

The Defence of Ekowe

by

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On New Year's Day, 1879, No. 1 Column, under the command of Colonel C. K. Pearson, was encamped at Thring's Post, 24 miles from the Lower Tugela drift, better known as Fort Pearson.

At this time all hope of King Cetewayo complying with our conditions had been set aside, and our column was under orders to march to the Lower Tugela drift on 3rd January; should no signs of compliance on the part of the King be visible by 11th January, we were to cross the river into Zululand.

On 12th January, at daybreak, the passage of the river commenced, but it was not till the 16th that the whole column was encamped in the enemy's country. On Saturday, 18th, at 5 a.m., our column commenced its forward march, the troops being in excellent spirits and eager for the fight which we well knew was at hand. Everything progressed in the most satisfactory manner until the 22nd, for although we had, up to this time, observed the Zulu scouts watching our movements from the hills in front, yet we apprehended no imminent danger. However, on that morning we marched as usual at daybreak and all went on quietly until 8 o'clock, at which hour we were ordered to halt for breakfast.

The 'Bufs' and Naval Brigade had just 'piled arms', and the gunners were on the point of 'unhooking', when we were startled by the rattle of musketry in the bush about 50 yds. to our front, where our native scouts had been posted. We lost no time in taking up position on a knoll which lay to our left, from the top of which we could overlook the bush in our rear and right and left, but which was commanded by hills in front; from this point we saw the Zulus swarming down our right flank, in what appeared to me to resemble *échelon* of companies. The infantry and Jack Tars swarmed up the side with all speed, and, with the assistance of some of the latter men the guns soon gained the summit, so that in a few minutes from the time the first shot was heard we were firing shrapnel into a cloud of Zulus.

The tactics of the enemy were now apparent; they evidently intended to engage us in front, while large numbers swept round our flanks. However, the plan of attack, fortunately for us, was ill-timed, for the movement round our right flank was executed with marvellous rapidity, but that round our left we were happily enabled to check by sending round some mounted men and natives before it had fully developed itself. For the first hour the Zulus fought most stubbornly; having taken to the bush they directed most of their fire on our force on the knoll, and although we plied

them with shell, rockets, and Martini bullets, yet it was fully an hour-and-a-half before they commenced to retreat from the bush on our right flank.

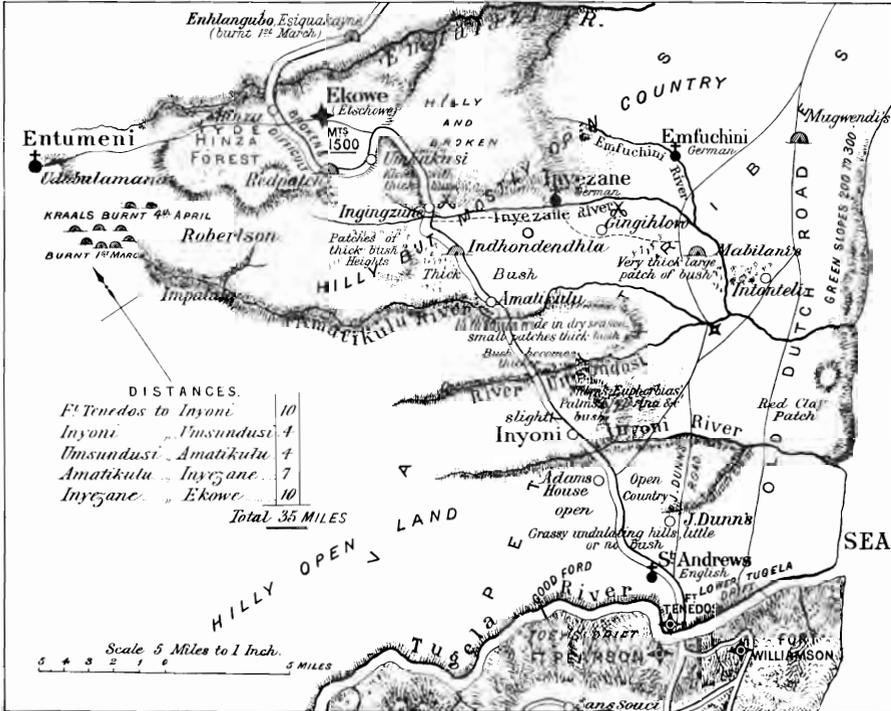
The 2nd division of the column, which had extended itself from the bottom of the knoll down the line of wagons, now brought its right shoulder forward and skirmished prettily through the bush. Having cleared the enemy from this part we were enabled to bring the fire of both guns to bear on the hill in front, to which the enemy still clung. It was now suggested to Colonel Pearson by Commander Campbell of the *Active*, that it would be advisable to drive them from the heights. The Naval Brigade and a company of the 'Buffs' were ordered to carry out the operation under cover of the guns. The Jack Tars seemed mad for blood, for they charged up the hill in any formation, banging away right and left, driving the Zulus before them. The company of the 'Buffs' did their best to keep up with the sailors, but were not equal to the occasion, as they had been 'doubled' up from the rear in order to take part in the attack. One of the Zulu prisoners taken in this action informed me that they considered they were getting the best of the action until '*those horrible men in white trowsers rushed up and showered lead on them*'. These were, of course, the Tar's in their ducks. The enemy now fled precipitately, throwing away their shields and assegais. The ground was strewn with dead bodies, some lying in heaps where shells had burst among them. The Zulu loss was estimated at 600 killed and wounded, while 7 000 attacked us; on our side 13 killed and 17 wounded, while Col. Pearson and Col. Parnell of the 'Buffs' both had their chargers shot under them.

