

Major-General Bruce Hamilton rejoined me at Bethlehem on 11th July with the remainder of his troops.

6. I found that Bethlehem had been occupied on 7th July, after two days' fighting, by the troops under command of Major-Generals Clements and Paget.

Major-General Clements' Brigade left again for Senekal on 9th July to bring up supplies.

7. On 11th July I detached the 3rd Cavalry Brigade to Heilbron, via Reitz, and the same day received your instructions placing the troops of Lieutenant-General Sir L. Rundle and Major-General Clements under my orders.

8. The enemy, whose strength was estimated at 6,000 to 8,000 men with 20 guns, had retired through the mountains to the south of Bethlehem into the basin of the Brandwater, and were holding positions of great natural strength at Naauwport, Retief's and Slabbert's Necks, Witnek, and Commando Nek, positions which appeared to mark the only possible points of ingress and egress into and from the mountainous district which lay before me. I subsequently learnt that, in addition to several bridle paths over the hills, there was yet another exit available for the enemy in the pass of Golden Gate, which lies at the north-eastern extremity of the basin in the direction of Harrismith.

9. The task imposed upon me by the instructions of the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief was to block the enemy into the enclosed district into which he had retired, to prevent his escape, bring him to action, and if possible force him to surrender.

10. At the date of the assumption by me of command of the whole of the troops in the eastern districts of the Orange River Colony, the disposition of the investing line was as follows:—

The 8th and Colonial Divisions, under Lieutenant-General Sir L. Rundle, distributed upon a general line Ficksburg—Biddulphsberg, were charged with watching Witnek, Rooikranz, Moolman's Kloof, and Commando Nek, and preventing any outbreak of the enemy in a south-easterly direction.

Major-General Clements' 12th Brigade, awaiting supplies from Senekal, was at Biddulphsberg, whilst at Bethlehem were Brigadier-General Broadwood's 2nd Cavalry Brigade; Brigadier-General Ridley's 2nd Mounted Infantry Brigade; the Highland Brigade, under Major-General MacDonald; the 21st Brigade, under Major-General Bruce Hamilton; and the 20th Brigade, under Major-General Paget.

11. On 13th July, fighting occurred between a party of Mounted Infantry and some Boers entrenched at Meyer's Kop, 10 miles to the west of Bethlehem, which resulted in Lieutenant Robbins (Imperial Yeomanry) and 11 men being wounded, and on the following day I despatched Brigadier-General Ridley with 1,300 Mounted Infantry; the 5th Battery, Royal Field Artillery; two sections, "R" Battery, Royal Horse Artillery; and the 1st Battalion, Highland Light Infantry to the scene of the skirmish. Brigadier-General Ridley found Meyer's Kop now unoccupied, and at 4 P.M. he returned to Bethlehem.

12. As the southern portion of the investing line now seemed to me to be the weakest, and constant rumours reached me of an intention on the part of the enemy to break out in that direction, I detached Brigadier-General Broadwood on 15th July with the 2nd Cavalry Brigade along the Bethlehem—Senekal road, and Major-General Paget, 20th Brigade, with eight guns, and the 14th

and 15th Companies, Imperial Yeomanry, also proceeded the same day in that direction.

13. During that night, as I learnt later, a force consisting of from 1,500 to 2,000 Boers, with four guns and 100 wagons under General C. De Wet, and accompanied by ex-President Steyn, broke out from Slabbert's Nek, and was engaged throughout the 16th with the troops of Generals Paget and Broadwood towards Klipscheur and Bulfontein.

In the afternoon of the 16th the enemy's wagons were seen moving in the direction of Witklip towards Lindley, and his main body, followed as it moved to the north by Brigadier-General Broadwood, arrived at Sterkfontein at 3 A.M. on 17th July.

14. At 3 P.M. on 16th of July, the wires being cut, on receiving news of this outbreak of the enemy, I despatched Brigadier-General Ridley with 800 Mounted Infantry to reinforce General Broadwood, and sent Lieutenant-Colonel Donne with the 1st Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment and 81st Battery, Royal Field Artillery, to occupy Meyer's Kop. I also directed Major-General Clements to relieve Sir Leslie Rundle's troops at Witnek with a portion of his force.

I failed, therefore, in giving effect to the first part of the Commander-in-Chief's instructions.

15. On 19th July I was joined by the convoy under Lieutenant-Colonel Ewart from Heilbron, for which I had waited at Bethlehem.

16. On 20th July I detached Major-General Bruce Hamilton with the 1st Battalion Cameron Highlanders, Lieutenant-Colonel Bainbridge's Mounted Infantry, and the 82nd Battery, Royal Field Artillery, to occupy Spitzkop, 9 miles south-east of Bethlehem, a kopje said to overlook and command the approaches to Naauwport Nek.

Major-General Hamilton was engaged throughout the day with a force of the enemy, estimated at 400 men, and succeeded in establishing himself on two headlands  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles short of Spitzkop. He reported casualties to the number of two Officers and seven men wounded. His operations were resumed the following morning and resulted in the occupation of Spitzkop, in which three men were killed, three Officers, and 16 men wounded.

17. On 20th July, Major-General Clements reported to me that Colonel Hacket Pain, with a battalion and a half and two guns, had occupied Witnek, relieving Major-General Campbell, who now commanded the troops of Lieutenant-General Sir L. Rundle's Division at Rooikranz.

18. On 22nd July, having ordered a concentration of the troops of Major-Generals Clements and Paget, with a view to a simultaneous assault on 23rd July upon Slabbert's Nek, and a demonstration by Sir Leslie Rundle's forces along their whole front, I left Bethlehem at 11 A.M. with the intention of attacking Retief's Nek, taking with me the Highland Brigade under Major-General MacDonald, two 5-in. guns, the 5th and 76th Batteries, Royal Field Artillery, Lovat's Scouts, and Rimington's Guides. At the same time I directed Lieutenant-Colonel Donne to join me the next morning from Meyer's Kop with the 1st Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment and 81st Battery, Royal Field Artillery. With the idea of deceiving the enemy, my force started, in the first instance, as if going to Naauwport Nek, but changing direction, it moved to Boshof's Farm under Vaal Kranz, about 3 miles to the north of Retief's Nek, where it bivouacked. My mounted troops were engaged towards the close of the day with some 200 Boers who retired into the nek as dusk fell.

19. Major-General Bruce Hamilton was again engaged with the enemy on the 22nd near Spitz-