

Mosul Vilayet of the remnants of his troops. By 10th November we were in full possession, and the Turkish troops had been withdrawn to Nisibin.

24. The complete success of the operations reflects the greatest credit on Lieutenant-General Cobbe, who had entire charge of the main operation, and also on his staff and subordinate commanders. The difficulties of supply, not only of food and water, but also of ammunition, were very great, but were largely overcome by the energy and resource of the responsible staff.

The daring and brilliant leadership of the Cavalry Brigades under Brigadier-Generals Cassels and Norton contributed largely to the final result, whilst the able tactical handling of the detached column under Brigadier-General Lewin efficiently safeguarded the exposed flank of our main forces.

The long protracted campaign in Mesopotamia was thus brought to a highly successful conclusion, and my warmest thanks and admiration are due to the troops who achieved this crowning victory. Their courage, endurance, and fortitude under conditions of considerable privation and exhaustion are worthy of the highest praise; they were continuously called upon for redoubled efforts, and they responded nobly and unflinchingly.

25. I now turn to events in North-West Persia, where, as I described in my last despatch, the Turks had during the summer given me some anxiety by reason of my long and vulnerable line of communications to the Caspian Sea.

There were three possible lines on which operations might take place, viz.: Mianeh, Bijar, and Senna. On the Mianeh line the Turks were in possession of a strong position on the Kufon Kuh effectively covering Mianeh from the south. On October 1st our troops were not in actual contact with the enemy, but frequent reconnaissances were undertaken by aeroplanes as well as by light armoured motor cars. From the information received from these and other sources it was clear that the Turks were being withdrawn, but, owing to difficulties of maintenance and to the ravages of influenza, it was decided not to follow them up, but to attack them by aeroplanes only, the rest of the troops on this line being concentrated at Zinjan.

On the Bijar line a strong patrol of British cavalry sent out from Bijar on October 2nd caused the Turkish detachment that had been in contact with them to withdraw. A small mixed force moved north on October 5th, the enemy retiring without offering fight, but a severe epidemic of influenza brought operations to an abrupt close, the troops returning to Bijar on October 9th.

On the Senna line a reconnaissance in force was carried out for 20 miles along the Sakiz road on October 2nd and 3rd, but this failed to establish contact with the Turks, who were later reported to have withdrawn to Sakiz.

26. Immediately after the conclusion of the armistice with Turkey on October 31st, I received instructions to re-occupy Baku (in co-operation with our Allies), and all available troops of the 39th (British) Infantry Brigade were ordered to concentrate for this purpose at Enzeli. They were joined there on November 9th by Russian and Armenian troops under General Bicharakhov, who had been driven by the Turks out of Petrovsk, where the Turkish

Commander, despite representations by both British and French Staff Officers, refused to recognise the armistice. At this time Nuri was commanding the Turkish forces in the Caucasus. An envoy had been despatched to him on November 4th asking for a definite date to be fixed by the Turks for the evacuation of Baku, but a procrastinating reply was received, and in consequence the envoy was sent back again to him accompanied by a staff officer to inform him that Baku would be occupied by a British and Russian force on November 17th, by which date Turkish troops, with the exception of a small detachment to preserve order, were to be clear of the town.

At dawn on November 16th a fleet of 17 transports left Enzeli escorted by three vessels of the Caspian Fleet, which had been armed by the Royal Navy under the supervision of Commodore D. T. Norris and Captain B. G. Washington, R.N.

During the morning of November 17th they were joined off Nargin Island by General Bicharakhov's Russian force, escorted by the Russian Caspian Fleet. The expedition was accompanied by French and American representatives, and the vessel conveying Major-General W. M. Thomson, C.B., M.C., commanding the British troops, entered Baku at the head of the combined fleets flying the flags of Great Britain, France, Russia and America. Our troops landed without opposition, and Baku was taken over from the Turks, who completed their evacuation of the town during the afternoon.

Many and varied were the questions which had to be dealt with in Baku, amongst which I may instance shipping control, feeding the inhabitants numbering a quarter of a million, finance, including the reopening of the Russian State bank, settlement of labour disputes on the oilfields, strikes in the town, payment of overdue wages, reopening the Trans-Caucasus system of railways, getting into working order the oil pipe-line from Baku to Batoum, etc., etc. All these questions were most ably and firmly dealt with by General Thomson, who was quite evidently the right man in the right place.

Our efforts had to contend with the mutual jealousy and intolerance of various factions, and it is not too much to say that all arrangements for reorganisation were hampered by entirely unnecessary delays in withdrawal on the part of the Turks. After retiring from Petrovsk they made further delays at Elizabetopol and other towns, much of which being due to the excessive amount of baggage (mostly loot) which they attempted to remove, together with a reserve of one month's supplies requisitioned by them from the country. A mission had also to be sent to Tiflis to put an end to the hostilities which had commenced between the Georgians and Armenians.

28. Besides the troops in Baku, a small force was also despatched to Krasnovodsk in order to secure that place as a naval base for the shipping working under our orders, and to deny it to the Bolsheviks, who were holding Astrakhan in strength. Portions of this Krasnovodsk detachment were taken to assist in the fighting near Askabad and Merv.

Despite armed Bolshevik ships based on Astrakhan, our armed vessels have permitted of the reopening of the Caspian trade and fisheries except in the far north.