Such, in brief, was the action of the Inyezane, and without further comment I may say we were thankful for having come out of it as we did. The artillery fired 65 rounds of shell; at the commencement of the action the practice with the shrapnel was excellent, but the want of a more perfect time fuze was sorely felt. Some splendid chances were lost through loss of time in boring and fixing. It is impossible to suppose that in the heat of action a time fuze can be bored with any degree of accuracy. A man may be possessed of great nerve, yet I defy him to have a perfectly steady hand on such occasions. Undoubtedly, one's first impulse is to discard the time fuze in action and use the percussion fuze altogether. When the enemy took to the bush the common shell and percussion fuze acted extremely well — we did not notice a single case of 'blind' shell, although 40 rounds of this nature were fired. The rockets, as I expected, proved of little value; so much had been said of their moral effect on savages, but, to my mind, the Zulus displayed the utmost contempt for them. The enormous 24-pr. Hale's war rocket fired from tubes by the Naval Brigade seemed to cause as much anxiety to our own men as to the enemy.

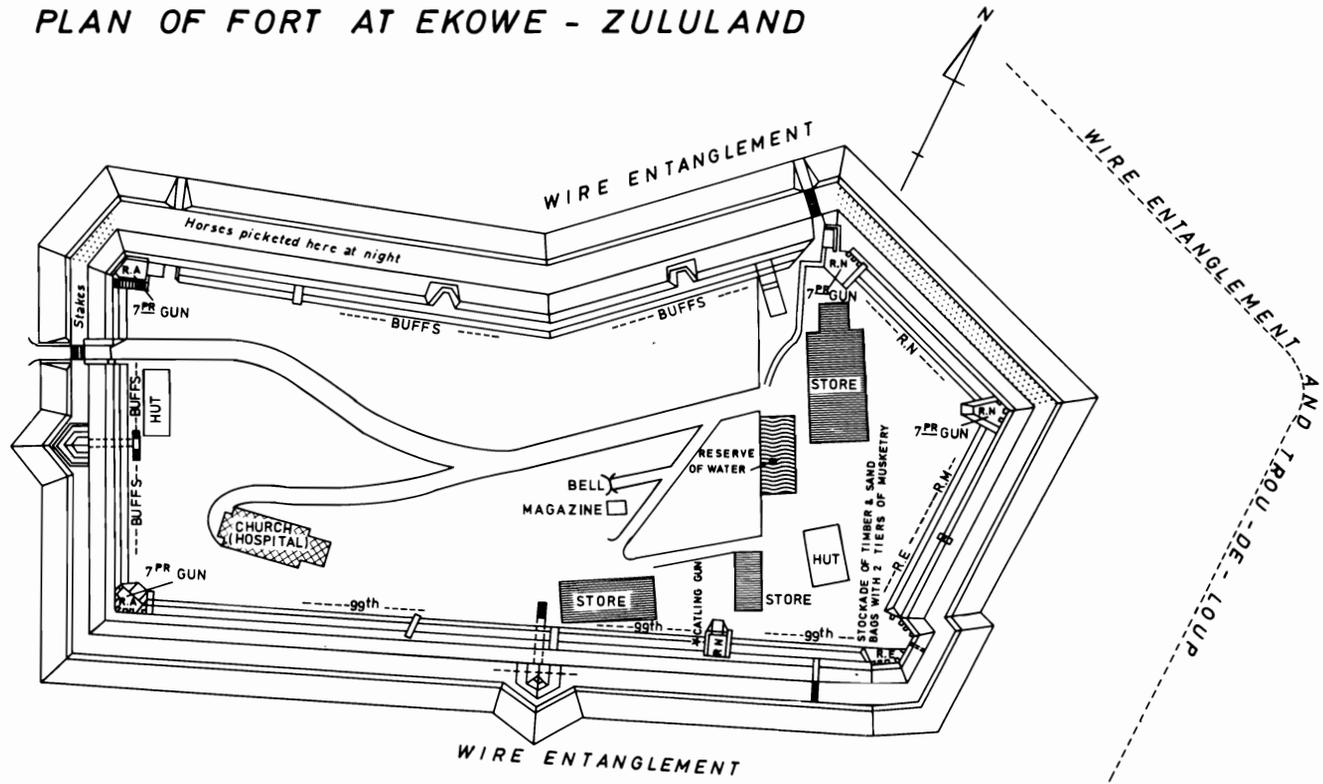
The column now pursued its route with delay, and bivouacked for the night on a ridge about three miles from the battle field. We started again at daybreak on the following morning and arrived at Ekowe mission station about noon.

