

On the evening of the 23rd March the whole of our mounted troops, without wheeled transport or guns, moved west from Klerksdorp and Vaalbank (116) for a distance of some 40 miles. During the night they passed in column unobserved to the west of the enemy, and at day-break on the 24th turned back east and extended laterally upon the following general front:—Colonel Kekewich's columns on the left from the Lichtenburg—Vaalbank blockhouse line to Geluk (97); those under Colonel Sir Henry Rawlinson from Geluk (97) to Gestoptefontein (145); Major-General W. Kitchener's troops from Gestoptefontein to Zwartrand (86), and the columns under Colonel Rochfort, which had moved up from the Vaal, from Zwartrand to Klipspruit (97).

A movement upon the Schoonspruit blockhouse line, which had been strengthened for the time being by portions of the Cameron and Seaforth Highlanders, was then commenced, and, as our troops closed in, it was found that a considerable number of Boers were within the encircling cordon. Several parties unfortunately broke through, one of 300 men who were materially assisted by wearing khaki clothing, escaping between the columns under Colonels Lowe and Keir, before the latter could complete their extension in the early hours of the morning. Further to the north, about Leeuwfontein (140), Paardeplaats (189), and Buisfontein (186) some sharp fighting took place. Here the columns under Colonel Kekewich and Sir H. Rawlinson were in touch with a large body of Boers, who at first seemed inclined to risk an effort to break through the blockhouse line, towards Lapfontein (85), and then made off south, eventually escaping under cover of the mist and darkness of the succeeding night. Colonel Kekewich's columns were able to recover three 15-pr. guns, two pompoms, and a considerable amount of ammunition which had been lost in the reverses to Colonel Von Donop's convoy and Lord Methuen. Eight Boers were killed and our other captures included 165 prisoners, 71 horses, 1,600 cattle and 103 carts and wagons.

The sustained effort made by our mounted troops in this operation was a considerable one, distances varying from 70 to 80 miles being covered within the space of 26 hours. With the conclusion of this movement Colonel Kekewich returned to Vaalbank, and Major-General W. Kitchener and Colonel Sir Henry Rawlinson to Klerksdorp, Colonel Rochfort's columns returning meanwhile to the line of the Vaal River near Commando Drift.

At the close of the month our columns again moved out west to search for the Boers, Colonel Kekewich leaving Vaalbank on the 29th March for Middelbult (239); and Major-General Kitchener and Colonel Sir H. Rawlinson quitting Klerksdorp on the 30th for Rietvlei (167) and Rhenosterspruit (16) respectively.

On the 1st April, Colonel Kekewich pushed on to Leeuwpan (53) where he hoped to hear of General Delarey's wagon laager, but failing to find it he returned west, by Ruigtevlei (243), to Middelbult.

From Rietvlei, Major-General W. Kitchener advanced the columns under Colonel Cookson and Lieutenant-Colonel Keir to reconnoitre Brak Spruit and Klein Hart's River, remaining himself in support at Driekuil (134) with Colonel Lowe's troops and the 1st Battalion Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.

At 3 P.M. on the 31st, heavy firing was heard to the west in the direction of Brak Spruit, and Major-General W. Kitchener therefore moved out in support of his other columns, which were found on the following day in an entrenched

position at Doornbult (197). They had been heavily engaged on the previous afternoon.

Colonel Cookson had become aware as he advanced with the two columns from Rietvlei (167) that a Boer force of 500 men with two guns was retiring rapidly before him to the west. He accordingly dropped his baggage at Steynspan (159) and pressed on with a number of mounted men towards Boschbult (138), engaging the enemy's rearguard as it fell back. At Boschbult and Doornbult (197), however, the enemy were reinforced, and Colonel Cookson decided to halt on Brak Spruit, closing up his baggage from the rear and entrenching his position.

At 1.20 P.M. the enemy opened fire with three guns and a pompom, and then, under cover of their artillery, attempted to rush the eastern side of the camp. This venture, however, was a costly one, for the Boers lost heavily in their advance, especially from the fire of a party of our men who had taken up a position in a detached house. They then worked round to the north of the bivouac, captured a small advanced party of the 28th Mounted Infantry, and poured in a very heavy fire from a fringe of bushes 2,000 yards from our position, out of which they were ultimately dislodged by the well-directed fire of our guns. Finally, failing to penetrate our camp at any point, and hearing of the approach of Major-General Walter Kitchener, the Boers, about 5.30 P.M., abandoned the attack and withdrew altogether out of range.

The heaviest loss in this engagement fell upon the Canadian Mounted Rifles, who, in this their first fight of importance since landing, displayed the utmost bravery and determination. Lieutenant Bruce Carruthers, of the regiment, especially distinguished himself. Being in command of a detachment of the rearguard when coming into camp, he remained out in a position of observation, in which he eventually found himself isolated and surrounded by a large body of the enemy. Rejecting all idea of surrender, however, his small patrol of 21 men fought stubbornly on to the end, no less than 6 of their number (including Lieutenant Carruthers) being killed and 12 wounded. There have been fewer finer instances of heroism in the whole course of the campaign.

The Boers who took part in this unsuccessful attack upon Colonel Cookson's camp were estimated to have numbered 1,800 men, and were under the command of Generals Delarey and Kemp.

On the 2nd April, General Kitchener, with his whole force, marched to Witpoort (148), where he was joined by Colonel Sir H. Rawlinson, who had moved up in support from Rhenosterspruit (16). Leaving his camp in charge of General Kitchener at Driekuil (134), Colonel Sir H. Rawlinson then moved on the night of the 5th with all his mounted troops to Middelbult (239). Here he joined Colonel Kekewich, and on the following night their combined force made a long and rapid march in a north-westerly direction, over the Hart's River, upon Makioes Pan (61), where they hoped to encounter a large party of the enemy. In this they were disappointed, only a few prisoners and wagons being picked up, and the columns subsequently returned to Middelbult.

5. After a few days' rest following the movement which terminated at Harrismith on 27th February, our columns were placed in position for a fresh series of operations. The plan of these provided that, whilst the columns under Major-General Elliott, Colonel Barker, Lieutenant-Colonel Lawley, Colonel Rimington, and