

BATTLE OF PARDEBERG

Col. Otter's Official Account

OF THE THREE ENGAGEMENTS LASTING FROM FEB. 18 TO FEB. 27.

The following are Col. Otter's official reports to the militia department regarding the engagements of Feb. 18th, 20th and 27th, at Pardeberg:

The Chief Staff Officer of Militia, Canada—

Pardeberg Drift, Feb. 25th, 1900.

Sir,—I have the honor to report upon the part taken by the battalion under my command in the engagement at Pardeberg on the 18th instant.

The battalion arrived near Pardeberg Drift with the 19th Brigade at 6 a. m. of the 18th instant, having formed the rear guard to the brigade in its march during the night from Klip Drift, a distance of 21 miles. Within half an hour of the arrival of the battalion orders were received to be ready to proceed at 7 a. m., and at 7.20 a. m. the battalion moved out to support the artillery about a mile away. The men in the meantime had had a biscuit and a cup of tea.

CROSSED THE RIVER.

Hardly had the battalion reached the place designated than it was ordered to move to the drift and cross the river. This was done, and the crossing began at about 8.30 a. m. The current ran nine miles an hour, while the water was sufficiently deep to reach up to the men's arms-pits. Two crossings were used about 50 yards apart, over one of which a rope was stretched, by which the men passed across by holding on to it, and at the other the men passed over the force of the current. The companies as they crossed were pushed forward, and at 9.30 a. m. "A" and "C" companies were in the firing line at about 500 yards from the enemy, who occupied the woods along the near edge of the river, but were totally hidden from view. They also occupied a series of dongas, enfiling our left flank; but this was not discovered until towards afternoon, when they disclosed themselves, although they were quietly "sniping" from that direction all day. "D" and "E" companies formed the support, while as "B", "F", "G" and "H" came up they formed the reserve. The remainder of the brigade was disposed of as follows:—The Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, the 19th Brigade, the 3rd (Highland) Brigade was on the south of the river, besides artillery and mounted infantry.

FIRING BEGAN at about 9.20 a. m. from the enemy's right, and continued along their front towards the centre. The advance of the battalion took place over perfectly open ground, somewhat undulating, and with no cover save the inequalities of the ground, and a few bushes. The firing line attained a position from the enemy varying from 400 yards on the right to 800 yards on the left, where it remained until late in the afternoon. After the establishment of the firing line, the enemy's fire was for some time very severe, and Capt. Arnold, who at the time was

doing most excellent service, was mortally wounded, and many others hit.

During this time three or four men on the reserve ("H" Co.) were wounded at a distance of over 1,000 yards. At about noon "D" Co. reinforced the firing line, and shortly afterwards "E" and part of "B" Co. also reinforced, the remainder of "B", "F" and "G" companies becoming supports, with "H" still in reserve. Only one Maxim gun could be crossed, and that was soon got into position by Captain Bell on the rising ground on the left. A battery of field artillery occupied the hills on our left rear, and shelled the enemy's lines at intervals during the day. The fire discipline of the several companies engaged was excellent, and perfect coolness, as well as accurate shooting, was maintained throughout.

Throughout the day the fire was maintained, at times being comparatively slack and then severe. The enemy evidently had the ranges marked, as their fire at certain prominent places was so accurate as to render them almost untenable by us. Interruption to our fire was occasioned several times during the day by the cry from beyond the right of our line to "Stop firing on the left," as men in that part were being hit from the fire from our left. The fire complained of from our left, I am satisfied, from the dongas occupied by the enemy on our left, and not from our own men.

"FINISHED THE BUSINESS." At about 4 p. m. three companies of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, under Lt.-Col. Allworth, came up, and this officer informed me that "he had been sent to finish this business," and "proposed doing so." He then asked for information respecting our own position and that of the enemy, which I gave him.

One company of the Cornwalls was at once sent into the firing line, followed in half an hour by the other two, this reinforcement being received by a very heavy fire from the whole length of the enemy's front. At 8.15 p. m. Lt.-Col. Allworth notified that a general advance would take place and about 3.15 p. m. the whole force with the exception of parts of "C" and "H" companies, which I held in reserve went forward with a rush. The fire of the enemy became intense, and after an advance of about 200 yards effectively stopped our men, and no further progress could be made.

The loss to both the corps taking part in the charge was very severe. The Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry lost 100 men, and a continuous heavy fire maintained until darkness set in about 7 p. m. when I gave the order to collect the dead and wounded and withdrew to the bivouac at the drift. The enemy also withdrew from their position at the same time to the Boer laager some two miles up the river, leaving a few men in the dongas on our left, who continued "sniping" our collecting parties until 10 p. m.

