

*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