CHAPTER X

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL GRENFELL'S OPERATIONS—
TRANSVAAL, N.

WHILE Colonel Grenfell was occupying Pietersburg at the extreme limit of the northern line, news came in that small hordes of Boers were moving in the Zoutpansberg district. It was decided to head off this northern trek, consequently Colonel Grenfell with 600 of Kitchener's Fighting Scouts, 12th Battalion Mounted Infantry, two guns and four companies of the 2nd Battalion Wiltshire Regiment, made an expedition into the bush veldt to the north of him. His destination was a small township called Louis Trichard, some hundred miles off. Here Colonel Colenbrander, commanding the advance force (Kitchener's Fighting Scouts), arrived on the 9th of May. From this time, after disarming the Boers in the town and clearing the surrounding country, Colonel Grenfell was engaged in the pursuit of marauders who were pushing east towards the Portuguese frontier. Yzerberg was reached on the 17th. On the 19th the dashing Scouts, who had continued their way successfully, skirmishing with and dispersing Boers, performed a feat more smart even than was their wont. Colonel Colenbrander, hearing that a laager was comfortably ensconced at Klip Spruit, planned a midnight excursion to the locality, and surprised Field-Cornet Venter and seventy-two burghers who imagined they were sleeping the sleep of the just. Before they could awake from their delusion their persons, waggons, rifles, and ammunition were at the mercy of the adventurous British scouts. This same party on the 21st seized on a smaller laager and swelled their number of captured vehicles.

On the 23rd, at the request of Commandant Van Rensburg and Field-Cornet Du Preeze, Colonel Grenfell met them, accepted their surrender, and that of some 1500 of their followers, and in a short time marched them back to Pietersburg. With them came seventy waggons and quantities of forage and ammunition and stock. This was a highly satisfactory and pacific termination to the operations in this quarter, and Colonel Colenbrander was now able to turn his attention to roving gangs which were hiding in the direction of Buffels. Several of these groups were encountered, and in various skirmishes seven Boers were disposed of and a Maxim gun captured. Major Knott, with a detachment of the Scouts, pursued and fell
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upon a commando under Barend Viljoen, made seventy-nine prisoners, and secured 13,000 rounds of ammunition. Thus the work of pacification in northern districts was progressing favourably, and the Boers in the vicinity were learning that resistance was useless. The grand total results of the Zoutpansberg excursion included 9 Boers killed, 150 prisoners, many hundred voluntary surrenders, 550 rifles, 200,000 rounds of ammunition, a Maxim gun, which had belonged to the Jameson raiders, 175 wagons, and much stock.

While these activities had been going forward, General Beyers, who had watched Colonel Grenfell’s departure for Louis Trichard, decided that “while the cat was away the mice could play.” He accordingly collected his playful burghers for purposes of mischief around the Pietersburg line. To frustrate him, Colonel Wilson, commanding the 2nd Kitchener’s Scouts, with two guns and two companies of the 2nd Battalion Gordon Highlanders, concentrated at Naboom Spruit, while from Pretoria Major M’Micking, with 400 Mounted Infantry and two guns, was moved to Nylstroom. The combined operations began on the 19th of May over terrible country, which in some places was without roads and in others was seamed with ruts, obstacles, and bush.

The Boers, however, were overtaken some twenty miles north-west of Nylstroom by Colonel Wilson, who succeeded in capturing Field-Cornet Oosthuisen and 79 burghers, 100 rifles, 33,500 rounds of ammunition, 66 wagons, a quantity of dynamite, and a vast amount of cattle.

Certain remnants of the Dutch gangs continued to hang about, but these were promptly pursued to westward, and caught on the 21st. While Major M’Micking’s force demonstrated in front of the Boer position, that of Colonel Wilson made an ingenious détour and caught the enemy napping. The Dutchmen, however, made a stubborn effort at combat; but finally, when Kitchener’s Scouts pressed home the attack, they broke and fled, leaving 18 prisoners, 48 rifles, 9,000 rounds of ammunition, and 44 wagons as trophies of the fight. So much for the month of May. June began auspiciously, for a detachment of the Scouts, moving from Warm Baths towards Rooiberg, caught and sharply handled some 500 Boers under Nys and Pretorius, and pressed them into the arms of Colonel Wilson, who
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on the following day polished them off. There was a good deal of resistance and some warm fighting creditable to both parties, but in the end 40 prisoners were captured, 70 rifles, 48 waggons, 8000 cattle, and ammunition in plenty. Thus the enemy was gradually becoming bereft of transport and supplies, their capacity for conflict becoming weaker day by day. Still Colonel Wilson and Major M’Micking relaxed not an iota of their activity and vigilance, and spent the remainder of June in scouring here and hunting there, and protecting the Pietersburg line from any forces which might congregate in the west. Meanwhile arrangements were made to collect an additional force (Colonel Grenfell’s) at Potgieter’s Rust, so that a combined attack on General Beyers’ commando in the Zand River Valley might be begun. On the 21st of June these arrangements were complete. Colonel Grenfell marched south-west from Potgieter’s Rust, menacing the enemy’s rear, while Major M’Micking proceeded direct from Nylstroom. But owing to the terribly complicated nature of the country which had to be traversed by Colonel Grenfell’s force, Beyers’ bandits were able hurriedly to scuttle to cover in the north-west.

