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THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR OF 1899-1900.

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(Continued and concluded from October JOURNAL, page 1247.)

PART XI.

GUERRILLA WARFARE.—THE WEPENER EPISODE.

It was no empty phrase when, in the days of depression succeeding Cronje's capitulation, Kruger announced: "The *real* war will begin now!"

War on the large scale, the war of large units, did not suit the Boers. Their capabilities in this direction were limited to the selection of favourable positions, which suited their purely defensive tactics, and enabled them to extend their line so as always to occupy a wider front than the attacking force could cover. They never succeeded in collecting their scattered forces for a counter-attack, and were therefore never able to win a decisive victory.

After the death of Joubert, on 27th March, Botha had been raised to the chief command. He was not ambitious to command masses of troops; he let the Boers fight in their own way with small flying columns, which appeared unexpectedly here and there, and were everywhere and nowhere at once. These columns would at one time lie in ambush and suddenly sally out to attack; at another time they would stubbornly hold out in a favourable position and escape at the last moment with the slipperiness of eels.

And it really appeared that in this manner the Boers did, on the average, considerably more damage to the English than before.

But this was only because the Boers, when carrying on war on a large scale, had never understood how to utilise their victories by taking the offensive at the proper moment so as to completely crush their adversaries.

During the next few months the English not only suffered considerable losses in men, but were placed at a serious disadvantage by the enormous waste of horses. The English cavalry were kept so constantly on the alert by the activity of these small parties of Boers that their horses died by hundreds from over-work, and from want of food and water.

It was owing to the miserable condition of the English cavalry horses that the commandoes of Olivier and De Wet were able to carry out their retreat from the Orange River right through the middle of the English lines and past Bloemfontein. They marched through the mountains of Winberg and effected a junction with Botha.

These small successes of Olivier and De Wet had not only given a fresh impulse to the Afrikaner agitation, but had raised the spirits of the Free Staters, who had previously been visibly depressed. They became so enterprising that Roberts was forced to leave Gatacre's division and Brabant's division along the railway to Port Elizabeth and East London, to protect his line of communications. He was only able to move up Clements' division (about 2,000 strong) to Bloemfontein.

Even the troops in Bloemfontein, especially the cavalry, were not left in peace. The Boers made daring raids to within a few miles of the city; they blew up railway bridges, captured the mails, and destroyed the telegraph lines. The ubiquitous De Wet inflicted a disagreeable check on Roberts by cutting off, on the 31st March, a detachment which French had left behind at Thabanchu. He surprised them at Sanna's Post, and partly dispersed them and partly made them prisoners. A serious result of this affair was the capture and destruction of the water-works which provided Bloemfontein with drinking water. The health of the troops suffered in consequence, as in the dry winter season the few wells and springs gave only a scanty supply of water. On strategical grounds the water reservoirs of Sanna's Post were really of higher military importance than the town of Bloemfontein. It was not till the 24th April that the water-works again fell into Roberts' hands.

The Boer offensive movement which was being carried out to the west of Bloemfontein simultaneously with De Wet's operations, was directed against the line of communications across country from Modder River to Bloemfontein. Unfortunately, owing to the want of initiative of the Boer leaders, nothing much came of it. But to the east of Bloemfontein, Olivier and De Wet, after the success at Sanna's Post, continued their offensive operations against the railway line to the south. On the 3rd April, De Wet forced a small English flying column to capitulate at Reddersburg. The unfortunate Gatacre, who must have been able to hear the sound of the guns, did not move till he was ordered to the rescue by a telegram from Roberts. This was his last exploit; on the 9th April he was sent home.

The advance of the Boers in the district south-east of Bloemfontein was more important on agricultural and political grounds than from a strategical point of view. The object of the Boers was first to secure the harvest of this, the richest district in the Free State; secondly, to ensure the adhesion of the wavering inhabitants to the Boer confederation; and, lastly, to impress the Basutos. At the same time the Boers lost no opportunity of annoying the English by threatening, and in places interrupting, the line of communications, and so hindering the further advance of the English to the north. They completely succeeded in carrying out all these objects, with a force of only 8,000 men. Unfor-

tunately the Boers were induced, by senseless racial hatred, to commit themselves to the useless siege of Wepener. The troops in Wepener were mostly Volunteers from Cape Colony and Natal. The Boers considered them "traitors to the Afrikander cause." And even the clever De Wet considered it more important to crush them than to thoroughly destroy the railway to Bloemfontein. This mistake of the Boers was the more serious, since at this time the English reinforcements (the 8th Division under Rundle) were moving up by this line.

This episode of the unprofitable siege of Wepener gave Roberts a welcome opportunity to collect his scattered forces from the south and west, to clear the railway line, and finally, by an advance from Bloemfontein to the east, to manœuvre the Boers away from Wepener and force them to retreat to the north-east. Like all previous attempts of this nature, an attempt to cut off their retreat resulted in failure.

