

7,000 strong. This body was at "One Tree Hill," in the Biggarsberg Range, and it was moving towards Laing's Nek.

On the 9th March Sir Redvers Buller informed me that 800 Boers with 2 guns were occupying the Tintwa Pass, and the Harrismith and Kroonstad Commandoes with 3 guns were posted at Van Reenen's Pass. The other passes were being held by small bodies of the enemy. On the Biggarsberg about 9,000 Boers were entrenched from Water Kloof, past "One Tree Hill" and Hlatikulu, to Glencoe Junction. These included the Johannesburg, Rustenburg, Middleburg, and Vryheid Commandoes, with 10 guns. Dundee was occupied by the enemy. If he were to remain quiet, Sir Redvers Buller was of opinion that the Boers would begin raiding, and he proposed therefore to repair the railway to Elandslaagte and thence to strike at Dundee through Beith. He would thus turn the enemy's position and probably save the line to Newcastle. To do this, and simultaneously to threaten the Drakensberg Passes, Sir Redvers Buller considered that he needed all the troops at his disposal, though, if I desired it, he would still send me the 5th Division.

In reply, on the 10th March, I agreed that the despatch of the 5th Division should be postponed until I reached Bloemfontein and was able to judge of the situation as it might then present itself. I added that I had no objection to active operations being undertaken in Natal, but that no attempt should be made to force the passes of the Drakensberg until I was in readiness to co-operate from the west of that range.

Turning now to the northern frontier of Cape Colony, I heard on 28th February from Major-General Clements that he had that morning marched from Rensburg to Arundel, and on arrival there had ascertained that Colesberg had been evacuated by the enemy. He accordingly sent a force to occupy Colesberg Railway Junction and himself with other troops entered the town of Colesberg, where he was accorded an enthusiastic reception by the loyalists.

On the 3rd March I received news that a further advance had been made to Achteertang Station, and that the line towards Norval's Pont was being repaired.

On the 5th March the enemy were reported to be holding a position 3 miles to the southwest of Norval's Pont, the bridge being still intact, but during the evening of the same day they crossed to the north side of the river.

On the 9th Norval's Pont Station and the adjacent drifts on the south side were occupied by Major-General Clements, who proposes to cross the river as soon as the Pontoon Train arrived, and to begin repairs to the railway line and bridge, the latter as well as the road bridge having been blown up by the enemy. I have this morning sent by train a force consisting of the 3rd Battalion Grenadier Guards and the 1st Battalion Scots Guards, with four guns, from Bloemfontein to Springfontein Junction. I anticipate that their presence will lead to the withdrawal of any Boer troops which may still remain to the north of Norval's Pont, and will thus enable railway communication across the Orange River to be restored with all possible speed.

As regards the eastern line of advance, Lieutenant-General Sir W. Gatacre reported on the 3rd March that the number of the enemy at Stormberg had been much reduced. News was also received from Cape Town that the Boers were retreating towards Burghersdorp.

On the 5th March Lieutenant-General Gatacre telegraphed that he had that day occupied Stormberg with one battalion of Infantry, four companies of Mounted Infantry, two field batteries, and some Cape Police. The enemy had evacuated the town during the night of the 4th. Repairs to the railway line were being begun. On the 7th March Brigadier-General Brabant reported that the enemy had retired from their position in front of Jamestown, and that the road to that place was now open.

On the same date Lieutenant-General Gatacre intimated that the repairs to the railway line towards Stormberg and Steynsburg were being pushed on, and that he intended that day to occupy Burghersdorp. His intention was carried out, and the British troops were cordially welcomed by the inhabitants. Many rebels in the vicinity were stated to be anxious to lay down their arms, if their lives would be spared.

Brabant's force from Dordrecht reached Jamestown on the 8th March without opposition. Information was received from Ladygrey that the rebels were handing in their arms and ammunition to the Field Cornet of Herschel, 55 rifles and 70,000 rounds having already been surrendered. The local civil authorities were proceeding to Ladygrey to resume control over the district.

On the 11th March Lieutenant-General Gatacre telegraphed from Burghersdorp that he had reconnoitred to within a mile of the Bethulie railway bridge, and had found it blown up, though the piers were standing. The enemy were still holding the north bank of the river. The road bridge at Bethulie was uninjured, though the piers had been mined. It would appear that the charges had failed to explode, and the Boers had no time to attach fresh fuzes. The railway as far as Knapdaar was open on the afternoon of the 11th.

In the Prieska, Britstown, and Carnarvon districts of Cape Colony, west of the railway between De Aar and Orange River, I regret to report that signs of organized disaffection have been apparent during the past fortnight.

At the end of February I ordered a force to be held in readiness for operations in this direction. One column from De Aar was directed to concentrate at Britstown under Lieutenant-Colonel Adye's command, consisting of 3 companies of Mounted Infantry, 1 Field Battery, and 400 City Imperial Volunteers. Another column under Major-General Settle was to assemble at Hopetown, consisting of Orpen's Horse about 60 strong, one company of Mounted Infantry, one field battery, and half a battalion of infantry from the Orange River Station. This left for the defence of the Orange River and Zoutpan's Drift two 15-pounders, two Maxims, two howitzers, 3 companies of Infantry, and 700 City Imperial Volunteers. A third column consisting of 3 companies of New Zealand Mounted Infantry and 1 company of West Australian Mounted Infantry, with a Canadian Field Battery, was ordered to march on Carnarvon from Victoria West-road Station, and afterwards to occupy Otterpan to the north.

On the 3rd March I was informed that Lieutenant-Colonel Adye had reached Britstown, and had been instructed to drive the rebels out of Houwwater. Major-General Settle had left for Hopetown and Omdraai Vlei and intended to co-operate with Lieutenant-Colonel Adye in an advance on Prieska. The latter officer appears to have reconnoitred on 6th