Colonel Grenfell, making Zandroverspoort into his advanced base, then proceeded to sweep the surrounding country with his troops. These, after numerous skirmishes and surprises, made a magnificent march of forty miles, “rushed” a Boer laager at Hopewell (at dawn on the 1st of July), and secured nearly 100 prisoners, besides 2000 cattle, 2000 rounds of ammunition, and 100 horses.

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The exciting series of chases between rushing Boer gangs, followed or headed by small British columns, continued with undiminished animation. The Boer leaders still in the field (if field it can be called, while burrow would be the more appropriate term) were Scheepers, Malan, Fouché, Kruitzinger, Lotter, Myburg, Smits, Van Reenan, Lategan (a Colesberg rebel), Maritz, and Conroy. Each of these was engaged in independent freebooting excursions—the total number of their followers being now about 1200. They were unharassed by a fixed base of operations, and lived from hand to mouth on such prizes as they could secure, or such hospitality as they could receive from sympathetic “loyalists.”

Early in May Colonel Henniker attacked Scheepers, and drove him north from Daggraboers Nek with considerable loss. The remnant, however, broke back and hid in kloofs and ravines in the difficult region around the Koetzeesberg. From their burrows they were eventually dislodged, only to collect again on the 25th of
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May in the Camdeboo Mountains, situated to west of Graf Reinet. Though their number was materially thinned in course of their hair-breadth escapes from Henniker's pursuing Victorians, they were soon refreshed with new blood, some seventy raiders (Commandant-less, owing to the death of Swanepool) having flocked to Scheeper's banner. These now secreted themselves, offering very little fight, and remaining cabined in their warrens, choosing a policy of mischief rather than one of open aggression.

Meanwhile Colonel Scobell was tackling Malan and his followers, who had remained to impede traffic west of Cradock. These made themselves perpetually offensive, and, on the 2nd of May, coming on Lieutenant Matthews and twelve men of the Diamond Fields Horse, they attacked, and after having shot down their horses, captured nearly all the party. Colonel Scobell came quickly to their rescue, and eventually effected their release. So ingeniously had this officer applied himself to the raider's tactics that he now succeeded in giving the wily ones a surprise. On the night of the 19th he marched in the direction of their laager, and before dawn captured it, killing four marauders, and capturing the horses of forty—while those who escaped did so on shanks' pony, or rode barebacked. Malan himself fled to the west and amused himself for the rest of the month in evading the chasing columns of Major Mullins and Captain Lund. By the 25th of June he had gathered to himself a sufficient commando to make it possible to attack Richmond, but he met with stout resistance, and the next day, on the approach of Captain Lund's column, was glad to make himself scarce. On the 27th Major Mullins, with some of Brabant's Horse, caught Malan's commando between Cradock and Maraisburg, and succeeded in wounding one of the leaders (Lieutenant Cloete) who was carried into hospital at Cradock.

Colonel Haig at this time was busily engaged in directing operations against Kruitzinger, Lotter, and Fouché, whose forces were now swelled by some 500 Dutchmen who had been collected by Kruitzinger during a hurried rush into the Orange Colony. They occupied the neighbourhood north of Steynsburg; and so as to enmesh them, if possible, Colonel Haig arranged a converging movement of Cape Mounted Rifles, and the columns under Colonels Munro, Gorringe, Crabbe, Scobell, and Murray. But the raiders were too wily to show fight. They slowly dribbled away in the surrounding country, most of them making towards Maraisburg. But they were promptly headed off by the British troops, and took refuge in the Bamboes Mountains, where—as a trooper expressed it—they "lay doggo," hoping to live by looting and to wear out the vigilance of their pursuers.

In June, Kruitzinger, Lotter, Myburg, and Fouché succeeded
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in dashing across the Molteno railway, and moving eastward from Cyphergat. Van Reenen broke north-west into the Steynsburg district. The main body was followed by the British troops, but they were not in time to save the strongly entrenched village of Jamestown, which was captured on the 2nd of June. This contretemps to ourselves was of splendid value to the enemy, for, in addition to much-needed horses to the tune of 150, and ammunition in quantities, they secured food and clothing at a time when they were internally and externally bare, owing to the effective sweeping operations which had denuded the country.

To pit against the Boer score came a signal success on the part of Captain Lukin, who, with the brilliant Cape Mounted Rifles, had been indefatigable in the work of pursuit, surprise, and skirmish, that filled day and night during Colonel Scobell's operations.

