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THE OPERATIONS OF THE BULAWAYO FIELD FORCE IN MARCH AND APRIL, 1896.

By Captain J. S. NICHOLSON, 7th (Queen's Own) Hussars.

The following reports of the earlier fighting round Bulawayo, with the accompanying plans, have been kindly placed at the disposal of the Institution by the Secretary of the British South Africa Company.

GIFFORD'S PATROL TO INSEZA.—ATTACK ON CUMMING'S STORE.

On Tuesday, March 24th, a patrol of 30 mounted men and 14 of the M.M. Police, under Inspector Southey, the whole under command of Captain Gifford, left Bulawayo at 8 p.m., for the purpose of enquiring into the murder of Maddocks, a prospector, and other disturbances in the Inseza district. Nothing unusual occurred, and the Inseza River was reached at 9 the following night; at 9 p.m., Wednesday, 60 miles had been covered. The next morning, Thursday, the march was resumed at daybreak, and Stevenson's Store reached at 8 a.m.; Cumming's Store, $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles further on, at 9 a.m. No natives were seen on the way; a number of refugees were found at the store, which consisted of a brick one-storeyed building with 9-inch walls and thatched roof. A few yards from it was a corrugated iron building, used as a storehouse, with iron roof; a few native huts stood in rear of the house. When Gifford arrived something had been done to make the place defensible—the thatch had been removed from the roof of the building and verandah, loopholes had been cut in the walls of both buildings, bags of earth placed in the doors and windows, and all precautions taken against surprise, under direction of Mr. Liebert, the weakest feature of the position being the high ground which commanded the whole place at short range. The ground is open grass land all round the house for a considerable distance. On Gifford's arrival a scherm of bushes was made between the two houses for the horses, vedettes placed on the high ground in rear, from which an extended view is obtained, and preparations made for the return march next day. At nightfall sentries were placed on all the approaches, and all natives ordered into the iron house. Nothing unusual occurred till at 4.15 a.m. shots were fired by the vedettes on the rising ground, and the sentries came into the house. The moon had set, and it was very dark. Almost immediately fire was opened on the store from three sides, and the natives were seen coming on in large numbers. Gifford then ordered all his men, some of whom were in the verandah,

into the house. Sergeant-Major O'Leary, M.M.P., who had been firing from behind a tree trunk in front of the store, was shot dead, his body being carried in by Inspector Southey. Corporal Strutt was struck by an assegai and wounded in the arm before he could get in. By this time the firing had become very hot, the rebels running right up to the verandah; one was shot with his hands on one of the loopholes, attempting to pull the sandbags away. In about 50 minutes, finding they made no impression and the daylight appearing, the rebels retired back on the high ground. At 6.30 the oxen were collected and inspanned, and the return march commenced. Natives were seen on the high ground at a considerable distance, but did not molest them.

Casualties: Sergeant-Major O'Leary, M.M.P., killed; and six wounded slightly.

Bulawayo was reached at 12 noon Sunday, March 29th, and 33 refugees were brought in.

GIFFORD'S PATROL.—ACTION NEAR FONSECA'S FARM.