PART XII.

ROBERTS AGAIN TAKES THE OFFENSIVE—ADVANCE ALONG THE WHOLE FRONT ACROSS THE VAAL—RELIEF OF MAFEKING—CONTINUANCE OF THE GUERRILLA WAR.

On the 1st May, after seven weeks spent in Bloemfontein, Roberts continued his advance to the north on a broad front. His centre was approximately on the line of the railway to Kroonstadt. His strength was about four times as great as the force which Botha could muster to oppose him; the English cavalry alone was as strong as the whole Boer force. The English cavalry were able to play a decisive part in this open country. It was here possible to turn the flanks of the Boer positions, however far they might extend. The invariable result was that as soon as the Boers found their rear threatened, they withdrew without waiting to be attacked.

This was what happened at Brandfort on the 2nd and 3rd May, and again at Winburg on the Wet River on the 5th May. At this place Roberts ordered a four days' halt; up to this point the division had advanced, mostly across country, at the rate of from 12 to 15 miles a day.

He sent the cavalry on two marches in advance to the Sand River, at which place he expected to encounter the next Boer position.

As a matter of fact, it was found on the 7th May that the Boers were entrenching themselves behind the Sand River. On the 9th May Roberts again advanced. On the 10th May both flanks of the Boers were turned and they were manœuvred out of this position in the simplest possible way, although it had been made as strong as possible by field fortification.

On the 12th May Roberts entered Kroonstadt. This had been the seat of Government of the Free State since the 12th March; it was now transferred to Heilbron.

At Kroonstadt Roberts first concentrated his troops and arranged his lines of communications, which had lengthened by 136 miles since leaving Bloemfontein; he allowed his troops, exhausted by forced

marches, a few days' rest. His attention was principally directed to the east. Here Buller should have been able to carry the Laing's Nek passes and to bring his division into line with the main army, so as to effect a junction with it in the course of the advance into the Transvaal.

Roberts was also looking forward to a successful termination of the campaign, which Rundle's division (then lately arrived) was carrying on against the commandoes of Orange Boers under De Wet, who had remained behind in the Moroka and Ficksburg mountains. Roberts depended upon Buller's and Rundle's success to shift his base to the Durban-Kroonstadt line, which was 150 miles shorter than the East-London-Kroonstadt line. He intended as he advanced to shift his base again to the still shorter line *viâ* Durban, Newcastle, and Johannesburg.

On the 9th May Buller had at last commenced his advance to the north. After deducting half a division of infantry, his force consisted of three and a half divisions of infantry and one of cavalry.




Roberts' victorious advance laid the passes over the Biggarsberg open to Buller as far as Helpmakaar. The few Transvaal Boers still remaining there at first gave back when pressed by Buller, but afterwards settled down obstinately in their positions on the crests on either side of the Laing's Nek pass. They blew up the railway bridge at Ingogo and the tunnel at Laing's Nek.

Buller utilised this forced delay to repair the railway, and was content to wait until Roberts' further advance over the Vaal River had cleared his (Buller's) front. On the 9th May—on the same day on which Buller advanced against the northern passes—Methuen again advanced from Boshof on Hoopstadt and Bloemhof. Hunter's half-division had been brought round from Natal by sea and by railway to Kimberley; they now succeeded, after a well-masked outflanking movement, in securing the crossing of the Vaal at Warrenton, which the Boers had held so long. At the same time a flying column under Colonel Mahon advanced through Bechuanaland to the relief of Mafeking. This movement was not discovered by the Boers for some time; but the smart Boer General Delarey succeeded in posting himself across Mahon's front. However, a simultaneous sortie of Baden-Powell's brave garrison decided the doubtful issue of this part of the campaign. The Boers raised the siege, and were content to save their guns.

On 17th May, after a seven months' siege, Mafeking was relieved. The garrison, and especially their energetic commander, had set an even better example of courage and endurance than the garrisons of Kimberley and Ladysmith.

Methuen and Hunter reached the line from Hoopstadt and Bloemhof at about the same time. But they were obliged to rely for their further advance on the line from Cape Town to Mafeking. The more so since Roberts, after carefully reconnoitring the Boer forces opposed to him, found himself obliged to force the passage of the Vaal without assistance from the west.

BULLERS' ARMY CORPS AFTER THE RELIEF OF LADYSMITH.

<p><i>5th (Warren's) Division.</i> 11th Brigade. Wyand.</p>	<p><i>4th (Lyttelton's) Division.²</i> 8th Brigade. Howard.</p>	<p><i>2nd (Cley's) Division.</i> 4th Brigade. Cooper.</p>
<p>10th Brigade. Coke.</p>	<p>7th Brigade. Colonel Kitchener.</p>	<p>2nd Brigade Hildyard.</p>
		
<p>3rd Cavalry Brigade. Burn-Murdoch.</p>	<p>2nd Cavalry Brigade. Broockelhurst.</p>	<p>Half 10th Division. Barton.³</p>

¹ Was called away at the beginning of April to act as Governor of West Griqualand.

