

BOERS FALLING BACK

Leaving Positions Held on British to Defend Their Own.

BULLER REPORTS COLENSO RETAKEN

Early Defeat of the British Forces Now Retrieved by Victory.

BOERS CONCENTRATE TO MEET ROBERTS

Aid Given to Assist Cronje Weakens the Defenses of Colenso.

ENGLISH PRESS TOWARD BLOEMFONTEIN

Burgers Retracting Their Steps from Zululand—Cronje Gets Away from Kimberley and Will Defend Free State Capital.

LONDON, Feb. 20.—News has been received here that General Buller has occupied Colenso after a slight engagement.

The following report has been received at the War office from General Buller: "BLOW'S FARM, Tuesday, February 20.—At 6 p. m. The Fusilier brigade yesterday took Hlangwane hill, the right of the enemy's position and commanding Colenso, the rest of the force advancing toward the Tugela."

"This morning the enemy has withdrawn all the troops north of the Tugela and had practically evacuated Colenso. Today General Buller occupied Colenso after a very slight resistance by a weak rear guard and we hold the line of the Tugela on the south side from Colenso to Eagle's Nest. "The enemy seems to be in full retreat and apparently are only holding the position they occupy across the Colenso-Lady Smith rail road, where it is close to the angle of the Tugela, with a weak rear guard. Hart's advance guard is crossing at Colenso. "Our casualties yesterday and today have I hope, been few."

Withdrawal of troops by the burghers to aid Cronje's resistance to Lord Roberts' operations probably weakened the defenses of Colenso.

Boers Concentrating for Defense.

LONDON, Feb. 21.—At 4.15 a. m.—The Boers are leaving all the positions held by them on British territory and are concentrating for the defense of their own. Sir Redvers Buller thinks they are about to raise the siege of Ladysmith and this, with the capture of Colenso, is the large news of the day.

General Clements reports that the forces confronting him are greatly diminished. Ten thousand men are estimated to have gone from the Colenso district alone.

The Boers are also retreating their steps from Zululand. At dawn on Friday the retreat of their hold on all sides in order to assemble to oppose Lord Roberts. He is pressing on steadily toward Bloemfontein. This is shown by his inconsequential telegram from Paardeburg, fifty or sixty miles away.

It is thought by the English press that the Boers are retreating from the column that is pursuing the Boers and the next important news may be the occupation of Bloemfontein.

Nothing has been heard from the chase of Cronje for two days. Although the last words of the War office were that he was retreating, it is now believed that he is being withheld until the operations culminate in something more conclusive.

Believe Cronje Has Got Away.

There is an equally strong disposition to think that General Cronje has got away. Owing to the lack of transport, the British are likely to invade Boer territory except where Lord Roberts is operating.

General Buller will have to stop at the Drakensberg mountains. Probably a part of his 40,000 men will ultimately join the legions of Lord Roberts.

General Buller says, the Boers are retreating from him, then the news on every side is favorable to the British. Nevertheless troops continue to go up. The War office thinks that the call to veterans to rejoin the colors, together with the bounty, will bring 45,000 men to the home defense. The urgency with which home defense is pressed excites some wonder.

With the casualties just reported, the British losses in killed, wounded and captured aggregate 15,000 men. The Daily Chronicle, telegraphing Sunday, thus describes General Cronje's retreat with the Boers at Magersfontein, on learning of General French's success.

Evacuate Magersfontein Lines.

On Thursday at midnight, headed by General Cronje, 5,000 Boers, with their guns and six wagons, evacuated the Magersfontein position on Friday. The retreat of the Boer army was seen from the British naval gun station on Klipdrift kop trekking eastward at a distance of 5,000 yards. Our guns opened up on them and a force of mounted infantry crossing the river, made a dash for the main body, and cut off the head of the enemy's column. But in half an hour their whole force had gained shelter under a line of kopjes.