At 1.40 a.m., Saturday, April 4th, a strong patrol composed as follows: 100 mounted men, 39 Cape boys, 1 Maxim gun and detachment, 1 wagon, and 1 light wagon, under command of Captain Gifford, left Bulawayo, for the purpose of verifying the report that an impi was massing near Fonseca's Farm, to disperse them and proceed *via* Campbell's Store and Inyati, if possible, back to Bulawayo. Nothing occurred to interrupt the march, till after outspanning and forming laager at 5.30 Sunday morning, two of Mr. G. Grey's Cape boys on their way from his farm to Bulawayo reported that a large impi of Matabele were on Holms' Farm. Gifford determined on moving in that direction towards Shiloh. Accordingly, laager was broken at 1.30 p.m., and at 4.30 p.m. crossed "Capsize Drift," where a large scherm recently deserted was found. At 5.30 a body of Matabele was reported by the advance party moving down the high ground on to his left, and shortly afterwards his rear-guard was attacked. Meantime the main body had moved out into open ground and formed laager. The attack was repulsed by the rear-guard, and the rebels drew off, firing occasional shots at long range. A quiet night was passed on Wessel's Farm, and about 700 yards from Umgusa River. Gifford struck laager at 9.30 a.m.; after marching about a mile his advance guard was attacked, which was repulsed, the rebels being followed up for some distance by the detachment of Colonial boys, who did considerable execution among them. Shortly after, his right being threatened by a large number of Matabele who came down on to the river, the Maxim was brought into action, and the rebels dispersed, the only casualty so far being one horse shot. At 2.30 p.m., the first laager shown on the map was reached, and laager formed, the advanced party sent on to occupy the kopje dominating the road which the columns had to traverse in its advance before reaching the spruit, had been fired on, but no serious opposition was made. Pickets were put out, and a quiet night passed. The next morning, Monday, April 6th, he broke laager after sending out patrols, and shortly after sunrise some

cattle being reported in the direction of the Umgusa, the Colonial boys were sent out to bring them in; they had proceeded a few hundred yards, when fire was opened upon them. The firing becoming brisk, and the rebels being in considerable force, they were forced to retire towards the laager. On this becoming evident, Captain Gifford moved the wagons and the remainder of his force across the dry donga, taking up a position north of the angle formed by the separation of the two nullahs. Captain Dawson and his troop were sent to cover the retirement of the Colonial boys, and, if occasion served, to deliver a counter-attack. This was rendered impossible, owing to the presence of a fresh body of rebels on Dawson's flank, and in his front, who opened fire and continued their advance. Dawson and the Cape boys rejoined Gifford when the attack developed from the rising ground to Gifford's front and right, small parties creeping up and opening on his left about the same time. The Maxim was brought to bear on the front attack with immediate effect, the rebels retiring further up the hill.

Trooper K. S. Mackenzie had been killed during Dawson's retirement, and Corporal E. Reynolds had been wounded when near the Maxim, which was mounted on its tripod on a wagon (he was hit a second time, and died half-an-hour later). On this gun the enemy's fire seemed to be concentrated. Shortly afterwards, Captain Gifford, when on the gun wagon, was hit in the shoulder. Captain Lumsden then assumed command. The firing was kept up till 9 a.m., when it began to slacken, and ceased, with the exception of dropping shots at a long range at 9.30 a.m., when the rebels drew off. Trooper Mackenzie's body was not recovered. Bushes were cut to form the first and second bush fences, and the laager moved into the space formed below the division of the nullah, the inner banks of both dry and wet occupied; the horses were placed in the nullah where they were completely screened from fire. Nothing further was seen of rebels that day and following night, which passed without incident, the total casualties being three killed and five wounded. Messengers had been despatched into Bulawayo with reports and asking for assistance, which was sent under command of Captain McFarlane, his detail being 60 mounted men, 1 Maxim gun, and a heliograph, with a medical man. He left Bulawayo at 9.45 p.m., Monday, April 6th. On Tuesday, April 7th, the attack on Gifford was renewed at 8 a.m. from both flanks, and was continued for two hours with great violence, secondary attacks developing in front and rear. This was repulsed, and the rebels retired. During this attack Captain Lumsden received a severe wound in the ankle. Captain Bisset then took over the command, and two other men were wounded, one severely. A message was despatched to Captain McFarlane, and received by him shortly after 2 p.m. when near the Umgusa River. He was at 3 p.m. met by a party from Gifford, who had been sent out for the purpose. About 4 p.m. Captain McFarlane reached the laager, having met with no opposition on the way. It being too late to return to Bulawayo the same day, he determined to remain the night at Gifford's laager. A party was sent out and recovered the body of Trooper Mackenzie, which was buried in the laager next to that of

Corporal E. Reynolds. No more firing took place, and the march back to Bulawayo was begun on the morning of the 8th, which was reached at 10.30 p.m., Wednesday, April 8th. About 3,850 rounds of Martini-Henry ammunition were expended, and 2,600 rounds of Lee-Metford.