This Norwegian mission station is built on a high range of hills overlooking the sea; in the distance were large rugged mountains, over which lay our path to Ulundi. The station itself consisted of a small church, the parsonage, school, and a few out-houses, built of brick with thatched roofs, all being hidden away among plantations, orange groves and gum

SKETCH OF ROAD FROM FORT TENEDOS TO EKOWE



PLAN OF FORT AT EKOWE - ZULULAND



Traced from plans drawn
by Lieuts. Main & Willock, R.E.

trees — it was a most picturesque spot. The approach to the station was across fairly level meadow-land, with clumps of magnificent trees and patches of bush here and there; while close to the church was a lovely little bubbling stream shaded by forest trees. It seemed such a pity to destroy a beautiful, peaceful-looking little spot of this sort. The site was well adapted for a mission station but was by no means a position on which to build a fort. It was commanded on three sides by rising ground within rifle range, while on the fourth side a ravine covered with bush ran up within a few yards of it; but, of course, the church and out-houses were invaluable as a hospital and storehouses, so that this site was chosen in preference to others which were better suited for defence.

Our orders were to form an advanced *depôt* at Ekowe, to construct a fort there, and, having completed our work, to move forward on Ulundi, leaving a sufficient garrison behind us. We were naturally in high spirits; our column had so far progressed admirably. We had encountered and defeated the enemy, and were fully convinced that with good honest work we ought to be on our way to Ulundi within two weeks' time.

Having, therefore, pitched our camp round the mission station, with the parsonage as Head-Quarters, we commenced to clear away everything which could afford cover to an enemy; the magnificent trees gradually disappeared, the gardens and orange groves were cut away, and out-houses, too far distant for use, were blown up. When this clearance was completed, ground was broken and the fort itself commenced.

It was now 28th January, but such a miserable system of inter-communication between the different columns existed that at this date we were in total ignorance of the disastrous battle of Isandhlwana, which had been fought on the same day and at the same hour as the action of the Inyezane — so much so, that we actually sent down our empty wagons (50 in number) to the Tugela, to bring up supplies, under escort of two companies of infantry! Easily then can an idea be formed of the sensation in camp caused by the arrival of the following despatch: 'From Lord Chelmsford to Colonel Pearson — Consider all my orders cancelled, you may expect the whole Zulu army down on you; do, therefore, what you may think best for the safety of your column.' As may be supposed, the news came like a thunder-bolt among us; it was, however, no time for arguing or conjecturing; a meeting of commanding officers was at once summoned. The momentous question now put to us was, whether to retire at once to the Tugela or to hold our position against overwhelming odds for an indefinite period? This question was certainly a difficult one to decide. On the one hand by retiring we should lose the ground already gained; we should, moreover, have not a single column left in Zulu territory, since the others must, as we knew, be forced to retire; in addition, the mere fact of our beating such a hasty retreat on all sides would have a most disastrous effect on the minds of the Natal Kaffirs. These Kaffirs would otherwise say (Lord Chelmsford afterwards informed us they *did* say) 'Oh! no, the English are not yet beaten; why, there is still a column in the heart of Zululand'. On the other hand, by holding our position we overcame these difficulties and, moreover, held a check on the Zulus should they contemplate an invasion of British territory, for they could scarcely attempt such an enterprise with such a large force in their rear. An argument more forcible than these was, that a convoy

of two months' provisions was within seven miles of our camp at that very moment. It was decided, then, to hold the fort at all hazards.

The mounted men, together with the two battalions of native contingent, were ordered to retire at once, as we had not sufficient corn for the horses of the former, and no room for the latter in the fort. We kept merely a sufficient number of mounted men and natives for vedette duty.

Our cavalry ought, no doubt, to have been kept at any risk; even if corn failed, there was an abundance of grass in the vicinity of the fort. We felt their loss greatly — we were able to gain literally no information of the movements of the enemy without them. Major Barrow, who was in command of them, was ordered to tell Colonel Ely, the officer in charge of the convoy, to hasten on with all speed, and to leave any wagon behind which could not keep pace with him. On that evening, to our delight, the convoy made its appearance, but it had been found necessary to abandon eight wagons, containing flour, biscuit, lime juice, coffee, and sugar — how we grudged their loss afterwards!

On the following day all the troops came inside the entrenchment, for as yet it had not assumed the dimensions of a fort. Tents were discarded, and the officers and men slept under wagons, which had been placed inside, round the parapet.

Now the defence of Ekowe commenced in reality. The garrison was as follows:

<i>Combatants</i>	
Staff	7
The 'Buffs' (6 companies)	609
99th Regt. (4 companies)	380
Naval Brigade	174
Royal Artillery	26
Royal Engineers	96
Natal Pioneers	50
Native Contingent	15

<i>Non-Combatants</i>	
Commissariat and Transport	12
Army Medical Dept.	20
Conductors	15
Wagon leaders and drivers	270
Native servants	20
Total, 1 339 whites, 355 blacks.	

<i>Armament</i>	
1 gatling, with 127 000 rounds.	
2 rocket tubes, 83 rockets.	
1 rocket trough, 25 rockets.	
4 7-pr. M.L.R. guns, 150 rounds per gun.	

For the next few days every available man was at work on the entrenchments, while the country round was cleared as much as possible, and although clusters of Zulus might be observed watching our movements, yet we were not interfered with. Occasionally we fired a shell at them, but as soon as

they saw the smoke from the gun they would either lie flat down, or, bending themselves nearly double, would run like madmen.

