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From Field-Marshal Lord Roberts to the Secretary of State for War.

SIR, February 20, 1901.

I HAVE the honour to submit for your information a Despatch, dated Camp Springfield, 8th February, 1900, from General Sir Redvers Buller, Commanding in Natal, giving an account of the operations between the 25th January and the 7th February. I regret that, through some mistake, the despatch was not forwarded to you at the time.

I have, &c.,
ROBERTS, F.-M.

Camp Springfield,
February 8, 1900.

SIR, I HAVE the honour to report that on the 25th ultimo, as already reported, I decided it was desirable to withdraw my force from the west of Spion Kop. While they had been there, the enemy had very considerably strengthened his right, so that any attempt to advance our left would probably have been unsuccessful, while the failure to hold Spion Kop proved the strength of the enemy in front of our right.

2. I therefore withdrew the force and commenced preparations for a trial by another route. These preparations involved the formation of a road to the top of a very precipitous hill and the occupation of its summit by guns. Unfortunately the weather was very unpropitious and seriously retarded this work. Begun on the 27th, by the evening of the 3rd February it was completed—about 1½ miles of road through a very difficult country having been made up a steep hill-side, and 6 naval 12-pr., 2 15-pr. Royal Field Artillery, and 6 mountain battery Royal Artillery guns having been got to the top.

Unfortunately, the weather was too bad to admit of our getting up the two 5-inch guns which we had hoped to mount there. I must bear witness to the admirable way in which the Naval Brigade, the Royal Artillery, the Royal Engineers, and the Royal Scots Fusiliers worked at this arduous duty.

In the absence of any Officer Commanding Royal Artillery in Natal, I asked Majors Findlay and Apsley Smith, Royal Artillery, to advise me as to the best positions for the various guns at my disposal, and was much obliged by their advice.

3. The demonstration in front of Brackfontein was very well made by the 11th Brigade under General Wynne. The men in their extreme keenness got rather closer to the positions than I had wished, but though a very heavy fire both of shell and rifle was opened upon them, they retired when ordered in admirable order and with, I am thankful to say, but slight loss.

The batteries were also under heavy fire, the men fighting their guns as coolly as if on parade: their loss fortunately was small.

4. As soon as sufficient time had been given to get the Brackfontein trenches fully occupied, the batteries moved in succession from the left to the right over No. 2 Pontoon Bridge which had been constructed the night before, and the 4th Brigade under General Lyttelton supported by the 2nd Division advanced under cover of their fire to cover the construction of No. 3 Pontoon Bridge which was well and rapidly thrown, under a well directed but long range fire.

As soon as it was completed the 2nd Durham Light Infantry supported by the 1st Rifle Brigade advanced on Vaal Krantz under a heavy fire from the hill and the dongas on the right, causing considerable loss, but the men would not be denied and the position was soon taken. It was later on occupied by the whole of the 4th Brigade, Mungers Farm being occupied by a battalion of the 2nd Brigade. The position thus gained was held till the following morning.

On the 6th, No. 2 Pontoon Bridge was taken up and reconstructed at the back of Vaal Krantz instead, to facilitate communication.

5. I should have mentioned that Vaal Krantz was occupied by a gun and some 120 of the enemy, of these the Field Cornet in charge went off with about half and the gun as we approached, most of the rest were killed by our shell and infantry fire, but we took six prisoners. I am sorry to have to report that among the men on the hill were several armed kafirs—Lieutenant Lambton of the Durham Light Infantry was wounded by one—and during the day we had ocular demonstration that the stories we had heard of the enemy arming natives to fight against us are not untrue.

We also all saw a gun detachment, and we thought the gun also, conveyed by the enemy to a gun position in an ambulance flying the Geneva flag.

6. On the evening of the 6th I relieved the 4th Brigade on Vaal Krantz by the 2nd Brigade, and all that and the following day I endeavoured to

* Omitted from Despatches, "Section II, Natal Field Army," published in the Gazette of 8th February, 1901.