

Allenby, and Lieutenant-Colonel Stewart) lost no time in following General Louis Botha into the Vryheid District, when the latter broke south from the eastern frontier, beyond Ermelo, to escape from the continuous pursuit to which he was being subjected.

General Hamilton reached Vryheid on 5th March, and there learnt that the Boers, numbering about 1,000 all told, were in two parties; one at Waterval (310), General Botha's own farm, and the other at Tabankulu, a mountain some 20 miles south-east of Vryheid.

He accordingly left Vryheid on 10th March, and moved by night, over difficult and almost inaccessible country, to endeavour to place his force by daylight in an intermediate position between the two commandoes whence he might strike at either as circumstances dictated. At the same time, Colonel Allenby and Lieutenant-Colonel Stewart, who had marched south through Paulpietersburg, were directed to a point between that place and Vryheid, from which they could command the road leading west from Waterval, by Bellevue (600).

At dawn on the 11th, General Hamilton decided to attack the party believed to be at Waterval, but found on arrival there that the Boers had already retired east in the direction of the Ngotsi basin.

He accordingly followed them up, and on the 13th marched upon Ontevrede (124), where he learnt that the enemy had trekked still further east. Believing, however, that they would return to Ngotsi if he simulated a withdrawal, General Hamilton now ordered his troops to move west towards Vaalbank (450); then, after nightfall, he suddenly turned about and executed a rapid return march upon Ngotsi. This plan met with some success, for as our men ascended the hills to the south of Ngotsi, they came face to face with a party of Boers who were making their way back to their hiding places. As this sudden meeting took place in the dark, many of the enemy escaped in the confusion, but four of their number were killed, two seriously wounded, and 21 captured, including General C. Emmett.

On the 18th March, General Hamilton received information that General Louis Botha was stopping at a farm in the mountains near Hlomo Hlomo, 45 miles east of Vryheid. He therefore decided to proceed there at once by night, and despatched 250 picked mounted men in advance, directing General Spens and Colonel Mackenzie to block all roads leading south-west from Hlomo Hlomo to the Ngome Forest. The night was very foggy, and the road, difficult by day and on foot, was almost impassable on horseback and by night. Despite these adverse conditions the advanced party got well on their way by dawn, the remainder of the force following behind at a slower pace. At Hlomo Hlomo though six prisoners and some cattle were captured, it was found that General Botha had slipped away quietly on the previous evening.

General Hamilton next moved, on 5th March, to Toovernaar's Rust (518), where all information pointed to the fact that General Botha was retracing his steps to the north. General Spens and Colonel Mackenzie were accordingly ordered to the angle formed by the Pougola and Pivaan Rivers to look after some local men, while General Hamilton with the remainder of his force, marched back to Vryheid preparatory to following General Botha towards Piet Retief.

On the 26th, General Hamilton reached Vryheid, and on the 28th he moved with Colonel Allenby's column on Paulpietersburg, there to effect a junction with Brigadier-General Spens and Colonel Mackenzie.

Lieutenant-Colonel Stewart marched from Vryheid, through Utretcht, to Wakkerstroom, whence he eventually rejoined General Hamilton at Ermelo with supplies.

On the 30th March, General Hamilton's main force was encamped on the Intombi River, and on the 1st April the movement upon Ermelo was continued. Whilst approaching the Intombi, a night expedition for some 25 miles to the north-west was organized, which resulted in the capture of 17 Boers of the Utrecht Commando. Ermelo was reached upon 5th April.

Touch with General Louis Botha had in the meantime been lost, but it has since transpired that, as our troops moved north, he carefully evaded their line of march somewhere to the south of Piet Retief.

Although General Bruce Hamilton's operations upon the frontier of Zululand were thus unproductive of any great result, it is only due to the Officers and men who served under his orders to express appreciation of the cheerful manner in which they underwent the hardships of incessant marching in pouring rain, by day and night, in perhaps the most difficult piece of country in South Africa.

The movements of one other column in this district remain to be traced. Upon receipt of the original news that General Botha had entered the Vryheid District, Colonel Colville's column was brought down from Newcastle and disposed upon the line of the Buffalo, to guard against any possible attempt to raid into Natal. With the disappearance, however, of this danger, Colonel Colville was ordered to move north by Vryheid and Paulpietersburg, to the north-east end of the Wakkerstroom—Piet Retief blockhouse line, there to watch for any further incursions along the border of Swaziland. He is now again in support of the blockhouse line in his original position near Piet Retief.

2. At the date of my last despatch, Colonel Park and Lieutenant-Colonel Williams were at Bronkhorstspuit, whence Colonel Park's troops moved to Wilge River Station. From the latter place on the night of the 11th March, Colonel Park made a rapid descent upon Buffelshoek (319) (just north-west of the junction of the Wilge and Olifants Rivers, which was reached at 4 A.M. on the morning of the 12th. Finding, however, that the party of Boers who were the object of their search had already evacuated the place, our mounted troops pushed straight on to Klipdrift (165), and Rhenosterkuil (158), where they were rewarded by the capture of a small laager, with 15 prisoners and some cattle.

In the meantime, Lieutenant-Colonel Williams had moved from Bronkhorstspuit Station to Rietfontein (153) (near Rhenoster Kop), where he secured five prisoners.

At the conclusion of these minor expeditions, Colonel Park and Lieutenant-Colonel Williams again returned to the railway, which they reached on the 15th and 16th of the month. Before doing so, however, Colonel Park despatched a small party under Captain Paton, Assistant Provost-Marshal, to pay a surprise visit to the Albert Silver Mine. This resulted in the capture of 11 prisoners and 15 rifles.

On the 17th March, Colonel Park and Lieutenant-Colonel Williams moved to Brugspruit, and thence, by Middlekraal (298) to Onverwacht (478) on the Steenkool Spruit.

Five days later the members of the late Transvaal Government, who appear to have abandoned their previous idea of making a wide detour round Pietersburg upon a visit to General Delarey, arrived at Balmoral from the north, under a safe conduct granted by me to enable