

#27

MEMORANDUM for the Director, 2nd Year Class, Command and General Staff

School, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Subject: A study of the Troop Leading of Lord Kitchener at the battle of Paardesberg.

1. PAPER S ACCOMPANYING. - Bibliography for this study.

2. THE STUDY PRESENTED. - The troop leading of Lord Kitchener at the battle of Paardesberg.

3. HISTORICAL RESEARCH NARRATIVE RELATING TO THE STUDY. -

a. Characteristics of Lord Kitchener and his position as Chief of Staff.

In order to have a clear understanding of the incidents surrounding the battle of Paardesberg and Lord Kitchener's participation therein, it is desirable to have a slight knowledge of the characteristics of the participants and of some of the events leading up to the battle.

When Lord Roberts was designated as Commander in Chief in South Africa, he personally selected Lord Kitchener as his Chief of Staff (2-335) (1-265). Lord Kitchener was at that time in his 50th year. He had been for the past several years in Egypt where he had gained his principal military experience and where he had gained a considerable reputation for powers of organization, administration, resolution, and driving force. (2-335)

At this time the British Army had no staff in the sense that it later became known. The duties of the staff and particularly the Chief of Staff were according to the desires of the commander. (1-265).

Lord Kitchener was used by Lord Roberts, not so much as a staff officer to work out his plans and convey his orders, but rather as a right hand man, in the fullest confidence of the commander, and as one who could be trusted with important missions and trusted to represent the supreme authority in any contingency. His particular qualifications seemed to supplement and complement those of Lord Roberts. (2-336) (1-265).

At the time of his appointment as Chief of Staff he was a Major General of the regular line of considerable seniority. He was actually senior in the regular army to Kelley-Kenny, Colville, and French whom he found commanding divisions of Lord Roberts' force as temporary Lieutenant Generals (1-288)

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b. Events prior to daylight 18th February.

In the advance to the north to the relief of Kimberley, Lord Kitchener had been, on February 14th, directed to accompany a part of the force under General Kelley-Kenny which it had been necessary to swing to the east of the line of march of the main Body in order that he might insure its coordination with the main body. (2-389) (4-29) (3-144) From that time on he was continually with this force until the concentration of Roberts entire force at Paardesberg.

Lord Roberts had not confided his entire plans to his division commanders (3-178). Kitchener who was in Roberts entire confidence, in compliance with the plans, continually urged the troops in the east column forward so that early on the morning of the 16th a Boer column was discovered in their front moving to the east. Kitchener ordered immediate change of direction to follow and overtake it. (2-404) (4-82) (6-29) (1-276) (3-156).

On the evening of the 16th Kitchener sent a written order to General French directing him to move as rapidly as possible to intercept the Boer forces (2-414) (3-158). At the same time he ordered the concentration of the mounted Infantry and the 6th division along the route of march of the retreating Boers and requested Lord Roberts to send the 9th Division (1-280)

Lord Roberts had established his headquarters at Jacobsdal where Kitchener had been in continuous communication with him. On the morning of the 17th Roberts was suddenly taken ill (2-418) (4-104) (1-280). Kitchener however maintained communication with him throughout the day.

All during the 17th Kitchener continued to hustle the troops forward in pursuit of the Boer column (2-417). While there was no open question of authority during the day as between Kitchener and Kelley Kenny, the situation was such as to cause Kitchener to refer the question to Roberts who replied in a letter to Kelley Kenny in which he requested him to "consider that Lord Kitchener is with you for the purpose of communicating to you my orders so that there may be no delay such as referring them to and fro would entail" (2-419) (4-104) (1-280) (3-156).

This caused some resentment on the part of Kelley Kenny who replied in considerable length to Lord Roberts although he assured him that he would comply with his request. (4-589)

It would appear that neither Colville in command of the 9th Division nor French in command of the cavalry were informed of this arrangement.

While Kitchener was in effect given command, he was given none of the machinery for carrying out the command such as requisite staff, communication personnel, etc. No arrangements were made with either the 6th or the 9th divisions for issuing orders. He had with him at this time only his personal aides and one Adjutant General. (1-281)(2-419)(4-105).

During the 17th Roberts sent word to Kitchener as to the strength of the Boer force and of the fact that Cronje expected reinforcements from Colesberg and Ladysmith. (2-447)(4-116).

