

From now onwards the enemy flotilla frequently employed "tip-and-run" tactics, coming down river, firing a few shots and retreating directly fire was returned.

On 27th May a lowest depth of 12 feet of water was found on Chamova Bar. On 31st May it was reported to have fallen to 10 feet.

6. I arrived up-river on 3rd June in the local paddle steamer "Borodino," which henceforth became Naval Headquarters and accommodated the flotilla staff.

7. The relief of the troops who had been out during the winter was in progress at this time.

8. *Intention to Advance.*—The success of Koltchak, and our obligations to leave the North Russian troops in a sound position when we withdrew before the winter, decided the policy of an endeavour to enable the Russians to reach Kotlas and join hands with Koltchak, who was at that time reported to be at, or near, Perm.

9. *Effect on Naval Plans.*—This decision materially affected the Naval considerations, as the flotilla had not been intended for an advance far up-river; some of the ships were of too deep draught and the river was already low and falling. Further, the gunboats had suffered from contact with the ice and constantly firing their guns at extreme elevation, and required refitting.

10. Guns mounted on shallow-draught barges would have been invaluable, but the base was unable to undertake the work. The heavy-draught monitors had therefore to be retained, at much risk, to ease the strain on the gunboats, which alone might be able to operate later.

11. By the middle of June the flotilla was complete with the exception of "Moth" and "Mantis," which had not then arrived from England, and "M.24" and "M.26," which were detached for service in the White Sea.

II.—*Capture of Topsa and Troitsa.*

On 19th June a more extensive operation was undertaken with the object of capturing the high ground between Topsa and Troitsa, and the flotilla co-operated with Graham's Brigade, bombarding heavily prior to the attack and countering the fire of the enemy ships.

2. H.M.S. "Cockchafer" (Lieut.-Comdr. Q. B. Preston-Thomas, R.N.) did particularly good work in getting up the narrow Kourgamen channel to within a mile of Topsa when that place was taken, and materially assisted in repulsing a counter-attack which threatened the success of our undertakings.

3. H.M.S. "Glowworm" (Commander (actg.) S. W. B. Green, D.S.O., R.N.) was actively engaged with the enemy flotilla in the main channel.

4. H.M. Monitors "Humber" (Lieut.-Comdr. A. Johnstone, R.N.), "M.27" (Lieut.-Comdr. G. H. I. Parker, R.N.), and "M.33" (Lieut.-Comdr. K. Michell, D.S.C., R.N.) also assisted in this operation, which marked the first stage of the advance, and materially improved our positions.

In the course of this fighting a barge on which the enemy had mounted two heavy long-range guns was holed by our fire and abandoned.

5. *Mine-sweeping.*—This brought the ships to the edge of the enemy minefield, and for the next week mine-sweeping had to be carried out under most difficult conditions. The river water was so thick that it was impossible to

see to any appreciable depth, even from a sea-plane. Instead of being able to sweep in comparative safety on the rise of the tide, as at sea, the river was of course tideless and falling.

6. It was necessary to explore channels with small steamboats, clear mines where discovered, buoy a passage, and then send up the heavier-draught tunnel mine-sweepers to sweep up the heavier and deeper-moored mines. The whole of the work had to be carried out within range of the enemy flotilla, and the mine-sweeping craft were daily exposed to heavy fire from his guns, and at times even came under direct machine-gun and rifle fire.

7. The exploratory sweeping in steamboats was most gallantly performed by parties of British seamen and the Russian boats' crews under the orders of Lieutenant R. H. Fitzherbert-Brockholes, R.N., and Lieutenant C. E. McLaughlin, R.N. The tunnel mine-sweepers were under the command of Lieutenant A. K. McC. Halliley, R.N.

8. I cannot speak too highly of the gallantry and devotion to duty displayed by the mine-sweeping party in their tireless endeavours to clear the river for the safe navigation of the flotilla and water transport.

Their efforts were crowned with success after a week's most arduous work, and over 40 mines had been cleared from the river. This had not been achieved, however, without the loss of the mine-sweeper "Sword Dance," which was mined and sunk on 24th June. Subsequently a second mine-sweeper, the "Fandango," also struck a mine and was lost.

9. *Flotilla passed through mine-field to Troitsa.*—On 27th June I went on board H.M.S. "Cricket" (Lieutenant I. W. G. White, R.N.), and that ship passed safely through the swept channel, and running the gauntlet of a heavy barrage of enemy fire arrived off Troitsa. Here the high cliffs gave some measure of protection, and a gunboat, once established, could drive the enemy's ships back and secure the anchorage for the flotilla.

10. The remainder of the ships and transport moved up the following day, and from then onwards this became our advanced base and Brigade headquarters.

11. *Situation on 7th July.*

On the right bank we held Topsa, Troitsa and advanced positions north-west of Selmenga River, the enemy having strong blockhouses on the opposite bank, with artillery in support.

On the left bank we occupied Yakolevskoe and advanced positions on the Nyuma River, the enemy holding Seltso.

The enemy flotilla was based on Puchega, with advanced gunboats between that place and Lipovets.

Enemy mines.—Three new lines of deep-sea mines were reported off Seltso.

12. *Mutiny of Russian Troops.*—On 7th July a mutiny broke out amongst the Russian troops of Dyer's Battalion, and the 4th North Russian Rifles also became affected. Fifty seamen under Commander F. G. Bramble, R.N., and a small Royal Marine Detachment under Lieutenant C. M. Sergeant, R.M., were landed at the request of the General Officer Commanding to assist in securing our position until the arrival of more British troops.

The enemy, who was evidently fully conversant with the situation, seized the opportunity to attack.

On the night of 7th/8th July the situation was critical, as British reinforcements had not arrived, and the enemy's gunboats were press-