CHAPTER IX

OPERATIONS BETWEEN THE DELAGOA AND NATAL LINES

GENERAL BULLOCK, early in May, engaged in the task of chasing Boers who had been dispersed by the operations of General Blood. Round Ermelo and Bethel the scattered commandos of Botha attempted to collect, but General Bullock, advancing through Amersfoort, attacked and drove them from Ermelo on the 9th of May. At this time General Blood's columns under General W. Kitchener and Colonel W. Pulteney were approaching Ermelo from the north, therefore General Bullock disposed his troops along the line Ermelo-Lake Chrissie, closed the road leading north-east, and connected his right with General Blood's force. Simultaneously Colonel Rimington marched to join hands with General Plumer, who was approaching Bethel from the west.

General Plumer, who had left Silvertown, near Pretoria, on the 14th of May, to work in conjunction with Colonel Allenby (from Whitbank) and Colonel E. Knox (from Greylingstad) against Boer laagers near the source of the Wilge River, joined hands with both the above-named officers at Krondraai, on the 16th and 17th of May. At the rumour of British approach, the Boer laagers at once broke up, their occupants dispersing towards south and east. Colonel Allenby, on his way to Springs, encountered the Boer rabble near Leeuwpkop, and drove them south-east, while General Plumer and Colonel E. Knox proceeded to join Colonel Rimington at Bethel. Considerable opposition was met with en route, but large numbers of prisoners were taken, together with a goodly amount of stock, and gradually the Boers, who had made this district a centre for their operations, found themselves empty and shelterless.

General Plumer now extended the three columns at his disposal on the line Bethel-Middelplaats, for the purpose of sweeping the country down to the Vaal, and clearing the region between Leeuwspruit and Kaffir Spruit.

The Boers at this period managed to collect in sufficient quantity to make a violent lunge at a convoy proceeding between Whitbank and Mooifontein, on its way to Standerton. The escort under Colonel Gallaway, consisting of detachments of Somerset and Munster Fusiliers, 10th Hussars, and Queenslanders, suddenly found them-
Operations Between Delagoa and Natal

selves attacked by 400 desperados, who made violent rushes to get to close quarters. The resistance of the British band was fierce as it was valiant, and, after a running fight lasting six hours, the Boers were routed, with a loss to them of six killed and thirty wounded. One British officer lost his life, and one was wounded. Five men were killed and twenty-four wounded.

General Plumer and Colonel Knox halted near Standerton, and

Colonel Rimington at Platrand, their columns, since leaving Bethel, having secured 37 prisoners and 650 horses.

General Bullock, who on the 25th of May was joined by Colonel Grey (from Standerton), now commenced a series of night raids on various farmhouses along the banks of the Vaal, south-east of Ermelo—excursions which were full of dash and daring, and resulted in the capture of many armed burghers.
The Transvaal War

June found both columns at Standerton. Five days later Colonel Grey started on an adventurous hunt for a Boer gun, said to be with a commando at Kaffir Spruit. On the 11th the force surprised a Boer laager at Rietvlei, and after a vigorous fight nine prisoners were secured. One Boer was killed and two wounded. Colonel Grey, having thoroughly searched the district between Ermelo and Bethel without finding a trace of the required gun, returned to Standerton. From the 10th of June to the 4th of July, General Bullock continued his clearance of the country, dispersing Boer gangs east of Elandsberg down to the valley of the Assegai River. He was then called in to the railway and returned to Standerton.

BRIGADIER-GENERAL PLUMER IN THE EASTERN TRANSVAAL

General Plumer, as soon as he had refitted his troops at Standerton, was again off to engage in further sweeping operations against Boer knots in the region between Amersfoort and Piet Retief. General Plumer, with Colonel Rimington on his right flank and Colonel Knox on his left, advanced on the 1st of June on the line Platrand - Springbokfontein - Uitkyk. By the 8th, all three columns had reached the line Driefontein-Breda-Waterval Drift, and thus, on the following day, the columns of Plumer (centre) and Knox (left) were able to swoop from the north upon Piet Retief, while that of Rimington (right), making a night détour, wheeled round the south of the town and blocked all southerly exits therefrom. But, warily, the Boers had made off, and the place was deserted. Colonel Rimington, however, contrived to cut off a Boer convoy which was hastily lumbering along towards the Vryheid Road, accompanied by the escaping Landdrost of Piet Retief and William Emmett, who were forthwith taken prisoners together with twenty-eight more of their compatriots. Twelve waggons and 100 horses were also secured. Colonel Rimington then stationed himself south-east of the difficult peaks of the Slangapiesberg, while they were traversed by Colonel Plumer's troops, who, having moved from Piet Retief towards Wakkerstroom to meet a convoy, were now proceeding over the dangerous heights. The whole force having cleared "as far as practicable" this gibbose and frowning region, moved to Paul Pietersburg, which was also found deserted. Near Elandsberg Nek, however, Colonel Gallway, with some 300 Bushmen, two companies of Munster Fusiliers, and some Sharpshooters, with two guns of Q Battery, were assailed by 300 Boers, who were strongly entrenched there. The enemy were speedily dispersed, but Lieutenant Rudkin, R.H.A., was wounded in both knees, and
BRIGADIER-GENERAL THE EARL OF ERROLL.

