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THURSDAY, 12 OCTOBER, 1916.

War Office,

12th October, 1916.

The following Despatch from Lieutenant-General Sir Percy Lake, K.C.B., relative to the operations in Mesopotamia from 19th January to 30th April, 1916, has been forwarded by the Government of India for publication:—

General Headquarters,

I.E.F. "D,"

12th August, 1916.

From Lieut.-General Sir P. H. N. Lake, K.C.B., K.C.M.G., Commanding Indian Expeditionary Force "D"

To the Chief of the General Staff, Army Headquarters, India, Simla.

Sir,—I have the honour to submit a Despatch describing the operations of the Force under my command from January 19th, 1916, the date of my assuming command, up to April 30th, 1916.

2. Sir John Nixon's last Despatches, dated January 17th, referred to General Aylmer's advance from Ali Gharbi; his capture of the Turkish position at Sheikh Saad after severe fighting on the 6th, 7th and 8th January; the battle of 13th and 14th January on the Wadi

River, and the retreat of the enemy to an entrenched position across the Umm-Al-Hannah defile.

3. The period now under report includes three phases in the further attempt to relieve Kut:—

1st Phase.—19th to 23rd January.

Unsuccessful attempt to force the Hannah defile. Commander, Lieut.-General Sir F. Aylmer.

2nd Phase.—24th January to 10th March.

A period of rest and reorganisation, followed by the unsuccessful attempt to outflank the enemy's right in the vicinity of the Dujailah Redoubt. Commander, Lieut.-General Sir F. Aylmer.

3rd Phase.—11th March to 30th April.

A brief period of preparation, followed by the attack and capture of the Hannah and Falahiyah positions; failure to force the Sannaiyat position, and fall of Kut. Commander, Lieut.-General Sir G. F. Goringe.

4. The general position of affairs on the Tigris front on January 19th, 1916, was that the bulk of General Aylmer's force, after the heavy fighting referred to in paragraph 2, was

encamped on the left bank of the Tigris, above the Wadi River; the advanced troops were in touch with the Turks entrenched in their Umm Al-Hannah position. General Aylmer was actively engaged in reorganising his force for a further advance with the least possible delay. He fully realised that an immediate advance must involve some deficiencies in his organisation and fighting strength, but was influenced by the following factors:—

(i.) General Townshend's reports as to the limit of his food supplies, and the influence of food supply questions generally on the operations of the relieving column.

(ii.) General Townshend's anxiety about the sufficiency of his ammunition supply and the condition of some of his troops.

(iii.) The rapidity with which the Turks might be able to reinforce the troops opposed to General Townshend, and the desirability of forestalling them.

It was, I understand, those three considerations that had mainly influenced my predecessor in ordering General Aylmer to advance as early in January as possible with the force which would then be concentrated at Ali Gharbi.

It was not until after the heavy fighting for the Hannah position on January 21st that General Townshend's report of January 25th, 1916, to the effect that as regards food supplies he could hold out for another 84 days, reached General Headquarters.

5. The difficulty experienced in pushing up reinforcements, supplies and munitions of war to the front seriously affected the operations.

The number of steamers available in January, 1916, for river transport purposes was practically the same as when in June, 1915, the first advance up the Tigris took place. Additional river craft had from time to time been demanded, as augmentations to the force in Mesopotamia were decided upon, but owing to the peculiar conditions which vessels intended for the intricate navigation of the Tigris have to satisfy, the provision of these vessels was a difficult problem, necessarily entailing long delays, and the supply was never able to keep pace with the requirements of the force.

In consequence of this it was never possible during the period now under report either to concentrate at the Tigris front the whole of the forces available in the country or to equip such forces as could be concentrated there with sufficient transport to make them mobile and enable them to operate freely at any distance from the river.

It was always necessary therefore for General Headquarters to balance most carefully the flow of reinforcements and supplies, so that the former should not outrun the latter.

1st Phase.—19th to 23rd January.

6. After the battle of Wadi River General Aylmer's leading troops had followed the retreating Turks to the Umm-Al-Hannah position, and entrenched themselves at the mouth of the defile, so as to shut the enemy in and limit his power of taking the offensive.

7. The weather at this period was extraordinarily unfavourable. Heavy rains caused the river to come down in flood and overflow its banks, and converted the ground on either bank into a veritable bog.

Our bridge across the Wadi was washed away several times, while the boisterous winds

greatly interfered with the construction of a bridge across the Tigris, here some 400 yards in width.

8. It was essential to establish Artillery on the right bank of the Tigris so as to support, by enfilading fire, the attack of our Infantry against the Hannah position.

9. Guns and troops were ferried across, with difficulty, owing to the high wind and heavy squalls of rain, but by the 19th all troops allotted to the right bank had crossed over and were established in the positions from which they were required to co-operate with the main force on the left bank.