Meanwhile two of our batteries had come up the Oxburgs, Buffs, West Riding and Gloucesters. Our infantry crossed the drift and for three hours were engaged with the enemy while our batteries shelled their position. The mounted infantry kept hard at work.

Unable to withstand our galling fire, the enemy retired, disputing every inch of the way, and took up a second position on the kopjes to the eastward. It was a magnificent spectacle to see the Boer army thus at bay. Their rear guard, 2,000 strong, fought us, while the main body trekked further eastward and then brought their guns into action while the rear guard retired.

The action lasted through the day. Our infantry fought splendidly, but the enemy held his ground under the continued bombardment. Later on the Boer commander ventured on a bold stroke. Leaving 2,000 of his men under cover he withdrew the rest from his main position and headed for Klipdrift, six miles to the east.

This movement was soon discovered. Our mounted infantry came back across the drift and marched along the south bank to endeavor to head off the enemy. When they reached the neighborhood of Klipdrift drift night had fallen and half the Boers were already across to the south side. Our mounted infantry harassed their movements.

Boer Make for Bloemfontein.

Meanwhile the Boer rear guard, having covered the crossing of the main body, retreated slowly and successfully passed the drift. The rear guard fought desperately and as it fell back to the river it was harassed on the flank and rear by the British. Having thus passed the Madder under cover of darkness the Boers trekked through

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General Buller determined to break off the attack on the Boer positions beyond Pietersdrift he fully intended to make a first attempt and he preferred to run the risk and put the matter to a decisive test as near Ladysmith and as near railway as possible, although this meant a long run through a difficult country, beginning with the almost impregnable Colenso position and further obstructed by several strong positions in the rear of Colenso. The position spreads in a wide horseshoe around Chieveley. The western half lies on a rising slope, often precipitous, and is fringed by a line of kopjes, hills, kopjes and scrub around Colenso village.

Against this position part of the attack of the Fifteenth was directed. General Buller has now decided to try the eastern bank, which lies on the south side of the Tugela river, running over Hlangwane hill along the green hills, resting on the high ridges of Monte Cristo, and beyond it Cinquola kop and the nek between the two latter.

Hussar hill was seized by cavalry and occupied by the army on the 14th (Wednesday). On the 15th (Thursday) batteries were established on this position and heavy siege and naval guns, all well entrenched. On the 16th (Friday) a spasmodic bombardment was kept up, but the Boers were well concealed and only replied with long range guns. A number of shells were fired into the country, across Gomba stream, upon Cinquola kop, continually reaching out to eastward to find the Lord Buff bank. The cavalry brigade, under Lord Dundonald, made a detour of ten miles to the eastward, and a force of Cinquola kop through the dense jungle, upon an almost precipitous slope, and arrived at the summit at 10 o'clock. After a brief skirmish with the Boer pickets, Major Gough's regiment gradually cleared the whole ridge. The Queen's Buffs, who now arrived on the extreme right of the line of attack, supported them in holding the hill which had been won. The Boers lost several killed and wounded. Ten horses were captured. The Boers retired under heavy fire across the nek to Monte Cristo.

The cavalry then, crossing Cinquola kop, reached out to the Tugela river and the South African horse advanced on the infantry. The Boers had now been driven from Cinquola kop, but still occupied Monte Cristo strongly. The nek between the two hills, however, was still in our hands, commanded by the fire of both combatants. The road across it being available to neither. At right angles to Monte Cristo ridge ran a long spur to Tugela. The Boer left now on the 17th closed his cavalry facing infantry and holding the ridge.

During the 17th and 18th Buller began a turning movement eastward round the Boers, his right resting high on the hills of Cinquola and Monte Cristo. The Boers' position was successful, both hills being captured without heavy loss. The cavalry on the extreme right, under Dundonald, menaced the Boer rear.

The enemy's losses in bombardment must be considerable. Personally I saw a wounded dragoon away. At last we have got on our flank and although fierce fighting lies before us, this gives us considerable strategic advantage and the relief of Ladysmith looks more hopeful. The devotion of the infantry was again apparent.

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