

Amersfoort on 21st; thence they worked north, and before dawn on the 25th, Colonel Rimington after a long night march surrounded a farm near Schimmelhoek (89), where the Boer leader was stated to be encamped. The operation was a difficult one. Between the columns and their objective, a Boer force 300 or 400 strong had been collected, and smaller posts were guarding the farm on all sides at a considerable distance from it. Colonel Rimington's Column was to make for the farm, avoiding the main laager and posts, while Colonel Rawlinson moved in between Ermelo and the farm. Our information was good, and the operation was well carried out by both columns, but it was almost too much to hope that the surprise would be complete, and when Colonel Rimington's mounted troops rushed Schimmelhoek they captured only four prisoners and some of General Botha's papers and personal property, which in the hurry of his departure he had been obliged to leave behind him. Certain of these papers afforded us useful information.

The enemy's main laager had also received information of the approach of our columns, and retreated north, towards Lake Chrissie, without being engaged. Pursuit in this direction was useless, and both columns returned south, Sir Henry Rawlinson reaching Volksrust on 29th, and Colonel Rimington Zandspruit on the same day.

To complete his operations south of the block-house line General W. Kitchener had at his disposal the columns of Colonel Campbell, Lieut.-Colonels Garratt and Stewart; also those of Brigadier-General G. Hamilton and Colonel Pulteney, who had moved from Vryheid, through Utrecht, to block any possible attempt to break through Northern Natal into the Orange River Colony.

Further south, Major-General Bruce Hamilton, with the columns under Brigadier-General Spens and Colonel Allenby, made a careful search of the country between Vryheid and Ngomi Forest.

While these operations were in progress heavy and continuous rains and thick mists added much to the difficulties which the troops had to overcome, but all worked hard to hunt down the scattered bands and clear the district.

In the many small skirmishes which took place 21 Boers were killed and 11 wounded, and over 160 unwounded prisoners were taken, together with 8,600 rounds small-arm ammunition, 400 horses, 5,800 cattle, 165 wagons, 54 carts, and large quantities of food stuffs.

This practically completed the work for which reinforcements had been brought to Natal during the month of September, and their gradual withdrawal was commenced on the 22nd October, when Colonel Allenby's column marched from Vryheid to Dundee, and entrained for Standerton, followed by General Spens' column, which reached Newcastle, by march, on 28th October. General Walter Kitchener's columns, except those under Lieut.-Colonels Garratt and Pulteney, were brought into Volksrust about the same time, Lieut.-Colonel Stewart's being detained there to act in conjunction with Colonel Sir Henry Rawlinson, while General G. Hamilton's and Colonel Campbell's moved on to Standerton, together with Colonel Rimington's from Zandspruit. At the same time the troops brought from Harrismith to guard the Zulu border from Eshowe were sent back to the Orange River Colony.

General Botha, reporting to his so-called Government on the 28th September, writes in reference to these operations:—

"To my regret I must report that it was

impossible for my commandoes to enter Natal because the enemy was aware of our plans, and he already had troops just opposite all the drifts of the Buffalo River."

"We had specially unfavourable weather, for 11 days it rained almost day and night. This weakened the horses very much, especially as we had to keep them tied up at night, and as I saw no chance of getting through to the Biggarsberg in one night, without exposing a large body of men to the danger of capture, I decided to move lower down, to see if there was no chance of working through from that direction. I sent a strong patrol towards Nqutu, thence we moved on Babanango, as Rorke's and Vant's Drifts were also in possession of the enemy."

"From the Buffalo River, I sent back to the Vryheid district about 300 horsemen whose horses were knocked up, so that nearly half of the original commando has returned."

2. While the enemy had been directing his attention to the futile attempt on Natal, his commandoes in the Eastern Transvaal had remained weak and inactive. During the greater portion of this period, Colonel Benson's column had been operating alone in this district, and the line of South African Constabulary posts had been moved forward unopposed to the Wilge River.

On the 12th October Colonel Benson's Column moved into Middelburg from the south to refit, and to exchange certain units. On the 20th he moved south from Middelburg, and on the 22nd, after a long night march, he surprised a laager at Klippoortje (169), due south of Brugspruit, capturing 37 prisoners. The following day Colonel Benson moved towards Bethal, and continuing to operate in that neighbourhood, had several small skirmishes with the enemy. On 26th October, when moving from Yzervarkfontein near Bethal towards Rietkuil (288) on the Steenkool Spruit, his rear guard was attacked with rather more than the usual vigour, and Civil Surgeon Robertson and one man were killed, but the attack was easily repulsed. Colonel Benson was aware that Commandants Grobblaar, Trichardt, and Erasmus had concentrated some 600 or 700 men to oppose him, and continually endeavoured to engage them, till on the 29th October he reported from Syferfontein (19), that he was moving the following day by Bakenlaagte (455) towards Brugspruit.

At 5 a.m. on the 30th October, the force marched from Zwakfontein (20), and was soon engaged in front and on both flanks by the enemy, estimated at some 500. These attacks were easily kept off, and the march was continued without any serious interruption. The morning was thick and misty, and heavy rain fell at intervals. At about 9 a.m. the advanced guard on approaching the farm Bakenlaagte, where Colonel Benson intended to halt, found the ground was held by the enemy, who after a short resistance was dislodged, and the column moved gradually into camp, covered by the rear guard, composed of two companies of Mounted Infantry, two squadrons 2nd Scottish Horse, two guns 84th Field Battery Royal Artillery, a pompom, and one company of the 2nd Bn. the Buffs, the whole under the command of Major Anley, 3rd Mounted Infantry.

The guns, with the company of the Buffs and 50 Mounted Infantry, took up a position on an irregular ridge running generally east and west, some 2,500 yards south of the camp. Small posts of Mounted Infantry were well out on either flank, and the remainder, with the Scottish Horse, occupying some hillocks another 1,000 yards to the south of the ridge where the guns