Casualties : — Killed : Corporal E. Reynolds, Trooper K. S. Mackenzie, and two Cape boys.

Wounded : Captain Hon. M. Gifford, shot wound in shoulder ; Captain Lumsden, shot wound in ankle (since deceased) ; Lieutenant Hulbert, shot wound in ankle ; Trooper Fielding, shot wound in ankle, slight ; Trooper Walker, shot wound in seat ; Trooper Eatwell, shot wounds in arm and chest, severe ; Cape boy, shot wound in mouth, slight ; and two men sick with fever. Six horses were lost.

REAR-GUARD ACTION ON THE TULI ROAD, APRIL 10TH, 1896.

On Thursday, April, 2nd, a force consisting of 50 mounted men Bulawayo Field Force, 50 of the Afrikaner Corps mounted under Captain Van Niekerk, 1 Maxim gun and detachment, and Dr. Levy, with ambulance; left Bulawayo at 5 p.m., the whole under command of Captain Brand, to proceed to Manzi-iyama, in Gwanda district. His orders were to bring into Bulawayo the white population of Manzi-iyama if still there. They had been warned to leave eight days previously, but had stated they wished to remain where they were ; matters becoming so critical and their force so small, a relief party was deemed necessary. No opposition was met with on the march down, and the people were found to have retired on Tuli. Captain Brand had been instructed to report on the road, particularly with reference to suitable sites for fortified camps, water supply, etc., with a view to future operations by a detached force.

Manzi-iyama is eight miles distant, the road is practically a defile commanded on either hand from Spargo's store, twelve miles from this town to Manzi-iyama. On the return march opposition was first met with seven miles this side of Spiro's store, the force being fired on from kopjes commanding the advance. The flanking parties became at once engaged, pushing the rebels before them, and occupying flanking positions as they advanced. On reaching the point almost parallel with Latijan's Farm, between the two hills shown on map, the dissel boom of the wagon broke. Firing recommenced and continued till more open ground was reached. The Matabele then appeared in considerable force, and Captain Brand determined to take up a position on the left of the road on a hillock with about 50 feet command. The Maxim was placed on a salient commanding the road to the East, the Afrikanders on the right and the remainder under Lieutenant Pursell on the left. Fair cover was obtained for the horses, the scrub came pretty well up to the position on the South and East faces. A determined attack then developed on three sides of the position, the rebels being in possession of a large number of guns of all sorts, and running up with great determination, some reaching to within 30 yards of the firing line. The Maxim opened early and did good execution, but the thickness of the

bush prevented full use being made of the longer ranges. The attack was successfully repulsed on the South and East faces, largely due to the action of the Maxim, whose fire was then turned on the North attack, which was making considerable headway, but which immediately slackened. Captain Van Niekerk then mounted twenty-five of his men, who made a counter-attack on the thick bush into which the rebels had retired, their right being safeguarded by the fire of the guns. The rebels were pushed through the bush on to open ground, beyond where the Afrianders inflicted heavy loss on them. By this time the remainder of the force was mounted and proceeded, as shown on map, to avoid the kopje and thick bush commanding the road, which was struck 300 yards further on, the Afrianders forming the rear guard.

Casualties: Five killed, fifteen wounded, thirty horses lost. The dead had to be left.

ACTION ON THE LOWER UMGUSA RIVER.

