artillery and Infantry, 116 Officers and 3,216 non-commissioned officers and men.

The troops left in camp and garrison at Suakim consisted of the Cavalry Brigade and Mounted Infantry under Brigadier-General Stewart, with orders to join Infantry early next morning, and of the following details left to protect camp and town :—

100 Royal Marines in the fort guarding the town, with five guns in position.

Sick and weakly men left in charge of the camp, the tents being left standing.

I appointed Lieutenant-Colonel Gordon, Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, Commandant of the Base, under the orders of Admiral Hewett.

At daybreak the Cavalry and Mounted Infantry watered at Suakim, and joined the force at Baker's zeriba about seven A.M. Their strength was as follows :—

10th Hussars—16 officers, 235 non-commissioned officers and men.

19th Hussars—19 officers, 343 non-commissioned officers and men.

Mounted Infantry—6 officers, 118 non-commissioned officers and men.

Total mounted troops, 41 officers, 696 non-commissioned officers and men.

On arrival I at once sent the Mounted Infantry to the front accompanied by Colonel Ardagh as Intelligence Officer.

About ten A.M. it was reported to me that the enemy was in force some six miles distant. Accordingly I ordered the force to advance as soon as the men had had their dinners, and got in movement about one P.M. The afternoon was hot, and frequent halts were necessary. About five P.M. the Cavalry scouts came in and I received a report in writing from the Officer that the enemy was advancing to attack in force. Accordingly I

at once formed up the troops in a defensive position on a favourable piece of ground having a clear space in front, and as there was now barely an hour of daylight left I directed the Engineers and pioneers of battalions to form a zeriba around the camp by cutting down the prickly mimosa bushes which grew plentifully about.

About six P.M. the Cavalry with Mounted Infantry were sent back to Baker's zeriba with instructions to bring in the convoy that had been previously signalled for.

About half-past six P.M. this convoy arrived safely, consisting of 245 camels carrying two days' supplies of water for men, 4,400 rations, forage for 1,200 horses, and reserve ammunition.

Before this the enemy had fired a few rifle shots at us and had shown in some numbers on a ridge about 1,000 to 1,200 yards distant. By way of checking this, and to show the power of our guns, I ordered out two of the 9-pounders under Major Holley, R.A., and fired four rounds of shrapnel, two of which burst with great accuracy. Captain Rolfe, R.N., also opened with a Gardner gun and the enemy disappeared.

About ten P.M. Captain Rolfe informed me that he had just returned from an expedition to the front, where he had been to see the effect of our fire. He had found one or two dead bodies, and had come across some of the enemy's sentries fast asleep. Further back the natives were shouting and dancing around fires.

About a quarter to one P.M. there was an alarm and the enemy opened a distant dropping fire, which continued throughout the night, causing but few casualties, but disturbing the men's rest.

I had two of Naval Brigade machine guns run out, but as the range was (by interval between flash and sound) estimated at 1,400-1,500 yards, and no men showed themselves, it seemed to me better to treat the enemy's fire with silence, in preference to making an inefficient reply.

Our casualties were one man killed, York and Lancaster; one Officer and four men wounded, besides two camel-drivers and some horses struck.

About 7 A.M. the Cavalry arrived, and at 7.30 Brigadier-General Stewart ordered out the Mounted Infantry to feel the enemy.

There was a native with us who had lately been a prisoner in Osman Digna's camp, and who informed me that the bulk of their force would be in a deep khor or dry watercourse, the sides of which would serve as an intrenchment. I therefore directed the advance to be made to the left of this position, where the ground rose a little, and from whence I hoped to be able to sweep the ravine with Artillery fire before attacking.

The advance was made by the two brigades in direct echelon of brigade squares from the left.

The 2nd Brigade was in the following formation:—On the left flank, four companies of 1st Royal Highlanders, in open column of companies; on front face, three companies of 1st Royal Highlanders, and, at an interval of 30 yards, three companies of 1st York and Lancaster; on right flank, three companies of 1st York and Lancaster; the Royal Marines forming the rear face of square. Inside the square were the guns of the Naval Brigade, ready to run out where required. The 9-pr. battery, with transport animals, moved in rear of the right front of the square.

The 2nd Brigade advanced from the place of formation about half-past eight A.M., and, owing to some delay in getting the 1st Brigade forward, were somewhat further in advance than I had intended when they first came in contact with the enemy.

This occurred about nine A.M., when a large

number suddenly appeared from the edge of a ravine in the immediate front of the brigade. These were soon cleared off; the Royal Highlanders distinguishing themselves by the gallant manner in which they cheered and charged up to the edge of the ravine; but at this moment a more formidable attack came from another direction, and a large body of natives, coming in one continuous stream, charged with reckless determination, utterly regardless of all loss, on the right hand corner of the square formed by the 1st York and Lancaster. The Brigade fell back in disorder, and the enemy captured the guns of the Naval Brigade, which, however, were locked by officers and men, who stood by them to the last.

