

This article was downloaded by: [Carnegie Mellon University]

On: 22 January 2015, At: 04:42

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954

Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Royal United Services Institution. Journal

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rusi19>

Extracts from a Report on Orange Walk, New River, as a Military Position for the Protection of British Interests in Honduras; with Notes and Experiences on Out-Post Duties in "the Bush"

Lieut. J. E. Bale ^a

^a 1st W. I. Regt. , Jamaica

Published online: 11 Sep 2009.

To cite this article: Lieut. J. E. Bale (1873) Extracts from a Report on Orange Walk, New River, as a Military Position for the Protection of British Interests in Honduras; with Notes and Experiences on Out-Post Duties in "the Bush", Royal United Services Institution. Journal, 17:75, 806-812, DOI: [10.1080/03071847309433591](https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847309433591)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03071847309433591>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with

primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

EXTRACTS FROM A REPORT ON ORANGE WALK, NEW RIVER, AS A MILITARY POSITION FOR THE PROTECTION OF BRITISH INTERESTS IN HONDURAS; WITH NOTES AND EXPERIENCES ON OUT-POST DUTIES IN "THE BUSH."

Communicated by Lieut. J. E. BALE, 1st W. I. Regt., Garrison Adjutant, Jamaica.

Population.

THIS small settlement has a fluctuating population, may be from 300 or 400 inhabitants, on the average, the majority half-breeds, between the American Indians of the adjacent tribes and the descendants of Old Spain, long located on this portion of America, a few English artificers, or waifs and strays from over-crowded towns, who develop, from surrounding pressure and incidents, into useful hands, as carpenters, wheelwrights, smiths, and jobbing builders, &c.

Native Buildings.

The Indians are expert and ingenious in making their huts, or more properly, houses of hut materials, for they truss and frame their roofs on sound architectural principles, using only well-selected, naturally grown poles and timbers, which they bind or lash together with "tie tie," a strong fibrous parasite or vine, made pliable as rope by soaking in water; when dry, it keeps the whole firmly in position, and the roof is thatched with palms, using the stems of the leaf to hold it on the rafters and laths, in a complete and uniform manner. The butt of the principals is a natural fork, sometimes kept from splitting by interlaced "tie tie;" the walls are made of pimentos, small palm trunks, placed vertically side by side, and plastered with marl within and without. All the above they do without using a single nail or even a peg of wood. The floor is usually of marl, pounded down hard.

Water Transport.

The produce from the estates, also merchandise from Belize to the different stations, is conveyed by schooners or bongys (old Spanish bonga, a boat), along the river and the sea passage within the reefs and bays to Belize.

Road Communication.

Roads, so called, are, with the exception of short distances from or around a settlement, impracticable for carriage traffic, and the bridle roads are merely tracks through the primeval forest and across portions of lagoons, and quite impassable during a rainy period; the rains, however, are partial most of the year, so that no correct idea can be formed of roads at a distance, unless by traversing them often; a cart

road exists to Tril Farm, $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles north of Orange Walk, and another to Tower Hill estate, to the south about four miles.

Rivers—Lagoons.

The rivers are slow, even sluggish, very tortuous, frequently forming a letter S in a distance of half a mile, generally deep, with steep banks, or fringed with mangroves growing to a height of 30 to 50 feet for miles together; many savannas open out from these rivers; lagoons are numerous, and many are of considerable extent, and are mostly impassable.

Climate.

The sun is as usually felt in the tropics, and in addition to its rays, there is a great glare of reflected light and heat from the marly ground, when not overgrown with grass and weeds. A great change of temperature takes place at night during the winter months, the thermometer sometimes registers as low as 58° or 59° during the prevalence of the "Northerns."

If rain falls, or has lately fallen, the whole country is chill and damp, with dense vapours or fogs, which wet the clothes and hair, and chill the frames of people exposed at night, and especially so just before day dawn: these mists often last up to 10 or 11 o'clock, A.M., when they change, through the sun's power, to oppressive, hot vapour, till dispelled by evaporation.

Troops and Mercantile Influences and Results—Hardy Qualities of the Indians—Specialities of African Troops for Bush Service.

