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TO KUMASSI AND BACK WITH THE ASHANTI EXPEDITIONARY FORCE, 1895-96.

*By Lieut.-Colonel E. W. D. WARD, C.B., D.A.A.G. Home District,
late A.A.G. (for B) Ashanti Expeditionary Force.*

THE recent Ashanti Expedition provided the first opportunity of submitting to the test of active service the various organic changes in the administrative duties of the Army, instituted by the Royal Warrant of 1888.

Although the ultimate outcome of the operations was peaceful, still at the time of their conception, and during the whole period of the expedition, every measure adopted and every decision given had in view the possibility of resistance from an active and unscrupulous enemy.

The very limited time available between the authorisation of and the dispatch from England of the Expeditionary Force rendered it necessary for all the details and standing orders essential for the smooth working of the military machine to be evolved during the voyage to the coast.

Notwithstanding the fact that the re-constituted administrative organisation was not put to the test of actual warfare during the expedition, it is nevertheless submitted that the results achieved under it were such as to justify to the fullest extent the soundness of the principles upon which its founders built it up.

The advanced portion of the Ashanti Expeditionary Force, consisting of three Army Service Corps officers, an Ordnance Store officer, a paymaster, and a small detachment of warrant and non-commissioned officers, landed at Cape Coast Castle, on the 7th December, 1895, from the "Loanda," which also conveyed as large a quantity of supplies and stores as the limited time at the disposal of the officers in charge of the supply reserve and ordnance stores enabled them to provide.

Thanks to the forethought of His Excellency the Governor, a sufficient number of surf boats had been provided, and the work of unloading the stores proceeded without delay.

The base dépôt was established at Cape Coast Castle, the numerous rooms and stores of which were, with the approval of the Governor, appropriated for use as base stores and offices, and there the necessary preliminaries connected with the organisation prior to the forward movement of the fighting column commenced.

Under the benevolent despotism of the Labour Ordinance of the Colony, which makes every able-bodied man liable to be called out for duty as a transport carrier, at the rate of 1s. per diem (a sum representing affluence to the West African), a considerable number of carriers had

been collected and handed over to the Army Service Corps for work. It was found to be impossible, on account of the small number of Army Service Corps officers with the advanced party, to carry out at once the organisation of the carriers into gangs and companies in accordance with the instructions which had been handed to the senior officers of the detachment A.S.C. before the departure of the "Loanda." This part of the organisation had to be delayed until the arrival of the main body of the Army Service Corps which was conveyed in the "Bathurst," due a week later than the "Loanda."

Those carriers which had been collected were for the time simply divided into two equal portions, one of which worked between the coast and Mansu, and the other between Mansu and Prahsu. This system was of an entirely temporary nature, and only adopted to tide over the period until the arrival of the European cadres of the carrier companies, and as soon as they arrived, on the 13th December, the work of organisation was commenced and companies were rapidly formed. The constitution of each carrier company was as follows:—

- 1 officer.
- 1 warrant or non-commissioned officer, A.S. Corps.
- 1 interpreter.
- 10 superintendents.
- 40 headmen.
- 40 gangs of 20 each = 800 carriers.

Each gang of twenty carriers was under the charge of a headman, a superintendent being given the command of four of these gangs. The various carrier companies were distinguished by armlets of distinctive colours, each set of which bore consecutive numbers from one to eight hundred, and which, therefore, formed excellent and simple means of identification. In addition to this numbered armlet, every member of a gang wore round his neck a tin ticket on which the number of the gang was marked.

As the basis on which the whole of the carrier organisation was established was the gang system, and as, unless under the most special circumstances, gangs were never separated, this gang ticket was found to be invaluable. All consignments of stores and supplies were made on waybills on which were inserted the numbers of the gangs conveying them. The rule of joint responsibility was enforced on each headman and his gang, and the cost of deficiencies caused by one was divided among the other members of that gang. The enforcement of this simple law reduced peculation to a minimum.

