

to effect his retirement on the 28th, and was once more driven back, but eventually escaped through the dense bush and forest under cover of darkness and eluded pursuit.

The operations of Generals van Deventer and Northey at this time are interesting as showing the practical impossibility of cornering an enemy in country of a nature such as that in which these operations were conducted.

For the remainder of the period with which this despatch deals, the operations in the west, though they resulted in gradually pressing the enemy back, were not marked by any incident of special interest.

On the 1st January the Second Division drove back an enemy force which had advanced from Mgeta Pesten, and the Njukwas detachment occupied Kissada, while the situation before General Northey remained practically unchanged.

On the 2nd General van Deventer reported that torrential rains had stopped his movements and that he was confining himself to active patrol work.

On the 3rd General Northey reported that Murray's column had assaulted and captured the southern end of the enemy's position east of Mfrika, and on the following day the enemy force at Msalala (east of Mfrika) had retired and was being pursued.

On the 5th January General Northey reported that the enemy retiring eastward before him had taken up another position and that our attack upon this position was still in progress.

On the 6th Byron's column dispersed an enemy force at Gumbiro.

On the 9th General Northey's advanced troops were in touch with the enemy six miles east of Sylvester Falls, and on the next day the enemy were retiring partly eastward towards Mahenge and partly to the south towards Ifinga. Our advanced troops were about Smani and ten miles east of Sylvester Falls.

On the 11th General Northey reported that Lieutenant-Colonel Hawthorn was still pressing the enemy eastwards, and that Lieutenant-Colonel Murray was leaving Mfrika for Ifinga.

Three days later (on the 14th) the enemy were forced back from Smani and north-east of Ssongea between Likuju and Mpondas, and a quantity of stores fell into our hands.

On the 16th Murray's column of General Northey's force secured the bridge over the Ruhudje at Malawis, six miles north-west of Ifinga.

During the next few days the enemy continued to withdraw, followed by our troops, and a gradual retirement by the enemy towards the east and the south was still in progress in this theatre when I left the country.

Rufiji Operations.

(10) I now return to the main operations in the Rufiji area.

On the 22nd December I left Morogoro and proceeded to Duthumi, where advanced general headquarters were established on that date.

The distribution of our forces on this front was as follows:—

On the Mgeta front under my immediate command were:—General Sheppard's brigade (the 1st East African Brigade, hereafter referred to as the 1st Brigade), in occupation of our line as already described. The 2nd South African Infantry Brigade, under General

Beves, was at the summit of Sheppard's pass, on the road between Ruwu and Tulo, and was under orders to reach Dakawa on the 25th. The Nigerian Brigade, under Brigadier-General F. H. B. Cunliffe, C.B., C.M.G., of which the first units had reached Dar-es-Salam on the 9th December, was in process of concentration at Ruwu and was to assemble at Tulo for the initial phases of the coming operations.

The First Division (Hoskins') was still in its positions to the south of the Rufiji, about Kibata and in the Kilwa area, warned to be ready to advance. Headquarters of this division moved to Mitole on the 25th.

The columns at Mssanga and Kongo were in readiness to move forward on receiving my instructions to that effect, which were to be sent when my own operations had reached a stage where co-operation could be effected with the best result.

The opening movements in connection with the main advance on the Mgeta front under my own direction were timed to begin on the 26th December, but continuous heavy rain compelled me to postpone all movement until the 31st, when the weather improved. This delay, though forced upon me, was not without advantage, as it enabled the Nigerian Brigade, which was somewhat behindhand, to complete its equipment and come up.

Two main considerations governed my dispositions, viz., the seizure of a crossing over the Rufiji and the capture, if possible, of the enemy force immediately opposing me. To the former of these two objects I attached the highest importance, and the chief problem which confronted me was how to seize a crossing over the river without allowing the enemy to become aware of my intention, for I was particularly anxious that the enemy should not evade a heavy blow by an early retirement from my front. Once over the Rufiji my intention was to move south-east and effect a junction with Hoskins' division moving north-west from the Matumbi mountains and by these combined movements to cut all connection between the two enemy forces on Rufiji and at Mahenge respectively, and either to envelop the enemy on the Rufiji or deal him a heavy blow as he escaped south.

To secure a crossing over the Rufiji I decided to detach a considerable force to make a wide detour and capture and maintain a bridgehead in the neighbourhood of Mkalinso, twenty miles south-west of Kibambawe, while with the remainder of my forces I attacked and held the enemy north of the Rufiji.

My arrangements to the above end were as follows:—

The march to Mkalinso was entrusted to Beves' brigade, which was to reach Kirengwe, ten miles west of Kissaki, on the 31st December. From Kirengwe General Beves was ordered to send forward a picked body of scouts towards the Rufiji and, on the 1st January, to push forward his engineers and pioneers to Kwa Hobola, accompanied by half a battalion. On the following day this advance party—the half battalion increased to one battalion—was to reach Kidete and to arrive in the neighbourhood of the junction of the Ruaha and Rufiji rivers on the 3rd January. The remainder of the brigade was to follow one march in rear of its advanced troops. Before daybreak on the 4th January a crossing was to be effected in Berthon boats over the Rufiji below its