

were in position, formed a screen to the whole.

As the front of the column was cleared, the numbers of the enemy hovering round the flanks and the rear guard increased. It was now past noon, the rain continued, and a strong wind was blowing from the south-west. The country was open, an expanse of vast rolling downs without any very marked features, giving a far-reaching command of view, while the deep hollows afforded cover for the approach of an enemy who knew the ground and avoided heights.

As soon as the column and baggage had been brought into camp, and all arrangements made for the defence, Colonel Benson ordered the screen of Mounted Infantry and Scottish Horse to fall back on the remainder of the rear guard at Gun Hill; when about to carry this out between 12 and 1 p.m., Major Anley, who was in command, reported that the enemy was advancing in greatly increasing numbers, and was already close to his position, which he could no longer hold. He at once retired on Gun Hill, sending a company of Mounted Infantry to some small kopjes well to the left. The movement had hardly commenced, when a strong Boer force appeared over the rise, immediately to the left of the position just vacated by the screen, and wheeling sharp to its left, pushed in the Scottish Horse and Mounted Infantry. Our men passed over the ridge to the northern slope, while the Boers formed up in a large area of dead ground, which lay immediately under and in front of its western extremity; here they dismounted, and rapidly worked their way into a good position within close range of the guns on the crest. The company of the Buffs, which formed the original escort, posted well to the front of the guns on the south side of the ridge, was captured by the enemy, as he rode practically into our position almost in touch with our men.

In spite of the gallant efforts of the Mounted Infantry Company of the Yorkshire Light Infantry and a squadron of the Scottish Horse, which promptly formed up on the flanks of the guns, our troops were unable to offer any serious resistance, and the ridge, with the exception of the extreme western end, which was held by a party of the Mounted Infantry until dark, gradually fell into the enemy's hands.

As soon as Colonel Benson had become aware of the nature of the attack, he had ordered up two more companies of the Buffs to reinforce the rear guard on the ridge, but these did not succeed in reaching any position whence their fire could be effectually brought to bear.

It is now known that the sudden change in the enemy's tactics was brought about by the arrival of a reinforcement of 600 or 800 men under Commandant General Louis Botha, which came on the field from the direction of Ermelo, shortly before noon. Their subsequent attack, which was delivered simultaneously both on the camp and rear guard, was greatly aided by the heavy rain and mist which concealed the enemy's movements, as the storm burst in the faces of our troops. The attack on the camp was easily driven off, but no further reinforcements could be sent to the ridge, nor were the guns in camp able to materially assist the defence of those with the rear guard.

Both Colonel Benson and Colonel Guinness fell by the guns on the ridge, the former being wounded in three places. The fight was continued until dusk, and when our ambulance moved out after dark to collect the wounded, the guns were removed by the enemy.

All ranks in camp worked hard to entrench the position, and before midnight had rendered

it so strong that no subsequent attack was made. On Colonel Benson being brought into camp, he placed Colonel Wools-Sampson, C.B., in command. He died of his wounds the following morning.

I deeply regret the loss of Colonel Benson and of the officers and men who fell with him. Colonel Benson had served with the Army in South Africa since the commencement of the war, first on the Staff of the 1st Division, then for a short time on the Staff of General Clements' Force, and since January last in the command of columns in the field. In every capacity he had shown soldierly qualities of a high order, and had invariably led his column with marked success and judgment. In him the Army loses an Officer of great promise.

The first news of Colonel Benson's engagement was received at 9.30 a.m. on 31st, and immediately Colonel Barter's column, composed chiefly of Infantry from Leeuwkop (218), and all available mounted troops from Standerton, under Brigadier-General Gilbert Hamilton, were at once ordered out in support. Both columns started at 2.30 p.m. the same day, and both got touch with Colonel Wools-Sampson's camp early on the morning of the following day, covering respectively 25 and 55 miles. General G. Hamilton's march was slightly opposed by some 300 to 400 Boers, who retired north-east on his approach. The bulk of the enemy had moved off the previous day, and were already beyond the reach of our columns.

Colonel Wools-Sampson moved with Colonel Barter to Leeuwkop, whence the wounded were sent to Springs, and subsequently marched north to refit at Brugspruit.

The further operations in the Eastern Transvaal during the period covered by this despatch were confined to the columns under Colonel Park in the Lydenburg district, Lieut.-Colonels Hacket-Thompson and Bewicke-Copley supporting the South African Constabulary posts, and Colonel Sir Henry Rawlinson acting in the Heidelberg district.

Colonel Park's column, which returned to Lydenburg from the north on the 7th October, has since then been employed in protecting the communications with Machadodorp, and watching the movements of General Ben Viljoen's commando, which has from time to time threatened convoys and made desultory attacks on the blockhouse line to Lydenburg, now under construction.

Lieut.-Colonel Hacket-Thompson's column was withdrawn temporarily from the northern end of the Constabulary blockhouse line, on the Wilge River, on the 14th October, to disperse a Boer commando, collected in the neighbourhood of De Wagen Drift on the Eland's River, whence it threatened the Pietersburg line. On the way north the mounted troops of this column, under Major Ross (Canadian Scouts), surprised and broke up Field-Cornet Jan Visagie's commando at Kranspoort (513).

Marching from Bronkhorstspruit on 20th October, Colonel Hacket-Thompson met with considerable opposition in the difficult country after passing Tweefontein (522), and was obliged to fall back on this point to await reinforcements. 600 Australians, under Lieut.-Colonel E. C. Williams, were railed up from Klerksdorp, and reached Tweefontein on 25th, whence the two columns, under Lieut.-Colonel the Hon. G. G. Fortescue, who had been nominated to command the column when the Cameron Highlanders under Lieut.-Colonel Hacket-Thompson were withdrawn, moved forward the following day on Sybrand's Kraal (296), where the advance was