In the space of a week we made our position practically safe; the ditch and parapet were now a respectable size, and it was merely a matter of improving and strengthening our work by degrees. The fort was in shape an oblong, the north and south sides being 120 and 180 yds. respectively, the east and west sides 300 yds. each. The ditch was 12 ft. wide and 7 ft. deep. The church was used as a hospital, while the schoolroom and parsonage acted as storehouses, and as I said before, the officers and men made shelters for themselves under the wagons, and by allowing the tarpaulin (with which every wagon is supplied) to fall over the sides, they managed to make themselves fairly comfortable.

It took some time before one became accustomed to sleeping under these wagons without doing daily damage to one's head, for on the command going round at night to 'stand to your arms' (which took place when the alarm was given) one naturally jumped up imagining oneself in a tent, but the real situation was promptly suggested to one by a violent contact of head and wagon. After some time, when I got accustomed to my quarters, I found myself *rolling* out from under the wagon on the alarm being given, having been taught on several occasions the folly of *jumping* up.

I can safely say that for the first fortnight of our imprisonment at Ekowe there was a scare every night, during the rest of our stay there they occurred at intervals. As a rule the cry was false alarm. One night for instance I remember hearing a rifle shot, followed quickly by two or three more; in an instant the gunners were at their posts on the guns and the infantry lining the parapet, for we all slept in our clothes. These shots were quickly followed by a rattle of musketry along one face of the fort; so sure were we (the gunners) that the Zulus had made an attack that we produced the case shot. However, in a few seconds the firing ceased, and the cause of the alarm inquired into. The answer was, 'Please sir the sentry distinctly saw a Zulu loitering about round that bush outside'. The real cause of the scare being a pair of sailor's ducks which were hanging up to dry on a bush, having been blown about by the wind. Next morning we discovered those articles riddled with bullet holes, which at least spoke well for the shooting!

Reveill  sounded at daybreak, and we then commenced to work at the entrenchments, while 'last post' sounded at 8 p.m., at which hour lights were at once extinguished. Our rations at first consisted of flour, biscuit, tea, sugar, and meat. The two excellent officers of the 'Buffs' (my messmates) and I divided our rations as follows. At breakfast toasted biscuit and tea, at mid-day meal the same, and at dinner our meat and anything our soldier-cook could make out of the flour. At first his cakes were most indigestible, as we had no baking powder, but he improved as time went on. Occasionally, when our troops made a raid on the Zulu mealie fields, a large supply was brought into camp, we then had an *entr e* of roast mealies, while we made the green tops into an excellent vegetable.

The 2 000 head of cattle in our charge were a source of great trouble and inconvenience. During the day they were driven to the grazing ground under escort of two companies of infantry, while at dusk they were drawn in close round and under fire of the fort. A large number were placed in a wagon laager, the sides of which were enfiladed from the parapet, and the

remainder tied down to their yokes. The horses and the mules were at first picketed outside, but as we soon became aware of their immense value we constructed a stable in the ditch, and had them driven there at night, by means of a ramp cut in the counter scarp. The stench at night then may be easier imagined than described, thus surrounded by cattle on the outside, and packed like herrings within. But in the daytime the men were encouraged to keep outside the fort as much as possible in their leisure hours, while the blacks were positively forbidden to enter the fort till nightfall, and were driven out at daybreak; our sanitary arrangements being exceedingly well managed, and the greatest attention was given to them by all hands.

As regards ammunition there was a plentiful supply so we now felt perfectly secure. Every means of procuring cover had been taken; traverses were constructed at intervals along the parapet, the guns placed on platforms, and protected by blinded batteries. As the weary days wore on, *trous-de-loups*, wire entanglements, caponiers in the ditch, and finally a drawbridge made their appearance. What we felt sorely was the want of medicine. We searched through the kits of the mounted men who had retired with Major Barrow and discovered a fair supply of 'Eno's fruit salt', and 'Cockle's pills', also some private stores, which were afterwards sold by auction. It may be interesting to mention that some of these articles fetched the following prices: Bottle of pickles, 25s.; curry powder, 23s.; Worcester sauce, 25s. (per bottle); tin of lobster, 18s.; box of sardines 12s.; and a ham, £7 10s.! Tobacco fetched 20s. per lb.

I recollect talking to a group of officers in the fort some few days after this sale about the reported surrender of *Oham*, brother of King Cetewayo. We were standing outside the wagon of the officer who had purchased the ham for £7 10s. He was amongst us in a moment, and said 'What is that about another *ham*? Quite ready to give another £7 10s.' He was ever afterwards called 'Old Ham!'

Although there was a fair supply of gun ammunition, yet we discovered that the quantity of case shot was not sufficient, as this projectile would be most necessary in case of attack. Fortunately the idea struck me that one of *Morton's jam pots* might be made into a projectile of this description. It *exactly* fitted the bore. This important intelligence was conveyed to General Pearson, who issued orders for all the jam tins in camp to be left at the residence (under a wagon) of the O.C.R.A. Needless to say, the order was readily complied with, for I discovered the outside of my 'chateau' littered with every conceivable description of tin, from those which contained butter (in shape like a forage cap) to the most diminutive potted meat tin. Having selected those required, we constructed, with the assistance of a tin-smith of the 'Bufs', 25 excellent rounds of case shot. One of these articles may be seen in the R.A. Institution. We tested three rounds against dummies, and found they acted admirably.

