

On the morning of 14th December, Colonel Thorneycroft, who had been apprised of the approach of the Boer commandoes from the direction of De Wetsdorp, engaged the enemy midway between Thabanchu and Ladybrand, and though checking the efforts of their advanced parties to penetrate his line, was ultimately unable, owing to the extent of front necessarily occupied, to prevent the Boers breaking through to the north.

During the course of their retreat the Boer forces became much demoralized, and our captures included:—

1—15-pr. gun.

1—pom-pom.

60,000 rounds of small-arm ammunition, and a number of wagons and carts.

De Wet having passed the Thabanchu—Ladybrand line, continued his retirement northwards towards Lindley, still followed by Major-General Knox, who was joined about 25th December, near Senekal, by a column of Lieutenant-General Sir Leslie Rundle's troops, under Major-General Boyes. Lindley garrison was reinforced by Bethune's Mounted Infantry, under Lieutenant-Colonel Monro (Seaforth Highlanders), from Natal.

Minor engagements in the Lindley district were now of frequent occurrence, in which we made a considerable number of prisoners; but despite the energy and perseverance displayed by our troops, no definite results could be achieved, as the enemy, broken up into small bands, was dispersed over a very wide area.

While De Wet's first attempt at an invasion on a large scale had thus been thwarted, two of his subordinate leaders succeeded in effecting an entrance into Cape Colony.

3. On December 16th, Kritzing, with 700 men, who had become detached from De Wet's main column in the Rouxville district, after evading our pursuing troops, was able to cross the now fordable Orange River at Odendaal Drift; and on the same day Hertzog entered Cape Colony with some 1,200 men, by Sand Drift, west of Colesberg.

To meet these inroads, it became necessary to send large bodies of troops into the Colony, and the columns under Lieutenant-Colonels Thorneycroft, Byng, Williams (Royal Artillery), Sir C. Parsons, and De Lisle (Durham Light Infantry), all operating in the Orange River Colony, were marched to the railway, and entrained for Naauwpoort Junction, whence they followed the march of the invaders southward.

Additional troops, including the 7th Dragoon Guards, under Lieutenant-Colonel Lowe, with two Royal Horse Artillery guns and the 1st Regiment of Brabant's Horse, were also despatched by rail from the Transvaal to Cape Colony, whilst the two battalions of Foot Guards which, under Major-General Inigo Jones, had hitherto been disposed between Orange River Bridge and Bethulie were, with all available details, formed into mobile columns, under Lieutenant-Colonels Crabbe (Grenadier Guards) and Henniker (Coldstream Guards).

I had already, in view of the unrest in the Colony, sent Major-General Settle, Royal Engineers, to De Aar, to control any movements that might become necessary in that direction, whilst Major-General Inigo Jones directed operations at Naauwpoort, and Major-General MacDonald at Aliwal North.

Kritzing's column in its movement south from Odendaal towards Burghersdorp was quickly pursued and eventually pushed westwards by

Lieutenant-Colonels Grenfell (1st Life Guards) and Herbert, who with small mounted columns had been left behind by Major-General C. Knox when he recrossed the Caledon to clear the Zastron district.

Kritzing's march followed a line—Venterstad, Steynsburg, Middleburg, Zuurpoort, Murraysburg, and thence by Aberdeen to Willowmore. During the whole of which movement his steps were dogged by the mounted troops of Lieutenant-Colonels Byng, Williams, Grenfell, and Lowe, all acting under the orders of Colonel Douglas Haig, 7th Hussars.

Lieutenant-Colonel Herbert's column had to be deflected towards Stormberg and Dordrecht, to follow a small commando under Myberg, a Colonial rebel, which eventually dissolved.

Hertzog, driven westward after crossing at Sand Drift by our troops holding the line Colesberg—Naauwpoort—De Aar, followed a route by Britstown on Carnarvon. Being forestalled at this point by the arrival of an advanced detachment of Colonel Parsons' column, which I had rallied, with this view, to Victoria West, the enemy moved round Carnarvon to Williston, Sutherland, and Calvinia, reaching the latter place about the 3rd January.

While the pursuit from De Aar and Britstown was maintained by columns under Lieutenant-Colonels Bethune (16th Lancers), Thorneycroft, and De Lisle, troops and local levies were hurried up to occupy centres of disaffection in the Ceres, Worcester, and Piquetberg districts; at the same time Lieutenant-Colonel Henniker's column, and Lieutenant-Colonel Collenbrander's newly-formed regiment of Kitchener's Fighting Scouts were rallied to Matjesfontein, whence they moved out to hold the passes leading south from Sutherland.

My object was to keep the enemy north of the Roggeveld Mountains, and to prevent any junction between Hertzog and Kritzing in the Prince Albert or Worcester districts.

This being achieved, it appeared to me useless to follow out into the far west an enemy at all times disinclined to fight and ever ready to scatter. I therefore brought in to the railway at Victoria Road the columns of Lieutenant-Colonels De Lisle and Thorneycroft and disposed them on a line Piquetberg road—Matjesfontein, thus effectually barring any further movement on the part of Hertzog to the south.

On 9th January Hertzog's commando withdrew northward towards Calvinia. Our troops entered Sutherland on the same day, and on the 23rd of the month Lieutenant-Colonel De Lisle reached Clanwilliam, which had already been occupied by local defence troops, and a general advance northwards was commenced by the columns under Lieutenant-Colonels De Lisle, Scobell (Scots Greys), and Collenbrander (Commanding Kitchener's Fighting Scouts). These quite succeeded in driving the enemy out of Calvinia and Van Rhynsdorp, and pursued him as far north as Carnarvon.

4. Turning to the Transvaal, though no events of importance had transpired during the month of November, towards the end of that month there was undoubted evidence of increased activity among the enemy, which was apparently timed to coincide with the arrival of ex-President Kruger in Europe.

On the 27th November, Major-General Paget (Scots Guards) had a successful engagement with Viljoen at Rhenosterkop, to the north of Middleburg, which resulted in the seizure of this position by our troops, thus securing an important centre from which to block several of the most exten-