Photo Elliott & Fry, London.
Plumer in the Eastern Transvaal

narrowly escaped death, as a Boer bullet passed through the litter while the wounded man was being carried from the field of action. The columns finally converged on Utrecht. The prize of their labours after leaving Piet Retief amounted to 21 prisoners, 232 horses, and 100 waggons. Twenty-six Burghers surrendered.

Action was now taken by Colonels Rimington and Wing against the enemy to north of Utrecht, in the valley of the Pongola River. Colonel Rimington, on the night of the 26th of June, marched towards Tiverton, while Colonel Wing made a détour over the Elandsberg Pass to Schuilhoek. There, the latter attacked the wandering hordes, driving them before him up the valley, where they soon found themselves un unpleasantly warmed and welcomed by Colonel Rimington’s guns, which took them in the rear. Away they went helter-skelter, leaving behind them nine vehicles, 6500 rounds of ammunition, horses and cattle in plenty, and six dead Boers. Three were captured. Colonel Rimington, after immense activity around Wakkerstroom, returned independently to Platrand, while General Plumer and Colonel Knox from Utrecht marched towards Amsterdam and Carolina, reaching Bothwell, near Lake Chrissie, on the 7th of July.

In the meantime, on June 20, the Boers published the following notice, dated Waterval, Standerton District, signed S. Burger and Steyn, which showed they were still truculent:—

“As his Honour the State President Kruger and the Deputation in Europe have not heard anything direct from our Government since the conference between Commandant-General Botha and Lord Kitchener at Middelburg, and as the Government of the South African Republic deemed it advisable that they should be acquainted with the state of affairs here, therefore, at request of the Commandant-General, and with the kind compliance of Lord Kitchener, a private telegram was sent to them, in which the entire state of affairs was fully described and intentionally put in the worst light, for the means of making the advice of his Honour and the Deputation the more weighty. On this his Honour informed us that he and the Deputation have still great hopes of a satisfactory end of the long struggle, that after material and personal sacrifice we should continue the struggle, and that on their part all steps are already taken and will still be taken for proper provision for the captive women and children and prisoners of war. For discussing and considering this answer of his Honour a conference of the Governments of both Republics was arranged, at which were present Chief Commandant C. R. de Wet, Commandant-General L. Botha, and Assistant-Commandant J. H. Delarey. After a full revision of the condition of military affairs represented by these chief officers,
The Transvaal War

and thorough discussion of our whole cause by both Governments, the following resolution was taken by both Governments, with the advice of the said chief officers:—

"The Governments of the South African Republic and Orange Free State, with the advice of the said chief officers, and taking into consideration the satisfactory report of his Honour State President Kruger and the Deputation in the foreign country, and considering the good progress of our cause in the Colonies, where our brothers oppose the cruel injustice done to the Republics more and more in depriving them of their independence, considering further the invaluable personal and material sacrifices they have made for our cause, which would all be worthless and vain with a peace whereby the independence of the Republics is given up, and further considering the certainty that the losing of our independence after the destruction already done and losses suffered will drag with it the national and material annihilation [?] of the entire people, and especially considering the spirit of unbending persistence with which the great majority of our men, women, and children are still possessed, and in which we see with thankful acknowledgment the hand of the Almighty Protector, resolve that no peace will be made and no peace conditions accepted by which our independence and national existence, or the interests of our colonial brothers, shall be the price paid, and that the war will be vigorously prosecuted by taking all measures necessary for maintenance of independence and interests."