We thus find on the evening of the 17th, General French's cavalry ahead of and in contact with the Boers and other forces concentrating on Paardesberg Drift after almost continuous marching for the past two days. Kitchener bivouaced that night with the Mounted Infantry, southeast of Paardesberg Drift. (4-105)(1-282)(3-168).

c. Events of the 18th.

At 3:00 AM Kitchener sent for Col Hannay of the Mounted Infantry and ordered him to take his command to the Koedoes Drift, cross to the right bank and wait there until the attack from the west developed when he was to attack supported by an infantry brigade. (2-422)(4-116)

When daylight came at 5:30 Kitchener, from his position on a hill about two miles west of Kitcheners Kopje, was able to look across the valley of the river. Along the river bank on the north side he saw Cronje's entire force encamped with apparently no immediate intention of moving. (2-423)(4-116)

Two plans seemed to be available to him at this time.

(1) To invest the Boer force and shell them into surrender.

In favor of the plan.

The terrain, as the Boers could be entirely surrounded without difficulty
It would be the least costly of lives.

Against the plan

There would not be sufficient time to dig in before dark and an active enemy might break through.

It would require a line nearly 20 miles long as the Boers were occupying about 5 miles of river bed

Arrival of expected Boer reinforcements. (2-448)(4-110*)

(2) To assault at once.

In favor of this plan.

Present comparative strength which might change at any time

An immediate assault, even if it failed to carry the laager, would pin the Boers to the ground by destroying or dispersing the horses and oxen. (4-111)

Against the plan.

Open nature of the terrain.

If the Boer force were not captured and permitted to escape, the

British forces probably could not again hope to overtake and surround them because of the condition of the men. (2-447)

His decision was to attack at once.

The plan of attack seemed simple. French was to occupy the enemy from the northeast. One brigade of the 6th division was to occupy the Boers from the south bank while the remainder of the force attacked along the north bank from the east and west. (4-113)(2-283).

The action divides itself into four phases.

(1) The period of preparation during which units were given orders and moved to position for attack.

From his position on the hill, Kitchener saw the 6th Division on its way back to Paardesberg Drift which it had overmarched in the darkness of the preceding night. He immediately galloped to the division and headed it in such direction as to carry out his plans and returned to his former position on the hill with Kelley Kenny. (2-424)(1-282).

Kelley Kenny, on seeing the situation, immediately suggested investment but Kitchener cut him short. Kelley Kenny although senior could do nothing but acquiesce in view of Lord Roberts instructions and he yielded to Kitchener's insistence for an immediate attack but he did not accept

Kitcheners spirit and point of view. (2-424,425)(3-180)

In accordance with Kitcheners instructions the 13th Brigade (Knox) launched an attack across the open plain toward the river bed while the 18th Brigade (Stephenson) was directed to move to the east with the expectation of later giving it instructions to attack along the river to the west; however its orders were to support the mounted infantry. (2-428)(4-117).

At 7:00AM he established contact with General French by helio who reported detachments arriving from the east. It was suggested that French keep them off. (2-425)(4-122)

In the mean time the 9th Division had received no orders from Kitchener or Kelley Kenny so it conducted a reconnaissance of its own and started to cross to the north bank of the river at Paardesberg Drift when at 7:00 AM a staff officer brought a verbal message to Colville from Kitchener to prolong the lines of the 6th division guns. This order apparently intended that only the guns of the 9th division should be brought into action. As no other instructions were given it was taken to mean the entire division so the crossing was stopped and the leading brigade was advanced up the river and prolonged the line of the 13th Brigade. (2-426)(4-119,120).

Thus by 7:00 o'clock we find all principal troop units starting out on individual missions with no unit having very complete instructions.

In the movement of the mounted infantry to the east it came under fire from some small Boer detachments which caused part of it to deploy facing east. (4-120) Stephensons brigade under the orders it received deployed facing to the east when it came up with the mounted infantry. (2-436).

About 8:30 the frontal attack of the 13th brigade and the brigade of the 9th division having been stopped, the remainder of the 9th division was ordered to cross the river and attack from the west. (2-426)(4-121) the exact place and direction of attack being indefinite (4-126). It joined contact with the ~~five~~ enemy about 11:30. (3-180)

(2) The period when Kitchener considered the preparatory movements sufficiently advanced and during which he endeavored to bring about a simultaneous attack.