A reconnaissance in force having been determined on to ascertain the strength and positions of the rebels on the Lower Umgusa, a force consisting of 110 mounted men, 60 Cape boys under Captains Selous and Cardigan, 100 Friendlies under Captain Taylor, 1 Hotchkiss 1-pounder, and 1 Maxim .303-inch, the whole under command of Captain Bissett, moved out on April 22nd at 6.30 a.m., in a Westerly direction till over the ridge $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles West of Bulawayo. Direction was then changed to the North, when the dissel boom of the Hotchkiss gun broke, allowing the breach of the gun to come violently into contact with the limber box. This delayed the advance three-quarters of an hour, while a tree was cut and fittèd. The advance was continued past the West side of Government House, and down the slope towards the Umgusa. Order of march: Grey's scouts covering the front, the Afriander troop on left flank. Brand's troop forming the rear guard, and Meikle's troop on the right, On reaching the high ground South of the river, the rebels were seen in small parties along the rising ground the other (N.) side of the Umgusa. Fire was opened by Grey's troop at 500 yards, and the advance continued. The fire was returned. The Afrianders then pushed on to the rising ground shown on map, and their fire became brisk. They took up a position there commanding the river bed, which is hollow, and held a good number of the rebels, who returned the fire. On reaching the crest line the column took up its position as shown on map, the Cape boys, under Captain Cardigan, being pushed down the slope and across the river, clearing the natives out of the river bed. This advance was very boldly and well made. On reaching the other slope they continued their advance parallel to the river, driving the rebels, who then showed in force, in front of them. Grey's scouts were eventually sent in support along the right bank, as report was made of large numbers of rebels being seen higher up the river. By this time the Cape boys had got considerably ahead, and Grey had to gallop quite 700 yards before they could come into action, which they did very smartly, bringing a flank fire to bear on the rebels retreating before the Cape boys, and a strong attack on the

rebels who were then thick in the nullah, at a range of from 150 to 200 yards. No further support was sent to Grey, and the remainder of the force kept its original position. The Hotchkiss was then found to be unable to open fire, owing to the accident earlier in the day having put the firing gear out of order. Before Grey had been in action three minutes shouts were heard on our right, and a large body of Matabele were seen, not 150 yards off, running down on our right rear through the bush, which is pretty thick just there. If they had come on quietly we should certainly have been cut up. We had to mount and retire, the natives were then quite close, and pistols were being used. Unfortunately, several horses were shot, and several had very narrow escapes, Trooper Crewe being struck in the back by a knobkerry and Trooper Frank Baxter being killed, Captain G. Grey slight bullet wound on the head, his hat being shot through, and Corporal Wise being shot through the shoulder. The Cape boys on the other side of the river were then forced to retire, being almost surrounded. Captain Selous was here almost cut off, his horse being killed. The advance of the rebels was checked by the fire of the Maxim at 900 yards. It being then 12 mid-day, it was decided to return to Bulawayo. Sufficient use does not appear to have been made of the force at command, and if the firing line had been supported by the main body moving parallel with it on the high and open ground, a great success would undoubtedly have resulted. The Friendlies, armed with assegais, were not engaged; this was the first time they had come into action with us, and were not absolutely relied on. The Cape boys fought very well under European leaders, but are very wasteful with ammunition. They are armed mostly with Martini-Henry rifles and carbines; they carried side arms.

Casualties: One killed, four wounded, and two horses killed.

The march into Bulawayo was not interfered with, all proper precautions being taken to safeguard the flanks and rear.

ACTION ON UMGUSA RIVER, APRIL 25th, 1896. COLENBRANDER'S FARM.

The enemy being known to be in strength on the Umgusa River, and it becoming necessary to check an advance on to the South side of the river, a column, consisting of 115 mounted men, 70 Cape boys with fire-arms, 40 with assegais and bayonets, 100 Friendlies under Captain Taylor, armed with assegais and red limber on their shoulders as distinguishing mark, 1 Hotchkiss 1-pounder, 1 Maxim 303 inch, 9 hospital corps with Dr. Vigne and ambulance wagon, the whole under Captain R. Macfarlane, late 9th Lancers, moved out at 7.30 a.m. Saturday, April 25th. The route was down the Salisbury Road $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles, the Afrikaners being echeloned on the left, Dawson's troop on the right, Grey's scouts covering the front. On approaching the farm-house (Colenbrander's), a one-storeyed brick building, Grey's troop advanced to the rising ground immediately to the front, and opened fire on natives seen on the other side of the river. Meanwhile the force took up a position as shown on the map. Grey's firing became pretty brisk, and large numbers of the enemy were seen in and beyond their scherm running down towards the river, with the obvious intention of