² Took over White's Division after his departure.

Hunter's Brigade and Hart's Brigade had been handed over to Roberts.

Thanks to the successful start made on the left wing, matters in the centre now progressed favourably. Roberts again advanced on 22nd May, attacked the enemy in position on the Rhenoster, and again succeeded in turning his flank.

Except the Vaal, the rivers had lost their value as obstacles during the dry season, and no longer offered any assistance to the defence.

One disadvantage of this enormous extension of the front was to limit the results of the campaign to bloodless strategical successes. Matters never reached the point of a tactical decision. Moreover, with an active enemy, this method of attack would have constantly exposed the force to partial counter-attacks. But Roberts counted on the disinclination of his adversary to assume the tactical offensive, and the event showed that he was right.

Before attacking the Vaal, the only remaining military obstacle, Roberts carried out an extremely useful reconnaissance. He found that the nature of the country along the railway at Vereënging was very unfavourable for the action of his centre division, as also the ground at the O'Grady road bridge for the right division; the south bank was everywhere commanded by the north bank. On the other hand, to the west of Vereënging, the advantage of the ground lay with the attacking force. Either this circumstance escaped the Boers, or else they believed that as they were unable to compass an active defence of the river they would not be able effectively to oppose their adversary further down the Vaal. Roberts had formed a correct estimate of the situation, and accordingly shifted the main force of his army to his left wing. From 25th to 27th May, while occupying the enemy with demonstrations on his centre and right wing, Roberts succeeded in effecting a crossing with his left wing without much trouble. It was sufficient to wheel his strengthened left wing to the right, in order to secure an almost unopposed passage for his centre and right wing.

By 28th May, Roberts was in possession of the line of the Vaal River. But as various small flying columns of Orange Boers under De Wet remained south of the Vaal, he was obliged to weaken his front again. When on 29th May he continued his advance on Johannesburg, his force consisted only of two infantry divisions (the 7th and the 11th) and the bulk of his mounted troops.

The advance on Johannesburg now became a regular race. The object in view, the grand prize of the whole war, was to secure possession of the gold mines of Witwatersrand, if possible, intact. The Transvaal Government had on several occasions¹ announced that it would under no circumstances allow the gold mines to fall into the hands of the English, or that it would at the very least destroy them so thoroughly as to render them useless for a long time to come.

After some sharp fighting by the mounted troops and advance guard on 29th and 30th May the investment of Johannesburg was completed, and on the 31st Roberts made his victorious entry into the Golden City;

¹ Blue Book 261, pp. 85-86.

the great thing was, that the mines had not been destroyed! A few days previously, on 28th May, at Bloemfontein, the Orange Free State had been declared a portion of the British dominions as the Orange River Colony.¹ London was mad with rejoicing—the end of the war seemed at hand! But it was then, and is, now² far distant; the reasons which justify us in looking forward to a long continuance of the war have already been detailed in these pages.³

In any case, Lord Roberts was not so well pleased with his position in Johannesburg as the Stock Exchange men and politicians in London. Although, thanks to his special⁴ precautions, he was able quickly to repair the railway bridges over the Rhenoster and the Vaal, the lively development of guerilla warfare in the new Orange Colony under De Wet left him no rest; no later than 31st May the festive rejoicings were spoilt by the unpleasant news of the capture of a whole battalion of Yeomen.

Kruger had carried off all the available produce of the Witwatersrand mines, and the goldfields of Crocodile River and Olifant's River provided further means of carrying on the war. The seat of Government was immediately transferred to Machadodorp, in the Lydenburg Mountains, on the Delagoa Bay Railway, and it was given out that there was no intention of defending the entrenched camp at Pretoria. The Boer force was no longer strong enough to man the forts, and there was no time to replace in position the heavy guns which had hitherto been used in the field.

Roberts had no means of knowing that the Boers had come to this decision. From his point of view, therefore, he acted quite rightly in hastening the advance on Pretoria. Although his fighting front was again weakened by another brigade, left behind to protect the gold mines and the lengthened line of communications, he continued his advance on the 2nd June. On the 4th June he arrived before Pretoria, and after a short parley Botha consented to vacate the city. On the 5th June Roberts made his entry into the capital of the Transvaal. The English had advanced so quickly that the Boers had found it impossible to carry off all their prisoners of war. Four-fifths of them, or about 3,600, were left behind. This formed a welcome reinforcement of men, both well-fed and full of fight, for Roberts' army.