The enrolment and organisation of the carrier companies were almost simultaneously commenced at Cape Coast Castle and Mansu, the European cadres of three companies being dispatched to the latter place as soon as landed from the "Bathurst." As far as was possible, the composition of the companies was carried out by districts and tribes—the kings and chiefs being appointed superintendents. In view of the urgency for the early completion of all transport arrangements in order that no delay in the forward movement of the fighting column might

take place, every effort was made to expedite the collection of natives. Colonial officers were dispatched to various outlying districts to collect carriers, and several of the most influential kings and chiefs were promised a reward for each carrier whom they produced for work with the force, and who remained with it until discharged by authority. It was also explained to these potentates who became, as I have stated, transport superintendents, that their own salaries were dependent upon the numbers of their people who were "present and fit for duty." For this purpose, a scale of rates based upon each chief's following was fixed and approved of by the Governor. These appeals to West African cupidity produced most excellent results. By the 21st December, viz., eight days after disembarkation, 8,420 carriers were enrolled, numbered and organised into companies, and were working under their company officers on the line of communication between Cape Coast and Prahsu.

This number gradually increased as the line of communication lengthened, until 14th January, 1896, when there were 14,800 carriers at work; at the base, landing and removing stores, filling up the depôts on the line of communication, with regimental units, and on the sick transport service from the advanced depôts to the base. From the latter date, carriers were as rapidly discharged as circumstances would admit. The average daily strength of carriers employed with the Expeditionary Force from the 13th December to the 8th February was 9,640.

The transport was divided into three portions:—(1) Local, (2) Regimental, and (3) Sick Transport.

LOCAL TRANSPORT.

1. The local transport consisted of all carriers employed at the base or on the line of communication. From the coast as far as the advanced depôt it consisted of the organised carrier companies, who were distributed along the line in such proportions as the officer commanding lines of communication found necessary. At the base, the labour necessary for removing stores and supplies from the landing place, and the work of stacking and shifting them, as well as, any transport required for purely base purposes, was furnished from gangs, chiefly of women, under the charge of a specially-detailed officer, who engaged them in numbers proportionate to the daily requirements.

The transport on the line of communication was worked on the staging method, than which no better can be employed with carriers.

At each stage, the headquarters of one or more carrier companies were established, so that the machinery for the daily payments and other detail was present in an organised form.

The carriers formed their encampments on sites selected at a suitable distance from those of the Europeans, and also from the sources of drinking water; this latter precaution was a most important one, in view of the insanitary habits of the natives. Markets were also established at these halting places, where the carriers were enabled to obtain their native food.

The stages were. Mansu, Prahsu, Esiaman-Kuma, Akuserim, and Kwisa. It was originally intended that the distance between the coast and Kwisa should be divided into a larger number of stages, but on arrival of the head-quarters on the coast it was found that the forerunners of the Expeditionary Force had established only one depôt, Mansu, between the coast and Prahsu, and that the carriers had become accustomed to the Mansu stage. It was, therefore, deemed advisable that it should be retained as the only one between the coast and Prahsu, as those acquainted with the working of the native mind gave it as their opinion that any alteration at that juncture would most probably create doubts among the carriers as to our instructions, and would lead to confusion. The long stages, however, answered well, and were continued on this portion of the line until the end of the expedition.

A carrier service of special runners was formed for the conveyance of ice to Prahsu from the coast, a distance of 72 miles. The loss on the way was surprisingly small, and the good effects of its use in the numerous cases of sickness at Prahsu were most gratifying.

REGIMENTAL TRANSPORT.

2. Regimental transport was allotted to all the units forming the field force, and formed an integral portion of the unit. It conveyed the baggage, camp equipment, regimental reserve ammunition, three days' supplies, entrenching tools, and the stores required by the medical officer. Included in each regimental detail were also the bearers for the hammocks of the officers, who, in other climates, would have been mounted, and also those for the regimental sick transport detail allotted to the 2nd West Yorkshire Regiment, the Special Service Corps, the detachment West Indian Regiment, and the Royal Artillery, etc.

The following are the units whose carriers were included under the designation of regimental transport :—

- Head-Quarter Staff.
- Royal Artillery.
- Royal Engineers.
- 2nd West Yorkshire Regiment.
- Special Service Corps.
- Detachment 2nd West India Regiment.
- Supply Column.
- Ammunition Column.
- Bearer Company.
- Mobile Field Hospital.

The transport of each unit was, as in the case of the carrier companies, distinguished by coloured badges.

