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War Office, May 7, 1901.

THE following Despatch has been received from Lord Kitchener, G.C.B., &c., Commander-in-Chief, South Africa:—

From Lord Kitchener to the Secretary of State for War.

Army Head-Quarters, Pretoria,
8th March, 1901.

SIR,

1. I HAVE the honour to report that on assuming command of the forces in South Africa, I found that General C. De Wet, who, after his defeat at Bothaville, had rallied his burghers on the Doornberg, east of Winburg, and Commandant Hertzog, who had assembled a force in the south-west corner of the Orange River Colony, were known to be contemplating a raid into Cape Colony, where they hoped to be joined by large numbers of disaffected Dutch Colonials.

Already, on the 23rd November, De Wet had captured De Wetsdorp, and thence on the 26th had pushed on towards Smithfield, followed by the columns of Lieutenant-Colonels Pilcher (Northumberland Fusiliers), Barker (Royal Artillery), and Herbert (17th Lancers), the whole under Major-General Charles Knox, who engaged the enemy's rearguard at Vaalbank on November 27th.

By the 29th of the month, Major-General C. Knox, moving south through Smithfield, had outmarched De Wet's commandoes, and had disposed his columns along the Smithfield—Bethulie road in such a manner as to interpose himself between the enemy and the Orange River.

On the intention of De Wet becoming apparent, the following troops were despatched by rail from the Transvaal, to reinforce Major-General C. Knox and to strengthen the hands of Major-General MacDonald, whom I despatched to take command at Aliwal North:—

- 1st Mounted Infantry.
- 2nd Regiment Brabant's Horse.
- Strathcona's Horse.
- "M" Battery, Royal Horse Artillery.
- Two guns, 86th Battery, Royal Field Artillery.
- Four guns, 85th Battery, Royal Field Artillery.
- 1st Battalion Suffolk Regiment.
- 1st Battalion Connaught Rangers.

On the 2nd and 3rd December General C. Knox, who had already been joined by some of these reinforcements, had an obstinately contested engagement with the enemy east of Slick Spruit, in the vicinity of Good Hoop Farm, which resulted in the retirement of General De Wet in a north-easterly direction.

Rain was falling heavily at this time over the Orange River Colony, and an opportune rise of the Orange and Caledon Rivers, coupled with our occupation of the Commissie Bridge, and all possible crossing places over the Orange River between the Basuto Border and Bethulie, had already to all appearance made De Wet's task a hopeless one.

Determined, however, to leave no stone unturned to effect his object, the Boer leader retiring before General Knox, who followed him closely up the right bank of the Caledon, suddenly crossed that river at Karreepoort and made a dash for the drift over the Orange River at Odendaal.

To meet this movement Major-General Knox at once withdrew a portion of his force by Bethulie, to the south of the Orange River, along the left bank of which it marched to Odendaal Drift, and towards Aliwal North.

With the remainder of his force he followed the enemy over the Caledon River, harassing and keeping in close touch with him. Finding the Orange River unfordable and all passages blocked, De Wet was now obliged to abandon his projected invasion of the Colony.

After a rapid movement in the direction of Rouxville, and on towards Commissie Bridge, which latter passage was denied to him by the presence of a small garrison of our troops, he succeeded in recrossing the Caledon at one of the upper drifts, and making good his retreat to the north.

2. General C. Knox followed him without loss of time, and on 11th December came up with the retiring Boers at Helvetia, to the north of which place a running fight was maintained throughout the 11th and 12th.

In this engagement the troops of Colonel Sir C. Parsons, which had just arrived at Reddersburg from the west, were able to effect a junction and co-operate with General Knox on his left flank, assisting him to press the enemy vigorously in the direction of De Wetsdorp.

To endeavour to bar De Wet's further retreat north, I had two days previously moved out Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry, under Lieutenant-Colonel Thorneycroft (Royal Scots Fusiliers), and the South African Light Horse, under Lieutenant-Colonel Byng (10th Hussars) (which corps had been rallied to Bloemfontein from Standerton and Volksrust respectively) to strengthen the Thabanchu—Ladybrand line, and these troops were in position there on 10th December.