10. Meanwhile the leading Infantry Brigades on the left bank had pushed nearer the enemy. January the 20th was devoted to a systematic bombardment of his position, and during the night the Infantry pushed forward their advanced line to within 200 yards of the enemy's trenches.

11. On the morning of the 21st, under cover of an intensive Artillery bombardment, our Infantry moved to the attack.

On our right the troops got to within 100 yards of the enemy's line, but were unable to advance further. Our left column, consisting of the Black Watch, 6th Jats and 41st Dogras, penetrated the front line with a rush, capturing trenches which they held for about an hour and a half. Supports were sent forward, but losing direction and coming under heavy fire, failed to reach them. Thus, left unsupported, our previously successful troops, when Turkish counter-attacks developed, were overwhelmed by numbers and forced to retire.

12. Heavy rain now began to fall and continued throughout the day. Telephone communication broke down, and communication by orderly became slow and uncertain.

After further Artillery bombardment the attack was renewed at 1 p.m., but by this time the heavy rain had converted the ground into a sea of mud, rendering rapid movement impossible. The enemy's fire was heavy and effective, inflicting severe losses, and though every effort was made, the assault failed.

Our troops maintained their position until dark and then slowly withdrew to the main trenches which had been previously occupied, some 1,300 yards from those of the enemy.

13. As far as possible all the wounded were brought in during the withdrawal, but their sufferings and hardships were acute under the existing climatic conditions, when vehicles and stretcher-bearers could scarcely move in the deep mud.

14. To renew the attack on the 22nd was not practicable. The losses on the 21st had been heavy, the ground was still a quagmire and the troops exhausted. A six hours' armistice was arranged in order to bury the dead and remove the wounded to shelter.

15. I cannot sufficiently express my admiration for the courage and dogged determination of the force engaged. For days they bivouacked in driving rain on soaked and sodden ground. Three times they were called upon to advance over a perfectly flat country, deep in mud, and absolutely devoid of cover, against well-constructed and well-planned trenches, manned by a brave and stubborn enemy approximately their equal in numbers. They showed a spirit of endurance and self-sacrifice of which their country may well be proud.

2nd Phase.—24th January to 10th March.

16. The hurried improvisation of temporary Brigades, Divisions, etc., with which the force had been obliged to commence its advance from Ali Gharbi was now showing its inherent weakness. Divisions and Brigades, the units of which knew each other and had served together in France, had perforce been broken up to meet the difficulties of transport on a long sea voyage. There had been no time on arrival in Mesopotamia to await belated units. In many cases, Field Ambulances had arrived after the combatant units. Brigade and Divisional formations had been made up with such units as were first available. This was a severe handicap to the troops, and steps were now taken to reconstitute formations as far as possible in their original condition.

17. Throughout the month of February, preparations were made for resuming the offensive. Reinforcements were pushed up from the Base by steamer and route march; reorganisation and training were carried on at the front. On the left bank our trenches were again pushed forward towards the Hannah position. Frequent reconnaissances were made by land and air on both banks. During this period no severe fighting took place, though several minor operations were undertaken to gain information and to harass the enemy. On February 11th the bridge which had been destroyed by floods on January 14th was replaced.

18. The situation at the end of February was briefly as follows:—

On the left bank the enemy, having been reinforced, still held the Hannah position in force; further in rear were other defensive lines, at Falahiyah, Sannaiyat, Nakhailat, and along the northern part of the Es Sinn position. All except the last-named had been constructed since the battle of Hannah on 21st January. They were all protected on both flanks, by the Tigris and the Suwaikieh Marsh respectively. On the right bank, the Es Sinn position constituted the Turkish main line of defence, with an advanced position near Beit Aiessa. The right flank of the Es Sinn position rested on the Dujailah Redoubt, which lay some five miles south of the river and 14 miles south-west of the British lines on the right bank.

19. It was decided to attack the Turkish right flank and Dujailah Redoubt, as the first step towards the relief of Kut before the arrival of the flood season, expected about the middle of March. It was feared that, as soon as the Tigris came down in flood, the Turks would cut the bunds and so flood the country as to render further offensive operations impracticable.

The whole area was so flat that there was hardly any portion of it which could safely be said to be above flood level.

20. General Aylmer made his arrangements accordingly. He decided not to wait for further reinforcements, but to advance with the maximum force for which land transport could be made available with two days' food and water. To conceal his intentions during the period of preparation, our Artillery on both banks engaged the enemy's trenches on the left bank, whilst the force in front of the Hannah position displayed great activity.

