

in association with Colonel Rochfort's columns from Schweizer Reneke right to Vryburg—Maribogo railway line.

Colonel Rochfort's columns continued to operate in the Vaal valley from Commando Drift and Hoopstad up to the 8th April, a surprise visit being paid to Bloemhof, by parties moving down the left bank of the Vaal from Hoopstad and Wegdraai Drift. This expedition did not result in the capture of any prisoners, as the village was found to be unoccupied; but by the 8th the whole of Colonel Rochfort's force (with the exception of Colonel Western's column, which had been left at Commando Drift) was concentrated at Bloemhof ready for a fresh enterprise.

On the night of 11th April, Colonel Rochfort having left Lieutenant-Colonel Sitwell's troops to guard his camp, again quitted Bloemhof, with the columns under Lieutenant-Colonel Lord Basing and Majors Driscoll, Bulfin, Vaughan, and Reynolds, and moved north upon Karee-boschfontein (116), where a small laager with 5 prisoners and 450 cattle was captured. He then returned to Bloemhof, where he was joined by Lieutenant-Colonel Western from Commando Drift, and on the 15th made a forced march with every available mounted man, to endeavour to surprise a Boer laager then reported to be 6 miles south of Schweizer Reneke. As a matter of fact, the laager was found 3 miles to the north of the town, and a successful surprise resulted in the capture of Commandant Douthwaite, Adjutant Hennop (of General C. De Wet's staff), 55 other prisoners, and a number of wagons and cattle belonging to De Beers' commando.

On the 18th April, Colonel Rochfort marched back once more to Bloemhof, adding to his captures as he came in some 800 cattle and 12 other prisoners of war who were found wounded at the different farmhouses in the neighbourhood.

On the 21st he moved to Hoopstad, leaving troops to hold Bloemhof in his absence. He then went south on the 23rd to Bosmansfontein, and the same night made a rapid march to Groot Gannapan (373), where he surprised and captured 24 prisoners, 700 cattle, and five wagons belonging to Badenhorst's commando. From Groot Gannapan he returned to Bloemhof, then moved by the north bank of the Vaal to Christiana, where he arrived on the 28th, and finally swept eastward along the left bank of the river back to Bloemhof, which was reached on 30th April. During this latter movement his troops were slightly engaged with 100 Boers under Commandant Du Plessis.

Between the 30th April and 8th May, Colonel Rochfort's troops were employed in collecting crops in the country round Bloemhof, whilst awaiting the arrival of a convoy of supplies from Hoopstad, and on the latter date he again marched north upon Schweizer Reneke, to join in upon the left of Sir Ian Hamilton's combined sweep towards the Vryburg-Maribogo Railway.

On the 6th May, Sir Ian Hamilton's troops had been disposed as follows:—Major-General Walter Kitchener at Koranfontein, Colonels Sir Henry Rawlinson and Thorneycroft at Noitverwacht (204), and Colonel Kekewich at Rooirantjessfontein. On the following day these columns moved forward to a general line, Witklip (29)—Kareekuil—Schoonoord (91)—Biesjevaller (57), and on the 8th a further advance was made to the line of the Groot Hart's River.

The necessity for deceiving the enemy who were known to be between our columns and the Vryburg railway was upon this occasion simplified by the fact that no sweep right through to

the western line had ever been previously undertaken, whereas on two former occasions our columns, after moving a certain distance to the west had turned back for a combined eastward movement upon Klerksdorp. A report that a similar scheme was once more in contemplation was carefully circulated by Sir Ian Hamilton, with the result that on the 7th and 8th the Boers edged still further away towards the Vryburg line to avoid being enclosed in the area which they imagined would shortly be swept by our returning line. When, however, on the morning of the 9th, General Hamilton's force continued its westward movement, it must have become evident to the enemy that our troops were heading for the Vryburg—Mafeking railway line, and it became all important to prevent them breaking out until the cordon had sufficiently contracted to render such an attempt impossible.

In order to fill up the gaps which in the first instance existed, especially between the left of General Hamilton's line and the right of Colonel Rochfort's troops moving up from Schweizer Reneke, scouts were sent out at dusk to set fire to a continuous line of veld between adjacent columns. They were also instructed to discharge their rifles frequently, and to endeavour in every possible way to convey the impression that the gaps in question were occupied by a numerous and watchful force.

On the night of the 10th the cordon was much more complete, and General Hamilton's troops had closed in to a line which extended from Doornbult Siding, along the frontier boundary which formerly separated the Transvaal from British territory, to Brussels Siding, south of Vryburg.

Although at this juncture it did not seem as if many Boers had been enclosed, shortly after dark heavy firing burst out and several attempts were made to break through the line, on Colonel Sir Henry Rawlinson's left, and Colonel Thorneycroft's right and centre.

Our troops, however, were so well posted, and had entrenched themselves so strongly, that there was now small risk of the enemy being able to break back, more especially as the search-lights on the armoured trains on the railway, some 20 miles distant, lit up the background, against which the outlines of the Boers were plainly visible from our entrenchments.

The railway, it may be mentioned, had been very strongly reinforced for the occasion by six armoured trains, 900 men of the Guards, and three battalions of Militia, which were placed at the disposal of Major-General Maxwell, and presented quite as impenetrable a barrier to escape to the west as did General Hamilton's advancing line to the east.

On the morning of the 11th the whole force closed in to the Vryburg railway, when it was found that our captures included 367 prisoners of war, 526 horses, 95 mules, 175 wagons, 66 cap carts, 3,620 cattle, 106 trek oxen, and 7,000 rounds of ammunition, this loss to the enemy constituting a blow to his resources such as he had not previously experienced in the Western Transvaal. Most of the prisoners fell into the hands of Lieutenant-Colonel De Lisle, who, with the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the Commonwealth Regiment, formed part of Colonel Thorneycroft's column.

In reporting upon this extremely successful operation, General Sir Ian Hamilton desires to draw my attention to the enthusiasm and energy with which the troops met the exceptional hardships and work involved by lining out and entrenching themselves on four successive nights after long marches in a practically waterless