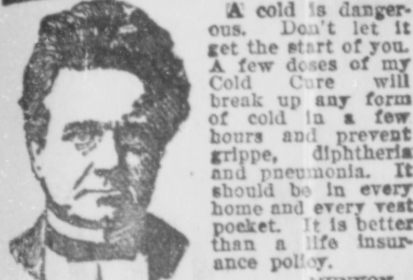


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# The Transvaal War

## A MARCH THAT WILL BECOME HISTORIC.

The London Times correspondent at Bloemfontein gives a striking picture of the difficulties of that great march to Bloemfontein, the whole aim and direction which had to be suddenly changed by Lord Roberts, as Lord Kitchener had independently changed the direction of the force under his own control to meet the situation created by Cronje's flight. Only a very complete organization of transport, and extraordinary willingness on the part of the troops to put up with unavoidable shortness of rations after the great dislocation, could have enabled Lord Roberts to carry out a march which will become historic. The correspondent says:—

"Lord Roberts has entered the capital of the Orange Free State, and a general view of a march which had so successful a determination, and will probably eclipse in fame even the field-marshal's well known descent upon Kandahar, can now be taken.

"In its widest aspect the movement may be said to have had two distinct parts, of which one, directed upon Kimberley and the eastern side of the Boer force holding Magersfontein and Spytfontein, came to an abrupt end on the evening of February 15, when it was found that Cronje was conducting in hot haste a retreat upon Bloemfontein; the other, of which the capture of Cronje was the chief incident, though an incident only, had for its objective the enemy's capital.

We have already traced the movement of the divisions through the Ramdam gate of the country to Dekiel's drift, or to Wateival, thence through Wegdraal or Jacobsdal to Klip drift, Drieput, Klip kaal, and Paardeberg, but the consideration of the chief feature in this march has been left to the present time. It has been hitherto impossible to realize the full effect of the change of plans above referred to, a change that had of necessity to be decided upon in two or three hours only.

"To organize the march of a force 40,000 men and 20,000 horses and other animals needs an amount of preparation which can be guessed at by a layman, but of which the unending labour and anxiety would exceed the wildest estimate. Delay is charged against the organizing department of the army so often and so easily—often, perhaps, so justly—that the present example of an instantaneous rearrangement of gigantic plans, carried out without a day's warning, deserves most careful notice.

"Momentum can only be safely gained by caution, but once gained is a masterful force; the instant reversal of an army's line of march from west to east is like the reversal of the heavy flywheel of a delicate machine that has but slowly gathered speed and is now working at high pressure. In many ways the order was experimental, and, from the commander-in-chief downward, heads of departments powerless now to help the mechanism so carefully built up, could only stand aside and watch with anxiety to see if it would stand the strain. That it did so stand is now a matter of history, but it is doubtful if many at home have yet realized all that is implied in the situation; indeed, to take that department alone, so delicately adjusted and so long prearranged are the systems of supply adopted by the Army Service Corps that the revised scheme presented difficulties from Cape Town to the Modder that are comparable only to those that would be suggested to an ordinary man by an attempt wholly to reorganize immediately and successfully the train service of a small railway company.

"Never was confidence better reposed, and it is difficult to say which has deserved more credit, those who were, in spite of all, nearly always able to supply throughout this expedition full rations to the men, or those men who have for their commander-in-chief undergone without a murmur the inevitable hardships of a long march through a waterless country, scorched by day and drenched by night, without change of clothes, without tents, without the hundred and one little comforts that in a standing camp make a soldier's life by no means an unpleasant one.

"It is one thing to cheer a general in the streets of an English town, or to flock to see the spectacle of some march past with all its cheerful accompaniments of color and music; it is quite another to face the realities of war with hearts as full of quiet confidence in and blind devotion to their leader as those of Lord Roberts' command; and the unshaven, grimy men with outworn khaki that marched into Bloemfontein—the last few miles of the 40 covered by them since the same hour on the previous day—as freshly and in as perfect a dressing as the parade grounds of Aldershot ever saw, testified in their own sufficient way to a love of 'Bobs' that is one of the most important factors of this campaign.

