

THE NANA EXPEDITION.

Interviews With Blue-Jackets.

Joseph Herbert Perkins, leading stoker, from the *Alecto*, and Thomas Molyneux, seaman, from the *Phæbe*, who were wounded in the operations against the chief, Nana, in the Brohemic Creek, Niger Protectorate, and were invalided home, arrived at Liverpool on the 18th inst., by the African steamship *Benin*. Mr. Walter Pym, assistant paymaster of the *Alecto*, who has come home on the expiration of his time, was also a passenger by the *Benin*.

The blew-jackets were interviewed by a Liverpool Press representative, who has published the following graphic account of what transpired:—

"When we started that morning to go up the Brohemic Creek," said Perkins, "I knew some rough work was expected. For five days I had not had my clothes off. We were running up and down the rivers and creeks with the launch after the enemy's canoes, and many of them we captured. I was the leading stoker of the *Alecto*, and that morning the protecting shields were put round the launch and the gun before starting, showing that something unusual was expected. The gun was a two-barrelled Nordenfelt. There were nine of us in the launch, and all were armed. I had my cutlass and revolver, and some had their rifles, and our duty was to reconnoitre the enemy's position. 'Not a word is to be spoken,' was the order given by Captain Heugh, our commander, as we entered the creek. The engines were going slow so that the enemy would not hear our approach. The silence of the journey will never be forgotten. The creek narrowed until the trees on each side almost met. Everything was as still as the grave. A short distance up we found a canoe placed across the stream to block the passage, and also to allow the natives to cross from one side to the other. The bush on each side was dense, and as the creek became too narrow further up to turn our launch we turned here, going up stern first and dead slow. The propeller faintly striking the water was the only sound we heard, and we each looked at the other and only spoke by motions. We moved the canoe to the side and passed slowly up, keeping a sharp look-out on either bank. We saw nothing of the enemy, but suddenly rang out the 'bang, bang, bang' of heavy guns, and these and the shouts of the natives told us we were right under the enemy's fortress. The launch was turned end on, but the shots came flying about us with fearful rapidity. One of the first shots struck the Nordenfelt gun and disabled it. The steersman was knocked over, and our captain bravely took his place at the helm in the thick of the fire. The shots simply rained on us.

"Let me give them a rocket, sir," said the drill-instructor who was with us, and an instant later one of these was playing havoc amongst the enemy. To admit of this being fired our captain had

to crouch down, and the rocket shot a few inches over his head, and went so near me that the smoke rushed into my face.

"It was a moment of intense excitement; the majority of us were lying at the bottom of the launch wounded; a cannon ball had struck my right foot, but I dare not leave my post. I was ordered to drive ahead full speed. I tried the engines and found them intact. This was a blessing—a Godsend. Had anything happened to those engines, not a man would have been left alive to tell the tale. I called out to my mate Lambkin to give me something to bind my foot up, and he gave me his belt, but this was too hard. 'I have nothing else, Joe,' he said; 'but here, take my flannel,' and off went his flannel singlet.' I then bethought myself of my sweat rag and tied that round, and over this Lambkin wrapped his singlet. The brave fellow had then only his trousers on. I usually sat on the exhaust chest to drive the engines, with a cushion under me, but now I took the cushion to rest my foot on, and sat down on the hot exhaust chest itself.

"For God's sake, Perkins, go ahead!" came from Captain Heugh, who had himself been wounded now. The launch was travelling as fast as I could make her go.

"Open her out or we'll all be killed," he shouted out again.

"I cannot go any faster, sir; she is opened out as much as possible," I replied.

"Up to this time Captain Heugh did not know I was moving, and my mate called out, 'His foot's shot off, sir.' We sped down the creek with the cannon balls and other shots ringing after us. Then, too, we saw for the first time that the enemy were on each side of us. We now had to slacken down, as the canoe had been replaced across the stream, and to run into it might be meant the sinking of our launch. Our craft was struck several times, and was gradually sinking under us—indeed, the engines were working with the water half-way up them, and at every revolution they threw the water in all directions. Our gallant captain still stuck to his post at the tiller, and my mate, Lambkin, half-naked, with chief gunner's mate Crouch, were having a regular duel with the fort. Both men were firing from the side of the launch as she sped on. It was a fearful journey. Poor Jury was lying in the bottom of the boat calling out for water. He had been struck on the back with a cannon ball, and was on the point of death. Another of my comrades was calling out, 'Go on, Joe.' All was excitement. Major Crawford, with a broken shin, most cheerfully bade the men bear up, as the *Alecto* was near. Captain Lalor, too, with a fearful wound in his leg, cheered us all he could. The firing still continued on both sides, and the good little launch did her work well. In the excitement I forgot I was wounded, but when I got along-

side our ship and the work was over, I felt faint. Comrades bore me to the *Alecto*'s deck and revived me with a little brandy. It was a most providential escape all through, for no sooner had we all left the launch than she filled, and would have sank but for being held by the falls from the davits. It is at times like these when true nature comes to the front. Major Crawford and Captain Lalor, although badly wounded, said, 'The sailors first,' and so it was that we got our wounds attended to before them. Poor Jury just lived to reach his vessel, and Captain Lalor, who had his leg amputated, never regained consciousness, and died. Major Crawford, while in the launch, took off his trousers and bound the upper part of his leg up tightly. This stopped him losing too much blood and saved his life. After getting on the *Alecto* I lost my senses, and when I came to next morning I was in the hospital, lying beside the wounded men who had survived. I cannot say too much for the bravery and kindness of our captain and all in the boat. My mate Lambkin was promoted to my post, and well he deserved it. Believe me, sir, while I was at those engines urging the little craft on I never felt my injury. It must have been the excitement and the knowledge that the lives of us all depended upon those engines that made me forget my hurt."

"You'll get the Victoria Cross," said the reporter.

"Oh, no, sir, that ain't for such as me; I'm only a blue-jacket. Besides, what else could I do? It's at times like them that we must pull ourselves together, whether wounded or not, and help others."

The interview took place as Perkins on his crutches was waiting for the train to start for London. He was on his way to Chatham to go into the hospital there. It was sad to see, writes the reporter, such a fine young fellow maimed for life. He is only twenty-eight years of age, and was married but last January, and he is now in hopes of being furnished with a cork foot by which to walk. He was coming on splendidly when the treacherous African fever struck him down, and when seen at the railway station on Friday last week he still bore traces of the prostrating malady.

Molyneux formed one of the party of about 250 men who went to avenge the attack on the *Alecto*'s launch. The men were from the *Phæbe*, *Alecto*, and the newly formed native troops. The strangest part of Molyneux's case is that he has at present a bullet "rattling about," he says, "some where near to or in one of my lungs." He is reputed by the doctors to have had the narrowest "squeak" possible with his life. He left Liverpool on the Friday for Plymouth.

"There were twenty-eight guns in the stockade that fired on the launch," said Molyneux. "We took this, captured, dismantled, and spiked the guns, and then marched on to Nana's town."

"You took a portion of Nana's town