

Artillery and Mounted Infantry keeping the enemy at a distance.

At one portion of the line of retirement the enemy had evidently trained a position gun, which made good practice at 6,000 yards range.

Molteno was reached about 11 A.M.

At 5 P.M. Infantry entrained: the two companies 1st Battalion Royal Scots and Royal Engineers for Bushman's Hoek, the Northumberland Fusiliers and Royal Irish Rifles for Sterkstroom, the Divisional Staff, Royal Artillery, and Mounted Infantry for Cyphergat. Brabant's Horse (160) arrived in afternoon and scouted towards Stormberg; they saw a party of about 50 Boers patrolling, and counted about 1,100 mounted men on the position.

They bivouacked at Molteno, falling back the next morning on Ciphergat.

With regard to the foregoing, I have the honour to report that, from information received from the most reliable sources at my disposal, it appeared there were about 1,700 Boers only at Stormberg, that there were two or three guns there, and that, if the position was approached from the west, Artillery could be brought into action on the kopjes which lie to the west of the Stormberg basin, and from which the whole of the Boer positions could be commanded. It appeared to me that the moment afforded an excellent opportunity for seizing the junction with all its attendant advantages, so I decided to move from Putter's Kraal with as many troops as I could spare and attempt a surprise. To give such movement any chance of success, it had to be carried through in one night, as a halt at Molteno would have given the enemy information of our intended attack.

I thought the plan out and discussed it with Commanding Officers, and after considering the details of ground with the police who belong to Molteno and its neighbourhood, and who are supposed to know every yard of the ground, I decided to carry out the project.

I was aware that the column, when it moved off from Roberts' farm about 12.30 A.M., 10th December, was moving too much to the west, and I questioned the guide and Sergeant Morgan, Cape Mounted Police, who were leading us, but both declared they knew the way perfectly, and that they were taking us by a road which, although slightly longer, would enable us to avoid wire and a bad piece of track which the guns would find a difficulty in getting over at night. This difficult piece of road had not been mentioned by them before, the whole way had been reported fit and easy for wheeled transport. The police guides said that the road, though longer than the originally named road, was not much longer, and that it would bring us out at the spot I wished to arrive at.

The column therefore proceeded, but half an hour after moving off the Officer Commanding 2nd Battalion Royal Irish Rifles (whose regiment was leading) reported to me that he thought the guide had lost his way. I immediately questioned Sergeant Morgan again, but he assured me that the guides (two Europeans and two natives—police) knew the road accurately, and that he also was positive about it. I made Sergeant Morgan himself go to the head of the column and lead it.

I moved myself with the leading battalion and constantly questioned the guide, but was as constantly assured by Sergeant Morgan that we were moving on the right road, though it was further than he had estimated.

Just before dawn he pointed out to me the kopje which he said was our objective, but it was

then I should say about two miles off. I considered that as he reported the remainder of the road to be very good going, it was better, notwithstanding the fatigue of the men, to push on and seize the position. It became a question of doing this, or of retracing our steps to Molteno. The dawn was just breaking when the column was suddenly fired into, before the Mounted Infantry, who were kept behind the Infantry during the night march, had pushed out to cover the front.

Owing to the precipitous nature of the ground, the Artillery was unable for some time to find a suitable position, but one battery managed to come into action on the south end, while the second battery opened fire from the west of this kopje.

The retirement of the guns was steadily and carefully carried out by alternate batteries, covered by the Mounted Infantry, and Lieutenant-Colonel Jeffreys showed great judgment in the selection of positions.

It was not reported to me that the men of the Infantry regiments (who were subsequently taken prisoners) had not rejoined their regiments when I gave the order to fall back, and I was under the impression that they had reached the ridge, as I was with the Mounted Infantry the whole time, and had seen numbers of men of both regiments crossing the plain, falling back to where the regiments were assembling. It appears many of these men remained in the nullah under shelter of the banks instead of retiring to the second ridge to their regiments. When I saw no more men coming back I gave the order to the remaining battery of Artillery to move back, covered by the Mounted Infantry.

The retirement, though under Artillery fire, was steadily conducted.

I much regret the serious loss in Officers and men entailed by the non-success of the operation.

An eye sketch of the country and a nominal roll of Officers wounded and missing are attached.* I bring the names of—

Second Lieutenant Duncombe-Shafto ;
No. N.F. 2270, Band Sergeant J. Stone ;
No. N.F. 1989, Colour-Sergeant A. Landen ;
No. N.F. 3923, Private G. Benson,

2nd Battalion Northumberland Fusiliers, to the notice of the Commander-in-Chief.

Major E. M. Perceval, 77th Battery, Royal Field Artillery, though severely wounded, continued to command his battery till the end of the day, and I would wish to bring his name prominently to notice in this connection.

W. GATACRE, Lieutenant-General,
Commanding 3rd Division.

19th January, 1900.

War Office, March 16, 1900.

THE Queen has been graciously pleased to confer the Decoration of the Royal Red Cross upon—

Her Highness Princess Victoria of Schleswig-Holstein.

Foreign Office, March 2, 1900.

THE Queen has been graciously pleased to appoint Captain Fritz Crowe to be Her Majesty's Consul-General for the Portuguese Possessions in East Africa to reside at Lourenzo-Marques.

Foreign Office, March 2, 1900.

THE Queen has been graciously pleased to appoint Major William Percy Chapman to be Her Majesty's Consul for the Republic of San Marino.