

From Brigadier-General J. R. L. Macdonald, C.B., R.E., Commanding Tibet Mission Force, to the Adjutant-General in India (No. 1532-A., dated Gyantse, the 9th October, 1904).

I have the honour to submit this my final despatch on the operations of the Tibet Mission Escort during 1903-04, operations which had to be carried out in the face of exceptional national and climatic difficulties.

1. The theatre of operations was on the whole singularly barren and sterile, the only comparatively fertile districts being the Chumbi Valley, the Gyantse-Shigatse Valley, the Sangpo Valley near Chaksam, and the Lhasa district.

The operations had to be carried out at an average altitude of 14,000 feet, while the troops had more than once to fight at altitudes of 17,000 to 18,000 feet. Four lofty ranges had to be surmounted by passes of 14,200, 15,200, 16,600 and 16,400 feet, respectively, and the first two of these had to be regularly traversed during the winter, when gales, snow and 50 degrees of frost were not unusual.

The Escort had to traverse two stretches of country each nearly 100 miles, when not only food for the men, but grain, fodder and even fuel had to be transported in whole and part.

To these difficulties must be added the passage of the Sangpo, a rapid and dangerous river. In addition to the formidable natural obstacles, we had to overcome the obstinate resistance of the Tibetans, whose inferior armament and want of tactical skill were largely counterbalanced by their great superiority of numbers, by the solidity of their fortifications, and the immense natural strength of their positions.

3. The first phase of the operations included the occupation of the Chumbi Valley and the period of preparation for the advance on Gyantse, or from 15th October, 1903, to 24th March, 1904. In December, 1903, the enemy had collected a considerable body of troops to watch the Mission at Khamba Jong, and every effort was made to encourage them in the idea that our main advance was to be made from there. Thus, when the Mission withdrew into Sikkim on the 13th December simultaneously with the main advance into the Chumbi Valley, it appears that a number of the enemy's levies seeing the former movement, and not having time to hear of the latter, disbanded, and could not be again collected in time to resist our advance up the Chumbi Valley. Chumbi was occupied on the 15th December, 1903, and a flying column pushed on and secured Phari Jong on 20th December, thus completing our hold on the valley. For urgent political reasons the Mission was installed at Tuna on the 8th January, 1904, with sufficient escort to protect them against the 2,000 to 3,000 Tibetans who had by now assembled at Guru. Between the Chumbi Valley and Gyantse stretched a barren tract of about 100 miles, where not even fuel or fodder could be depended on, and before an advance in force could be made some 15,000 maunds of supplies had to be collected at Phari. The forwarding of this mass of stores in mid-winter, over the lofty passes which separate Sikkim from Chumbi, was one of immense difficulty. The Nepaulese Yaks had succumbed to various diseases, and I relied on 700 ekkas to take their place on the barren uplands of Tibet; these ekkas also had to be carried in pieces over the mountains before they could be utilized at

Phari. The roads also were execrable and their improvement when the soil was frost-bound a work of extreme labour. This period of preparation was one of grim strain, and I cannot speak too highly of the fortitude and endurance of all ranks, by whose efforts the necessary arrangements were completed by the 24th March, 1904.

4. The second phase included the advance to Gyantse and the period of preparation for the advance on Lhasa if necessary. For though the actual decision to advance to Lhasa was not arrived at till July, the military preparations for such an eventuality had to be made in advance.

This period extended from 25th March to 12th June.

On the 29th March the Gyantse column was concentrated at Tuna, and next day all available transport returned to Phari to bring up supplies. The Tibetans had now about 7,000 men in the field distributed as follows: 3,000 at Guru guarding the Gyantse road; 2,000 at Hram, east of the Bamtso Lake, guarding the Lhasa road, and 2,000 in reserve between Kala Tso and Gyantse. The first-mentioned body commenced active hostilities on the 31st March, as we marched to Guru, and were completely defeated. This defeat led to the hasty retirement of the Hram force on Kala Tso. A company was left at Tuna and the advance to Gyantse was resumed on the 4th April, the enemy falling back before us and skirmishing at Samoda and Kangma.

On the 10th April, having received reinforcements from Gyantse, they stood at the Zamdang gorge and were again decisively beaten. Our Escort pushed on and on the 11th April, were before Gyantse, the fort at which place was surrendered to us next day. The Mission were then located in the village of Chungloo, which was fortified and provisioned, and Lieutenant-Colonel H. R. Brander, 32nd Pioneers, was placed in command of their escort consisting of 500 Rifles, 50 Mounted Infantry, two seven pounders and two Maxims with details, and with sufficient transport for a moveable column of 400 men and two guns. The remainder of the Force, consisting of 300 rifles, 100 Mounted Infantry, and two guns, with all remaining transport, begun its return march to Chumbi on the 19th April, and dropped *en route* one company at Kangma and another at Kala Tso, where a Company had been already left on the way up. Chumbi was reached on 27th April. The weather had been very inclement, with frequent snowstorms.

Meanwhile the Tibetans were again assembling and Lieutenant-Colonel Brander went out with his Moveable Column on the 2nd May, and on the 6th completely defeated a gathering of 3,000 men at the Karola. Another force of 1,600 men, who had assembled at Dongtse, took the opportunity to attack the Mission Post on the early morning of the 5th May, but were beaten off with heavy loss. They, however, occupied and strengthened Gyantse Jong. Reinforcements of 200 men including half a company of Sappers and two ten-pounder guns were sent to Gyantse, and Lieutenant-Colonel Brander was directed not to assault the Jong but to be sufficiently active to keep the enemy's attention concentrated on Gyantse and off our communications. He carried out his rôle admirably, and by the capture and occupation of a house afterwards called