When first coming into action, the 9-pr. battery of four guns, under Major Holley, R.A., had been ordered outside the square on the right flank, and, when the disordered retirement took place in the 2nd Brigade, this battery was for a time unprotected by infantry, and exposed to the assault of the enemy, now coming on in crowds. Yet Officers and men stood firmly to their guns, raking the advancing enemy with case, which told with deadly effect.

The 1st Brigade was attacked about the same time, but stood firm, and the Cavalry moved up to protect the flank of the 2nd Brigade, which was soon rallied, and advanced to retake the guns of the Naval Brigade.

The zeriba was also threatened, but the little garrison stood to its arms and drove the enemy back.

After this there no more serious fighting, and the enemy retreated sullenly, making an occasional stand, towards the camp and village of Tamai, which was occupied by the 1st Brigade, about 11.40 A.M., when I despatched a telegram to Admiral Hewett announcing the victory.

The 2nd Brigade held the heights above the springs where the Cavalry watered. Ambulances and mule cacolets were sent for to bring away the dead and wounded, all being brought into the zeriba occupied the previous night, where tents and all necessary medical requirements had already been brought up. The Cavalry returned again to Baker's zeriba.

The night was undisturbed by any fire from the enemy, but voices were heard shouting and wailing from the battlefield.

On the morning of the 14th I sent the Cavalry on at once to the watering-place, where piquets of mounted Infantry were posted on the heights. The enemy offered no opposition beyond sending a few dropping shots, which were replied to by selected marksmen.

The whole force was moved out except the Naval Brigade, and the 1st Infantry Brigade crowned the heights above Osman's camp and village, whilst a fatigue party were employed collecting the ammunition preparatory to firing the huts. An escaped Egyptian soldier, one of the garrison of Tokar, informed me of a gun being there, but only the carriage could be found, which was destroyed, together with large quantities of ammunition.

After the men's dinners the retirement commenced, the Cavalry going straight to Suakim, leaving only a squadron to cover the Infantry, who marched to Baker's zeriba.

The advanced zeriba had been cleared. 200 sailors of the fleet, who had been promptly sent by Admiral Hewett, and two Companies of the 1st Royal Highlanders, together with the ambulance and mule cacolets, being employed to carry the wounded.

On the 15th the whole force was again concentrated at Suakim.

In reviewing the operations of the force since landing at Suakim, I beg to record my opinion that the troops of all arms have behaved admirably.

There has been no crime and no grumbling, even all through the severe toil of the disembarkation, and of the march in the waterless desert. The absence of scares or panic among the troops during the nights, and especially their silence during the trying ordeal of a dropping fire on the night preceding the battle, all showed a sense of discipline and confidence worthy of the best troops. There was but a temporary check in one portion of the force during the action of Tamai, and for that many reasons can be given. At the moment of receiving the attack the front face of the square of the 2nd Brigade was slightly disordered, owing to the gallant rush of the Royal Highlanders in charging the enemy to the top of the ravine.

For this disorder I am to some extent personally responsible, as the charge took place under my eyes, and with my approval. My own observations of the attack were made from the right front angle, formed by the two half battalions of the 1st York and Lancaster, where I posted myself as soon as I saw the enemy's attack, and it was here the main rush came.

It is the habit of these Arabs to attack the angles of squares, as they know that least fire can be brought to bear on them from these points.

As the 9-pr. battery was on the right, the sailors' guns were on the left, but I at once sent for them to meet this attack from the right. The Arabs, however, gave no time for further arrangements, but, throwing themselves with desperate determination upon the angle of the square, broke it, carrying all before them. There were many attempted rallies among the York and Lancaster, and at one time I was almost surrounded by the enemy, one of whom got over my horse's quarter.

In rear of the square were the Royal Marines, than whom there can be no finer troops, and on whom I had calculated as a reserve in the last emergency. Such, however, was the sudden nature of the disorder, and the impetuosity of the rush, that the Royal Marines were for a few minutes swept back, and mixed up in the general confusion.

Yet, I submit, there was no panic among the men; they had been surprised, attacked suddenly, and driven back by a fanatical and determined enemy, who came on utterly regardless of loss, and who were, as I have since learned, led by their bravest chiefs. As soon as the men had had time to think they rallied and reformed. This check affected only the 2nd Brigade. The remainder of the force, the Cavalry, the Royal Artillery, and 1st Brigade were firm and perfectly in hand, repulsing all attacks, and co-operating to assist the 2nd Brigade in driving back the enemy, who suffered tremendously for his temporary success, and never charged home again that day.

Our loss was very grievous, many brave men of the Royal Highlanders and York and Lancaster devoting themselves to certain death in noble efforts to maintain the honour of their régiments.

The Naval Brigade, too, fought desperately for their guns, three Officers and seven men being killed beside them; but they did not abandon them till they were locked, so that the enemy could not turn them against us.

Many acts of the highest personal courage have come to my notice, and I propose bringing forward at a later period the names of Officers and men who distinguished themselves on this occasion, and during the operations subsequent to the landing at Suakim.

I have, &c.,

GERALD GRAHAM, Major-General,
Commanding Expeditionary Force.

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