On the evening of the 5th, Colonel Scobell's force (9th Lancers and C.M.R. with three guns) moved out from Roodeneck for the purpose of hunting out a laager which was known to be somewhere in the vicinity. With numbed fingers and quaking frames—the thermometer stood below freezing-point—these gallant troopers marched and clambered. Over rugged roads and precipitous paths they went for miles and miles—on foot mainly, in order to keep themselves warm—hunting and exploring around the north-west of Barkly East, and ascending at last a mountain so high that it seemed impossible to get the guns up. Then, near the summit came the split and spurt of rifles, and the advance party knew that the object was attained, the lair of the marauders was discovered. The shots came from the picket, who, having made their protest, fled. Now came the search for the laager itself, but whether it was in the valley some 400 feet below, or whether close at hand, it was impossible to say. A squadron of Cape Mounted Rifles, under Captain Lukin, wheeled to the right, one under Captain Purcell moved to the left. In the light of the moon, brilliant, but casting deep shadows, it was impossible to detect any movement. But the shuffle of hoofs could be heard in the valley. On went the C.M.R., Captain Lukin ahead of them, when suddenly this officer found himself in the thick of a volley. The enemy, alarmed by the picket, had upsaddled and were alert. But the heroes of Wepener were "all there," as the saying is. A shout from their commanding officer was enough, and with a rush as of the wind, the C.M.R. (Captain Goldsworthy's squadron) had galloped on the foe. The Boers were off. Blankets, baggage, rifles, clothing (much of the spoil captured from Jamestown), horses, ammunition, all were left. Three wounded rebels fell into our hands, and fourteen other Dutchmen. The enemy, from a distant hill, again endeavoured to show fight, but their fire was eventually silenced by
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a few shells, and the Boers in full retreat were pursued as far as was feasible by the Lancers.

A few days later, in the neighbourhood of Ladygrey, this smart column came in for further triumphs. A detachment of the C.M.R., which had been persistently sniped at by the enemy during their moonlight march, showed that two could play at the game of annoyance. They charged the hiding-place of the miscreants, and surprised them by the shouts of "Hands up!" before they were aware of their proximity. The result was that the dashing Colonials returned to camp, after a quarter of an hour's gallop, plus twenty prisoners and 13,000 rounds of ammunition.

On the 9th of June, French, the magnificent, the indefatigable, came once more to the scene of his first triumphs in the days before the great coup made by the relief of Kimberley. He took but a few weeks' holiday after his wholesale dispersal of Botha's hordes on the Swaziland border, and was again to the fore. Now, as Lieutenant-General Sir John French, K.C.B., he directed the operations of all the mobile columns extended over the face of Cape Colony. Widened movements were necessitated owing to the scattered state of the commandos which were now here, there, and everywhere picking up rebels, and needing each to be separately hunted by a detached column.

On the 17th, Krantzinger and Lotter were caught in the first instance by Colonel Munro, with Lovat's Scouts and Bethune's Mounted Infantry, and later by Crabbe, some twenty-five miles south-east of Maraisburg. Four Boers fell, twelve were wounded, twenty-five horses were left on the field, and fifty captured alive. Other captures included eight prisoners and a quantity of ammunition and saddles. It was reported that Krantzinger's mongrel force at the time consisted of 276 whites, 10 armed natives, and 18 armed Hottentots, many of whom rode barebacked colts in the last stage of emaciation. Four days later sixty of the Midland Mounted Rifles, a Colonial corps which had done good work in the district, were surrounded by Krantzinger's band and captured, after the loss of two officers and nine men killed, and ten men wounded.

Colonel Munro spent the remainder of June harassing raiders under Myburg, north of Jamestown, and others under Erasmus, east of Rayner Station. Colonel Scobell still chased Krantzinger, and strove to drive him into the arms of Colonel Crabbe, who was engaged in hunting Van Reenan among the Bamboes Mountains. Colonels Crewe, Doran, and Wyndham combined in operations against Scheepers and Hugo, who were still dodging among the Camdeboo Mountains, while Captain Lund flew after errant gangs which had endeavoured to take Richmond and been repulsed by the gallantry of the North Stafford Militia, under Captain Hawkshaw,
GENERAL BRUCE HAMILTON.

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and by the Town Guard. More troops were also engaged in blocking the passes of the Drakensberg, through which Fouché had gone east towards Maclear in the fond hope of gathering recruits and fresh horses, and returning reinforced; but Colonel Dalgety, with Cape Mounted Rifles and East Griqualand Rifles, frustrated him. In the Calvinia district two gangs under Maritz and Conroy had made themselves troublesome for some weeks, but eventually Conroy, after being too warmly handled, particularly in an engagement which lasted five hours, when Captain Ramsbotham and Lieutenant Beresford of the Border Scouts tackled him near Kenhardt, fled north across the Orange.