The carriers of the West Yorkshire Regiment, the Special Service Corps, the Supply Column, the Bearer Company, and the Mobile Field Hospital were under the charge of officers detailed by the officer commanding the Army Service Corps; that of the Head-Quarter Staff was under the camp commandant, while the transport of the Royal Artillery,

Royal Engineers, and detachment West India Regiment was under the command of non-commissioned officers of these corps.

The regimental transport was almost entirely formed from the carrier companies. In selecting it, care was exercised that the carriers forming it should be taken from those tribes least liable to panic. For the conveyance of heavy loads, such as guns, etc., specially strong men were selected, similar steps being also taken as regards the stretcher bearers.

The regimental transport system proved a great success, and was very favourably reported upon by all officers concerned.

SICK TRANSPORT.

3. The sick transport consisted of three portions:—

- a.* The hammock train service, formed for the purpose of conveying the sick and wounded from the advanced dépôt to the base.
- b.* The bearer company, which undertook the collection and removal of the wounded and sick from the front to the advanced dépôt.
- c.* The regimental hammock bearers, who performed the duties which would in peace have been performed by the regimental stretcher bearers.

a. The hammock train service was formed as the troops advanced from the base, and worked in stages under the supervision and direction of the Army Service Corps; south of the Prah, fifteen hammocks moved either way from each stage at fixed hours, while north of that river ten hammocks were similarly worked on the stages. These hours were so arranged that a constant through communication was established between all stages, and thus passengers and goods were passed up and down with regularity and dispatch. Notwithstanding the very great difficulties which arose on account of the objection of the Fantis to become hammock bearers, and the numerous desertions which in consequence took place, the hammock service was most satisfactorily carried out. In addition to its use on the downward journey for the transport of sick, it was employed when moving up the line for the conveyance of individual officers and men, or of light loads of supplies and stores.

Two hundred and fifty-six hammocks and seventeen hundred and twenty carriers were required for the hammock service between the coast and the advanced dépôt.

The stations for the hammock train were Cape Coast, Dunkwa, Mansu, Suta, Assin-Yankumassi, Prahsu, Esiaman-Kuma, Fumsu, and Kwisa. A warrant or non-commissioned officer of the Army Service Corps was stationed at each of the smaller stations in charge of the hammock service.

b. The formation of the bearer company and mobile field hospital was as follows:—Bearer company, carriers 208, cots and hammocks 16; mobile field hospital, carriers 595, cots and hammocks 64.

The carriers of these two units were under the charge of a subaltern of the Army Service Corps, assisted by a warrant officer of that corps, and

were organised in a similar manner to those belonging to the carrier companies.

c. The hammock bearers of the regimental transport were under the command of the officer commanding the unit, and were allotted to each corps for the conveyance of sick in proportion to its strength. They were under the charge of the medical officer of the unit, who had also under his immediate supervision the carriers conveying the medical panniers and other stores of the unit.

In addition to the hammocks detailed for the transport of the sick and wounded, a considerable number were required for the conveyance of individual officers. A hammock was authorised for each officer of the general or personal staff, one to each officer of Royal Engineers, one to each officer commanding a battalion and his adjutant ; and in the case of the 2nd West Yorkshire Regiment, one to the second in command ; one to each officer in charge of supply and transport arrangements of the marching force, and one to each medical officer.

As the Cape Coast native has a very strong dislike to carrying a hammock, and even when this aversion has been overcome makes a most indifferent hammock bearer, it was decided to engage as many Sierra Leone hammock bearers as possible. Unfortunately a larger number than four hundred was not obtainable. However, those who accompanied us to the coast were most reliable. They were principally employed in the conveyance of officers and with the regimental sick transport.

I may here state the cots and hammocks used in this expedition were of varied patterns, the most suitable being those of English manufacture, supplied by the Colonial Government.

SUPPLY COLUMN.

When the forward movement to Kumassi commenced, a supply column capable of ten days' rations for the force was formed at Kwisa. This column conveyed supplies for 800 Europeans for ten days and for 500 Hausas and 4,000 carriers for five days. It was found possible after the villagers comprehended the honesty of our dealings to establish markets as we advanced, and, consequently, the native rations were reduced by one-half, a money equivalent being granted for the other half.

A bakery and a butchery section were attached to this column. The troops replenished their supplies from the supply column on the march, the carriers thus relieved being sent back to the advanced dépôt for the quantities necessary to complete the column to its reserve of ten days.

