

Lieutenant-Colonel Colenbrander remained at Sterkfontein to rest his tired horses.

The two columns are now converging again towards Geelhout Kop, with a view to fresh operations in that neighbourhood.

On the departure to India of Colonel Hall, Royal Artillery, who has commanded the line of communications north of Pienaar's River since the occupation of Pietersburg in April last, Colonel Harrison, Liverpool Regiment, assumed command.

At the date of my last despatch, Lord Methuen was advancing from Zeerust by Mabalstad to co-operate with Colonel Kekewich, whose column had passed west through Olifant's Nek from Rustenburg on the 5th of November.

To effect this junction, Lord Methuen marched through Mabalstad upon Blokkloof (400) where he arrived on November 9th, Colonel Kekewich proceeding by Vlaktfontein (584) to Brakfontein (278) on the Rustenburg—Zeerust Road. Neither column met any serious opposition, though Lord Methuen's captured, during its march, 13 prisoners, 34 wagons, 13 carts, and some cattle.

The enemy, as it subsequently appeared, had moved south, and on November 10th a report was received from Lieutenant-Colonel Hickie whose column was covering the construction of the Schoon Spruit Blockhouse Line, that a strong Boer force was threatening his camp at Brak spruit (5). No attack was delivered on the camp, but on the 13th November a squadron of Imperial Yeomanry, detached by Lieutenant-Colonel Hickie with the object of verifying the enemy's reported presence, was suddenly surrounded and captured by a superior Boer force, which only retired, releasing its prisoners, on the arrival of reinforcements under Lieutenant-Colonel Hickie.

On receipt of this intelligence, Lord Methuen and Colonel Kekewich were ordered to move south to disperse the commandoes in front of Colonel Hickie.

Colonel Kekewich reached Ventersdorp on November 15th, and from there marched down the left bank of the Schoon Spruit towards Klerksdorp; whilst Lord Methuen, moving on a wide front, followed a route which brought him down the right bank of the spruit some miles to the west of Colonel Kekewich. Both columns reached Klerksdorp on the 18th without having encountered the enemy, who withdrew to the west on their approach.

Lord Methuen's column again left Klerksdorp to operate to the west about Hartebeestfontein (624) and Kaffi's Kraal (135), Colonel Hickie and Colonel Kekewich co-operating on Lord Methuen's right. Lord Methuen soon got touch of the enemy at Doornlaagte (160), and following south in the direction of Wolmaranstad, he was again engaged at Rooipoort (114), his total captures in the two skirmishes being 26 prisoners (including Liebenberg's adjutant), 33 wagons, some horses and some stock. He returned to Klerksdorp on December 4th.

Colonel Kekewich's co-operation during this time had contributed in a large measure to Lord Methuen's success, whilst the presence of both columns had so effectively relieved all pressure from Colonel Hickie, and the blockhouse line that rapid progress was made, and on the 5th December the work being completed, Colonel Hickie's column was released and marched into Klerksdorp, whither Colonel Kekewich's had proceeded two days earlier.

In the north-eastern portion of Orange River Colony, the early part of November was marked by a carefully-arranged converging movement

by a number of columns upon the country lying between Vrede and Reitz.

A concentration of Boers had been reported in this neighbourhood, and the rendezvous, of various columns having been suitably arranged for the purpose by November 6th, a gradual contraction from their wide perimeter upon the infested area was devised so as to surround the Boer bands within the country to be enclosed.

The operation was a comprehensive one, and some idea of its extent and the difficulty attending its execution may be gained when it is noted that the rendezvous and starting points of the outermost columns engaged upon it were roughly at the angles of a parallelogram, whose diagonal is 175 miles in length, and of which no side is less than 100 miles, marked by the points:—Standerton, Harrismith, Winburg, and Heilbron.

Although the difficulties of distance and of marches designedly tortuous were most successfully overcome by the column commanders, and although the time of arrival at their allotted positions on the circumference of the inner circle was as perfect in this far-reaching manoeuvre as could have been in the most restricted of peace operations, I was disappointed in the event. The results were less than the excellence of the work performed by Officers and men deserved, and this was in a great measure due to accident.

Almost as soon as the converging movement had commenced, and before it could possibly have been recognized as such by the enemy, a portion of them (about half) began to pass out of the threatened area towards the north-westward, and moving in their usual indefinite and undetectable fashion, succeeded in drifting through the gaps, at this time and at this point necessarily wide, of our encircling line, the number of Boers within the circle, originally somewhat over-estimated, was thus materially reduced, and these, aided by the misty, rainy weather prevalent at this season, displayed even more than their accustomed ability in making use of it to effect their escape from the troops in touch with them.

The columns selected to participate in this movement were disposed on the 6th of November in the following positions:—General Elliot (with Brigadier-General Broadwood and Colonel Lowe under his orders), together with the 2nd Imperial Light Horse at Harrismith; Brigadier-General Spens at Botha's Pass; Colonels Rimington and De Lisle at Standerton; Major Damant at Frankfort; Lieutenant-Colonels Hon. J. Byng and Wilson at Heilbron; Lieutenant-Colonels Barker and W. H. Williams, and Major Holmes at Winburg; and Lieutenant-Colonel Briggs with the 1st Imperial Light Horse at Bethlehem.

The instructions issued to these column commanders were briefly to the following effect:—The Winburg force, on the first day of the operations, was to move in six marches via Senekal to the line Bethlehem—Lindley, where it would remain blocking any egress to the south-west by parties breaking through our inner columns. At the same time, Sir Leslie Rundle's troops were to perform a similar function between Bethlehem and Harrismith, holding the main passes of the Langeberg, and all roads leading south, thus forming in conjunction with the Winburg column a second line to the south and south-west some seventy-five miles in length. Meanwhile, the remainder of the columns, starting from the points mentioned, would converge in six marches upon a gradually diminishing circle, whose centre was about Paardehoek, some 20 miles south of Frankfort.