

effected during his return march, and on the 20th his troops again returned to Kaalfontein.

Colonel Barker returned to Winburg without opposition, but Brigadier-General Dartnell was hotly attacked during the final stage of his march back to Elands River Bridge. After leaving Bethlehem on the morning of the 18th December, the latter officer found himself opposed by a large force of Boers under De Wet, who, occupying a position along the Tygerkloof Spruit, disputed his further advance, whilst he vigorously assailed General Dartnell's flanks and rearguard. Sharp fighting was maintained throughout the day. Every successive attack was gallantly repulsed by the two regiments of Imperial Light Horse, until the approach from Bethlehem of the column under Major-General B. Campbell, who had established signalling communication with General Dartnell during the progress of the fight, finally compelled the enemy, about 3 p.m., to beat a hurried retreat in the direction of Reitz.

Though his failure against General Dartnell was thus complete, De Wet did not remain long inactive, having apparently decided to strike a sudden blow at the troops employed in covering the gradual construction of the Harrismith-Bethlehem blockhouse line. On the 24th of December, the head of this line had been pushed as far west as Tweefontein, some 9 miles west of Elands River Bridge, and a covering force lay that night a mile or two in advance of the working party. This covering force was composed of 4 squadrons of the 4th Battalion Imperial Yeomanry, 1 gun of the 79th Battery, and a pom-pom under the temporary command of Major G. A. Williams, 1st South Staffordshire Regiment.

Lieutenant-General Sir L. Rundle, with a small column, consisting of 270 of the Grenadier Guards and 66 mounted infantry of the 1st South Staffordshire Regiment, with 1 field gun, was also encamped at a point some $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles to the east of the covering force.

The position held by Major Williams' troops was on the slope of a solitary kopje, the southern side of which is steep. The outpost line held this crest, and the Camp lay on the gentle slope to the north. About 2 a.m. on the morning of the 25th, an attack was delivered from the south, the Boers suddenly rushing the picquets upon the crest in overwhelming numbers. The loss of the ridge was at once followed by a rush through the Camp, when many officers and men were shot down before they had time to realize what had happened.

The casualties in this action amounted to 6 officers (including Major Williams) and 51 men killed; 8 officers and 80 men wounded.

On hearing the firing at Major Williams' Camp, General Rundle at once sent Lieutenant-Colonel Tudway, D.A.A.G., with his mounted infantry detachment to ascertain its cause, and summoned up the 2 regiments of Imperial Light Horse from Elands River Bridge, a distance of 14 miles. On the approach of the latter force, the Boers retired into the Langeberg, taking with them, however, the gun and pom-pom of Major Williams' force, which were both captured in their assault upon his Camp. A Court of Enquiry has been held* upon the circumstances connected with this unfortunate affair, which is not, in my opinion, satisfactorily covered by the explanations hitherto put forward. Considering the warning which this covering force had recently received, directing them to be on the alert, and the knowledge they possessed of De

Wet's concentration to attack General Dartnell in the neighbourhood of their post, the preparations made by them to meet any night attack by the enemy seem, as far as I can judge at present, to have been most defective.

On receipt of the news of this successful attack by the enemy, I arranged to reinforce General Rundle by the 1st Black Watch and 4th King's Royal Rifles, then landing from India and England respectively at Durban, and despatched Lieutenant-Colonel Dawkins' column from the Northern Transvaal to Harrismith. Since the arrival of these reinforcements no further attempts have been made to molest the troops engaged upon the construction of the blockhouse line, which is now being pushed on in the direction of Bethlehem.

Another very determined attack was also made upon Lieutenant-Colonel Damant's column, in the vicinity of Tafel Kop, between Frankfort and Vrede.

On the evening of the 19th of December, this column, together with Colonel Rimington's troops, who had also moved from Heilbron to Frankfort, marched from the latter town towards Tafel Kop to cover the extension of the blockhouse line in that direction. They moved throughout the night by two parallel roads, some three miles apart, and to the north of the proposed line of blockhouses, and, after circling round Tafel Kop, were at daybreak in the vicinity of Bacchante Farm. Here a resolute attack was suddenly made by some 800 Boers under General Wessels, upon Colonel Damant's advanced guard, who were deceived by the khaki disguise of the enemy, and their clever imitation of the formation usual with regular mounted troops. To complete the deception, the enemy even fired volleys, as they approached Colonel Damant's men, in the general direction of some Boers who were escaping across the front of the two forces. This clever ruse enabled them to get sufficiently close to Colonel Damant's troops to anticipate them by a few yards in the occupation of the crest of a kopje which commanded the whole field, including the guns and the main body of our troops.

Lieutenant-Colonel Damant's men displayed the utmost gallantry, holding on to their inferior position so as to save the two guns which accompanied the advanced guard, and every officer and man, except four, of the leading troops was shot down before reinforcements, which were pushed forward from the main body and Colonel Rimington's column directly firing commenced, could arrive upon the scene.

The appearance of these reinforcements compelled the Boers to relinquish their attack, and they fled over the Wilge River, pursued for some miles by Colonel Rimington's troops.

Since the date of this affair the troops of Colonels Rimington and Damant have continued to operate in the neighbourhood of Tafel Kop, where I am reinforcing them by two of the newly-formed battalions of Royal Artillery Mounted Rifles, and by the Canadian Scouts under Major Ross. The 2nd Battalion Essex Regiment, which has just landed from India, has also been placed at the disposal of Brigadier-General E. O. Hamilton, for duty on the blockhouse line to the east of Tafel Kop.

On the 22nd December, Major-General Elliot's division, now organized into two columns under Lieutenant-Colonel De Lisle and Major Fanshawe, moved out once more to Quaggafontein Hill, to the north of Lindley, where it was joined by the column under Lieutenant-Colonel Hon. J. Byng.

At Quaggafontein, General Elliot heard that De Wet, who moved north after his attack upon Major Williams' camp, was at Reitz, so, leaving

* Proceedings not yet received.