The original proposition was that the supply column should carry four days' reserve. It was, however, ultimately deemed advisable to increase the reserve to ten days. This latter decision was made with the view of reducing as far as possible the number of troops required for escort duty.

AMMUNITION COLUMN.

An ammunition column capable of carrying the following reserves of

ammunition was formed, and proceeded to Kumassi under charge of an officer of the Ordnance Department.

7-pounder ammunition .. 180 rounds.

Maxim 6,000 rounds.

S.A. ammunition 50 rounds per man = 55,000 rounds.

The loads of stores, supplies and ammunition averaged from 45 to 50 lbs. in weight, and were carried without complaint by the natives. Experience has proved that the most portable load for all descriptions of transport is one of 50 lbs. weight, and it is recommended that all loads for service abroad should be of that size, which would be suitable for carriage by carriers, mules, camels, or wagons.

PAY.

The daily rates of pay allowed to the carriers and others employed on the expedition were as follows:—

Chief Superintendents 5s. 0d.

Superintendents 3s. 6d.

Headmen 2s. 0d.

Carriers 1s. 0d.

The rate of pay issued to carriers was that prescribed by the Native Labour Ordinance before mentioned, and with a view of stopping desertions, it was decided that all those employed with the carrier companies and regimental transport should receive their pay when their services were dispensed with. This system of deferred payment worked well, and no difficulty was experienced in settling the claims of the carriers at the conclusion of the operations.

A daily subsistence allowance of 3d. was made to each carrier south of the Prah. North of that river rations on the authorised scale were originally provided for them, it having been reported that food for the natives could not be obtained there. When, however, the Prah was crossed, and it was found that native food was obtainable, subsistence money was paid to the carriers with local transport and the supply column; those with the regimental units being given half subsistence money and half rations, an arrangement which worked satisfactorily. On the return journey to the coast, all carriers were, as far as possible, supplied with rations in order to use up the surplus reserve.

The forms for payment were of a most simple nature, and, therefore, the best under the circumstances. All payments, either of subsistence or in final settlements, were made by an officer; and in the strict observance of this rule is to be found the cause of much of the contentment which was so conspicuous among the men of the carrier corps.

The chief paymaster of the force had his head office at Cape Coast Castle and a secondary office at Prahsu, from which the various officers stationed at or beyond that station drew their money.

CAMPS, ETC.

The sites of the principal camps for the troops on the march to Kumassi were Jeykuma, Akroful, Dunkwa, Mansu, Suta, Assin-Yankumasi,

Prahsu, Esiaman-Kuma, Fumsu, Brafu Edro, Kwisa, Essian Kwanta, Esumeja, Edunku, Adwabin, Dede-Siwa. At a large number of these stations huts were erected by the Colonial authorities prior to the arrival of the Expeditionary Force, and, subsequently, by the Royal Engineers. These huts were of leaves resting on a rough wooden framework, and, as it was most important that Europeans should invariably sleep off the ground, each hut was provided with a sleeping bench of sufficient size for its occupants. At those places where the hammock train halted hospital rest houses were also constructed.

As Kumassi was neared *lentes d'abri* took the place of these leaf huts, while in the capital itself the troops were accommodated in the native houses, which were divided into districts, each of which was allotted to a corps.

The selection of the sites for the various supply and ordnance dépôts was the subject of much anxious consideration. It was necessary to push on the reserves with the utmost speed in order that there might be no delay in the advance of the fighting column, and it was also of vital importance that across the Prah these dépôts should be within such distances of each other that any wholesale panic among the carriers might not interfere with the constant supply to the troops in the front of all things needful for them.

The following were the situation and resources of the various dépôts on the line.

At Cape Coast Castle were the base dépôts both of the supplies and ordnance stores. All disembarkations of troops and stores were made under the supervision of a naval officer, the stores being removed from the beach to the stores by working parties of natives. Among the miscellaneous establishments at the base, were a baggage store, a clothing store, and last, but not least, an ice-making machine. At Mansu, about thirty-five miles from the coast, were intermediate dépôts for supplies and stores. Here, seven days' supplies for 1,180 men were retained, also 100 rounds of Martini-Henry ammunition for each carbine, and a proportion for the 7-pounder battery, and also for the Maxims and Nordenfeldts.

