

Cavalry brigades crossed the river and made a wide turning movement past the diamond mine at Dirksburg, supported by the 1st Mounted Infantry Brigade under Major-General Hutton. I directed Ross' and Henry's Mounted Infantry battalions to seize the drift near the railway bridge. This they succeeded in doing by 7 A.M., and were followed across the river by the 3rd Cavalry Brigade and the 11th Division. The 7th Division crossed by Junction Drift. Major-General Ian Hamilton pushed forward the Cavalry Brigade across the same drift followed by the 21st Brigade under Major-General Bruce Hamilton, and the 19th Brigade under Major-General Smith-Dorrien. The enemy on his flank, as well as in front of Lieutenant-General French, offered a stubborn resistance, but by 11.30 A.M. they were driven from the positions they had taken up, and withdrew towards Kroonstad, blowing up the railway bridges and culverts as they fell back.

20. My head-quarters with the 11th Division pressed on that day to Riet Spruit, 8 miles north of the river. The 7th Division bivouacked at Deelfontein Noord, and Major-General Ian Hamilton's column halted about 4 miles east of that place. During the afternoon Lieutenant-General French with the 1st and 4th Cavalry Brigades, and Hutton's Brigade of Mounted Infantry, reached a point 4 miles west of Ventersburg Road Station.

21. On the 11th May I marched with the 11th Division some 20 miles to Geneva Siding, 14 miles from Kroonstad, and 8 miles from Boschrand, where the Boers were holding an entrenched position to cover the town. Gordon's Cavalry Brigade advanced to within touch of the enemy, supported, on the left, by Hutton's Mounted Infantry. Lieutenant-General French, with the 1st and 4th Cavalry Brigades, marched to the Valsch River Drift, 10 miles northwards of Kroonstad, with instructions to cut the railway line. The 7th Division halted a short distance south-east of Geneva Siding, with Major-General Ian Hamilton's column a little further to the east.

22. During the night the enemy evacuated their entrenchments at Boschrand and retreated northwards, and on the 12th May I entered Kroonstad, with the 11th Division, without encountering any opposition.

President Steyn had left the town on the evening of the 11th May, after having previously proclaimed Lindley to be the seat of the Orange Free State Government. Commandant-General Botha and Commandant De Wet accompanied the Transvaalers in their retreat northwards.

23. Turning now to the operations in other directions, I may remark that during the period dealt with in this letter nothing calling for special notice occurred in Natal. The Boers continued to entrench themselves on the Biggarsberg, and held the Drakensberg Passes, but they attempted no offensive action. Sir Redvers Buller remained at Ladysmith, and beyond keeping the enemy under observation did not risk any serious engagement. In this he was acting in accordance with my wishes, for, as he did not feel himself strong enough to force the Drakensberg Passes, he could not afford me any material assistance until I was in possession of Kroonstad and prepared to advance on the Transvaal.

24. In the vicinity of Kimberley the course of events has been as follows:—On the 16th March, Lord Methuen reconnoitred as far as Fourteen Streams, returning the same evening

to Warrenton. He subsequently visited Barkly West, and repaired the railway line between Kimberley and Warrenton. On the 3rd April he proceeded to Boshof with the force marginally named.* On the 5th April, with the Imperial Yeomanry, Kimberley Mounted Corps, and 4th Field Battery, he surrounded a small Boer commando near Boshof. Colonel de Villebois Mareuil and seven of the enemy were killed, eight were wounded, and the remainder, numbering 54 Boers, Frenchmen, and Germans, were taken prisoners.

25. On this day, a message, dated 17th March, was received from Colonel Baden-Powell to the effect that the enemy were still besieging Mafeking, though in somewhat reduced numbers. A reinforcement under Colonel Plumer was approaching from the north, but it seemed doubtful whether it could break through the Boer lines. I had previously enquired from him how he stood as regard supplies, and he informed me in reply that they would, in all probability, only last until the 18th May.

26. On the 17th April, I gave orders for the formation of a flying column of mounted troops about 1,100 strong, with mule transport, for the relief of Mafeking. I placed Colonel B. T. Mahon, 8th Hussars, in command of this force, which consisted of 900 mounted men, including the Imperial Light Horse, four Horse Artillery guns with 100 men, 100 picked infantry soldiers to guard the wagons, 52 wagons with 10 mules each, and nearly 1,200 horses. The column was to take with it rations for 16 days and forage for 12 days. Medicines and medical comforts for the Mafeking garrison were also to be taken. Food and other stores for Colonel Baden-Powell's force were to be sent on by railway as soon as the line could be repaired. The flying column was ordered to start not later than the 4th May.

27. On the 24th April I instructed Lieutenant-General Hunter to have everything in readiness for an immediate advance, and to co-operate with Lord Methuen in distracting the enemy's attention until the flying column had crossed the Vaal and had obtained a good start. On the 29th April, Lieutenant-General Hunter reported that he hoped to force the passage of the Vaal on the 2nd May, and to send on the flying column on the 4th May. It started on the day specified, and while penning these words the gratifying news reaches me that Mafeking was relieved on the 18th May after an heroic defence of over 200 days.

28. On the 5th May, Major-General Barton's Brigade engaged the enemy 2,000 strong, 2 miles north of Rooidam, and inflicted considerable loss on the Boers, who retired northward. On the 7th May, Lieutenant-General Hunter occupied Fourteen Streams without opposition, the enemy retreating in great disorder, and abandoning their ammunition, clothing, and personal effects. This result was in a great measure due to the able dispositions of Major-General Paget, who brought a powerful artillery fire to bear on the Boer position.

29. The repair of the railway bridge at Fourteen Streams was at once taken in hand, and a strong entrenched post to be held by one battalion was constructed. The force under Sir A. Hunter occupied Christiana, and is now moving along the railway line towards Mafeking, while that under Lord Methuen is marching from Hoopstad to join me.

* Three field batteries, a section of a Howitzer battery, seven companies of Imperial Yeomanry, Kimberley Mounted Corps, 600 strong, the 9th Infantry Brigade, and two battalions of the 20th Brigade.