

East of the railway our troops have steadily strengthened their grip upon the country, and the enemy's field of operations in this district will shortly be completely cut in two by a line of blockhouses which, starting from Kroonstad, will pass by Lindley and Bethlehem to Harrismith.

The existing blockhouse line between Heilbron and Frankfort is in course of extension to Tafel Kop, which has long been a favourite Boer rendezvous and signalling station, and will eventually be joined by a line about to be pushed out from Botha's Pass. Besides the advantages that may accrue from thus cutting up a vast stretch of country, these lines tend to increase our own power of mobility, and under their protection the extension of the railway from Harrismith to Bethlehem is about to be commenced. The earthworks and culverts of this line were finished before the outbreak of the war, and the opening of it for traffic, while greatly facilitating the passage of troops, material, and supplies into the heart of the north-east district of the Orange River Colony, will go far towards establishing our hold on that portion of the country which has hitherto been the general resort of De Wet's bands.

A similar extension is already working from Bloemfontein to the Waterworks, and is gradually being prolonged to Ladybrand.

In the Transvaal and Orange River Colony, the protected area is now roughly marked by the points Rustenburg—Brugspruit Station (on the Eastern line), Waterval Station (on the Standerton line), Villiersdorp, Heilbron, Wolvehoeck, Kroonstadt, Coalmine Drift, Klerksdorp, Ventersdorp, Naaupoort, Rustenburg, the principal extension of this boundary being an advance eastward of the Constabulary posts from a line between Wilge River Station and Greylingstad to a fresh position between Brugspruit and Waterval Station, and westward of the blockhouse line on the Mooi River to a new line on the Schoon Spruit.

The eastward advance of the line of South African Constabulary posts; which has just been completed, has been covered by a number of columns operating in the Eastern Transvaal under Major-General Bruce Hamilton, who is now dealing with the commandoes under General Louis Botha, within the somewhat reduced areas remaining open to his burghers.

In connection with these operations, Major-General Clements has been instructed to establish a line of blockhouses from Standerton to Ermelo, thus subdividing the district lying between the Wakkerstroom—Piet Retief line and the Constabulary posts.

Thus the system of protection of the railway lines by blockhouses has been extended to the protection of areas in conjunction with the establishment of lines which divide up the country outside these areas. The value of this undertaking is already evident, and its completion promises to produce lasting and beneficial results.

At the end of October, Major-General Bruce Hamilton assumed the general control and direction of operations in the Eastern Transvaal, and on the 7th of November four columns were ready to take the field under his immediate orders, whilst Colonel Williams' column from Wonderfontein, Colonel Sir H. Rawlinson from Volksrust, and Brigadier-General Spens from Standerton, were instructed to co-operate as the situation required.

The columns under General Hamilton's command were:—Colonel Allenby's and Colonel Campbell's at Standerton; Colonel Barter's at

Leenwkoop (218), 44 miles west of Bethal; and Colonel Mackenzie's (late Colonel Benson's), at Brugspruit. Lieutenant-Colonels E. C. Williams and the Honourable C. G. Fortescue were approaching Middelburg from the west, and available. Brigadier-General Spens' troops were covering the construction of the Standerton—Ermelo line of blockhouses.

By the 16th November, Major-General Hamilton had made the following dispositions:—Lieutenant-Colonels Fortescue and Williams at Middelkraal (298); Colonel Mackenzie at Bombardry (388); Colonels Allenby and Wing (the latter commanding a portion of Colonel Campbell's column) at Trigaardsfontein (151), just west of Bethal; Colonel Campbell with the remainder of his troops at Ruigtekuilen (298); Lieutenant-Colonel Barter at Rietkuil (113); and Colonel Sir H. Rawlinson, with Lieutenant-Colonel Stewart, at Goedgedacht (282) to the south of Bethal. On this date the forward movement of the Constabulary posts to the line Brugspruit Station—Waterval Station was commenced, and carried out without interruption.

When he had seen the Constabulary posts secure in their new position, General Bruce Hamilton next prepared for a further advance eastwards of his columns, and on the 22nd, having forced the Boer commandoes to retire, established his headquarters at Bethal.

In connection with this move, his left columns under Colonel Mackenzie, Lieutenant-Colonel Fortescue, and Lieutenant-Colonel Williams, were disposed on a line Middelburg—Middelkraal (298); his centre consisting of the columns under Colonels Campbell, Allenby, and Wing, were in and about Bethal; and Colonels Sir H. Rawlinson and Stewart on the right had arrived at Uitkyk (286). The same night General Bruce Hamilton, with a strong mounted force, made a rapid movement upon Mooivlei (56), twenty-five miles north-east of Bethal, where General Louis Botha was reported to be laagered, but the enemy's advanced picquets gave the alarm, and enabled the Boer force to retire in safety upon Ermelo. Finding, therefore, that the enemy had fallen back out of reach, General Bruce Hamilton returned at once to Bethal to complete his preparations.

On the 1st of December his column again moved eastwards, with the exception of Lieutenant-Colonel Barter's, which remained in occupation of Bethal. On the left the three columns under Colonel Mackenzie and Lieutenant-Colonels Fortescue and Williams reached Carolina on the 2nd, and on the following day General Bruce Hamilton, with the troops of Colonel Campbell's column (now commanded by Lieutenant-Colonels Wing and Simpson), arrived upon a line Klipstapel (145)—Ermelo, whilst Colonel Allenby, moving north-east from Bethal, through Middelkraal to Boschmansfontein (204), took up a position in rear of the left centre to watch for any attempt to break back through our columns.

On the right Colonel Sir H. Rawlinson had marched to Klipfontein (9), south-west of Ermelo, and General Spens, advancing from the neighbourhood of Standerton, had reached Klipfontein (101), between Ermelo and Beginderlyn (286) on the Vaal. From these points these two columns converged upon Ermelo, which they entered simultaneously with General Bruce Hamilton on the 3rd of December.

Still further to the south-east, in prolongation of our line, Brigadier-General Plumer and Colonel Pulteney were also instructed to move north-east from the Wakkerstroom—Piet Retief line, to close all roads between the Vaal and the