On 7th February we received in a despatch an account of the disaster at Isandhlwana, which cast a gloom over the fort, for among the names down as killed we found many old and valued friends — many of them our companions in arms in the late Kaffir war. In this despatch Lord Chelmsford said: 'Should like to see Naval Brigade garrisoning forts of Lower Tugela; you and your staff should be there also. Endeavour to arrange for the holding of an entrenchment requiring a smaller garrison. Your best field officers

should remain in command. Bring back only what baggage is absolutely necessary — sick and wounded in empty wagons.' At a council of war at once summoned it was unanimously agreed that it would be impossible to carry out Lord Chelmsford's wishes. In the first place we knew that a force of about 15 000 Zulus lay between us and the Tugela. How then could half our garrison, encumbered with wagons and with sick and wounded, hope to cope with such numbers. Again, we could not attempt to break through under cover of night, as we could not by any possibility cover the distance (32 miles) in the time. Moreover we could not carry out Lord Chelmsford's plan of 'arranging to hold an entrenchment requiring a smaller garrison'. For, should half our garrison be sent away, the remainder would be insufficient to man the parapet of our fort in case of attack.

To this despatch, Colonel Pearson therefore replied, that these reasons in support of his remaining where he was were so strong, that he determined to communicate them to him (Lord Chelmsford) before taking further action in the matter; and that he hoped Lord Chelmsford would reconsider the words of his despatch.

We waited anxiously for a reply from Lord Chelmsford, but the 'runner' who took this despatch shared the fate of many others; so our garrison remained at Ekowe.

Some of the Kafirs, composing our Native Contingent in the fort, would volunteer to run through the Zulus at night for a sovereign! Many were the letters I sent home, but I have since discovered that only three arrived safely, so conclude our poor 'runners' seldom escaped the vigilance of the enemy.

We had now been 20 days shut up; the monotony of the situation was becoming dreadful; we were of course unable to walk or ride out of sight of the fort, so we found difficulty in passing the time.

The impertinence of the Zulus was becoming laughable. They would shout out 'come out of that hole you old women; we always thought the English would fight, and not burrow under the ground!' Having in the meantime looted the wagons of the convoy abandoned by Colonel Ely, they frequently informed us that our coffee and sugar, &c., was excellent, and that they hoped soon to come and share ours with us!

This war of words was carried on between our cattle boys and the Zulus posted on the neighbouring hills.

On the 22nd February the enemy made a faint-hearted attack on our cattle, but were repulsed with loss by two companies of infantry, and the mounted men. Beyond this attack, and few successful raids made by our troops on their mealie fields, nothing important occurred until 1st March.

We intended on that day to make a sortie against Dabulamanzi's military kraal, which was situated about eight miles from the fort, and from which parties of Zulus frequently appeared for the purpose of harassing our cattle guard. Our plan of operation was to start about midnight, or a little after, and to arrive at the kraal if possible about daybreak. It was, however, 2 a.m. before all arrangements were complete, and our force started off. It was composed of the following troops: 400 infantry, some native pioneers, about 30 mounted men, and one gun R.A. The night was luckily clear, for we struck a path straight across country, under the guidance of one of our Zulu allies.

It was the most silent march I ever took part in, and will be long remembered. All orders were given in whispers, we seemed to glide along, and yet the gun-wheels creaked outrageously, or rather one seemed to imagine so.

Our progress was not rapid, as halts were called continually in order either to overcome obstacles, or to allow our guide to inspect the country. When within half-a-mile of the kraal the day began to break, and here an incident worthy of mention happened. About 500 yds., on a hill to our left, I noticed in the dim light some kraals, and perceived a Zulu strolling leisurely out of one of them. For a few seconds he had his back to us, but quickly turning round no doubt espied our little force wending its way along below. He fled like a hare. The circumstance was at once reported to Col. Pearson, who sent four mounted men to try and cut him off. It was, however, too late, and I feel sure that the man upset our plans, for on arriving in sight of the military kraal some few minutes after, we saw to our disgust the whole Zulu *impi* streaming out of it with all their goods and chattels in their arms. We could hear the loud voice of the chief giving orders, and the cattle being driven away. We were unfortunately unable to bring our gun into action on them as they moved down a hill out of sight, but we sent our mounted men forward to take and burn the kraal. They found it evacuated. The rest of our force moved forward as rapidly as possible, and soon came in sight of the retreating Zulus, who were already some 1 500 yds. distant, streaming up a hill opposite. We fired two or three rounds of shrapnel at them, killing and wounding about ten, but owing to the thick cover the fire was not very effective. The Zulus soon crowned the hill opposite, which overlooked the private kraal of Dabulamanzi, but Col. Pearson considered we should lose too many in attempting to burn it, so we had to content ourselves with having destroyed the military kraal. We therefore retired ignominiously. Dabulamanzi afterwards informed me that the Zulus considered that we had received a decided reverse in this little expedition. They showed us indeed at the time that they thought so, for our retreat was closely followed. They appeared on the crests of hills soon after we vacated them; took advantage of every patch of bush to our right and left by keeping up a hot fire on us. We divided our mounted men into a front and rear guard, and thus kept the enemy from closing in on us, but were forced to halt at intervals and silence them with a volley.

