

Al Tubal; a mixed brigade under Major-General Sir C. Melliss pushing on towards Kut to deal with hostile mounted troops which had interrupted the passage of steamers at Chubibat about twenty-five miles below Kut.

18. The troops had to remain at Umm Al Tubal as the ships were in difficulties in shoal water in this vicinity and the enemy's whole force came up during the night. They attacked in great strength at daylight on 1st December.

A fierce fight ensued, the Turks losing heavily from our artillery fire at a range of 2,500 yards. General Townshend took advantage of a successful counter-attack made by the Cavalry Brigade against a column which attempted to envelop his right flank, to break off the fight and retire by echelons of Brigades. This was carried out in perfect order under a heavy shell fire, and by mid-day the enemy had been shaken off. General Townshend reports that it was entirely due to the splendid steadiness of the troops and to the excellency of his Brigadiers that he was able to repulse the enemy's determined attacks and extricate his force from the difficult situation in which it was placed.

The mixed Brigade, commanded by General Melliss, consisting of:—

30th Infantry Brigade,
1/5th Hants (Howitzer) Battery R.F.A.,
and the 16th Cavalry,

which had been despatched to Chubibat on the morning of 30th November, was recalled on the night of 30th November/1st December. This Brigade marched 80 miles in three days, including the battle of December 1st. At the end of it their valour and discipline was in no way diminished and their losses did not include a single prisoner.

19. After a march of 30 miles, Shadi was reached on the night of 1st/2nd December, and on the morning of 3rd December General Townshend was installed at Kut-Al-Amarah, where, it was decided, his retirement should end.

20. The Naval flotilla on the Tigris operated on the left flank of the troops throughout the operations that have been described.

From November 22nd to November 25th the gunboats from positions below Bustan (two miles east of Ctesiphon) were engaged against hostile artillery, particularly against concealed guns on the right bank which prevented ships from moving above Bustan.

21. During the retreat from Ctesiphon to Kut the gunboats under Captain Nunn, D.S.O., Senior Naval Officer, rendered valuable services in protecting the steamers and barges and in assisting when they grounded. The Naval gunboats were employed at this work day and night, frequently under fire from snipers on both banks.

Owing to numerous loops and twists in the course of the river, it was impossible for the flotilla to remain in touch with the troops during the retirement.

22. On the evening of the 28th November, "Shaitan" went aground about eight miles above Aziziyah and could not be refloated. Throughout November 29th, "Firefly" and "Shushan" salvaged "Shaitan's" guns and stores under heavy sniping from both banks, until the situation was relieved in the afternoon by the action of the Cavalry Brigade which has already been referred to.

The hull of "Shaitan" eventually had to

be abandoned, as the Turks opened fire with guns on the ships which had remained behind.

23. On the occasion of the Turkish attack on the morning of December 1st, at Um Al Tubal, "Firefly" and "Comet" made good practice with lyddite at a large body of Turks at a range of 3,000 yards. The ships came under a heavy and accurate shell fire, and, at 7 a.m., a shell penetrated the boiler of "Firefly," disabling her. H.M.S. "Comet" (Captain Nunn) took "Firefly" in tow, and in endeavouring to turn in the narrow river, both ships took the ground. "Firefly" was got clear and sent drifting downstream; but "Comet" would not move from the bank, against which she had been wedged by "Firefly."

24. "Sumana" came up and made several unsuccessful attempts to drag "Comet" off the bank. The enemy's fire increased in intensity; they brought up several field guns to short range; the ships were surrounded by Turkish troops and fired on at a range of 50 yards. "Comet" and "Firefly" were badly damaged and on fire. They were abandoned after the guns had been rendered useless and the crews were taken on board "Sumana," which succeeded in effecting her escape.

Subsequently "Sumana" did most valuable work in salving shipping which had got into difficulties further downstream.

25. Throughout these operations Captain Nunn, Lieutenant Eddis, who was wounded, and all officers and men of the Naval Flotilla behaved with great coolness and bravery under most trying circumstances.

26. The valour of the troops who fought under General Townshend at the battle of Ctesiphon is beyond praise. The 6th Division exhibited the same dauntless courage and self-sacrifice in the attack that has distinguished it throughout the campaign in Mesopotamia.

The dash with which the Indian troops (enlisted from all parts of India) have attacked a stubborn foe in well-entrenched positions, I attribute largely to the confidence with which they have been inspired by the British battalions of the Force.

When forced by greatly superior numbers to act on the defensive, and during the retreat to Kut, under the most trying conditions, the troops responded to the calls made on them with admirable discipline and steadiness.

They proved themselves to be soldiers of the finest quality.

27. These fine troops were most ably commanded by Major-General C. V. F. Townshend, C.B., D.S.O. I have a very high opinion, indeed, of this officer's capabilities as a commander of troops in the field. He was tried very highly, not only at the battle of Ctesiphon, but more especially during the retirement that ensued. Untiring, resourceful, and even more cheerful as the outlook grew darker, he possesses, in my opinion, very special qualifications as a commander.

He is imperturbable under the heaviest fire and his judgment is undisturbed.

28. With great regret, I have been forced, by reasons of ill-health, to resign the command of the British Forces in Mesopotamia—an appointment I have had the honour of holding during the past nine months.

In order to complete the record of events during my period in command, I will now give a brief narrative of the operations on the Tigris from the time that General Townshend's Force