

Major Damant's column would, it was hoped, assist to allay any suspicion on the part of the enemy by remaining immobile at Frankfort until the other columns had completed the fourth day's march.

The need for both punctuality and deception of movement was especially enjoined upon all column commanders, and thus a difficult combination was effected without a hitch. No column marched straight upon its objective; some at times were actually moving away from it, and the marches of all were circuitous and misleading to a degree, yet none were late, and all reached their allotted points fresh and ready for the work they hoped would ensue. A more or less free hand as to the route he should pursue had been given to each commander, the necessity for inter-communication on the third day, and for the punctual arrival of the columns at their final positions being alone insisted upon. The last march was performed at night, and when dawn of the 12th November brought the columns to their objective, the fears that the bulk of enemy they had hoped to enclose had escaped were realized.

On the night of the 9th November, when there was still a large gap between General Elliot's left column and General Dartnell's right, small parties of the enemy were detected moving south-east. The following morning a thick heavy mist, hanging over the whole country made it impossible for the columns to verify the movement indicated by the direction taken in the night by the enemy's patrols. Such information as was obtainable pointed to a body, some 300 or 400 strong, having escaped south-east, but under the existing conditions the columns could do no more than adhere to the original programme, and trust to finding their objective still within their grasp on its completion. This they did not do. The bulk of the Boers, favoured by the weather, had escaped through our columns, leaving their stock and transport, which fell into our hands.

Although the actual loss inflicted upon the enemy in these operations was not heavy, the damage in respect to his means of mobility and subsistence was very considerable indeed. Twenty-two Boers were killed, and 98 prisoners (12 of whom were wounded) were taken, together with 10,200 cattle, 3,000 horses (not more than 5 per cent. of any use), nearly 200 wagons, and a large number of other miscellaneous vehicles.

At the conclusion of this converging movement, the whole of the columns returned to their original points of departure, with the exception of those under Brigadier-General Spens and Colonel Rimington, which marched respectively into Standerton and Frankfort.

The return of our columns was uneventful, except in the case of the combined force under Lieutenant-Colonels Byng and Wilson, whose troops were vigorously attacked on the 14th of November, some few miles to the south of Heilbron, by a party of 400 Boers, said to be under the personal command of De Wet. This was almost certainly the party which had moved through the cordon almost before it had begun to be drawn, and it was rather by their good fortune than the result of any preconceived plan or especially good information of our dispositions that they thus found themselves in a position from which to strike at a favourable moment at one of our returning columns.

The attack, delivered in a resolute manner, was, after two hours' hard fighting, successfully repulsed on all sides by Lieutenant-Colonel Byng's rear guard, which was well and skilfully

handled by Lieutenant-Colonel Wilson, of Kitchener's Fighting Scouts, and the enemy retired leaving 8 dead on the field.

Colonels Byng and Wilson marched into Heilbron the same evening.

Since the 15th of November, successful operations have been carried out by Colonel Rimington and Major Damant, operating from Frankfort along the valley of the Vaal. Frequent captures have been made by these Officers, who have exhibited marked ability in adapting themselves to the peculiar methods of Boer warfare. It would be tedious indeed to give in detail the many minor successes which have rewarded their energy and ingenuity.

The most important capture effected by Colonel Rimington was that of Commandant Buys, who fell into his hands after being wounded in a skirmish with a detachment of the Railway Pioneer Regiment, to whose assistance Colonel Rimington had gone.

In the course of their operations on the Vaal, Colonel Rimington and Major Damant have covered the advance of the South African Constabulary blockhouses between the river and the Heidelberg—Standerton line, made in conjunction with the eastward advance of their posts on the north of the railway.

General Elliot's Division returned to Harrismith at the termination of the operations in the vicinity of Reitz, and left again on the 19th of November to sweep across the Orange River Colony from Harrismith by Bethlehem and Lindley to Kroonstad.

During the first part of this march, General Dartnell, with the Imperial Light Horse Brigade, moved parallel with General Elliot's line of advance and to the south of the Harrismith—Bethlehem Road. Little or no opposition was encountered, and General Dartnell having come west, as far as Bethlehem, left General Elliot, returning with his own command to operate near Harrismith.

On the 24th of November, the 2nd Imperial Light Horse, belonging to Brigadier-General Dartnell's command, surprised Lauren's commando between Eland's River Bridge and Bethlehem, killing 2 Boers in their attack, and capturing 12 prisoners. This success was followed up on the 27th by a raid by a combined force of the 1st and 2nd Imperial Light Horse under Lieutenant-Colonel Mackenzie, in which 24 prisoners, 150 horses, and 800 cattle fell into our hands.

Co-operation by other columns during the second part of the march had already been arranged. Colonel Rimington and Major Damant leaving their work in the Vaal valley, marched south from the Heilbron—Frankfort line to co-operate on the right flank of the Cavalry Division. To the west and south-west Colonels Byng, Barker, and W. H. Williams, and Major Holmes were ordered to watch for any parties of the enemy who might be driven towards them by General Elliot's movement from Harrismith.

General Elliot marched in three columns, two of which—those under Brigadier-General Broadwood and Colonel De Lisle—were organized with a special view to mobility, whilst the third, under Colonel Lowe, acted as an escort to a convoy working as a supply base by more easy stages in rear of the centre, which was directed by the south of Reitz upon Karoospruit.

Between the 26th and 28th of November, several night raids were undertaken with more or less success, but the enemy was not met with in strength, and on the 1st of December General Elliot arrived at Kroonstad with 15 prisoners, 114 wagons, 89 carts, 2,470 cattle, and 1,280