21. Operations were again interrupted at the beginning of March by adverse weather conditions. This delay was unfortunate, as it gave time to the enemy to construct trenches

closing the gap which had hitherto existed between Dujailah Redoubt and the Hai River.

22. On the afternoon of March 7th, General Aylmer assembled his subordinate Commanders and gave his final instructions, laying particular stress on the fact that the operation was designed to effect a surprise; and that, to prevent the enemy forestalling us, it was essential that the first phase of the operation—*i.e.*, the capture of the Dujailah Redoubt—should be pushed through with the utmost vigour.

23. His dispositions were briefly as follows: The greater part of a Division under General Younghusband, assisted by Naval Gunboats, contained the enemy on the left bank. The remaining troops were formed into two columns, under General Kemball and General Keary, respectively, a reserve of Infantry and the Cavalry Brigade being held at the Corps Commander's own disposal. Kemball's column, covered on the outer flank by the Cavalry Brigade, was to make a turning movement to attack the Dujailah Redoubt from the south, supported by the remainder of the force operating from a position to the east of the Redoubt.

24. The night march by this large force, which led across the enemy's front to a position on his right flank, was a difficult operation, entailing movement over unknown ground and requiring most careful arrangements to attain success. Thanks to excellent staff work and good march discipline, the troops reached their allotted positions apparently undiscovered by the enemy, but while Keary's Column was in position at daybreak ready to support Kemball's attack, the latter's command did not reach the point selected for its deployment, in the Dujailah depression, until more than an hour later. This delay was highly prejudicial to the success of the operation.

25. In spite of their late arrival the presence of so large a force seems to have been quite unexpected by the Turks, as Dujailah Redoubt was apparently lightly held when our columns reached their allotted positions. Prompt and energetic action would probably have forestalled the enemy's reinforcements. But time was lost by waiting for the guns to register and to carry out reconnaissances, and when, nearly three hours later, Kemball's troops advanced to the attack, they were strongly opposed by the enemy from trenches cleverly concealed in the brushwood, and were unable to make further ground for some time, though assisted by Keary's attack upon the Redoubt from the east.

The southern attack was now reinforced, and by 1 p.m. had pushed forward to within 500 yards of the Redoubt, but concealed trenches again stopped further progress, and the Turks made several counter-attacks with reinforcements which had by now arrived from the direction of Magasis.

26. It was about this time that the Corps Commander received from his Engineer officers the unwelcome news that the water supply contained in rainwater pools in the Dujailah depression, upon which he had reckoned, was insufficient, and could not be increased by digging. It was clear therefore that unless the Dujailah Redoubt could be carried that day, the scarcity of water would of itself compel our troops to fall back. Preparations were accordingly made for a further assault on the Redoubt, and at 5.15 p.m. attacks were launched from the south and east under cover of a heavy bombardment. The 9th and 28th Infantry Brigades

got within 200 yards of the southern face, where they were held up by heavy fire, although reinforced. Meanwhile the 8th Infantry Brigade, supported by the 37th, had assaulted from the East; the two leading battalions of the former, the Manchesters and 59th Rifles, and some of the 37th Infantry Brigade, succeeded in gaining a foothold in the Redoubt. But here they were heavily counter-attacked by large enemy reinforcements, and, being subjected to an extremely rapid and accurate shrapnel fire from concealed guns in the vicinity of Sinn Aftar, they were forced to fall back to the position from which they started.

27. The troops, who had been under arms for some 30 hours, including a long night march, were now much exhausted, and General Aylmer considered that a renewal of the assault during the night 8/9th March could not be made with any prospect of success. Next morning the enemy's position was found to be unchanged, and General Aylmer, finding himself faced with the deficiency of water already referred to, decided upon the immediate withdrawal of his force to Wadi, which was reached the same night.

28. The evacuation of our wounded had preceded our retirement. The first parties of wounded reached Wadi at 4 p.m. on March 9th, and the last wounded man was attended to in Hospital at that place at 2 a.m., March 10th. The Corps Commander speaks in high terms of the gallantry and devotion displayed by officers and subordinates of the Medical Service and Army Bearer Corps during the fighting. They collected and attended to the wounded under heavy fire in a manner which called forth the admiration of the whole force.

3rd Phase.—11th March to 30th April.

29. No further operations of any importance occurred during March, though minor engagements took place on the right bank, in which enemy trenches were taken and prisoners captured. But rain fell, and the Tigris came down in heavy flood on March 15th, causing extensive inundations, which compelled our troops to evacuate their advanced positions on that bank. For the remainder of the month there was a strenuous struggle with the inundations to prevent the whole country being flooded. Every available man was engaged in digging embankments, and operations were temporarily suspended.

