CHAPTER II

CAPE COLONY—PURSUIT OF RAIDERS—MARCH AND APRIL—CHASING KRUITZINGER

While the pursuit of De Wet was going forward, our troops under General Settle, and subsequently under Colonel Douglas Haig (Colonels Henniker, Gorringe, Grenfell, Scobell, and Crewe), worked unceasingly against the Boer raiders who were making themselves obstreperous in various parts of the Colony. Pearston was occupied by seven hundred of the enemy with two guns, who captured sixty rifles and 15,000 rounds of ammunition, in spite of the gallant defence of the tiny garrison. The invaders, a part of Kruitzinger's commando, were promptly swept away by Colonel Gorringe, who reoccupied the place on the 5th, and caused the fugitives to be pursued. Accordingly the commando broke into three parties and fled eastward over the railway.

About the same time one hundred raiders, under Scheepers, made a desperate attack upon the village of Aberdeen—an attack which happily failed owing to the smartness of the garrison. This consisted of a portion of the 4th Derbyshire Militia, Town Guard, and twenty men of the 9th Lancers, under Colonel Priestly. The Boers, however, succeeded in penetrating into the town, and releasing some of their compatriots who were in gaol. They further tried to loot the stores, but were not given the opportunity, so promptly did the Town Guard send them to the right-about. Colonel Parsons arrived on the scene in the afternoon, followed, the next day, by Colonel Scobell and some Colonials, and soon, though not without sharp fighting, the kopjes surrounding the place were purged of the raiders. The sharpshooters of the Imperial Yeomanry under Major Warden were untiring in the energy of their pursuit of the enemy from hill to hill, and the detachment of the 6th Dragoons under Captain Anstie helped in the discomfiture of the foe. These escaped by means of the thick bush and dongas, which afforded them timely cover.

It was now necessary to prevent Scheepers and his Boers from entering Murraysburg. To circumvent him, Colonel Scobell—commanding a force of Cape Mounted Rifles, Cape Police, Diamond Fields Horse, and Brabant's Horse, with some guns—marched hot foot at the rate of fifty-nine miles in less than twenty-five hours.
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Meanwhile Captain Colenbrander, commanding the Fighting Scouts, moved promptly from Richmond towards Murraysburg, located Scheepers' hordes in an adjacent village, and attacked them. The enemy were repulsed with the loss of five of their number, while the British party had no casualties.

Kruitzinger's commando, continuing its depredations, seized Carlisle Bridge with a view to pressing towards Grahamstown, but the activity of Colonels De Lisle and Gorringe frustrated all effort to get to the sea. The invaders gave a vast amount of trouble, however, burning farms and securing horses, and several encounters took place. In one of these, a few miles from Adelaide, Captain Rennie and some of the Bedford detachment of the Colonial Defence Corps gave an excellent account of themselves. The Boers lost one man killed, one taken prisoner, and three wounded, together with six horses.

The raiders were routed from Maraisburg, which was reoccupied by the British on the 8th; but in the interval the magistrate had had a somewhat uncomfortable experience, having been imprisoned in his own house. The enemy reaped a certain reward of their exertions in the form of some horses, saddles, and a revolver. They afterwards broke into small gangs, and were hunted by Colonel Donald's column.

The 15th found Colonels Scobell and Colenbrander's columns still in pursuit of Scheepers, who, having caused some commotion by burning the house of a British scout named Meredith, was now hiding in the mountains around Graf Reinet. Colonel Gorringe at the same time was dodging about the neighbourhood of Kruitzinger (who had abandoned the hope of going south, and was now making for Blinkwater) and keeping him perpetually on the move. Space does not admit of a detailed account of these continuous activities, but in an engagement on the 15th some smart work was done by Captain Stewart, assisted by Gunner Sawyer (5th Field Battery). While the guns were being hauled up a precipitous slope, and most of the gunners were dismounted, they were assailed by a furious fire from the ambushed foe. With admirable presence of mind, Sawyer took in the situation, and, with the assistance of Captain Stewart, unlimbered one of the guns and gave the Boers a quid pro quo. This considerably damped their ardour, and afforded time for the rest of the guns to come into action. The position was finally stormed by the Albany defence force under Captain Currie. In the engagement nine Boers were killed and nine wounded. On the 17th, after a sharp action, the Boers, abandoning seventy excellent horses and saddles, besides losing some forty of their number, were driven across Elands River. Kruitzinger got across the Elands River in safety, but, while turning an angle of the main
road towards Tarkastad, on the morning of the 18th, he came suddenly in collision with Colonel de Lisle, who, by night, was marching—a memorable march in a terrific storm!—from Magermansberg to Tarkastad. The British force, as surprised at the sudden encounter as that of the Boers, promptly sprang to action, and succeeded in shelling the rearguard, while the Mounted Infantry started off in pursuit. From ridge to ridge went hunted and hunters, the Irish Yeomanry, under Captain Moore, with Mounted Infantry, under Colonel Knight, doing splendid work; but at last the wily quarry, through some of the troops having lost direction, succeeded in getting away through the loophole of Elands Poort. Kruitzinger, still maintaining a north-easterly direction, was next traced across the railway at Hemming Station on the 21st. Scheepers, Fouché, and Malan, who had growing forces, and had been beaten, with the loss of nine killed and seven wounded, by Major Mullins on the 15th, were proceeding east from Marais Siding. Other detached parties gave trouble elsewhere. Some, on the 16th, attacked at Yeefontein, near Steymburg, a patrol of Prince Alfred’s Guards under Major Court, but left behind them two killed, three wounded, and three prisoners, while the Guards lost one killed and two seriously wounded. Fighting was taking place in various other places daily. On the 20th and 21st Colonel Scobell’s force, increased by Colonel Grenfell’s, skirmished in the region north of Jansenville with excellent effect. Kitchener’s Fighting Scouts, under Captain Colenbrander, Major Mullins, and Colonel Gorringe converged from their various positions, while the main body made for Blaankrantz. On the 20th, by 9 A.M., a hammer-and-tongs engagement had begun, Captain Doune’s two guns being met by a blizzard from the foe in the surrounding ridges. The assailants were, however, rapidly silenced and forced to retire, the British party taking up the vacated position, and “speeding the parting guest” with a salvo from pom-poms, rifles, and field-guns. But the enemy could not be entirely netted, for in ones and twos they squeezed through the bushes and made their escape. Four, however, were left on the veldt, and four were taken prisoners, while about one hundred sound horses came in handy at a time when they were much in demand. The British force lost three killed and four wounded.