At Prahsu, which was the first advanced dépôt, there were stored before the main body of the expedition landed and commenced the forward movement, twenty days' supplies for 1,180 Europeans, 500 Hausas, and 4,000 carriers. At this station also was formed the ordnance advanced dépôt, where a further reserve of ammunition was maintained and a proportion of articles of camp equipment sufficient to meet ordinary requirements.

As soon as the reserve of supplies at Prahsu had been completed to its authorised extent, a further reserve of four days for a similar force was pushed forward under the protection of a detachment of Hausas and of Baden-Powell's levy to Esiaman-Kuma. This station was thirteen miles from Prahsu.

On the completion of the Esiaman-Kuma dépôt a further advance

was made under similar protection to Akuserim, where ten days' supplies were stored. On its completion the post at Kwisá was fixed upon as the furthest advanced depôt, and sixteen days' supplies for the force were placed there; subsequently the depôts at Akuserim and Esiaman were dispensed with and their supplies transferred to Kwisá. The supply column was organised at, and drew its supplies from, the last-named station.

As far as my researches have led me, I cannot find that on any previous expedition have the wants of the soldier been so well provided for as on this occasion. The supplies and stores of every description were abundant in quantity, most excellent in quality, and perfect in condition; and, notwithstanding the difficulties which arose in consequence of the failure of the filters, a sufficient quantity of potable boiled water was always ready for the troops at the various halting places.

After the advance posts were passed, the water supply was carried out by water parties under charge of non-commissioned officers of the Royal Engineers, attached to each corps, who superintended all the arrangements for the supply and boiling of the water before issue to the troops. Water carriers were also included among the regimental transport of each unit, and carried a reserve of water for use on the march or in action.

On leaving this part of the narrative it is only just to the natives employed to say that the success which attended this expedition was to a considerable extent due to the faithful manner in which we were served by them. Punishments were almost entirely restricted to fines, and in only a few glaring cases was corporal punishment resorted to, and even then it was limited in its extent. They were humanely treated in accordance with the stringent instructions issued on this point by Sir Francis Scott, were not overloaded, and received their daily allowances of either money or food in the presence of their officers, and well did they repay all the care which was bestowed upon them.

As already stated, advantage was taken of the spare moments during the voyage of the Head-Quarter Staff from England to the coast to prepare standing orders for the expedition. These orders contained instructions as to the manner in which the various duties were to be carried out, details of the transport, stores and supplies allotted to each unit, and regulations as to the reserves to be held in the various depôts which were formed during the earlier stages of the expedition. These orders were printed in book form, and were issued to all concerned, who found them to be of immense advantage in the execution of their various duties.

The return of the column from Kumassi was made under similar arrangements to those which existed on its upward march; and on the 8th February the Expeditionary Force had re-embarked for England, having between this date and that of the disembarkation of its advanced party on the 7th December successfully carried out the objects for which it was sent.

Its work is fittingly summed up in the following farewell Order issued by Sir Francis Scott :—

“ Cape Coast Castle,

“ 4th February, 1896.

“ The greater portion of the Expeditionary Force having returned to Cape Coast Castle, and the operations being now concluded, the Colonel Commanding desires to take this opportunity of placing on record his high appreciation of the thorough manner in which all ranks, whether of the Imperial or Colonial Services, have carried out the duties allotted to them ; and he begs to thank officers, warrant officers, non-commissioned officers, and men for that cordial support which they have accorded to him throughout the entire expedition.

“ The Colonel Commanding is pleased to be able to testify to the excellent conduct of the troops, and to the high state of discipline prevailing in their ranks. Although the object of the expedition was, fortunately, achieved without bloodshed, the trials and hardships to which the troops were exposed were, nevertheless, unusually severe.

“ A rapid advance had to be made through 150 miles of tropical forest in a country practically destitute of supplies, and, above all, the perils of a climate notorious for its unhealthiness had to be encountered. While lamenting the loss of those who have fallen victims to the climate, the Colonel Commanding has especially to deplore the deaths of Colonel H.R.H. Prince Henry of Battenburg, K.G., and Major V. J. E. Ferguson, Royal Horse Guards, both of whom were members of his staff.”