30. On March 12th Major-General Sir G. F. Goringe succeeded to the command of the Corps. Fresh troops now began to arrive upriver, and it was decided to renew active operations as soon as this reinforcement was complete. Careful investigations were made meanwhile as to the feasibility of an advance on Kut by the right bank from Shaikh Suad, but as inquiry showed that the country along this route was not flood-proof, and would be liable to inundation by the breaking of the bunds on the right bank of the Tigris, which were under Turkish control, it was decided that conditions were more favourable for an attack on the Hannah position and an advance up the left bank.

Preparations were accordingly made for putting this plan into action.

31. The 7th Division had been engaged in sapping up to the enemy's front trenches, continually under heavy fire and hampered by floods. By March 28th their sap-heads were 150 yards from the Turkish front line.

On April 1st the 13th Division moved up from Sheikh Saad to relieve them in the front trenches preparatory to the assault. Heavy rain fell, however, on this and the following day, and floods rendered some of the positions of our troops on the right bank untenable. The ground became impassable and operations had to be postponed.

32. By the evening of April 4th the ground had dried sufficiently for the assault. At daylight the next morning the 13th Division jumped out of their trenches and rushed the Turkish first and second lines in quick succession. Our Artillery and machine-guns at once opened on the third and other lines in rear, and by 7 a.m. the whole position was in our hands.

33. The attack on Hannah had been prepared with the greatest care, and was brilliantly executed by General Maude and the 13th Division. The enemy's position was a maze of deep trenches occupying a frontage of only 1,300 yards between the Tigris and the Suwaikieh Marsh, and extending for 2,600 yards from front to rear. Although it was lightly held by the Turks with a few companies and some machine-guns it was a position of great strength.

34. Meanwhile, on the right bank, the 3rd Division had been gaining ground. In the morning the 8th Infantry Brigade, led by the Manchesters, captured the Turkish position on Abu Roman mounds. An attempt by the enemy to recapture this position in the afternoon was beaten off.

During the day the river rose considerably, and it was evident that a fresh flood was coming down. This pointed to the urgency of capturing the Falahiyah and Sannaiyat positions, three and six miles respectively West of the Hannah position, before the rising river should enable the Turks to flood the country between us by opening the bunds.

35. After nightfall a heavy bombardment was directed on the Falahiyah position from 7.15 p.m. to 7.30 p.m., after which the 13th Division assaulted and captured a series of deep trenches in several lines. The position was stubbornly held by about three Battalions of Turks, but by 9.30 p.m. it was completely in our hands and consolidated.

The 38th Infantry Brigade and the Warwicks and Worcesters of the 39th Infantry Brigade did particularly well in this assault. High praise is due to Major-General Maude, his Brigade commanders, and all under their command for this successful night attack. The Division suffered some 1,300 casualties during the day.

36. The 7th Division, which had hitherto been in support, now moved forward, and, passing through the 13th Division, took up a position about two miles east of Sannaiyat, ready to attack the northern portion of these entrenchments at dawn on April 6th. The line of direction was to be maintained by moving with the left flank along a communication trench which joined the Falahiyah and Sannaiyat positions. Previous reconnaissance of the terrain to be traversed had, of course, been impossible during daylight, as it was then still occupied by the Turks.

37. The passage, however, of numerous and deep cross-trenches so hampered the advance that, at dawn, when the assault was to have taken place, the troops were still some 2,300 yards from the enemy's position. This delay was fatal to their chance of success, as the

ground was perfectly flat and without any vestige of cover. In these circumstances it would have been wiser to have postponed the attack at the last moment. The advance was, however, continued with the greatest gallantry under heavy artillery and machine-gun fire, to within 700 yards of the Turkish trenches. Here the attacking lines were checked, and eventually fell back on to the supporting 3rd line, where they dug themselves in at about 1,000 yards from the enemy.

38. During the night of 5/6th April and throughout the 6th the river rose steadily, until at mid-day it reached the highest level of the year. The wind changed to the north, and blew the water of the Suwaikieh Marsh southwards across the right of the 7th Division; protective bunds along both the Tigris and the edge of the marsh had then to be constructed under the enemy's fire. Our guns were surrounded by floods, and for some time the position was distinctly critical.

The marsh continued to encroach so much on the ground occupied by the 7th Division, that all efforts had to be devoted to securing from the floods the positions already gained. On the right bank the inundations rendered communication most difficult, and threatened to isolate the 3rd Division altogether. On April 8th, in face of many difficulties, a new bridge over the Tigris was completed at Falahiyah.

