

AN AUSTRALIAN IN NYASSALAND.

THE BATTLE OF KARONGA.

LONDON, November 27.

'The following letter has been received from a young Australian officer now serving with the King's African Rifle* at Zomba, Nyassaland. East Africa. It gives a vivid picture of an out-of-the-way corner of the world struggle :-

"The battle of Karonga has been fought and won. The whole truth and nothing but the truth will, I suppose, never be known, but I will tell you what I think about it. The whole of our force, three columns of average strength, four officers, 170-175 R. and F. and 18 white volunteers (i.e., about 525 black and 70 white fighting troops exclusive of staff and medical) marched out with some 900 carriers. Instead of sticking to the Karonga-Newlangenburg road, we went through the bush. We had not gone three miles outside our outposts before the enemy was re-reported on three sides of us. My own company was sent on with the idea of cutting off one party, but was recalled before the movement could be completed. Night overtook us, and our guides were fairly bushed, so the CO. decided to halt for the night, and formed in a square, with nil the carriers in the centre. The white volunteers and carriers could not be impressed with the seriousness of the situation, and made the most ghastly noise. \Voic- still, as soon as one had knocked a lighted lantern out of one fool's hand, another fool seized it and lighten! it again. Why we were not attacked and wiped off Africa that night heaven only knows. We officers got jolly little toot. and less sleep. At 4 am. we moved on with the moon to the Lufira stream, halted, sent out outposts, and started to cook. Our breakfast was just ready when our outposts were fired on, and we heard guns firing in our rear in the neighbourhood of Karonga. This was about 8 am., 9/9, '14. Karonga was garrisoned by about six civilian»and 30 (more or less useless) soldiers. Harton decided that a large force of enemy had passed us in the night, and that he would retire and relieve Karonga. I drew in my outposts without much trouble. In the meantime No.III. column had marched light and fast to Karonga. We were twice fired on from our left flank when in this formation and halted. When we got our Maxims, into action the enemy drew off, after some hours of very slow advance and numerous sniping shots. Then we came to a deep ditch, with water pools in it and thick growth on the banks. When about half the carriers were across a heavy fire was open-ed on us from our left front. The columns halted, and a real good en-engagement started. At one time I was under the impression that No. III. column had been driven back from Karonga, and that we were firing on it. However, it appears that No. III. took the Germans completely by surprise just in the nick of time, and got them completely on the run, capturing two Maxims. And it was the retreating Germans whom who had bumped into.

"My Maxim and company were still on the wrong side of the stream, and I kept them there with our backs to the fight, momentarily expecting the troops who had attacked our outposts to attack us in the rear. We must have stayed on the wrong side of the river for an hour or two. And very unpleasant it was, with any amount of bullets, and no enemy to be seen.

"As nobody showed up in our rear, and most of the carriers had broken through us, I decided to reinforce the front. The company carne up well until at about 100x rningo we came to where II reserve company was lying. I tried to carry right on, but my men, seeing a firing line, laid down in it and I had to go hack to them. Soon afterwards the whole lino charged, and we drove the square heads out of their position. Unfortunately, just as needy was gloriously ours, some fool in the reserve company, which had lost both its officers, shouted "Retire." And retire the troops did for about 50 yards, despite our efforts. Just as this was taking place, the Germans tried to re-reinforce and retake their line ; they comeomo on, I believe our ca would have been clough. However, by the free use of heavy sticks and more bad language than you could imagine possible, we steadied them again, and got two more charge*) out of them before the Germans retired for good.

"About 5.30 pm. the fight finished, the Germans escaping up the lakeshore. We had won, but were pretty badly rattled.

"We had in the meantime heard that Karonga was safe, but we still had no idea what enemy was still between us and the place. So instead of following up the probable line of retreat we formed quickly and advanced again. We have since found out that they ran like hares up the shore, and we lost a grand opportunity. We were thankful to find that the Rukuru stream was not held, so that we got to Karonga unopposed.

"We lost two officers (Caldicott and Garnett) killed, Barton and Muirhead wounded, six men killed, and 25 wounded; also of the 50 to 60 white volunteers, three were killed and four wounded. Of these, my column lost one volunteer killed and one seriously wounded, throe men killed and six wounded. Considering that we were never more than 200, and generally about 60 yards from the enemy in frightfully thick country, where we could see neither front nor back, but fired at one's front, it is lucky that our casualties were not worse.

"We captured two field guns, two Maxims, the second in command, and one other officer, besides their only doc-tor (the first two wounded); also some 50 black prisoners, and quantities of arms and ammunition. We buried five-possibly six-white Germans, and I do not know how many of their soldiers. In all, we have accounted for about 150 of the enemy. Had we known it we might have got another gun and the whole of their camp.

"The enemy has now retired across the Songwe into their own country. The last report is that two companies have deserted almost en mass, and that their commandant ib wounded in the face. On the morning of the 10th we were just starting off to follow our victory, when an infuriated Indian tradesman dashed in and reported a large body advancing on us from the west. This, unless it was as said, their deserting Atongas returning to their country, was a false report, and we lost a day. One column went out to-day, and found that they had sot almost all their camp away.

"In the midst of |he second charge suddenly found myself just on the flank of one of their field guns, round which there was a pile of dead. A white German was lying behind a tree, and I saw him have three deliberate shots at me. Baxter, who was near me, luckily got our friend in the head with his second shot, and probably saved my life. I am sitting down pretty gingerly just now, as our fr: end put on no shotslap through my legs. I hope this counts as a shot in the leg, which was twice prophesied for me at Port Said.

"Stevens says that he has only been in one hotter piaco than this - for most of us our baptismal engagement - and that was Bothaville; it certainly was an exciting show. I fear we were all bit jumpy when the false alarm went the next morning. We have given the square heads more than they bargained for in their own country, so I do not expect we shall have any more serious engagements. However, the country is so thick and native intelligence so unreliable that the fog of war is probably thicker here than in any other country. I still feel as fit as a fiddle. Thee people left behind in Karonga must have put up a, great fight, especially when one thinks that there was not a regular officer amongst them. All my preconceived ideas of the attack fell to the ground. One lost control of ones column in five minutes, and of the company in five minutes after, and one had to content oneself with trying to steal the half-dozen nieu in one's immediate neighbourhood, and this could only be done by walking up and down the line with a heavy stick."