It was really a pleasure to watch the manner in which these Zulus skirmished. No crowding, no delay, as soon as they were driven from one cover they would hasten rapidly to the next awkward bit of country through which our column would have to pass. Luckily for us their shooting was inferior, or we should have suffered severely. We arrived safely at the fort about midday. So ended the exciting but most unsatisfactory expedition to Dabulamanzi's kraal.

It was on 2nd March that one of our vedettes reported that glasses were being flashed from the Lower Tugela. Sure enough, there was flashing going on as distinctly as possible. Our signallers were at once summoned, and were not long in reading the following message: 'Look out for 1 000 men on 13th; be prepared to sally out when you are aware of my presence.' This message was repeated for the next two or three days, as we were unable to convey to them that we understood. However, by 5th March we

had fixed our glass sufficiently well to inform them we had taken in the message, and they commenced to forward further information.

I cannot tell you how delighted we were on the receipt of this news. The spirits of the whole of the troops seemed to improve, even the poor sick men in hospital — some on the point of death — seemed to be cheered up with the happy intelligence. For some days the weather was cloudy, so signalling was impossible. Nothing worthy of mention occurred in the meantime except that a runner made his appearance in camp, bearing a despatch a fortnight old; this aroused our suspicions, more especially when we noticed that he wore an overcoat with the badge of 24th Regt. on it. Our Kaffirs, moreover, informed us that he could not have come from the Tugela by any possibility, as he was 'oiled' and his legs bore no marks of having been in the bush. In fact, he was no other than a Zulu spy. He was at once put in irons, and remained so till we were relieved. What became of the wretched man, I know not. When with us he was continually informed that his ultimate fate would be the gallows.

Just at this time one of our vedettes was killed and another wounded by Zulus, who surprised them by creeping up through the long grass which surrounded their posts. The latter vedette escaped miraculously; while sitting on his horse, evidently half asleep, with his carbine *slung across* his shoulder (contrary to orders), he was suddenly surprised by about a dozen Zulus. By his own account they rushed in on him, one of them actually laying hold of his horse's bridle. By dint of spur he cleared himself. The Zulus then fired a volley at him, but to his delight his horse went on, although he felt himself wounded. This man arrived safely in camp, although he had been shot through both thighs, two fingers shot off (or had to be cut off from effects of the wound), and his horse assegaied. We found, in addition, a bullet hole in the pommel of his saddle, and the splash where a bullet had hit the lock of his carbine. Curiously enough, this very man was afterwards brought before my brother, a resident magistrate in Ireland, for having assaulted an old man and stolen his hat, for which joke the Ekowe hero, I am sorry to say, paid the penalty.

We had now thoroughly established communication with the Tugela by means of our primitive heliograph which in reality was nothing more than an eighteen-penny bedroom looking glass, which can be seen at any time in the United Service Institution. By degrees we became acquainted with the events of the past two months, of which we had hitherto been in total ignorance. As each message was flashed, the excitement was intense; the men crowding round and straining their ears to hear each letter as the signallers pronounced it. As each word was spelt it was communicated to the crowd, whose pleasure it was to anticipate the meaning of the whole message. I recollect, on one occasion, sitting next to General Pearson when the following message was spelt out: 'Mrs. Pearson is—' then a dead silence all round; the sun had gone in and, as yet, we were unable to tell what the next word would be; would it be dead, or alive, or what? I shall never forget my general's face when the sun having again shone out we read the letter 'W', and he at once knew the word would be 'Well'. His look was that of intense relief.

At the end of each day the 'Latest Telegrams' were posted on a board in the fort, and eagerly devoured by the men.

As we now fully expected relief on 13th March, we made every effort to repair the road for the advance of the relieving column. This operation was carried out under considerable difficulty, for so sure as the troops were marched down to their work, so certain were the Zulus to collect from the neighbouring kraals and open fire on them. We were obliged to take out the guns and an escort every morning to cover the road party. As a rule the Zulus opened their fire from long ranges and did no damage; however, they succeeded in wounding poor Lewis, of the 'Bufs', very badly in the head; he was directing the men of his company, which was posted just below the guns, when I saw him fall, he was instantly picked up by two of his men; on arriving on the spot, I saw his face covered with blood and found that the bullet had passed through the peak of his helmet and hit his forehead just above the eye — a very lucky escape.

We were now receiving three-fourths our proper rations of everything except meat. We had killed all the 'fatted' oxen and were living on the *trek* or draft bullocks. Hard was no name for the meat; it was simply impossible to get one's teeth through it unless it was stewed down to ribbons. However, we were quite happy as we hoped to see the relief column on 13th.

Our utter dismay and disappointment may then be easily imagined when we received the following flash-signal on 12th March: 'The relief column will not march till the end of the month, as Lord Chelmsford considers it advisable to await the arrival of reinforcements.'

Our hopes, buoyed up for the past 10 days, were now dashed to the ground; we were to return to monotony and imprisonment. It was heart-breaking to be forced to impart this news to the sick, some of whom had, seemingly, taken a new lease of life at the idea of relief being so close at hand. Poor Captain Williams of the 'Bufs' died on this very evening, and young Coker of the *Active*, the midshipman who was so popular amongst us all, died of dysentery. He was a fine young fellow, beloved by his men, and only eighteen years old. His burial was the most affecting sight I ever witnessed in my short life; there were very few dry eyes. Out of our small force there were 150 men in the hospital, where there was overcrowding and a deficiency of medicine; the doctors worked manfully, and did all in their power to alleviate the suffering of their patients. The majority of the sick suffered from fever, which in most cases turned to delirium. The moaning of these poor men throughout the night was painful to hear, especially as one was certain to be informed in the morning that another death had occurred.