Many instances of individual bravery were displayed. The collection of the dead and wounded of both our own battalion and those of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry was made by parties of the Royal Canadian Regiment all night. The duty was a most onerous one, and too much credit cannot be given to those who were engaged in it. By 7 a. m. of the 19th all dead of the battalion of the D. C. L. I. must here place on record the great services rendered by the Roman Catholic chaplain of the battalion, the Rev. Father O'Leary, who was present in the field all day, and towards the end in the firing line, while during the night he was prominent in the search for the wounded as well as officiating in the burial of the dead. Several of

the officers accompanied these parties up to midnight, while No. 68 Artillery, Reading, Sgt. Middleton, and No. 7388, Pte. Whiggle, were out all night on this duty.

Another incident of coolness and pluck was that of No. 7347, Private Hornbrook, who at daylight in the morning of the 19th instant, was down into the extreme right of the lines occupied by the enemy the previous day. He was unarmed, and came suddenly upon an armed Boer, looking for a stray horse. With great presence of mind Hornbrook pretended to be armed with a revolver, and called imaginary assistance at the same time demanding the man's surrender. The Boer at once submitted, and on being brought in proved to be one of General Cronje's assistants, and a most important officer.

I have the honor to be, sir, your obedient servant, (Signed) W. D. Otter, Lieut.-Colonel commanding Royal Canadian Regiment, 2nd Battalion.

THE ENEMY'S "POM-POM." Wounding of Four Canadians on the 20th of February.

Pardeberg, February 27th, 1900.

Sir,—I have the honor to report upon the operations upon which the battalion under my command was engaged upon the 20th inst., on which occasion four men of corps were wounded.

Following the retirement of the enemy from the position which he withdrew from on the evening of the 18th instant, the battalion was at 6 a. m. of the 20th instant detailed for the outpost line and advanced to within 1,000 yards of the trenches in front of the Boer laager, the Shropshire Light Infantry being on our right, the Gordon Highlanders on our left.

The ground occupied by the battalion was quite open, and slightly rolling, but fairly covered with anti-hills.

The men were served with tea and biscuits about 10 a. m. the cook wagon and water cart being brought up to within 200 yards in rear of the reserve.

An intermittent rifle fire was kept up all day until about 4 p. m., when that of the enemy ceased, and their celebrated Vickers-Maxim gun "pom-pom" was turned upon us no less than five different times, but fortunately without loss to us. The moral effect of the gun, however, is very great, and infinitely more disastrous in its direction than any other arm we have experienced.

The wounds received were entirely among men in the reserve, and from long range rifle fire about 1,700 yards. The day was a trying one, being very hot, while, owing to the enemy's fire, it was almost impossible to get water forward to the men. It was the attempt to bring the water cart forward that first brought the "pom-pom" to bear upon us.

At 6 p. m. the battalion was withdrawn to its bivouac thoroughly done out. The position occupied I have denoted on the sketch accompanying my report of the action of the 18th inst., and a list of the wounded included in the general list.

I have the honor to be, sir, your obedient servant, (Signed) W. D. OTTER, Lieut.-Col. Commanding Royal Canadian Regiment, 2nd Battalion.

TOE NIGHT AT ACK.

How the Force was Disposed for the Attack—Forced a Surrender.

Pardeberg, South Africa, March 2nd, 1900.

Sir,—I have the honor to report on the action of the 27th ultimo, in which the battalion under my command was engaged.

In accordance with instructions received from the general officer commanding the 19th Brigade, 9th Division, on the previous evening, the following disposition of the battalion was made by 10 p. m. of the 26th instant. In the main trench running north and south from the river, and beginning on the left, were placed "C", "D", "E", "F", "G", and "H" companies, while on the extreme right, the trench was about 200 yards long, the right of the trench within 25 yards of the river and 500 yards of the nearest Boer trench. The force placed in this trench numbered 500 men and men of the battalions of the "A" company remained on the south side of the river, where it had been detailed for patrol duty on the morning of the 26th.

The line advanced without interruption for about 400 yards, when it was met by a terrific fire from the enemy. The premature discharge of a couple of shots, just before the general full-on of our men, who instantly threw themselves on the ground; but the effect of the fire was disastrous to us. The river bank, did not suffer, but "G" and "F" companies, being in the open, lost heavily, the former having 4 killed and 12 wounded, the latter 2 killed and 9 wounded. "C" company was within 65 yards, actual measurement, of the advanced trench of the enemy, when the fire was opened on them, the companies on the left, "D", "E", and "G", being from 75 to 100 yards distant from a subsidiary trench in prolongation of the enemy's line. On receiving the enemy's fire the line

AT ONCE LAID DOWN and returned it, while the rear rank generally began to entrench. The time

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