39. During the night 8/9th April the 13th Division took the place of the 7th Division in the trenches, and at 4.20 a.m. advanced to the assault on Sannaiyat. When within 300 yards of the enemy's front line they were discovered by the Turks, who sent up Very lights and flares and opened a heavy rifle and gun fire. The first line, including detachments of the 6th K.O. Royal Lancaster Regiment, 8th Welsh Fusiliers, 6th L. North Lancashire Regiment, and 5th Wiltshire Regiment, penetrated the centre of the enemy's front line trench. In the glare of the lights the 2nd line lost direction, wavered, and fell back on the 3rd and 4th lines. Support thus failed to reach the front line at the critical moment, in spite of the most gallant and energetic attempts of officers concerned to remedy matters.

Our troops who had reached the enemy's trenches were heavily counter-attacked by superior numbers and driven back to from 300 to 500 yards from the enemy's line, where brigades dug themselves in.

40. I had been at Wadi in close touch with the Corps Commander since April 6th, and after the failure of this attack we met and discussed the situation together in detail. While it was clearly very desirable to secure the Sannaiyat position with its obvious advantages, yet we had to bear in mind how very short the time at our disposal was if Kut was to be relieved, and the delay which a systematic approach by sapping right up to the position must involve. It was therefore decided that another attempt to force the enemy's right about the Sinn Aftar Redoubt offered prospects of speedier success.

41. General Goringe accordingly proceeded to make the necessary arrangements for this move. As will be understood, it involved securing the control of the river bunds which were covered by the enemy's advanced position at Beit Aiessa, and establishing communications across the intervening flooded areas which must be traversed before we could reach that

position. It should be borne in mind that there is no such thing as a road, in the sense in which we use the word, in this part of the country, and that no road material or metalling of any sort exists; yet in order to supply the troops with food and ammunition when they should have succeeded in crossing the inundations, some sort of permanent track above flood level, along which transport could work, was essential.

42. The 7th Division now again took over and pushed forward the trench work in front of Sannaiyat as far as constant interruptions by floods would permit. The 13th Division was held back near Falahiyah Bridge in reserve.

43. On April 12th, the 3rd Division, advancing across belts of inundation intersected by deep cuts, drove in the enemy's picquets east of Beit Aiessa and occupied their outpost line, consolidating their position during the night.

On April 15th and 16th, some of the enemy's advanced trenches were captured and counter-attacks were repulsed. Our new line was consolidated by night, guns were moved forward and preparations were made for the attack of the main Beit Aiessa position on the morning of the 17th.

44. Under cover of an intense bombardment, the 7th and 9th Infantry Brigades advanced at 6.45 a.m., and actually reached the Turkish trenches before our Artillery fire lifted. When the bombardment ceased they leapt into the trenches, bayoneted numbers of the enemy, and the Beit Aiessa position was soon in our hands. The enemy left 200 to 300 dead in the trenches and 180 prisoners were captured.

These operations, culminating in the capture of Beit Aiessa, reflect great credit on Major-General Keary and the troops under his command. Steady and consistent progress was made day after day in spite of most difficult conditions and often with a shortage of rations which the transport was heavily strained to bring forward.

45. Orders were now issued for the 13th Division to move up in relief of the 3rd Division, after dark, the latter to concentrate on the left rear of the 13th, preparatory to further operations next day.

46. At 5 p.m. the enemy's artillery commenced to bombard Beit Aiessa and to establish a barrage in rear of the 3rd Division, sweeping the passage through the swamps along which its communications lay. An hour later a very strong counter-attack came from the southwest. In spite of heavy shelling from our guns, the attack was pressed home against the 9th Infantry Brigade, from which a double company had been pushed forward to guard two captured guns which could not be brought in during daylight. In retiring the double company masked our fire; the 9th Infantry Brigade was pressed and gave ground, exposing the left of the 7th Infantry Brigade, which was also forced back. Our troops rallied on the 8th Infantry Brigade, which was holding its ground firmly on the left of the line, and on a portion of the 7th Infantry Brigade.

Reinforcements from the 13th Division were already moving forward, but owing to the darkness and boggy ground they were delayed, and some hours elapsed before they arrived.

The attack which commenced at 6 p.m. was followed by a series of heavy attacks throughout the night, the 8th Infantry Brigade on the

left repelling as many as six such attacks. But our line held firm, and the enemy retreated at dawn, having suffered losses estimated at 4,000 to 5,000 men.

47. In this engagement the following units particularly distinguished themselves by their steadiness and gallantry:—1st Battalion, Connaught Rangers; 27th Punjabis; 89th Punjabis; 47th Sikhs and 59th Rifles—also the South Lancs., East Lancs. and Wiltshire Regiments. The 66th and 14th Batteries, R.F.A., did good service, also the 23rd Mountain Battery, which expended all its ammunition, and did great execution at close range. Generals Egerton and Campbell, who commanded the Brigades most heavily engaged, set a fine example of coolness and gallantry in the hand-to-hand fighting which took place.