MAJOR-GENERAL BEATSON'S OPERATIONS

While General Plumer was at Bethel, General Beatson, who had been watching the Middelburg-Bronkens Spruit line, moved to Brugspruit. He then (with Colonel Allenby's column from Springs) marched south, on the 23rd of May, towards the junction of Olifants River and Steenkool Spruit in order to catch such Boers as had escaped General Plumer. (Major Garratt, with a few of Allenby's men, during the advance from Springs, made good use of his time, and secured, besides rifles and ammunition, eight prisoners and waggons, a Colt gun, and forty mules.)

General Beatson, on the right bank of Olifants River, soon came in contact with Trichard's commando, which was strongly entrenched on Vaalkrans. The Boers were hard pressed, and had to run for it, leaving behind them, as usual, waggons and stock. After this Allenby's column, temporarily commanded by Colonel Hippisley, searched the region of Brugspruit, found no signs of the foe, and consequently returned via Wilge River Station to Pretoria. General Beatson continued his operations in the
Sir Bindon Blood's Operations

direction of Bethel. A small force of the enemy was reported to be at Boschmansfontein, consequently the General, then encamped at Van Dycks Drift, detached a force to deal with them. Major Morris, with four companies of Victorian Mounted Rifles and two pom-poms, marched towards the lager and found it deserted. On the 12th of June he was instructed to combine with the General in an attack on the marauders to be made on the 13th at Elandsfontein. Therefore the detachment the night before bivouacked at Wilmansrust. No sooner had darkness fallen than the enemy, evading the outposts, crept up to the bivouac, and within very short range poured a deadly fire in on the astonished force. A scene of turmoil followed. Rifles blazed, horses stampeded, and soon the guerillas had rushed the camp and captured the pom-poms. The struggle was desperate, and two officers and sixteen men were slain, four officers and thirty-eight men wounded, while many men were made prisoners. Only two officers and fifty men escaped to General Beatson's camp, though such as had been made prisoners were afterwards released. Promptly to the rescue rushed the General, leaving his baggage under guard of his infantry, but though he arrived soon after daybreak on the 13th, the desperadoes had made off, and not a vestige of them was to be seen. He therefore concentrated his force at Koornfontein. The column later, sweeping east, came in touch with General Blood's force north of Ermelo on the 19th, and from thence proceeded, clearing the ground as they went, to Middelburg to refit. The total result of the operations were, 16 Boers killed and wounded; prisoners, 23; rifles, 160; ammunition, 10,850 rounds; 58 vehicles, and some stock.

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL SIR BINDON BLOOD.

EASTERN TRANSVAAL

In the middle of May General Bullock, as we are aware, was holding a line from Lake Chrissie southwards. To co-operate with him came General Blood on the conclusion of his operations north of the Delagoa line.

By the 17th of May the columns of General W. Kitchener and Colonel Pulteney were in touch with General Bullock near Ermelo, and General Blood occupied Carolina with his cavalry. Finding the enemy had scampered, operations were set on foot to clear the country towards the East. Colonel Benson, marching south from Belfast, crossed the Komati Valley, while Colonel Douglas, moving from Machadodorp, via Uitkomst, operated between Komati River and the railway. To stop the guerillas from fleeing north, and also to check them attempting to fly south from the column of Colonel
The Transvaal War

Park (which was scouring from Lydenberg and the difficult ruggedness of the Mauchberg towards Nelspruit), General Spens kept a watchful eye at Nelspruit. General Blood at this time had accounted for four Boers killed, eighteen captured, and nine burghers surrendered, and the number was greatly augmented by the combined movement which followed.

General Spens then proceeded (on the 10th of June) to operate in the mountainous districts surrounding Machadodorp, Lydenburg, and Nelspruit. He and Colonel Park swept north-west of Nelspruit, while Colonels Benson and Douglas cleared the country north-east from Machadodorp. The reward of the combined efforts, which were quite herculean in view of the region traversed, was 17 Boers killed, 48 prisoners captured, 107 rifles, 38,700 rounds of ammunition, 266 vehicles. Large quantities of stock were seized.

In consequence of the attack before mentioned on Major Morris and the Victorians at Wilmansrust on the 12th, General Blood moved west from Carolina with all available troops. He formed two columns, composed of General Babington's cavalry and the 1st King's Royal Rifles under Colonel Campbell, and directed General W. Kitchener and Colonel Pulteney, who by this time were at Amsterdam, to follow in all haste.

