

The Fight for the Flag in South Africa

down in fairly good cover, the battle in this quarter became nothing but a rifle duel, continuing, with two brief intervals, from ten in the morning until past six o'clock in the evening.

Each of the British Guardsmen started out with one hundred and fifty to one hundred and sixty rounds, and many boxes and bags of cartridges were sent creeping to them during the afternoon. An attempt was made to cross the river and outflank the enemy's left, but the fire was too hot and the water too deep. The enemy's rain of bullets was such that many of the British wounded, being crippled, lay flat on the ground for hours, not daring to crawl back for help. If the head or a hand were raised for a moment, it became a mark, and it was impossible for stretcher-bearers to get near disabled men. We must now see what was passing on the left of the struggle.

The Northumberlands advanced along the east side of the railway, supported by half a battalion of the Argyll and Sutherlands, while the Yorkshires, with the rest of the Scottish battalion, were on the west of the railway, with the Lancashires prolonging the line to the left, seeking to cross the river and threaten the enemy's right flank. The advance of the Brigade was checked by the fire from an outcrop of rocks and small kopjes on the northern bank of the Modder, much in advance of the enemy's main position there, and by that from a farmhouse and kraal to the east, covering the dam and the drift, or ford, at the west end of Modder village. The 75th Battery and three guns of the 18th, with the heavy pieces of the Naval Brigade, were of great service at this part of the battle, and at about half-past two some of the Yorkshires, Highlanders, and Northumberland Fusiliers got across the river and drove out the enemy in the west of the village. The Lancashires at the same time stormed the kopjes and rocks on the extreme left, and the Boer right flank was thus turned. It was about half-past five in the afternoon when Lord Methuen received a flesh wound in the right thigh, which disabled him for some days,

and he gave over the command to Major-General Colville.

The ten hours' battle ended at dusk with the sheer exhaustion of the combatants. The British artillery, of twenty-two guns after the arrival of a fresh field battery at three o'clock from Orange River, had fired on an average two hundred rounds per gun. The Guards, the Yorkshires, and the artillery, in particular, had been under a terrific fire all day without food or water except what they carried with them into action. At nightfall the enemy were still in possession of most of the village. A touching incident of the struggle was that connected with Captain Earle, of the Grenadier Guards, after he had been thirteen hours at work, under fire most of the time, and without food. He then saw a riderless horse, which he recognised as that of his brother, Captain S. Earle, of the Coldstreams. Overcome by the sudden shock of what this sight portended, and exhausted by his exertions in the terrible heat, he was just able to call on his company to charge before he fell senseless. His brother had, as he feared, been killed.

The total British loss in the Battle of Modder River was four hundred and seventy-five. Sixty-eight non-commissioned officers and men were killed, three hundred and seventy-seven wounded, and seven found "missing." The four officers killed were Colonel Northcott, of the staff, Colonel Stopford and Captain Earle, of the 2nd Coldstreams, and Lieutenant Long, of the 2nd Yorkshire Light Infantry. Nineteen officers, including Lord Methuen, were wounded. The regiment most severely injured was the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, who had, as we have seen, only just reached the front. With two officers wounded, they lost in all one hundred and twelve men. The 2nd Coldstreams, with two officers and ten men killed, and a third officer and fifty-six men wounded, came next on the list of casualties.

The Boer commander, with mendacity due to a desire to hide the truth from his