

ASHANTI.

A LECTURE DELIVERED AT THE ROYAL CANADIAN ARTILLERY INSTITUTE,
QUEBEC, BY CAPTAIN ERNEST F. WURTELE, R.L.

(Concluded from last issue.)

ON the 6th of January Sir Garnet Wolseley sent an ultimatum to the king, that he would be prepared to make peace on the following conditions :

1st. All prisoners, both European and African, to be at once delivered up.

2nd. An indemnity of 50,000 ounces of gold to be paid.

3rd. A treaty of peace to be signed at Kumassi, to which place the major-general would proceed with a sufficient force of Europeans, hostages for their safety being first given.

The king was alarmed and wished for peace, as did most of his chiefs, as their army had been disbanded and could not be re-assembled for some weeks, and, further, the white man was already north of Prah. On the 9th of January the king wrote to Sir Garnet Wolseley that he accepted his terms of peace and sent one of the Europeans, and begged that the British force might not proceed any further. He would doubtless have complied with the first and perhaps the second demand of the ultimatum, but not the third, for the presence of a European force in Kumassi would have been regarded by all the surrounding tribes as a proof of the downfall of Ashanti, and their haughty spirit would never submit to it without a struggle. Sir Garnet replied on the 13th of January that he could not halt his force until his terms were complied with, after which the troops were pushed on rapidly. On the 20th of January the passage of the Prah was commenced by the European troops, upon whom the climate was beginning to tell. On the 23rd of January another letter was received from the king, urgently entreating that the advance of the troops should be suspended, and in proof of his friendship he released all the European captives. Sir Garnet replied on the 24th that he intended to go to Kumassi and it was for the king to decide whether he went there as a friend or as a foe. The troops continued to advance, and by the 29th of January, 218 Europeans had become non-effective through sickness.

On the 31st of January, 1874, the troops advanced in three columns. The centre consisted of the 42nd Highlanders and Scouts, the left of half the Naval Brigade and one regiment, and the right of the other half of the Naval Brigade and another regiment. The Rifle Brigade and a company of the 23rd Welsh Fusiliers were held in reserve. The total force in round figures amounted to some 1,600 Europeans and 700

natives. The enemy was first encountered three-quarters of a mile from Kwaman, which was taken without serious resistance ; beyond this point he was found in considerable force. A swampy hollow, through which flowed a sluggish stream, had to be crossed, beyond which the enemy was in position upon a ridge. They opened fire as the 42nd commenced descending the hollow, and one hundred yards in advance the forest was hid by smoke, from which shot forth tongues of flame without a single foe being visible. The fire was so heavy that the branches of the trees overhanging the path were almost stripped of their leaves. As, however, they were firing at a range too great for their weapons, the hail of lead was almost harmless. As company after company went down the path they were lost to sight in the forest, but their positions could be told by the sharp reports of their rifles, so different to the loud, dull roar of the Ashanti musketry, and their advance to the stream was rapid. At this point the engagement became more serious, the Ashantis being close at hand, and men began to fall fast and the wounded to stream to the rear. Although seven of the eight companies of the 42nd were engaged, they made but little progress, and it became necessary to bring up the company of the 23rd, and a little later two guns were ordered into action in the front. With difficulty they were got across the stream and a little way up the path, where they fired into the dense masses of the enemy crowded together for its defence. After the firing of some 15 rounds the 42nd were able to carry the ridge with a rush. A large camp was found on the summit, and when crossed a determined opposition was met from a ridge beyond. A repetition of the same tactics, and this was also carried. The village of Amoafu was then rushed and taken. The Ashantis, who were in very superior numbers, had endeavored to follow their usual outflanking tactics, and the latter was really won by the piercing of their centre by the 42nd, while the columns to the right and left prevented them from enveloping it.

Much difficulty was experienced in bringing up the baggage, as the enemy continued to attack them from time to time. Many of the European troops had to be kept out until after dark to protect the carriers. At this slow rate of progress it would have been necessary to make a protracted halt till more supplies were brought up. Sir Garnet decided to make a dash for Kumassi, some

15 miles distant, as his force had supplies for four days with them.

On the morning of February the 3rd the advance upon Kumassi was commenced. The enemy was met with shortly after starting, but was quickly dispersed. The advance had then to be continued slowly, as the enemy formed numerous ambuscades, from which they fired and retreated, inflicting some losses at every discharge. Shortly after noon messengers arrived from Kumassi with a flag of truce and a letter from the king, in which he begged for some delay, as he was willing to meet all demands. Sir Garnet replied that he could not halt until the hostages were in his keeping. It was learned that the enemy which had fought at Amoafu was encamped ready to bar the approach to the capital. The force bivouacked at the Ordah River, which was about 50 feet wide and waist deep. Rain fell steadily all night and drenched the men. By daybreak next morning the Engineers had completed a bridge, and the advance from the Ordah took place shortly before six. The head of the column was fired upon almost immediately, and the advance was continued in short rushes. At 11 a.m. the Ashantis made a determined attack upon Ordashu. They at times pressed boldly up, cheering and shouting, and at one time came up in close line and fired a regular volley, but were at once mown down by the fire of the Sniders. At noon the 42nd were ordered to break through the enemy in front and push straight through to Kumassi, disregarding all flank attack. Without stop or stay the 42nd rushed on cheering, their pipes playing, their officers to the front ; ambuscade after ambuscade was successfully carried, village after village won in succession, till the whole Ashantis broke and fled in the wildest disorder down the pathway on their front to Kumassi. The ground was covered with traces of their flight. Umbrellas and war chairs of their chiefs, drums, muskets, killed and wounded covered the whole way, and the bush on each side was trampled as if a torrent had flowed through it. No pause took place till a village about four miles from Kumassi was reached, when the absolute exhaustion of the men rendered a short halt necessary. The king was present and witnessed this advance. When the 42nd reached Karsi, the last village before Kumassi, a messenger arrived with a flag of truce and a letter from Mr. Dawson, begging the major-general to stop, but no notice was taken of it. A little further on a second flag of truce was met, with a letter on this occasion, requesting that the march of the troops be arrested. After a delay of half an hour, to permit of a communication with Sir Garnet Wolseley, the force pushed