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## Rushing a Boer Camp in the Dark.

A graphic account of a night attack on a Boer encampment is contributed by "Ling-nan" to the current issue of "Blackwood's Magazine." He writes:—"Night on the veldt and all the winds at rest save one, which every now and then sends a faint warm puff across the mile of withered grass, like the uneasy stretches of mutterings coming from a man talking in his sleep. All around dead,

utter silence—the silence peculiar to vast spaces—and deep blue velvet darkness resting upon the grass immensity like a hot, heavy hand; a silence that makes the ears throb with a desire to hear it broken, which is not broken but deepened by the fluttering putter of a mercant stealing to its burrow, or a beetle settling with a little click upon a sun-baked ant-heap; a darkness that is impenetrable even on the dim yellow shadow of the upland veldt road, and almost appalling in the kloofs and hollows. Many fine things have been written about Night, but nothing that even in the remotest degree can tell the reader of the awe and solemnity of the dark hours that precede moon-rise on the South African veldt. What the sea is to water, so is the veldt to earth—its acme of nobility and grandeur, tremendous in its very featurelessness, because, like the sea, there is nothing by which one may measure it but itself and oneself.

Few men can lead or accompany many night attacks and keep their nerve, but of those few the army in South Africa has luckily numbered many men whom an era of dangerous night work, coming after two years of incessant strain, still see unshaken and confident, and with confident men behind them. And the leader of this little band being such a man, they steal through the night over the anxious miles with no qualms, on their part at any rate, straight for the invisible berg ahead. Behind it lies their prey, 120 Boers sheltering, and, let us hope, sleeping under the lee of the great, grassy wall. A "pesky," irreconcilable lot of ruffians, led by a certain violent Erasmus, who have been swooping so often at the line defences from their eyrie that their destruction has become a necessity; and as one may as well attempt to arrest soot-flakes as Boers in the daytime, the blow must fall suddenly at night, and in the very eyrie itself. A hazardous off-chance, indeed, even with equal numbers, with many hundred chances against it, and ruin too hideous to contemplate if unsuccessful; but with numbers actually less than those of the objective, a night onslaught on a wary, semi-animal enemy, is an enterprise bordering on the desperate. Yet such has been the unique and dangerous nature of the fighting in South Africa, that what in other wars has been considered a job too risky to be often attempted, is here looked upon as all in the day's work; and this is by no means the first time that these 80 troopers have found themselves upon the open waste at night, with the camp far behind them and the tremendous unknown close in front. On they go, over the flats, down into the dark hollows, up the darker rises beyond, every man locked close to his neighbour, starting from side to side, and knocking his neighbour's knees when he starts, as he does momentarily at a fancied sound outside the squadron or a fancied sight away in the blackness.

Not a word must be spoken, even when Bill on the left of you clutches your bridle-arm, and points with his up to the left, where the rise we are breasting ends in a dim knob. Upon its very summit stand three black figures of horses, too dark to see more, motionless as the kopje they stand on. They disappear, and from the knob comes a faint ring of a hoof upon a stone. Are we discovered? The officer in front holds up his hand, the leading files halt, those in the rear bump into them, and the whole party stands huddled together halfway up the slope, every man's head bent sideways in a fever of listening. If those were Boers the game is up; they are galloping back to the laager now, and very few of those 80 blankets and picket-peg in camp will see their proper occupants again. The commanding officer is whispering to the guide, a little active figure in a slouch hat, and one of his subalterns, who dismount and vanish on foot towards the knob. They are going to solve this riddle somehow. Quietly they creep upwards 10 yards apart, and from there to their intense relief perceive the three black shapes some distance down the further slope. Not Boers, evidently; probably not even Kaffirs. The subaltern and guide, taking no chances, stalk them carefully downhill through the long grass,

revolvers at the "ready," and finally lie staring and frowning a few yards above the suspicious objects. A sustained pause, then a low chuckle from the guide, which would lift a ton of anxiety from the band of listeners bulging if they could hear it—loose horses! The two rise and walk swiftly back over the knob down to their friends; still no word. That is only one of a thousand chances made good, and the march is resumed.

The business in hand must be done quickly, for there is little hope of success, even of return, if Erasmus' desperadoes once detect the small numbers of their assailants. In a night affair the attackers can expect little mercy if they are worsted. The confusion, terror, and indignation of the surprised give little scope or will to take prisoners those of the beaten surprisers whom it is impossible to shoot. The dismounted troopers, stealing forward in the half light, know all this well enough, and pray that events may march quickly, so that they may forget it and quit themselves like men. They have not long to wait. Down from the path above comes the clattering of a galloping, stumbling horse. A Boer half way up the hillside has detected the party climbing to cut off the picket, and with presence of mind he leaves the smaller issue to its fate and flies to warn the main body. The clattering changes to a heavy swishing as he plunges through the thicket behind the house. The three encircling parties run crouching in their places, only just in time. Then a hoarse shout from a Boer, who pulls up at the end of the wing and flings himself from his horse, "Come out, burghers! Come out! The English are on the pass!" He then runs behind the farm, calling wildly to a native to loose the precious cattle from their kraal. "Jantjie, Jantjie, you sleeping pig, loose the beasts!" The bewildered animals stream out, trotting lumberingly right amongst the men lying in ambush, and between them and the farm. Then some one fires. A rear arises within the building, an exclamation from a hundred startled men, the sound of a hundred men clutching at their rifles and clothes and leaping across the encumbered rooms.

The first man appears at the doorway in the end of the wing, another

shot and he is down. And then the tempest is let loose, and the scene becomes indescribable. Out of the doorway pours a stream of half-naked men, some firing, some falling, all yelling in their terror, some cursing, some for mercy. A ring of spitting, flashing fire bursts from the ambulance; it rolls from end to end of the half circle, backwards and forwards, forward and back, its uproar redoubled by the tremendous smacking of the bullets upon the stone walls, the resonant singing note as they smite and tear through the corrugated iron roof, and the crash and streamy tinkle of shivering glass. From every window figures are leaping, some black, fully clothed, others ludicrously white in drawers and shirts. Some of the English charge madly up to these windows. "Hands up! Hands up, you —!" Mercy is given wherever asked (have British soldiers ever forgotten in the wildest scuffles that their enemies were men with souls?), death is dealt out where roared for by a Mauser shot echoing from inside the rooms. The farm is surrounded by leaping, cursing figures, friend flying from friend in the gloom, some flinging themselves to the ground, some jumping high in the air at every shot, as if they expected the bullet to pass under their feet. It is an inferno, a Babel, anything you will, of horrible confusion, and agony. But the Boers are too many for their assailants. They break out behind the circle in twos and threes, in tens and twenties, some running at full speed with bodies bent until they almost touch at the straggling line which hems the ground; others manfully rushing them in; others slither through the thicket at the back, and the bullets rasp through the long dry grass over their heads. In odd corners, under walls and bushes, even odd waggons and heaps of manure, men are finding men to grapple with and bayonet or clutch by the throat. "Hands up!" "Hands up!" sounds from all sorts of dark spots—often from a soldier encountering another in the half light, when they part with an oath and a laugh which has something hysterical in it. And then it dies fitfully away—a hoarse cry here and there, a plunge of something heavy in the brushwood, and silence.



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