outflanking Grey's men through the thick bush on the right, which was what was desired. All in support of the guns were then lying down, and well concealed by the grass, their horses being in rear of the house and down the reverse slope. When the enemy came within 200 yards, Grey retired on the house, taking up position as shown (No. 2). The rebels quickly appeared at the edge of the thicker scrub on the right, advancing at a run, the men with guns continually shooting. When within about 300 yards, the Maxim opened with great effect and the direct advance was checked, but more men appearing on the prolongation of their left Dawson and the Cape boys came into action at short ranges, and did considerable execution, the rebels' fire gradually slackened and they were seen running back by twos and threes down the hill towards the nullah. Unfortunately one of the hospital assistants was here shot through the head, and one of Dawson's men through the body. Simultaneously with the left attack, great numbers were seen advancing rapidly down the opposite slope, and crossing the nullah, re-appeared on the high ground on our left, where the bush is thin. A considerable body was also seen advancing directly on our position, they also crossed the river and advanced up the subsidiary nullah bounding our left front. The Hotchkiss was brought to bear on their right attack, when about parallel with our face, and well massed together; fire was opened at 1,200 yards and very good practice was made. Many were left on the ground, and the remainder very shortly began retiring, using the clumps of bush to gain cover. These of course made an excellent target, and a general retirement took place all along their right, down to the river. Meantime the left front attack was met with a hot rifle fire opening at 800 yards, and in spite of determined efforts the rebels did not succeed in getting within 500 yards, when the Maxim was turned on them and they were driven back to the river, with the exception of a few men with rifles who had crept up to closer ranges before the opening fire; these were shortly disposed of.

Meanwhile their left attack had again advanced and was checked as before, when they made another advance on our left, likewise repulsed by shell fire, and long-range rifle fire. The Afrikanders were then advanced to a knoll on our left front commanding the nullah, Grey's scouts moving out to the rising ground in front. The Cape boys and Friendlies had been sent in pursuit on the right, and the rebels were pushed back to the river where large numbers were taking shelter. On reaching the knoll, the Afrikanders immediately became sharply engaged with their retiring left. Grey's troop bringing a converging [fire] to bear on the crowds in the nullah, and all resistance then ceased. The Afrikanders pushed across the river, numbers running in front of them, who then appeared in the more open ground when they came under the fire of Grey's troop, and the Hotchkiss which made excellent shooting at 1,150 yards; the Afrikanders pushed on to the knoll the North side of the river to our front. Dawson's troop had meantime advanced and completed the rout; very shortly the Afrikanders ceased firing and the action came to a close. The rebels had retired from both flanks, and no more were to be seen. Over

seventy-six bodies were counted in the nullah when the Afrikanders crossed, and the total loss to the rebels must have been very heavy. One hundred and thirty shells were thrown by the Hotchkiss, 4,500 rounds were fired by the Maxim, which ran well, but not so well as the older .45 Martini pattern. The Friendlies were very eager, and killed several, capturing two rifles, they are thus fairly committed to our side. The rebels' shooting was much better in this action, particularly as regards the elevation. It being then 2.15 p.m., a retirement on Bulawayo was ordered, the wounded and dead being conveyed in the ambulance and stretchers. I regret to state the following casualties:—

Killed: Trooper Henry George Whitehouse, Trooper Charles Gordon.

The following wounded:—Trooper Edward Appleyard (since dead), Trooper Roland Venables Lovett (since dead); Trooper Thomas Easton Howell, Trooper Francis Henry Talbot Rice, Troop-Sergeant-Major Johannes Christian Botha, all doing well.

While the action was in progress a patrol placed on the high ground near Government House to watch our left rear was cut off by a large body of rebels, estimated at from 500 to 1,000 men, and one man, trooper Benjamin Parsons, was killed. This body had evidently been held ready to operate against us in the event of a reverse, and to cut us off from Bulawayo. They retired from Government House hill at the conclusion of our action.