

Major-General Hart's Brigade of this division for the relief of Wepener, in conjunction with the main body of the Colonial troops under Brigadier-General Brabant, the remainder of Sir Archibald Hunter's Division proceeding to Kimberley. I increased and re-organized the Mounted Infantry, supplementing it by several battalions of Imperial Yeomanry, and these troops, together with the 4th Cavalry Brigade, which had recently arrived from England, I collected in the neighbourhood of Bloemfontein.

10. My dispositions for protecting the railway and expelling the enemy from the south-eastern districts of the Orange Free State had the desired effect, and on the 24th April Wepener was relieved and Dewetsdorp occupied by a body of troops under the command of Lieutenant-General French. The enemy finding themselves thwarted in the south-east portion of the Orange Free State, took up a position between Thabanchu and Ladybrand, from which they were gradually pushed back by the 8th division under Lieutenant-General Sir Leslie Rundle, Brigadier-General Brabant's Colonial Division, and a force under the command of Major-General Ian Hamilton.*

11. On the 28th and 29th April our troops were engaged with the enemy in the neighbourhood of Thabanchu, and on the 1st May the enemy was signally defeated at Houtnek with comparatively small loss on our side, thanks to the admirable dispositions made by Major-General Ian Hamilton. It would doubtless have been more satisfactory had the troops employed at Dewetsdorp and Wepener been able to cut off the enemy's retreat and capture their guns; but, as I have already explained, they were limited in number, and during the recent operations the Boers moved with hardly any baggage, each fighting man carrying his blankets and food on a led horse. Being intimately acquainted with the resources of the country, and where grain and cattle were abundant, the enemy were not obliged to take their supplies with them, and could march at a pace which our troops could not hope to equal. It followed, therefore, that they were able to escape without suffering any other loss than that inflicted by our troops when dislodging them from the various positions they occupied.

12. By the beginning of May I had all the strategical points in the south-eastern districts securely held, and I was no longer anxious for the safety of the railway. The condition of the Cavalry, Artillery, and Mounted Infantry had materially improved, and a considerable number of remounts had arrived; sufficient supplies had been collected at Bloemfontein, and the arrangements for the transport had been completed. Under these circumstances I felt justified in ordering a forward movement towards Kroonstad. I left Bloemfontein by train for Karee Siding; to this point I had previously despatched the 11th (Pole-Carew's) Division. The 1st (Hutton's) Brigade of Mounted Infantry had moved to Brakpau, 10 miles to the west, while Lieutenant-General Tucker with the 15th (Wavell's) Brigade of the 7th Division was

2 miles to the east of the siding; the 14th (Maxwell's) Brigade was at Vlakfontein, 5 miles further east. On the morning of this day, Major-General Ian Hamilton's force was at Isabellafontein.

13. Brandfort was occupied the same afternoon, the Boer forces under General Delarey making but a feeble resistance as soon as their right flank had been turned by Hutton's Mounted Infantry.

14. The following day the 7th and 11th Divisions with the 1st Brigade of Mounted Infantry remained in the vicinity of Brandfort, while Major-General Ian Hamilton engaged and drove back the enemy's rear guard at Welkom about 15 miles south of Winburg. On this occasion the junction of the two Boer Forces was frustrated by a well-executed movement of the Household Cavalry, the 12th Lancers, and Kitchener's Horse, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel the Earl of Airlie. The enemy fled after the encounter, leaving their dead and wounded on the field.

15. On the 5th May the force which I was accompanying marched to within 3 miles of the Vet River, the north bank of which was held by the enemy in considerable force. For three hours the action was chiefly confined to artillery on both sides, our Field and Naval guns making excellent practice, but just before dark the Mounted Infantry executed a turning movement, crossing the river 6 miles west of the railway bridge, which, like other bridges over the rivers along our line of advance, had been previously destroyed by the enemy. In this affair the Canadian, New South Wales, New Zealand Mounted Infantry, and the Queensland Mounted Rifles, vied with each other in their efforts to close with the enemy. We captured one Maxim gun and 26 prisoners, our losses being slight.

16. On this day Major-General Ian Hamilton captured Winburg after an engagement at Bobiansberg in which the 2nd Battalion Black Watch under Lieutenant-Colonel Carthew-Yorston greatly distinguished themselves.

17. During the night the enemy retired northwards to the Zand River, and on the 6th May the main force crossed the Vet River unopposed and occupied Smaldeel Junction. The drifts in the river bed were so bad that considerable delay occurred in getting the baggage and supply convoy across the Vet, and I was consequently obliged to halt at Smaldeel for two days. The Mounted Infantry, however, pushed on to Welgelegen, and Major-General Ian Hamilton's force moved some 10 miles north of Winburg, its place there having been taken by the Highland Brigade.

18. I was joined on the 8th May by Lieutenant-General French with the 1st (Porter's), 3rd (Gordon's), and the 4th (Dickson's) Brigades of Cavalry, and the following day the whole force marched to Welgelegen, the 1st and 4th Cavalry Brigades and the Mounted Infantry moving on to the south bank of the Zand, opposite Dupreez Laager. That evening a squadron of the Scots Greys succeeded in crossing the river near Verneulen's Kraal and holding the drift at that point. The 7th Division bivouacked near Merriesfontein, and Major-General Ian Hamilton marched to Bloemplaats, and pushed on the 1st Battalion Derbyshire Regiment to Junction Drift.

19. On the morning of the 10th May the enemy could be seen holding the north bank of the Zand in considerable strength. At day-break Lieutenant-General French with two

* This consisted of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade under Brigadier-General Broadwood, the 2nd Brigade of Mounted Infantry under Brigadier-General Ridley, Brigadier-General Smith-Morris's Brigade of the 9th Division, and a newly-formed brigade (31st) composed of 1st Battalion Sussex, 1st Battalion Derbyshires, the 1st Battalion Cameron Highlanders and the City Imperial Volunteer Battalion, under the command of Major-General Bruce Hamilton.