Seeing the Mounted Infantry and Stephensons Brigade held up facing

the east at 11:00 oclock Kitchener requested Kelley Kenny to send a staff officer to Stephenson to disregard the Boers and push on. Not satisfied Kitchener himself galloped over to explain the action and push the attack (2-434)(4-126)

At 2:00PM Kitchener rode to Colville, who had taken up his headquarters on Signal Hill, and explained in some detail his desires for immediate attack or renewal of the attack by him but Colville had no reserves at that time. (2-437)(3-180)

Riding back he urged further attacked by the 6th division. In order to do this Kelley Kenny sent word to Stephenson to pull back and cross to the right bank. In order to insure that this would be carried out as he desired Kitchener again galloped over to Stephenson. (2-438). While he was in consultation with Stephenson he received a message from Col Hannay to the effect that he had been held up and could advance no further. Kitchener sent such a reply as to cause Hannay to go ahead with only such men as could be gathered up immediately, in a useless unsupported attack which cost the entire force. (2-438)(4-132).

(3) The third period when attacked by the Boers from the rear and the necessity of facing them.

During the day a member of Kitcheners staff found a part of the 6th division occupying Kitchener's Kopje, placed there by General Kelley Kenny in order to guard his rear. This detachment was ordered down and into line and replaced by a part of Kitcheners Horse. Kelley Kenny was not notified. (2-443)(4-136)(1-182).

About 5:00 the rear of the 6th division was fired into from Kitcheners Kopje and the hills to the east of it. This effectively stopped any futher attacks from the south that afternoon as it required all of the efforts of Kitchener and Kelley Kenny to place the troops to face this threat and ward off an attack. (2-442)(4-136)(3-187).

(4) The fourth period, a period of spasmodic attacks.

General Smith Dorian in command of the brigade of the 9th division on the north bank, not receiving any instructions from Colville or Kitchener attacked at 5:15 PM without results. (2-440). From then on until the end of the day the action was limited to small spasmodic attacks. (4-135).

d. Events of the 19th to the arrival of Lord Roberts.

Early on the morning of the 19th a request was received from Cronje for an armistice to bury the dead. This was granted but was revoked as soon as Lord Roberts arrived about 10:00 AM.

e. Summary.

Lord Kitchener's Actions.

(1) Kitchener's estimate of the fighting power of the Boers was incorrect in that he did not understand the ability of the Boer to handle his rifle. On the 19th Kitchener stated " If I had known yesterday, what I know today I would not have attacked the Boer in the river bed. It is impossible against the modern rifle. (5-31)(3-226,196).

(2) His status was questionable. He was acting under an authority not sufficiently complete for him to command from the divisions the necessary instrumentalities for him to carry out his responsibilities when they had not been furnished by Lord Roberts. (2-450)

(3) He did not make use of the staff facilities of either the 6th or 9th division to supplement his own inadequate staff although both were within a very short distance of his own headquarters. (2-426)

(4) He held no conferences with his division and other subordinate commanders to outline his plans to them and curtly refused to accept suggestions from them when offered. (2-424, 434, 448)

(5) He and his staff galloped about the field giving orders to subordinate unit commanders who in many instances were already carrying out orders given them by their proper commanders in compliance with Kitchener's own previous instructions. (2-427)

(6) He failed to keep out a general reserve, so when he desired and needed additional troops, first to push the attack and later to offset the Boer attack from the rear, he had none. (2-437)

Lord Kitchener's orders.

(1) The orders given by himself and his staff were generally verbal and subject to misinterpretation. (4-120)

(2) The orders were incomplete as they covered only a short phase of the action and a short period of time. At no time were orders given which might in any way lead to a coordinated attack by all units, (2-449)(1-284)

f. The results.

The results obtained by such methods as were used by Lord Kitchener were inevitable.

(1) No one knew his complete plans. (2-434)

(2) His attack was essentially a piecemeal attack into which he threw each unit as it became available.

(3) His method of galloping around the field and giving orders to all in sight quickly upset everything and everyone, causing the division and brigade commanders to withdraw to the fullest extent possible from participation in the affair. (2-434)(3-191)

(4) He apparently completely lost sight of the action as a whole and saw it only as the action of a number of separate units which he attempted to engage the enemy. So the action as a whole from the standpoint of leadership and command was a failure.

C. B. Thummel
Major, Advance!

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