On the 11th and 12th of March we had observed from our 'lookout' hill large numbers of Zulus *trekking* towards the Tugela, evidently sent to oppose the relief column. So good was their 'Intelligence Department', that they discovered the relief had been temporarily postponed, and on the 14th we saw the *impi* marching back. We estimated this force at 35 000 men, so that had the relief marched up as originally intended they would have fared badly.

Three days and nights of rain now followed; it came down in torrents. The fort presented a miserable appearance. The mud in some places being about six inches deep, and everything and everybody soaked through and through! The poor sentries and vedettes suffered greatly, the remainder of the troops huddled together under the wagons and endeavoured to keep dry.

It was indeed a wretched spectacle. Nothing to do, nothing to amuse ourselves with, not a book, paper, or game of any sort.

People at home seemed to imagine that it was principally on account of the scarcity of provisions that our existence was rendered so unbearable. But to our minds the monotony of the situation had a far more dispiriting effect than the small quantity and badness of the food. We were unable to take much exercise, our appetites therefore were poor. So long as the men had work on hand — in fact during the time the fort was being constructed — when all hands were engaged, their spirits were good and little sickness prevailed. But when work ceased, monotony set in, and there was time on hand to brood over the situation; then I noticed the sick roll increased alarmingly.

On 20th March a 'runner' arrived in camp from the Tugela. He received quite an ovation, as he was the first 'runner' who had reached us in safety for 38 days. In the despatch brought by him we learnt that the relief column would march on 29th, and eagerly we looked forward to that day.

On 23rd, two Zulus made their appearance, bearing a flag of truce. They asserted that they had been despatched by King Cetewayo to inform us that he would give us permission to retire to the Tugela unmolested, provided we did no harm to his crops or kraals. He, moreover, invited us to send officers to treat with his *indunas* or chiefs on the other side of the Umlalazi River, and guaranteed that not a hand should touch them. We were not blind to the fact that these men were simply spies, and our ideas were confirmed on the receipt of a flash-signal received that very day to the effect that Cetewayo was doing his utmost to draw us out with the intention of annihilating the whole force. These two wily Zulus were also placed in irons.

On the following day we received a message from Lady Frere, saying 'Her best wishes to all; we were constantly in her thoughts, and all news of us she communicated to our friends'. This kind message was highly appreciated. Another message was received on 29th, from Lord Chelmsford, as follows: 'Come down with 500 fighting men when I am engaged. Four thousand men will leave the Tugela to-day or to-morrow, and arrive at Ekowe on 3rd April; expect to be hotly opposed.' Colonel Pearson replied that he could not spare the 500 men, for owing to the ravages of sickness we had only just sufficient men to hold the fort in case of attack.

There were now three large Zulu armies reported to be in the vicinity of Ekowe, and their instructions were to 'eat up' the relieving column, and then to turn their attention to us.

We were most anxious for them to attack us. Had they dared to do so they would truly have fared badly; for our position, to a force without artillery, was very strong, and they would have come under a withering fire from the fort.

The cavalry scouts of the relief column were first seen on 31st March; they were evidently some miles ahead of the column, and about 13 miles from the fort. However, on the following day, with the aid of field glasses, we made out the white hoods on the wagons of Lord Chelmsford's Column. Towards evening we saw them halt and form laager.

But in the meantime Lord Chelmsford had informed us by flash-signal, that at daybreak on the day on which he intended to march into Ekowe he

would fire two guns as a warning for us to be on the look out; and in case of his force getting the worst of an engagement with the enemy to be ready to render him any assistance in our power with such troops as could be spared. Accordingly the following troops were ordered to be under arms at daybreak on 1st April, ready to turn out at a moment's notice — 6 Companies of Infantry (350 men) some Naval Brigade and Royal Engineers (50 men), Mounted Infantry and one gun Royal Artillery.

The laager formed by Lord Chelmsford's column lay in the plain below the Ekowe heights, about 12 miles distant from the fort. The name of the spot was Gingilovo. The relief column had not advanced by the road originally selected by our column, but had used the coast (or John Dunn's) road in order to avoid the thick bush, through which they would otherwise have been obliged to pass. But by 31st March they had commenced to work gradually inland again, and the laager which they formed at Gingilovo on that day was within four miles of the Inyezane, the spot where our first battle was fought. We then made certain that the Zulus would allow Lord Chelmsford to break up his laager and advance until his force reached the Inyezane, and had commenced the ascent of the Ekowe hills. Here the bush was very thick, the ground uneven, and favourable to their method of fighting. At the same time we fancied that their attack would be delivered *as far from* Fort Ekowe as possible, consistent with their tactics, as they must be aware the danger of being suddenly taken in rear by our force.