Although the enemy had suffered heavy losses and had failed to obtain any success after their initial rush, they had checked our advance and regained that portion of Beit Aiessa nearest the river which included the bunds controlling the inundations. Its recapture was essential.

48. During the succeeding days some progress in this direction was made by trench fighting and by consolidating positions pushed out towards Sinn Aftar. The boggy nature of the ground made movement difficult, and many of the troops were worn out with fatigue.

Meanwhile on the left bank, although frequently interrupted by floods, the 7th Division had been steadily pushing forward saps, and as there were some signs of a weakening of the enemy's forces at Sannaiyat, there appeared to be an opportunity to make another attempt to capture that position. The 7th Division was ordered to prepare for an assault on the 20th, supported by troops from the right bank. But on the afternoon of the 19th the wind veered round to the north, water from the marsh flooding their trenches and the ground in front of them; the attack had therefore to be postponed.

49. Throughout the 20th and 21st the Sannaiyat position was bombarded. Arrangements were made for the assault to take place next morning, on a front which eventually had to be reduced to that of one Brigade, the extreme width of passable ground being only 300 yards. After preliminary bombardment the 7th Division advanced, the 19th Infantry Brigade leading. Besides our Artillery on both banks, massed machine-guns on the right bank covered our advance. The leading troops carried the enemy's first and second lines in their immediate front, several of the trenches being flooded, but only a few men were able to reach the third line.

50. Large Turkish reinforcements now came up. They delivered a strong counter-attack, which was repulsed. A second counter-attack, however, succeeded in forcing our troops back, as many men were unable to use their rifles, which had become choked with mud in crossing the flooded trenches, and so were unable to reply to the enemy's fire. By 8.40 a.m. our men were back in their own trenches.

51. By mutual consent parties went out, under the Red Cross and Red Crescent flags, to collect their respective wounded. The Turkish casualties appear to have been heavy as they were evacuating wounded until night-fall. Our casualties amounted to about 1,300.

52. Persistent and repeated attempts on both banks had thus failed, and it was known that at the outside not more than six days' supplies

remained to the Kut garrison. General Gorrington's troops were nearly worn out. The same troops had advanced time and again to assault positions strong by art and held by a determined enemy. For 18 consecutive days they had done all that men could do to overcome, not only the enemy, but also exceptional climatic and physical obstacles—and this on a scale of rations which was far from being sufficient, in view of the exertions they had undergone, but which the shortage of river transport had made it impossible to augment. The need for rest was imperative.

53. There remained but one chance if the relief of Kut were to be accomplished, and that was the introduction by some means of additional supplies into General Townshend's camp, which would enable him to hold out for a still longer period.

Faint as the chance was, the "Julnar," one of the fastest steamers on the river, had for some days been under preparation by the Royal Navy for an attempt to run the enemy's blockade.

54. At 8 p.m. on April 24th, with a crew from the Royal Navy under Lieutenant Firman, R.N., assisted by Lieutenant-Commander Cowley, R.N.V.R., the "Julnar," carrying 270 tons of supplies, left Falahiyah in an attempt to reach Kut.

Her departure was covered by all Artillery and machine-gun fire that could be brought to bear, in the hope of distracting the enemy's attention. She was, however, discovered and shelled on her passage up the river. At 1 a.m. on the 25th General Townshend reported that she had not arrived, and that at midnight a burst of heavy firing had been heard at Magasis, some 8½ miles from Kut by river, which had suddenly ceased. There could be but little doubt that the enterprise had failed, and next day the Air Service reported the "Julnar" in the hands of the Turks at Magasis.

55. The leaders of this brave attempt, Lieutenant H. O. B. Firman, R.N., and his assistant—Lieutenant-Commander C. H. Cowley, R.N.V.R.—the latter of whom had throughout the campaign in Mesopotamia performed magnificent service in command of the "Mejidieh"—have been reported by the Turks to have been killed; the remainder of the gallant crew, including five wounded, are prisoners of war.

56. In the hope of prolonging the resistance of Kut for even a day or two, the Royal Flying Corps and Royal Naval Air Service had dropped into Kut, between April 16th and April 29th, approximately 8 tons of supplies, besides fishing nets, medicines and specie.

Although these supplies could not materially alter the course of the siege, it was a performance which is deserving of high praise, for it involved a great strain on the pilots, and the journeys were subject to attacks by enemy aircraft of superior speed and fighting capacity. One of our machines was shot down while engaged on this supply service, another was damaged, but brought home safely with great skill.

57. With the failure of the "Julnar" there was no further hope of extending the food limit of the garrison of Kut. Everything that was possible with the means to hand had been attempted. The troops only desisted from their efforts when, through battle losses, sickness and exhaustion, the limit of human endurance

ance had been reached. On April 29th Kut surrendered.

