

War Office,  
12th September, 1902.

The following Despatches have been received by the Secretary of State for the Colonies:—

SOUTHERN NIGERIA.

High Commissioner Sir R. Moor to Mr. Chamberlain. (Received May 12, 1902.)

(Despatch relating to Field Operations.)

(No. 183.) Government House,

Sir, Old Calabar, April 17, 1902.

I have the honour to report that the operations of the Aro Field Force, which commenced at the end of November, terminated successfully on the 23rd of March last, the work having been carried out with entire success. I enclose herewith the final despatch of the Officer Commanding the Field Force, Lieutenant-Colonel Montanaro, giving particulars of the operations from the commencement.

2. The objects of the Expedition were:—

(a) To abolish the slave trade which was actively carried on throughout the entire territories belonging to, and dominated by, the Aro tribe.

(b) To abolish the fetish of the Aros known as "Long Juju," which, by superstition and fraud, caused many evils amongst the Ibo tribes generally, and to all the outlying tribes of the entire Protectorate, who continually appealed to it. While this Juju existed it was impossible to establish effective government in the territories.

(c) To open up the whole of the Ibo country lying between the Cross River and the Niger to civilization and trade, and to induce the natives to engage in the legitimate trade of collecting the natural products of their country and developing it to the best advantage.

(d) To introduce a currency in lieu of slaves, brass rods, and other forms of native currency that existed in the territories, and which from their nature and cumbersomeness were opposed to advance in any direction.

(e) Finally, to establish throughout the territories a labour market to take the place of slavery.

3. The area over which the operations of the expeditionary force extended was from the east of the Cross River to the Niger, and from a short distance inland to the upper waters of the Cross River, or to define it by distance, approximately 120 miles from east to west and 90 miles from south to north, within which area a tract of country of about 6,000 square miles had to be dealt with. The total of all ranks that took part in these operations amounted to 1,745 Officers and men, with the requisite number of carriers.

5. A few days before the operations commenced a most deplorable massacre of some 400 men, women, and children, mostly women and children, was carried out in the hinterland of the Opobo district, at a town called Obegu. The Aros had long threatened to attack the tribes friendly to the Government, and though the people of Obegu had been warned to keep careful watch, they were unfortunately caught napping by a conglomerate force of the various sections of the Aro tribe, together with other Ibos unfriendly to them, and their town was destroyed with the slaughter of the people above mentioned. This gave another object and duty to the Field Force, viz., that of capturing and bringing to justice the natives responsible for this bloodthirsty massacre, in the carrying out of which one section of the Aro tribe alone, the Abams, who were great head hunters, are reported to have obtained 200 heads.

6. The particulars of the operations as carried out are carefully detailed in the report of the

Officer Commanding, and need little comment from me. I am able to state with certainty that the objects of the expedition detailed in paragraph 2 of this despatch have been effectively carried out in so far as could be done by military operations. The slave trade has been abolished, the evil fetish of the Aro tribe has been broken, the entire colony has been opened up, and the natives are already beginning to engage in legitimate trade in place of the traffic in human beings, and a currency of British coinage has been introduced, which the natives are now gladly accepting in lieu of slaves, brass rods, manillas, &c. Again, the further object of capturing and bringing to justice the natives responsible for the Obegu massacre has been successfully attained, the towns and villages who participated in the massacre have been severely punished, and seven Chiefs found responsible for the organization of same have already been brought to justice. Two of them have already suffered the extreme penalty of the law on the very site, at the village of Obegu, where the crime was committed, in the presence of the assembled representatives of the country for many miles round, and others have been sentenced to a long term of imprisonment. There are several other Chiefs now in custody awaiting trial and sentence for participation in this act of cruel and bloodthirsty crime.

7. In conducting these operations and carrying out the various objects considerable, and in some cases determined, opposition was met with from the natives, which is more particularly detailed in the report of the Officer Commanding the Troops. I have, however, to place it on record that from the reports furnished to me from the Commanding Officer, the Political Officers, and from my personal observations during the period that I have been with the Field Force while the operations were in progress, I am fully satisfied that the work has been conducted with tact, judgment, and every reasonable consideration that could be extended to a native enemy in these territories. Every effort that circumstances and time admitted has been made to avoid hostile collision with the natives, and to bring them under the control of the Government by peaceable means.

8. During the conduct of these operations some of the natives in the Lower Niger took advantage of the attention of the Government being engaged elsewhere to carry out several murders and some acts of piracy, which resulted in the closing of the trade routes of the Lower Niger. Immediate action was taken, and a small detachment of the Aro Field Force, supplemented by a few men from the garrisons of the Niger Division, were detailed to deal with the matter under Major Hodson, I.S.C. This Officer, finding that the force at his disposal was not sufficient to both maintain a base on the Niger and undertake active operations in the disaffected area, applied for assistance to His Majesty's Ship "Thrush," which was promptly rendered by Lieutenant-Commander D'Oyly, Royal Navy, of that vessel. A water base was maintained by the Officers and men of the "Thrush," and the troops of this Protectorate were thus able to land, with the result that the difficulties were promptly and effectively dealt with, the waterways opened, and restitution made for the acts of piracy.

9. After the carrying out of the first objective, it was considered advisable to take steps to disarm the country, as the natives were found to have in their hands a large number of Snider rifles and cap-guns. In carrying out the further objectives, therefore, instructions were given to all column and company Commanders to insist on