

was not strongly felt, and the attitude of the Senussi towards Egypt remained friendly. It was not until the advent of Gaafer, a Germanised Turk of considerable ability, who arrived in Tripoli in April, 1915, with a considerable supply of arms and money, that this attitude underwent a change.

From that moment it became evident that the Turkish influence was gaining weight, and it was only by means of great forbearance, and by tactful handling of a delicate situation by Lieutenant-Colonel Snow, commanding the Western Desert, that a rupture was so long deferred.

The first incident of importance occurred on August 16th, 1915, when two British submarines, sheltering from the weather near Ras Lick, on the coast of Cyrenaica, were treacherously fired upon by Arabs under the leadership of a white officer, casualties being suffered on either side.

The incident was, however, closed by the acceptance of the Senussi's profound apologies, and of his assurances that the act had been committed in ignorance that the submarines were British.

A period of quiet followed, but at the beginning of November a series of events occurred which placed beyond all doubt the insincerity of the Senussi's continued assurances of friendship.

In the first week of that month (November) the crews of H.M.S. "Tara" and of H.M.T. "Moorina," torpedoed by enemy submarines on the 5th and 7th respectively, were, on landing in Cyrenaica, captured and held prisoners by the Senussi, who, in reply to strong representations for their immediate release, merely feigned ignorance of these occurrences, which they pretended to discredit.

Even then a last effort was made to preserve peace, and Sayed Mohamed el Idris was sent to arrange negotiations whereby the Senussi should get rid of his Turkish advisers in return for a sum of money. But before any decision could be reached matters had got beyond control, and the negotiations collapsed. On the 9th an Emergency Squadron of the Royal Naval Armoured Car Division was sent to strengthen the post at Sollum, which three days earlier had been shelled by enemy submarines, the Egyptian Coastguard Cruiser "Abbas" being sunk at her moorings, and another, the "Nur el Bahr," receiving considerable damage from shell fire.

On the night of the 14/15th two Egyptian sentries at Sollum were rushed by Mohafizia (Senussi regulars), and were severely handled and their arms carried off; the following night the camp at Sollum was systematically sniped, though no casualties resulted.

On the 17th the Zawia at Sidi Barrani (50 miles east of Sollum) was occupied by a force of some 300 Muhafizia, and on the 18th the Coastguard Barracks at that place were twice attacked during the night, one coastguard being killed.

This was followed on the 20th by an attack on the Coastguard Outpost at Sabil, a small post about 30 miles south-east of Sollum, though in this case, as at Barrani, the attack failed.

In view of these circumstances there was clearly no alternative but to recognise a state of war and to take action accordingly.

The events recorded above had caused a spirit of great unrest to prevail throughout the country, and the possibility of internal disturbances was a source of greater anxiety than the external danger.

This unrest was especially evident amongst the Arab population inhabiting the western edge of the cultivation—amounting in the Behera Province alone to over 120,000.

The religious influence of the Senussi is great amongst these people, and their natural sympathies are inclined towards their brethren in the Western Desert.

The above considerations made it imperative, on the one hand to keep the sphere of hostilities as far as possible to the west of the Delta and, on the other hand, to avoid anything in the nature of a reverse.

In pursuance of this policy it was decided to withdraw the Western Frontier posts to Mersa Matruh, and to concentrate at that place a force sufficient to deal swiftly with the situation; to secure the Alexandria—Dabaa Railway as a secondary line of communication by land with the railhead at Dabaa; to occupy the Wadi Natrun and the Fayum as measures of precaution; and to watch closely by constant and careful reconnaissance the Oasis of Moghara.

This course offered the following advantages:—

(a) The advance of the enemy would be opposed at the most westerly point at which a suitable harbour could be found, within one night's journey by sea from Alexandria, defensible on the land front.

(b) The enemy would be met on ground generally practicable to all arms and comparatively well supplied with water.

(c) The Egyptian Beduin of the coastal belt east of Matruh would be protected if loyal, and coerced if disaffected.

(d) Native opinion in the Delta would be affected favourably by an offensive policy.

(e) As more troops and transport by sea became available an opportunity would be afforded of striking at the enemy's main lines of communications by means of a landing at Sollum.

On the 20th November orders were issued for the assembly of the following force at Alexandria:—

*In Command.*—Major-General A. Wallace, C.B.

*Composite Mounted Brigade.*—Under Brigadier-General J. D. T. Tyndale Biscoe:—

Three Composite Yeomanry Regiments (from details 2nd Mounted Division).

One Composite Regiment Australian Light Horse (from details Australian Light Horse Brigades).

Notts Battery Royal Horse Artillery and Ammunition Column.

Auxiliary Services.

*Composite Infantry Brigade.*—Under Brigadier-General the Earl of Lucan:—

1/6th Battalion Royal Scots (T.F.).

2/7th Battalion Middlesex Regiment (T.F.).

2/8th Battalion Middlesex Regiment (T.F.).

15th Sikhs.

Auxiliary Services.