I need not enlarge upon the bitter disappointment felt by all ranks on the Tigris Line at the failure of their attempt to relieve their comrades in Kut. It was mitigated by His Majesty the King's gracious message of May 7th, 1916, in which His Majesty expressed his feeling that his troops had done all that was humanly possible.

58. By the courtesy of the Turkish Commander-in-Chief—Major-General Khalil Pasha—I was able to arrange, on April 30th and the following days, that all the more serious cases among the sick and wounded of the garrison of Kut should be handed over to me in exchange for an equivalent number of Turkish prisoners. In this connection I should like to acknowledge my indebtedness to Captain Hon. A. Herbert, M.P., Irish Guards, and Captain T. E. Lawrence, General Staff, Intelligence, Egypt, who greatly assisted me in these negotiations.

59. This report would be incomplete without some reference to occurrences in the other parts of Mesopotamia. During practically the whole period under review, neither the Turks on the Euphrates nor the Arab tribes in the vicinity of that river have given us any trouble. When, however, in January the advance against the hostile positions in front of Kut took place, it was thought advisable to make a demonstration northwards to a short distance from our advanced post at Nasiriyah with a view to deterring as many of the hostile tribes on the Hai River as possible from joining forces with the enemy.

60. The major portion of the force at Nasiriyah accordingly moved out at the beginning of January and encamped in the neighbourhood of Butaniyah Lake. Early in February, when the object in view had been attained, the troops returned to Nasiriyah. On the return journey some of the villages, with whom friendly relations had hitherto obtained, apparently mistaking our movement for a retreat, treacherously attacked our rearguard. The attack was beaten off, a party of the Royal West Kents and the 30th Mountain Battery behaving very gallantly. A small force marched out the following morning from Nasiriyah, surprised and destroyed the offending villages in retaliation for their treachery.

Nothing of importance occurred on the Karun Line, that country and the neighbourhood of the Oilfields, as well as the country to the West and South of Basrah, remaining quiet and undisturbed throughout the period under review.

61. When my predecessor, General Sir John Nixon, submitted his Despatch of January 17th, 1916, he had had no opportunity of bringing to notice the names of those officers and men who had distinguished themselves during the actions at Shaikh Saad from 6th to 8th January and at the Wadi River on 13th January 1916. I have therefore included them in this report.

62. I desire to place on record my appreciation of the services rendered by Lieut.-General Sir F. Aylmer. Faced by great climatic and other difficulties, and unable, for reasons already referred to, to allow himself the time for reorganisation and preparation which under other circumstances he would have deemed essential, he applied himself to a difficult task with an energy, ability and determination which enabled him twice to defeat a brave

enemy at least equal to himself in numbers, and which would in all probability have carried him to success at the Umm-Al-Hannah position but for weather conditions which proved an almost insurmountable obstacle.

Major-General (temporary Lieut.-General) Sir G. F. Goringe has rendered valuable service to the State. As Chief of the Staff to the Tigris Column from January 28th, and in command of the Column from March 12th onwards, he has shown untiring energy, ability and devotion in dealing with the many difficult situations which he had to face. He is a Commander of proved ability in the field.

Major-General C. V. F. Townshend has already shown himself a fine Commander of troops in action and a tactician of no mean ability. It was mainly his personal example of cheerfulness, courage and resource which inspired the garrison of Kut to sustain a siege of nearly five months, under every sort of trial, until sheer starvation compelled surrender.

Major-General H. d'U. Keary, after commanding his Division in France with distinction, has led it with resource and success throughout the operations under review. He could always be depended upon to handle his Division with skill in any operation with which he was entrusted.

Colonel (temporary Major-General) H. T. Brooking has displayed much ability in his administration of the Euphrates area and in the various minor operations which he has conducted.

63. This campaign in Mesopotamia has been one in which the difficulties experienced by the troops in actual contact with the enemy have been all but equalled by those which have had to be faced by the Headquarters and Lines of Communication Staffs and the Departments of the Army, upon whose exertions it depended that their comrades in the fighting line should be fed and supplied with the material they required to enable them to carry out their arduous task.

Major-General M. Cowper, as head of my Administrative Staff, has rendered most valuable service. His energy and ability, when things threatened to go wrong and an awkward emergency had to be faced, have more than once saved the situation.

Major-General A. W. Money, as my principal Staff Officer, has shown himself an exceptionally able Chief of the General Staff. With wide experience and sound judgment, his advice has always been of the highest value to me on all occasions.

Brevet Lieut.-Colonel W. H. Beach, R.E., has continued to me the valuable assistance which he rendered to my predecessor. As head of my Intelligence Section he has displayed a cool, well-balanced judgment of no mean order.