There was not much sleep that night in Fort Ekowe. What with the hope of relief and the expectation of a fierce battle on the morrow, talking was kept up till a late hour. Of the events which took place next day, the 2nd April, I shall tell my own story:

At the dawn of day I crawled out as usual from under my wagon. The niggers who, as I before said, were generally driven out at daybreak were still inside the fort, some slumbering peacefully, some few other restless creatures like myself had left their resting places, but as yet there was little stir. I was looking over the parapet at the horses in the ditch below, when I heard quite distinctly, the 'boom' of a gun in the distance. I at once said to myself 'the column is about to commence its march'. I ran towards the middle of the fort to inform Colonel Pearson, but he was already astir; in fact, the whole camp was alive as if by magic. We listened for the second gun; the clear sounding 'boom' again fell on our ears, but was quickly followed by a third report! The battle had commenced! It was no march! In no time we were running as hard as our legs could carry us to the nearest point whence we could see the laager in the plain below. This point was about 300 yards from the fort. On arriving there I saw the laager enveloped in smoke, and could distinctly hear a terrific rattle of musketry and the booming of guns, and could see the rockets flying in all directions. It was a lovely, still, clear morning with a slight mist at first rising from the plain, but this soon cleared off, and with the aid of glasses and telescopes we made out fairly well what was taking place. The Zulus seemed to have surrounded the laager and to have made a most desperate rush, for their fire was apparently close to the wagons. They were met by a perfect blaze of fire which checked them. The incessant roar of musketry went on for about twenty minutes, when the enemy appeared to be retreating slowly and the fire slackened.

We did not for a moment doubt what the result of the battle would be; but at the same time our excitement was intense as we felt that on the issue depended our safety, and should anything unforeseen occur whereby the Zulus would gain the day we knew that the only hope was to try and cut our way back to the Tugela, for at this time we had only three more days provisions left.

There was a deep sense of relief amongst us when we observed the Zulus commence to waver. Those looking through the telescopes informed the remainder of the different movements observed. 'Now the cavalry are coming out from the laager', I heard. We knew that victory rested with us. Sure enough the mounted men had emerged from the square and were charging the enemy. The Zulus were now retreating precipitately, keeping up a dropping fire. In a few minutes firing ceased altogether, and this short but decisive battle was over, having lasted only 40 minutes. The Zulu loss in this engagement was 700 killed. They fought with the greatest determination, many dead bodies being discovered within 30 yards of the trenches, while four were found within a few yards of the muzzle of the Gatling gun. The loss on our side was comparatively small, two officers and six men killed, two officers and 30 men wounded. The Zulu force engaged in this spirited attack was estimated at 12 000 men, while the 'relief column' was composed of 4 000 whites and 3 000 blacks.

We 'flashed' congratulations to Lord Chelmsford on his success, and were in turn informed that three regiments of infantry would march to our relief next day, and that Fort Ekowe was to be abandoned altogether as the General considered that the coast road was preferable. This latter piece of news was as disagreeable to us as the former was pleasant. It was too annoying to think that all our work had been done in vain, that we were to give up the splendid fort on which we had taken so much pains and time.

On the following day we were hard at work making preparations for our retreat.

At about 5 p.m. on this day the special correspondent of the *Standard* made his appearance. The first arrival at Ekowe! He was greatly pleased with his having outstripped the other correspondents, and chuckled to himself when he informed us that the *Times* had stuck in a bog, and the *Daily Telegraph* had met with some similar fate. However, we shook him warmly by the hand, and overwhelmed him with various questions; the first strange face we had seen for 72 days. It was late in the evening before the infantry appeared. The 91st Highlanders brought up the rear, and marched past the fort at midnight, their pipes playing the lively strains of 'The Campbells are coming'. The defenders of Ekowe manned the parapet, and greeted them with ringing cheers which were well responded to by the 'relievers'. Many were the greetings and congratulations exchanged next morning.

The relief column had marched up on the shortest possible rations. They therefore informed us that they had suffered much from the pangs of hunger, and felt they undoubtedly had come to the wrong place for assuaging their appetites. However, as luck would have it, much to their surprise, we managed to assist them, for we had carefully put aside three days full provisions, in case we should be forced at any time to cut our way back to British territory. These rations were produced, and our gallant 'relievers' enjoyed a hearty meal after their exertions of the past five days.

But it was remarked that most of the newspaper correspondents reported that the garrison of Ekowe had suffered but little from the scarcity of food, that they found the place well stocked with provisions, one of them went so far as to say that he never enjoyed a better meal in his life than that supplied by the starved-out heroes of Ekowe. The real truth being that they were gloating over these three days' provisions which we had treasured for so many days, and had longed to 'be at' on so many occasions.

During the defence we buried six officers and 35 men; and took away with us about 120 sick, while Captain Wynne of the Engineers, and Thirkill of the 88th both died shortly after our arrival at the Tugela.

On the morning of 4th April, we commenced our retreat from Ekowe, accompanied by all our wagons, ambulances, &c., and covered by the force under Lord Chelmsford. The sense of being once more free was delightful; and our men, notwithstanding their long confinement, marched splendidly. We passed our old battle field at the Inyezane, skirted Gingilovo, and on 8th April reached the Tugela.

So terminated the first phase of the Zulu campaign as experienced by No. 1 Column. In a few days the Ekowe garrison, now distributed among the 1st Division, was on the march, once more ready to commence its battles o'er again.