The mercantile and trading element at Belize has much influence, through the Members of Council, in ordering the disposal of the troops, a disposition seldom approved of by those in charge of stations for timber cutting, sugar estates, &c., who from past occurrences feel the insecurity of their position from the fact that when once the Indians cross the frontier, the Rio Hondo, they have made a successful invasion, and can march by various routes, skirting villages, and halt unperceived in the bush till opportunity offers to make an attack on any station, settlement, or estate; in fact they could pillage and destroy in detail many estates before military aid could be rendered, and an attempt at pursuit would be fruitless and disastrous, unless unusual accident favoured the pursuers. The Indians have a thorough knowledge of the bush tracks, a keen instinct for self-preservation, and from infancy are accustomed to hunt and travel through miles of country with but scanty provisions; being comparatively unincumbered, wearing merely linen cloth trousers and shirt, straw hat, and leather sandals or mocassins, with a gun, powder-horn, and shot-bag or valise, and a macee, they will far outmarch our West India soldiers, who are not in such training, although they cast off much of their cumbersome uniform and accoutrements, and possess considerable powers of endurance, and bear with impunity, apparently, malarious influences that would be highly detrimental to white troops. Their wants are few, they are generally inured to scarcity or irregularity in food, accustomed to prepare it

for themselves, and are expert foragers, even on the line of march if permitted; a few minutes after the halt, fires will be kindled and pots boiling, a pleasant cup of hot tea will be offered, produced from lemon grass and other wild herbs, and a palatable breakfast of simple materials, vegetables, roasted green corn in the ear, &c.; they one and all make excellent soup from their ration meat.

Geographical Position.

Orange Walk is about 40 miles up the New River, southward of Corozal, and N.W. by N. of Belize, about 70 miles by road or track through the bush, and 9 miles east of Albion Island on the Rio Hondo, which river runs approximately parallel to the New River, dividing British Honduras from the Indian territory of Yucatan.

It is a very deep sluggish stream with but three or four principal fords, *i.e.*, convenient places for landing when the river is crossed by dories, or pit-pans, for, like the New River, its banks are fringed for the most part with mangroves or thick bush, almost trackless, and in many parts impenetrable. The Rio Hondo is a strong natural barrier, and our first line of defence can be readily patrolled and watched by a small swift steamer. The key of this position is Albion Island, high land and of good extent, formed by the river diverging into two streams and meeting again.

Block-houses with a few men would guard the other fords, and these detachments might be often relieved and quickly reinforced by means of the small steamer. The *depôt* for fuel, &c., should be at Corozal, whence reinforcements could be obtained; small detachments (police) might be stationed at Orange Walk, being furnished from Albion Island and relieved by sections weekly, or oftener, thus affording the advantage of patrols to and fro, and keeping up communication between the frontier and the centre of the Northern District, as well as with Belize by the couriers mentioned herein under postal arrangements.

Description of Steam Vessel.

The vessel should have twin screws, so as to turn the quick bends of the river safely. She should have a commodious deck with shot-proof boiler-plate bulwarks, loopholed at certain parts for musketry, also a "dove-cot" (as they were called in the Southern States of America) at the main mast-head (the fore-mast must be clear for canvas) *viz.*, a cylinder of boiler-plate loopholed, from which position sharp-shooters have a good command; the wheel amidships and within a house, with bullet-proof shutters, to be raised in action, having cruciform slits in them, to obtain sights through.

Armament.

Howitzers of large calibre for canister grape and shell, the latter most useful in searching out and dislodging an enemy in the bush; Hale's rockets also are especially serviceable for this purpose.

Site of Barracks at Orange Walk—Selected Site for new Barracks and Block Houses.

Assuming that the garrison is retained at Orange Walk, the present site of the barracks is bad, in a position forbidden to be taken up when occupying a village; they are situated at the re-entering bend of the river, leaving fully three-quarters of the position defenceless, commanded by the adjacent ground and hemmed in by the houses; the bush growing up to and even among many of these houses, sheltered the approach of the Indians, and accounts for the sudden surprise of the garrison; steps have, however, recently been taken for building barracks on a suitable site, defensible themselves, and affording covering protection to the town and settlement; these, with the addition of block-houses on each flank, for the safety of the outposts stationed there, will completely protect the village, for the Indians dread water and never use canoes on the rivers for armed excursions; the local canoes, therefore, dories, or pit-pans being secured, the river forms a secure barrier to the position around which it partially winds.

Precautions on taking up a position in a wild, hostile Country—Check Patrol and its advantages—Precautions to prevent Observation by an Enemy—Check Patrols useful in obtaining Reports and Information.