Kruitzinger at this time was being gradually pressed towards the Orange River (which was known to be unfordable) by Colonel de Lisle’s column, which formed part of a cordon, composed of the columns of Colonels Gorringe, Herbert, and Major Crewe on one side, and Colonels Crabbe, Codrington, and Henniker on the other. Nearly all the commandos which had invaded the Colony were retracing their sorry steps after the failure of their expedition.
MAJOR-GENERAL SIR H. H. SETTLE.

Photo Elliott & Fry, London.
Cape Colony

The fact that they had been able to keep the field so long was attributed to the persistent way in which they avoided fighting, and their mode of hugging the sheltering kopjes and bushes, and never emerging from those beneficent harbours of refuge. According to good authority, the raiders succeeded in gaining certain recruits among the Colonial Dutch, but not nearly so many as they had expected. They were amply supplied with food from the sympathetic rural population, however, and received on all sides timely information of the movements of the pursuing columns, which enabled them to double like hares at the very moment when the pursuers seemed about to pounce on them.

Train-wrecking continued, and of necessity the running of night trains had to be suspended. Some of the raiders began to drive over the less known drifts of the Orange and disappear, while certain rebels contrived to hide themselves in the mountain fastnesses so as to escape both the Boer bands and the British pursuit. On the 30th of March a skirmish took place between some of Henniker’s troops (Victorian Bushmen) and a large force of Boers, during which the Colonials again showed their tenacity and grit. An advanced party of four only, under a splendid fellow, Sergeant Sandford, were set upon by the foe in the vicinity of Zuurberg. The enemy succeeded in wounding a Bushman, who fell beneath his dead horse, and was there pinned. His companions, under a perpetual sleet from the marauders’ Mausers, with great coolness engaged in the immensely difficult task of moving the dead animal and drawing out their comrade from his perilous position. They then managed to mount the rescued man on Sergeant Sandford’s horse and all got away in safety. Reinforcements arriving now frightened off the Boers, who had lost four of their number.

On the whole, things were progressing wonderfully. At the headquarters of General Baden-Powell’s Constabulary at Modderfontein 2000 more recruits were now expected to join the 1000 already on duty there. Australian and Canadian drafts were to follow. The clerical staff of the Rand Mines’ Corporation was about to proceed from the Cape to Johannesburg, a sure sign of approaching settlement. A warning to colonists was soon published stating that acts of rebellion committed after April 12 would not be tried under the Special Tribunals Act of last session, but by the old common law, the penalties under which include capital punishment or any term of imprisonment or fine which an ordinary court may impose.

On the 6th of April a post, ten miles north of Aberdeen, consisting of one hundred men of the 5th Lancers, thirty-two Imperial Yeomanry under Captain Bretherton, and Brabant’s Horse,
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was assailed by a horde of 400 Boers. After fighting vigorously from dawn till 11 A.M. the force was overpowered. Twenty-five of the number only escaped—one was killed and six were wounded.

On the 11th, Colonel Byng surprised a laager near Smithfield, captured thirteen tatterdemalions, who were not loth to rest, and some horses and stores.

Colonel Haig, on the 12th, reached Rosmead and took command of all the columns operating in the midlands, and he soon began the hunting of Scheepers' and Malan's commandos with his flying columns. According to Reuter's correspondent, the Boer forces in the midlands at this date comprised Scheepers, with 180 men, in the Sneeuwberg; Malan, with forty men, reported to be breaking northward; Swanepoel, with sixty men, near New Bethesda; and Fouche, with a force estimated variously at several hundreds, in the Zuurberg.

On the 14th of April Colonel Gorringe returned to Pretoria after three months' of exceptionally hard work and incessant trekking over some of the worst country in South Africa. His Colonial column had done on an average a daily trek of some thirty-one and a half miles. On one occasion, when rushing to the succour of Pearston when it was overpowered by raiders, these hardy troopers, with guns and equipments, covered seventy-four miles in forty hours, crossing the frowning heights of Coelzeeberg by a bridle path.

General MacDonald now proceeded to England in order to take up command of an important post on the Afghan frontier, and General Fitzroy Hart succeeded him in command of the 3rd Brigade. Sir Alfred Milner made preparations to go home on leave.

On the 24th the Dordrecht Volunteer Guard and Wodehouse's Yeomanry gave an excellent account of themselves. They were attacking raiders for the most part of the day, and sent the Dutchmen to the right-about, capturing their horses and forcing them to make good their escape on Shanks' pony.

On the 29th Major Du Moulin's column, accompanied by Lovat's Scouts under Major Murray, arrived at Aliwal North from Orange River Colony, bringing with it 30 prisoners, 60,000 sheep, 6000 head of cattle, 100 wagons, 800 refugees, and 300 horses.

1 See page 8.