This proceeding on the part of the Boers was a piece of sound common sense; and they deserve great credit for resisting the fatal attraction which permanent fortifications exert upon a defeated army, and the more so since it required a high degree of moral courage and resolute determination to abandon their own capital to the enemy without a battle.

By this well-considered sacrifice the Boer leaders had traversed the English plan of operations, which was to crowd the Boers together

¹ Blue Book 261, pp. 136-144.

² At the end of August, 1900.

³ *Jahrbücher*, July, 1900.

⁴ He had taken with him materials for building military railway bridges.

in Pretoria by pushing forward the right wing under Buller, and so to force all the Boers still under arms to the test of a decisive battle.

But Buller, to whom this leading part was assigned, could not keep pace with the advance of the main army. He was delayed till the 11th June by the difficulties encountered in forcing his way through the mountains at Laing's Nek. These mountains, which are over 7,000 feet high, were excellently suited to the Boer tactics. No blame attaches to Buller for this; on the contrary, it must be recorded to his credit that on this occasion he refrained from running his head against stone walls, and manœuvred his adversary out of successive strong positions by turning movements, even at the cost of some loss of time.

However, the 3,000 Boers had fully attained their object by delaying Buller's whole army corps, four and a half divisions strong, for four weeks from effecting a junction with Roberts. And even after Buller had successfully manœuvred his way through and entered the province of Wakkerstrom, he felt himself so unsafe between the Transvaalers (who had retreated to the north-west) and the Free Staters in the Elandsberg under De Wet, that he abandoned his immediate intention of joining Roberts. Assigning as an excuse the want of water, he again retired behind the passes to Charlestown for several days' rest—in fact, until the 17th June.

In the meantime, Roberts required more support than ever. De Wet was indefatigable in his raids upon the Kroonstadt-Vereeniging Railway from his hiding-holes in the Elandsberg near Lindley. No less than three divisions—Methuen, Colvile, and Rundle—had been detailed to watch him, and he kept them fully employed. This left Roberts only some 20,000 men in the fighting line, and he found himself obliged, with this reduced force, to attack Botha, who had entrenched himself at Eerste Fabriken. This position, only a short day's march from Pretoria, was a standing menace to his security.

After two days of fighting, in which Roberts was bold enough to adopt the well-proved method of extending his front to the utmost and turning both flanks of the enemy, in spite of numerical weakness (20,000 men to a front of 25 miles), the Transvaalers decided to retreat into the Middleburg Mountains.

At last, on the 17th June, Buller again advanced. He did not, however, move to the north towards Middleburg, but kept to the north-west along the Durban-Johannesburg Railway, the latest established line of communications. He had to keep up a running fight with the Boer commandoes previously opposed to him, who had never been thoroughly beaten out of the field. He had to leave brigade after brigade behind, and by the beginning of July, when he reached Johannesburg, he had actually used up the whole of his ten brigades to protect the railway, and did not bring a single man to reinforce Roberts. This was the more serious since Roberts' fighting line was being constantly reduced by losses and by sickness. It was only with the greatest difficulty that Roberts in the course of a three days' fight, from the 25th to the 28th June, had been able to force the Boers a short distance further

back along the Delagoa Bay Railway. Both French's and Hamilton's cavalry divisions had been almost put out of action by the enormous loss of horses, and the cavalry regiments only mustered from 120 to 200 "horses" apiece—these "horses" including all sorts of Colonial, Indian, and Australian animals.

And so we find the whole force of the British Army scattered over the Orange Free State and the Transvaal without any solid nucleus strong enough to fight a decisive battle. It is all they can do to protect themselves, and they look forward anxiously to better times in October, when the more favourable season, and, perhaps, the arrival of fresh reinforcements from England may alter the course of the war.

Roberts at Middleburg has only one infantry division left (Pole-Carew's). Both the semi-dismounted cavalry divisions are stationed around him.

Buller covers the railway from Durban to Johannesburg; Clery, Hunter, and Rundle, opposed to De Wet, have great difficulty in pacifying "Her Majesty's youngest colony." Methuen and Baden-Powell with Carrington, who has arrived from Beira, are having an anxious time in the western districts of the Transvaal. From De Wet's latest movements it looks as if the Boers were about to attempt to collect their scattered forces in this district at Rustenburg.

This being the general situation, it is not to be wondered at that when the home Government timidly enquired of Roberts whether he could not spare a few troops for China, he returned the categorical answer: "Not a single man!"

Nor is it surprising that the British nation is not satisfied with the results of the war, which has now lasted nearly a year, nor with the outlook as to its termination. Up to date the war has cost 50,000 men, and a great deal more than a thousand officers, besides £60,000,000 sterling. But what hits the English politicians the hardest is the fact that owing to England's whole military power being held at bay in the Transvaal, England's political influence is for the moment seriously curtailed.