"The march over. With all its weariness, all its haste, and the inevitable loss of beasts of burdens, the end had been attained and, in looking back over the long red track that our wagon wheels have beaten into the veldt the feeling is overmastering that one of the historic marches of history has been brought through to a successful close.

"The factors that made the difficulty will probably never again be met with in such numbers and in such force. To move 40,000 men and half that number of animals across open country for a hundred miles is a task difficult enough in circumstances such as would impede its execution in England. To have done so across the dry veldt, where water is met only once a day and must be the factor deciding the night's stay, to have done so in the teeth of a watchful enemy, and at a distance of 700—some say 7,000—miles from the base without a man going foodless for a day, without the loss of a waggon except though physical defect of cart or animal, and at a pace that Lord Roberts alone can draw out of his men, is a feat that must silence much untutored criticism of the organization of the army. It may be at once admitted that it could not have been done at manoeuvres; but, as a test of actual capability, nothing out here is more totally discredited than the foolish outdoor parades which we have been content to trust as experience sufficient of the capacity alike of man and organization.

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"The latest determination that for some reason we seem able to bring to the front only in an emergency has been realized as a powerful force by Lord Roberts, and has been drawn upon freely and with unerring judgment. Endurance, that will in the future decide battles more, perhaps, than any other rank-and-file quality, has had its severest test, and we may be thankful that our troops have to a man proved their strength to suffer even more than their strength to fight. The long march that was finished yesterday deserves one of the first places among the achievements of the army."

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# ON THE ROAD UNDER ROBERTS.

Letters from the Royal Canadian regiment written on their arrival at Bloemfontein illustrate more forcibly than the cable despatches did how rapid the movements of Roberts are after he makes a start. The method of the little general is palpably to keep quiet until he is good and ready, and then with go a rush. This was indicated magnificently by the jump upon Cronje. The Bloemfontein letters show that it was the case too after Paardeberg.

Cronje surrendered at Paardeberg on Feb 27. The British army lay silent until March 7, concentrating at Osfontein, just beyond. Then came the rush. There was a Boer army in front but it had to go in a hurry. According to the letters from the Canadians, their regiment travelled about as follows:

March 7. Left Osfontein to attack Boers. "Drove them along the river for about ten miles. It was a forced pace and mighty hard," writes one.

March 8. Apparently inactive.

March 9. Marched several miles and crossed Mooi river in pontoons.

March 10. Marched 21 miles.

March 11. (Sunday). Marched 12 miles under a blazing sun, "the hottest for weeks."

March 12. Marched 16 miles. "Oh our poor feet, skinned and blistered!"

March 13. Marched 12 miles reaching the railway, south of Bloemfontein.

March 14. Marched 8 miles to Bloemfontein.

This is pretty steady going, for hot days, rough roads, half rations and a heavy load. Julian Ralph, who accompanied the march of the Highlanders to Koodoosberg some time before, wanted to try what the soldier's load was. He equipped himself with the harness and arms of a Highlander who had been sunstruck. Quarter of an hour's marching in the sun was enough when he got back on his horse. Later he had the soldier's accoutrement weighed. The figure was fifty pounds. It was a little heavier than the ordinary, as it included 3 days' rations—but these weighed but a few pounds.

"It is said that when Lord Roberts realized the new position he sent for the head of the supply department and asked him if he could promise him full rations for the new movement. 'I cannot, sir,' 'Three-quarter ration?' 'No, sir,' 'Half?' 'I cannot promise.' A pause ensued, and the field-marshal asked gravely, 'Quarter rations?' 'Yes.' A second pause, and the commander-in-chief said, 'Well I think they will do it for me.'



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