

occupied by the enemy as night outposts, but found them evacuated.

28. The slight opposition met with by these various operations of the night of 7th—8th December made it appear probable that the enemy had unduly weakened his force to the north of us in order to strengthen that opposing Sir Redvers Buller on the Tugela. Recognising that if this proved to be the case there might be an opportunity for my Cavalry to get far enough north to damage the enemy's railway, I ordered Brigadier-General J. F. Brocklehurst, M.V.O., to move out at dawn with 5th Lancers, 5th Dragoon Guards, and 18th Hussars and 53rd Battery, Royal Field Artillery, along the Newcastle Road, to feel for the enemy and discover his strength and dispositions. The reconnaissance was carried out in a very bold and dashing manner by the 5th Lancers and 18th Hussars, the 5th Dragoon Guards being in reserve. The enemy, however, proved to be in considerable strength, and having obtained the information I required I directed Brigadier-General Brocklehurst to withdraw his brigade. The effect of these various enterprises was shortly evident in the return from the line of the Tugela next day of some 2,000 Boers.

29. On the 10th December, Lieut.-Colonel C. T. E. Metcalfe, Commanding 2nd Bn. Rifle Brigade, volunteered to carry out a night enterprise against a 4.7-inch howitzer on Surprise Hill. The undertaking was one of very considerable risk, as to reach that hill it was necessary to pass between Thornhill's and Bell's Kopjes, both of which were held by the enemy. Lieut.-Colonel Metcalfe moved off about 10 p.m., with 12 Officers and 488 men of his battalion, together with a destruction party under Lieutenant Digby Jones, R.E., and succeeded in effecting a complete surprise, his advance not being discovered until he was within 4 or 5 yards of the crest line, which was at once carried, and the howitzer destroyed. The retirement, however, proved more difficult, since the enemy from Bell's and Thornhill's Kopjes, consisting apparently of men of various nationalities, closed in from both sides to bar the retreat. Lieut.-Colonel Metcalfe, however, fixed bayonets, and the companies, admirably handled by their captains, fought their way back to the railway line, where a portion of the force had been left in support; and from which point the retirement became easy. A number of the enemy were killed with the bayonet, and his total casualties must have been very considerable. Our own loss amounted to 1 Officer and 16 men killed, 3 Officers and 37 men wounded, and 6 men missing. The affair reflects great credit on Lieut.-Colonel C. T. E. Metcalfe and his battalion, and I have much pleasure in bringing to your notice, in a subsequent portion of this despatch, the names of the Officers who particularly distinguished themselves on this occasion.

30. My attention was now chiefly directed to preparations for moving out a flying column to co-operate with General Sir Redvers Buller. All these preparations, including the movement of a 4.7-inch and a 12-pr. gun, both belonging to the Royal Navy, were completed by 15th December. Meanwhile the enemy had moved his 6-inch gun from Middle Hill to Telegraph Hill, and on 12th December I moved down the 6.3-inch howitzers to near Ration Post to oppose it.

31. The firing of Sir Redvers Buller's guns from the direction of Colenso had been audible for some days, and was especially heavy on 15th December. On 16th, Sir Redvers heliographed

that he had attacked Colenso on the previous day, but without success. Although this news was naturally disappointing to the hopes of immediate relief which they had entertained, yet it was received by both soldiers and civilians without any discouragement, and with a cheerful readiness to wait until the necessary reinforcements should arrive. From this time up to the close of the year few other events of importance occurred, but on Christmas day a telegram was received from Her Majesty and most gratefully appreciated by the garrison of Ladysmith. At this period a few of the many shells daily fired into our camps were especially destructive, one shell, on the 18th December, killed and wounded 10 men and 12 horses of the Natal Volunteers. Another, on 22nd December, killed 8 and wounded 9 of the Gloucestershire Regiment, and, on the same day a single shell wounded 5 Officers and the serjeant-major of the 5th Lancers. On 27th December, again, one shell killed 1 Officer of the Devonshire Regiment and wounded 8 Officers and 1 private of that regiment. During this period, also, fresh complaints regarding the Intombi Camp were made by the enemy; and, by agreement with General S. Burger, Major-General Sir A. Hunter was sent to that camp to hold an inquiry. A few minor irregularities were discovered and corrected, and a copy of Sir A. Hunter's report was sent to General Burger, who was apparently satisfied that the complaints were without serious foundation.

32. At the close of the year my chief source of anxiety lay in the heavy and continuous increase in the number of the sick, which had risen from 475 on 30th November to 874 on 15th December, and to 1,558 on the last day of the year. Enteric fever and dysentery were chiefly responsible for this increase, there being 452 cases of the former, and 376 of the latter under treatment on 31st December.

33. The Boers opened the new year by a fire of heavy guns at midnight, but beyond the daily long-range bombardment, nothing of importance occurred until 5th January, when we shelled, by indirect fire, two Boer camps, one behind Bell's Kopje, and one near Table Hill on the Colenso Plateau. In the latter case the fire probably had little effect, as the range was too great even for the naval gun employed, and the only possible observing station was very inconveniently placed. It was subsequently ascertained from the Boers themselves that the shells falling into the camp behind Bell's Kopje had been very effective, stampeding the horses and compelling the enemy temporarily to vacate the camp and seek shelter elsewhere.

34. On the 6th January the enemy made a most determined but fortunately unsuccessful attempt to carry Ladysmith by storm. Almost every part of my position was more or less heavily assailed, but the brunt of the attack fell upon Caesar's Camp and Wagon Hill. On the night of the 5th—6th January, Caesar's Camp was held by its usual garrison, consisting of the 1st Bn. Manchester Regiment; the 42nd Battery, Royal Field Artillery; a detachment of the Royal Navy, with a 12-pr. gun; and a detachment Natal Naval Volunteers. Wagon Hill was held as usual by three companies, 1st Bn. King's Royal Rifle Corps, and a squadron, Imperial Light Horse. A detachment Natal Naval Volunteers, with a 3-pr. Hotchkiss gun, had been sent there on the evening of the 5th January, and two Naval guns, one a 4.7-inch and the other a 12-pr., were in process of transfer to the hill