64. To Rear-Admiral Sir Rosslyn Wemyss, K.C.B., K.C.M.G., D.S.O., Naval Commander-in-Chief, East Indies, I am indebted for much useful advice and cordial co-operation. Captain Nunn, C.M.G., D.S.O., Commander Wason, and the other officers of the Royal Navy have afforded us the able assistance which we have become accustomed to receive from them.

I have referred elsewhere to the daring attempt made by the S.S. "Julnar" to run the gauntlet of the Turkish defences. Knowing well the chances against them, all the gallant officers and men who manned that vessel for the occasion were volunteers, among them

Engineer Sub-Lieut. Lewis Reed, the regular Chief Engineer of the vessel. I trust that the services in this connection of Lieut. H. O. B. Firman, R.N., and Lieut.-Commander C. H. Cowley, R.N.V.R., his assistant, both of whom were unfortunately killed, may be recognised by the posthumous grant of some suitable honour.

65. The Air Service, which includes both the Royal Naval Air Service and the Royal Flying Corps, has distinguished itself throughout by hard work and devotion to duty, and the assistance which it has afforded to the other arms has been invaluable. Never fully manned, it found itself, towards the end of the last advance, very short-handed and faced by one or more enemy machines of considerably greater speed and fighting capacity, but its efficient work was nevertheless maintained.

66. The manner in which the Signal Service, only recently organised, and augmented from time to time with but partially trained men, has succeeded in carrying out its duties reflects credit upon both officers and men.

67. None know better than the officers of the Royal Indian Marine how inadequate to meet the ever-increasing requirements of this force have been their resources in personnel, in materiel, and especially in river craft. Their endeavours to satisfy those requirements have been unceasing, and the measure of success obtained has been highly creditable to all concerned. In addition to the permanent officers I would especially mention the temporary officers in command of the river steamers plying between the Tigris front and the Base, who, working always at high pressure and often under dangerous conditions, have displayed a patriotic devotion to duty worthy of high praise.

68. The energy and devotion to duty shown by the personnel of the Medical Services deserve commendation. Overworked and undermanned as they were during the advance in January—for the greater portion of the medical organisations then in the country had been shut up in Kut, and the medical units of the 3rd and 7th Divisions had only begun to arrive—they did their utmost with the means at their disposal to alleviate the sufferings of the sick and wounded. With the arrival in February of the first river hospital ship "Sikkim," and a steady increase in personnel, their power of dealing with the situation was considerably improved, as the action on March 8th showed.

69. No report on the Medical Services would be complete without reference to the splendid services rendered by Mr. T. A. Chalmers, of Assam, who brought out, and himself drove, his specially designed motor-boat "Ariel." He spent his whole time, frequently under fire, in conveying sick and wounded between collecting stations, field ambulances and river hospital

craft in a manner which no other boat in our possession could have imitated.

70. The Ordnance Services, under Colonel A. P. Douglas, with many serious difficulties to combat, have throughout worked quietly and efficiently to keep the force at the front supplied with the munitions they required.

71. The Supply and Transport Corps have had their establishment seriously reduced from sickness and other causes, and have always worked at high pressure. They have been constantly confronted with the difficulty that sufficient river transport tonnage could not be allotted to them to admit of the full scale of rations being delivered at the front.

72. The Military Works Services, though having to compete with an enormous and ever-increasing volume of demands with a staff whose increase was by no means commensurate, has carried through creditably an amount of work the sum total of which can only be realised by those who have seen it actually in progress.

73. The Remount and Veterinary Services, the Telegraph and Postal Departments, have all worked very satisfactorily.

74. The Survey Department has performed valuable, if unostentatious work, often under very adverse conditions.

75. The Army Chaplains of all denominations have worked devotedly and given unstinted service to the Force. In their ministrations to the wounded they have freely exposed themselves in the front line.

76. I wish to record my appreciation of the valuable work performed by the Officers of General Headquarters and my personal Staff, to whom I am much indebted for their loyal assistance on all occasions.

77. I would express my deep obligation to Lieut.-Colonel Sir Percy Cox, Mr. Dobbs, I.C.S., and the officers of the Political Department for their valuable advice and assistance freely rendered on every occasion. The remarkably small amount of tribal interruption along our extensive Lines of Communication and the satisfactory condition of internal affairs throughout the occupied territory and adjoining districts are a high testimony to Lieut.-Colonel Sir Percy Cox's ability, tact and experience.

78. Accompanying this Despatch is a list of officers and men whose names I would bring to notice in connection with services rendered during the operations herein reported upon.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

P. LAKE,

Lieutenant-General,

Commanding Indian Expeditionary Force "D."

NOTE.—The list of mentions referred to in paragraph 78 will be gazetted in a few days.