In taking up or defending a position in a hostile or threatened district, safety mainly depends upon the frequency of patrols and the unobtrusive vigilance of sentries; every patrol should be conducted after the rules laid down for advanced or rear-guards, and additional precaution should be taken to transmit to, and receive communication from, the main body. This would generally be merely an outpost in itself, furnishing an inlying and outlying picquet, with a chain of sentries furnished from the latter, the guard sentries serving as connecting links between them and the outposts. The small number of men available, and the encumbered nature rather than the extent of the ground to be covered, renders the double chain of sentries impracticable for a number of consecutive days; but similar, and almost equal advantage, may be obtained by making the single sentries do their own patrolling between post and post; this is ensured by the following simple expedient of "patrol-checks" (as instituted by Lieutenant Bale, whilst on a tour of out-post duty at Orange Walk, just after the late raid of the 1st September). Say the picquet sentries are out, and the guard sentries (1 and 2) in their ordinary positions; if it is considered desirable to send the check round between reliefs, the Officer on duty or the non-commissioned Officer of the guard takes a "patrol-check" (which may be an oblong piece of wood, lettered P, with a number or letter on it) and accompanied by a file of the guard, goes to any sentry's post he wishes to start it from, say No. 6, and gives it him to carry to No. 5, and 5 to 4, and so on. One of the guard is left to hold No. 6 post, till the "return-patrol" reaches him, this is another check—a bit of wood of different shape, say wedge-shaped, having R P, and a number corresponding to that on the patrol-check, on it—carried by the non-commissioned Officer to No. 1 sentry, who

after receiving the "patrol-check" and ascertaining that all is correct, gives up the "return-patrol;" the latter is then passed back along the chain of sentries, each man resuming his original post, till No. 6 gives it to the guard man at his own post, who takes it back to the guard-room, and the time of its absence is noted by the non-commissioned Officer. This effectually prevents any laxity or irregularity on the different posts, and any observations made by a sentry are communicated for information; the men themselves like the system as varying the monotony; it cheers them to meet a comrade and exchange "all's well" at the other posts, and often trivial scraps of news are God-sends during a period of anxious solitude; it, moreover, keeps the men on the alert without becoming irksome. At night the sentries are instructed to patrol alongside fences and on the grass, avoiding the bare light-coloured ground, and whilst on their posts to stand under the shade of trees or against any dark object, from which they cannot be distinguished at even a few yards distance. The great coat is put on loose over belts and accoutrements, and the sling removed from the rifle, otherwise a white pipeclayed strap will at once reveal the whereabouts of a sentry. The pass or countersign is varied according to instructions from the Officer on duty, and may be a low whistle, two soft taps on the butt of the rifle with the palm of the hand, or any decided but not conspicuously loud challenge. The rounds on duty can at once verify the statement or conjecture of any sentry, as reported to the non-commissioned Officer of the guard, by proceeding direct to the post in question, or if the "check" or "return" is an unusually long time in passing round the chain or *cordon* of sentries, the non-commissioned Officer and a file of the guard patrol to ascertain the cause of delay.

In case of a change in the posts of the sentries being decided on, the non-commissioned Officers of outlying and inlying picquets are assembled and instructed, that they may afterwards explain their orders to the men, and if deemed necessary the men are posted for a short time during daylight, that they may know, and take up their positions without confusion if suddenly ordered out. In case of alarm, the picquet sentries are doubled. After the outlying picquet parades at the guard, or the rendezvous, they proceed direct to their respective posts, and as soon as sufficient time has elapsed, the check is sent round to ascertain if they are at their posts and all correct.

Officers Instructing Men during a Tour of Duty—Cover and Sentries—Shelter from Rain.

It is of great advantage to both the Officer and soldiers if, when the former visits the sentries on their posts he encourages them to give their opinions in addition to answering questions; many valuable suggestions are thus obtained, for no one can know the specialities of a post better than the sentry who has done duty on it a few times; it further encourages the men to make intelligent observation of what is around them, and they feel that the Officers have an interested share in their duties. So with the non-commissioned Officers and men

accompanying an Officer whilst patrolling, admirable opportunities are afforded of illustrating the best way of proceeding unobserved, and acquiring information, if at night or dusk passing along by dark objects and under the shadows of trees, or if the ground is cleared keeping to the hollows, and when stopping to listen, getting beside a tree stem, or down on the grass by a bush. It also tests the vigilance of the sentries, who, if they are Africans, will be faithful to their trust; and if their instructions are to fire if their challenge is not answered, the patrol will be fired into if they do not keep their ears open. A limit of distance for each sentry to patrol on his post is advisable, according to the nature of the cover afforded, and at night they soon learn to conceal themselves effectually. By daylight all advanced sentries should be protected by a temporary cover, concealed by a little growing bush, and be provided with waterproof sheeting, one to lie on and one to cover themselves with in wet weather; all other sentries should have assigned places for shelter, in the event of a heavy downfall of rain, or the percentage of sick from fever and ague would soon make a great deduction from the effective strength of a small outpost force.