General Blood made his headquarters a few miles north of Ermelo, and established signalling communication with General W. Kitchener and General Beatson. On the 19th of June General Beatson reached headquarters, and the column, accompanied by General Blood, from thence proceeded to Middelburg (which was reached on the 25th) to be reorganised. Meanwhile the column of Colonel Pulteney went to Carolina to draw supplies, following afterwards in the wake of General Babington, Colonel Campbell, and General W. Kitchener, who were moving west to the line Middelkraal-Uitgedacht, north of Bethel. These columns were soon joined by General Blood with a convoy.

On the 31st the troops moved from Middelkraal towards Springs in the following positions: Campbell on the right marched on Kleinkoppie, Babington on Roodepoort, and Kitchener on Grootpan. The last officer on the 3rd of July opened up communication with the columns of Colville and Garratt (the last had relieved Colonel Grey), which were moving up from Standerton and Greylingstad respectively.

Vigorous measures were being taken to prevent Viljoen and other Boer leaders from escaping to the east. The dispersed hordes were collecting in their numbers near Middelburg, and to be beforehand with them Colonel Benson hurried from Machadodorp to Dullstroom. Colonel Park from Lydenburg turned westwards so
Around Standerton and Heidelberg

as to hem in the enemy from the north, while General Spens' column hovered at Wonderfontein ready to pounce as circumstances might suggest.

On the north-west of Machadodorp Colonel Benson soon came in touch with the foe; caught him at Vlakfontein, twelve miles out, handled him vigorously, and killed six of his band. One prisoner was taken. The British lost three men, and eight wounded. This was on the 3rd of July. On the 7th Viljoen, with the Johannesburg and Middelburg commandos, again attacked the column at Dullstroom, but got the worst of it, and had to flee, followed up hill and down dale, through ravine and bush, by the dashing little force. General Spens from Wonderfontein now took up the chase, but Viljoen, intimately acquainted with the country, contrived to become as slippery an eel as De Wet, and to make off on the now proverbial Boer principle of those who fight and run away live to fight another day.

ACTIVITIES AROUND STANDEARTON AND HEIDELBERG

May in the district between Standerton and Ermelo was opened by a smart affair which resulted in the capture of eight prisoners, a Maxim Nordenfeldt machine gun, fifteen rifles, twelve waggons, and fifteen horses. The force under General Clements had for some little time been engaged in Boer-hunting in the region north-east of Standerton on the right bank of the Vaal. On the 4th May a laager was located, and while troops detached from Standerton and Platrand blocked the roads leading south from the river, Colonel Colville with his column made a night march towards it, along the Standerton-Ermelo road. The surprise was complete, and the Boers opened their eyes to dawn and desperation at one and the same moment. Those who were sufficiently nimble scattered to the four winds, the remainder were seized. Pursuit was impossible, owing to the already fatigued state of Colonel Colville's men. This column, which was composed of 2nd Division Mounted Infantry, 2nd Johannesburg Mounted Rifles, 63rd Battery R.F.A. (4 guns), "O" Section pom-poms, 2nd East Surrey, 1st Auxiliary Company A.S.C., 2nd Brigade Field Hospital, and 2nd Brigade Bearer Company, was now strengthened by four squadrons of regular cavalry. Colonel Colville, commanding this entire force, then spent the remainder of May in operations in conjunction with General Elliot, who was moving through Vrede to the Natal Border. Colonel Colville's route lay from De Lange's Drift up the right bank of the Klip River through the Verzammelberg. On nearing the junction of the Klip and Ganzvlei, Colonel Colville crossed into Orange River Colony, fought more
The Transvaal War

Boers, captured more stock, and after having made an enormous haul, retraced his steps to his starting-point, De Lange's Drift.

The early part of June was spent in sweeping down the right bank of the Vaal towards Villiersdorp, clearing farms and denuding the district of supplies. On the 22nd Colonel Colville marched north from Val Station to act on the left flank of Colonel Grey's column, which was operating against the enemy between Standerton and the west of Bethel. Towards Watervalshoek the two forces converged, and from here, on the 25th, Colonel Grey's Queenslanders and New Zealanders drove off some 400 of the enemy. After this dashing exploit Colonel Grey moved to Greylingstad to fill up with supplies, and Colonel Garratt (as has been said in the narrative of General Blood's movements) took over command from Colonel Grey. Colonel Colville remained near the scene of the fight, so as to connect with General Blood's columns which were due from the north-east. Colonel Garratt, keeping west of Colonel Colville, and in communication with him, moved north via Boschmankop to Springs. Colonel Colville at Watervalshoek got in touch with General W. Kitchener, who, as we know, reached Grootpan on the 3rd of July.