

Lieutenant-Colonel Keir moved north from a line marked by Bethlehem and Majoor's Drift on the Wilge, up to the Frankfort—Tafel Kop—Botha's Pass blockhouses, the troops under Lieutenant-Colonel Garratt, Colonel Nixon and Colonel Sir H. Rawlinson should work west from the Wilge, about Majoor's Drift and the Junction of the Molen River, up to a line extending north-east from Lindley to Noble's Mills on Liebenberg's Vlei. The northern columns were then to turn about and wheel back, with Frankfort as a pivot, into a general line with the southern columns facing west between Lindley and Frankfort. Finally, the whole line of columns, with its flank resting upon blockhouse lines to the north and south, was to sweep steadily forward to the Kroonstad—Wolvehoek railway line.

On the 4th March the movement to the north commenced from a line Bethlehem—Bellevue (636)—Phillipi (952)—Majoor's Drift, and on the 6th it terminated with the position of columns, from left to right, marked by Leeuwspruit (576) (10 miles west of Frankfort)—Frankfort—Tafel Kop—Uitgedacht (382). On the 7th March a halt was made to replenish supplies, and on the 8th the troops under Major-General Elliott, Colonel Barker, and Colonel Rimington commenced to wheel back into their section of the position to be taken up facing west, between Leeuwspruit and Noble's Mills. This brought their left into touch with Colonel Garratt's right of the southern line, which, advancing from Majoor's Drift as a centre on the 5th March, had arrived by the 9th in position between Lindley and Noble's Mills.

The columns under Lieutenant-Colonel Lawley and Lieutenant-Colonel Keir did not participate in the last stage of these operations, Colonel Lawley being detached from Frankfort by Heidelberg to Springs, as previously mentioned, whilst Lieutenant-Colonel Keir, who was accompanied by Lieutenant-Colonels Wilson and Damant, moved through the Vrede district to Volksrust where they entrained for Klerksdorp.

The main advance to the west was then pushed home up to the Kroonstad—Wolvehoek line, which had been strengthened for the occasion by the 2nd Battalion Inniskilling Fusiliers and half the Seaforth Highlanders. This movement was completed on the 12th March, when reports from the different columns showed, as a result of the operations since leaving Harrismith, 19 Boers had been killed, and 82 prisoners, 680 horses, 4,630 cattle, and 47 vehicles taken. In addition to this, Major Ross, of the Canadian Scouts (belonging to Rimington's Column), had discovered, in a cave near Tafelkop, a large Boer dépôt, containing 300,000 rounds of small-arm ammunition (mostly Martini-Henry) and also 10,000 Lee-Metford, some Krupp and 15-pr. shells and fuzes, 600 pom-pom shells, 200 pounds of powder, one Maxim gun complete, one Krupp breech block, two helios, one field telegraph instrument and telephone, harness, clothing, &c.

Several parties of Boers had broken out of the enclosed area during the course of the movement, one of considerable strength under Commandant Mentz effecting its escape to the north over the Heilbron—Wolvehoek line, near Pretoria (427), and another to the south through the Lindley—Kroonstad blockhouse line towards the Doornberg.

The pursuit of the party under Montz was at once taken up by the troops of General Elliot's Division, who followed it east as far as the junction of the Wilge and Vaal rivers, where the commando dispersed. Lieutenant-Colonels De Lisle and Fanshawe then returned to Heilbron. The party which went south towards the Doornberg was similarly followed up by the columns under Colonels Pilcher and Ternan.

General De Wet was never upon this occasion within the cordon of our columns. He had successfully passed to the north of the Frankfort—Botha's Pass blockhouse line in front of our movement in that direction from Majoor's Drift, and was now reported to have passed to the west of the Kroonstad railway at a point to the north of Wolvehoek.

Colonel Sir Henry Rawlinson, whose troops had just reached the railway at Rhenoster, was therefore detached to follow him towards Reitzburg. He moved west on the 13th March, with Lieutenant-Colonel Garratt's men on his right and Lieutenant-Colonel Lord Basing's column, from Kroonstad, on his left. Lieutenant-Colonel Garratt, whose starting point was Vredefort Road, made straight, in the first instance, for Parys, which was surrounded, but found empty, at 4 A.M. on the morning of the 14th. He then moved towards Reitzburg, hoping to drive any Boers in that neighbourhood in the direction of Colonel Sir H. Rawlinson, who was marching direct towards the same destination. Hearing, however, that 100 Boers had crossed the Vaal at Venterkroon and were upon the northern bank of the river, he detached a portion of his force, under Lieutenant-Colonel Dunlop, to try to head them off by Rensburg Drift. In this Colonel Dunlop was unsuccessful, being only able to chase the enemy for some distance in the direction of Lindique Drift. He accordingly returned and rejoined Colonel Garratt, who, at daylight on the 17th, sent out another party, under Lieutenant-Colonel Honourable White, to pay a surprise visit to the Bloemfontein Hills, south of Lindique, where 13 prisoners and 14 horses were captured. On the 18th March, Colonel Garratt returned to Vredefort-road Station.

Failing to obtain any information of the whereabouts of General De Wet, who ultimately succeeded in making his way to General Delarey's headquarters, Colonel Sir H. Rawlinson crossed the Vaal to the south of Potchefstroom, and on the 21st March arrived at Klerksdorp.

On leaving Kroonstad on the 14th March, Lieutenant-Colonel Lord Basing proceeded by the Lace Diamond Mines to Bothaville, from which place he searched the country lying between the Valsch River and the Kroonstad—Klerksdorp-road. He then moved on, on the 21st, to Commando Drift, where his columns became associated with those under Colonel Rochfort upon the line of the Vaal River.

The next operation contemplated to the east of the main railway line was a sweep of the columns under Colonels Rimington, Garratt, Nixon, and Barker, and Major-General Elliot, from a line from Heilbron to Doornkloof (on the Kroonstad—Lindley blockhouse line) right up to the frontier of Natal between Botha's Pass and Van Reenen's Pass. This march was to be conducted by easy stages, with a primary object of making a thorough search of the country for hidden dépôts of ammunition and supplies. The first of these stages, covering a period of three days, was to take our troops to the line of Liebenberg's Vlei, the second, of equal duration, would bring them to the Wilge, and the third would terminate upon the Natal frontier. At the close of each stage a halt would be made for several days to admit of a careful examination of the country, and of the lateral passage of convoys from the blockhouse lines to the different columns.

The movement commenced on the morning of the 20th, and proceeded in accordance with the pre-arranged plan as far as the line of the Wilge River. The latter, however, was found to be so swollen by continuous rains that its passage was