Silence and Secrecy Essential—Mounted Men as Patrols—Signalling not Available.

Secrecy in all outpost arrangements is essential, particularly when the natives are disaffected, and may act as spies, and the fewer loud words of command, and especially bugle calls that are heard, the better. The picquet sentries may be recalled during the day by visual signals, passed from post to post, and at night by sending the check round to recall them; they then come in direct from their posts, and no conspicuous signs of movement are apparent.

Cavalry are practically inoperative for the ordinary manœuvres of that arm, but as scouts and patrols, mounted men are invaluable: mounted Zouaves were occasionally employed as such, till His Excellency, Lieutenant Governor Cairns, entrusted the Colonial Secretary, Captain Mitchell R.M.L.I. with the formation of a body of mounted police, to be stationed at Orange Walk; they are commanded by a Sergeant of Constabulary, who speaks Spanish and the Mayor languages; he is a good disciplinarian, and his duty is to receive orders from and report to the local magistrate, who is the Commander of the outpost. Although the force consists of only 12 men, and the Sergeant, they have greatly relieved the burden of Military duties, and established a sense of comparative security, from the regularity with which they bring intelligence from the Fords on the Hondo and the villages, &c., of the frontier. From the generally level and densely wooded nature of the country, semaphore signalling is not available for any considerable distance; the natives signal by firing "Bombas," a charge of powder in any kind of vessel, perhaps a hollow gourd, wrapped or quilted over with cordage or grass fibres, and fired by a slow match, which makes a loud report; these, however, when used by allies to warn the garrison, afforded no intelligence, but caused general and groundless alarm in the neighbourhood.

Indian Drill and Formation of Companies.

Drill adapted to bush work. The Indians have taught us a practical lesson in this respect. Their companies formed in single rank are only twenty-four men, led by a Captain, who has subdivision leaders in the ranks. They usually march in Indian file, one behind the other, through the bush paths, never with a greater front than two abreast, and if they form into line it is only preliminary to a rapid deployment.

Field Exercises and Advantage of adopting Indian Drill—Judicious Tactics of Indians.

In West India regiments, ten men per company are trained and paid as gunners. This number will serve a howitzer. The half companies may be formed as separate companies in single rank, in charge of the guides, and the words of command in present use may serve for precisely similar formations to the Indian drill. This small force then becomes capable of covering a good extent of ground, and is flexible to a degree, but the Captain should be mounted to keep it well in hand; it is capable of counter-manceuvring the Indians by their own tactics, but is backed by a concentrative power unpossessed by them and has the support of artillery fire. The complete surprise of the garrison by the Indians and their orderly retreat after their long but abortive attack, are well known, but since this, particulars of their invasion and march on Orange Walk have transpired, which prove it to have been a well-planned and masterly-executed affair. Their ammunition was neatly manufactured, and the supply of rations of corn cake (unfermented) was sufficient for a week's supply to each man. They secured beforehand a number of pit-pans or dories on the Yucatan side of the Hondo, to effect a simultaneous crossing, and their most advanced files were two miles to the front. They passed all information to the advanced guard as well as persons they met with on their route, who were then transferred as prisoners to the custody of the rear guard, unless they had arms and volunteered to join the main body. This force carefully skirted all villages and plantations, and came unsuspectedly to the rear of the village of Orange Walk, and behind an outlying empty hut, within 100 yards of the magistrate's house. At this place there was all the appearance of an advanced party having bivouacked for some hours during the night. There is no doubt of the supineness or even treachery of the native inhabitants of Orange Walk; and no doubt that the Indians are a subtle and by no means contemptible enemy to deal with.

Earth-work Defences.

The barrack has been protected by earth-works, defended by two pieces of artillery, as far as its defective position will permit, by the Officer commanding the outpost.

Commissariat.

The Commissariat Department is efficient and in harmonious working order.
