

spread rapidly along the railway to beyond the Oxus. To deal with this rising, the Tashkent Bolsheviks despatched considerable forces, well equipped with artillery, machine guns and aeroplanes. The Transcaspian troops, who were without any such equipment, were forced back across the Oxus and were in danger of losing their hold on the Merv oasis, on which they depended not only for supplies but also for Turkoman support. They appealed for assistance from our force in North-East Persia, then under the command of Major-General W. Malleson, C.B., C.I.E., and on August 11th two machine guns with detachments were sent across the frontier to Bairam Ali, 15 miles east of Merv.

On August 12th the Bolsheviks drove the Transcaspian from the Bairam Ali position, and the withdrawal was continued through Merv as far as Dushak. In the official Transcaspian report of this fighting, it is admitted that but for the presence of our machine gun detachment, the retreat would have been a debacle.

It became evident that unless some further support was extended to the demoralised Transcaspian the Bolsheviks would recover the whole of Transcaspia as far as Krasnovodsk, where they would be able to get in touch with the Turkish forces then approaching Baku and with the Bolshevik troops at Astrakhan. As many troops as could be spared from East Persia were therefore sent into Transcaspia, and by August 25th our detachment at Kaakha amounted to 500 men. On August 28th the Bolsheviks attacked the Kaakha position in force, but mainly owing to the gallant and skilful conduct of our Indian detachment they were repulsed with heavy loss.

On August 29th a reinforcement of one company of the 1-4th Bn., Hampshire Regiment, and one section, 44th Battery, Royal Field Artillery, joined our force at Kaakha from Krasnovodsk. The period August 29th to September 10th was spent in improving the position and a Bolshevik attack on September 11th completely broke down under the accurate fire of the two British guns. A further attempt on September 18th was equally unsuccessful, but owing to the lack of sufficient cavalry we were prevented from reaping the full fruits of the victory. These successive defeats apparently completely destroyed the Bolshevik moral and the action of the 18th September was their last offensive against us for many months.

Meanwhile the imminent fall of Baku and the marked increase of Pan-Islamic propaganda throughout Transcaspia necessitated the despatch of further reinforcements, and on September 16th two squadrons of Indian cavalry

left Meshed for the front. The arrival of these additional troops made an offensive possible, and on October 14th the Bolshevik position at Dushak was attacked and captured with heavy loss to the enemy in men and material. The arrival of enemy reinforcements, which neither the Russians nor Turkomans were prepared to resist, necessitated the temporary withdrawal of our troops, but as a result of the action the Bolsheviks eventually abandoned Kushk and the whole of the Merv oasis.

On the 15th January, 1919, our force in Transcaspia was placed under the command of the General Officer Commanding, British Expeditionary Force, Constantinople; during this period no further operations of importance took place.

The force has since been withdrawn into North-East Persia, where it is co-operating with the Persian Government in protecting Khorasan from Bolshevik incursions.

EAST PERSIA CORDON AND LINE OF COMMUNICATION.

As explained in my despatch, dated the 13th September, 1918, our cordon of troops in East Persia had been extended early in the year as far north as Meshed. As the size of our force in North-East Persia increased owing to the situation in Transcaspia, this cordon was gradually developed into a line of communication, and in September, 1918, was placed under the orders of the General Officer Commanding, 4th (Quetta) Division. In February, 1919, railhead reached Duzrap from Mirjawa, and the road system runs thence through Neh, Birjand and Turbat-i-Haidari to Meshed, which became the headquarters of our force in North-East Persia after our withdrawal from Transcaspia. Beyond dealing with minor raids by local tribes, no operations have been undertaken on this line of communication during the period under review.

VI.—PROTECTION OF INDIAN COASTS.

Owing to the altered state of affairs brought about by the signing of the armistice, it was found possible in December, 1918, to suspend, with the concurrence of the Secretary of State and the Naval Commander-in-Chief, East Indies, both the precautionary stage in the defended ports, and the operation of the Indian Coastal Look-out Scheme. In a previous despatch I have acknowledged the valuable advice and assistance afforded to me by the Naval Commander-in-Chief in all matters connected with coast defence.

I have the honour to be,

SIR,

Your most obedient Servant,

C. C. MONRO, *General*,

Commander-in-Chief in India.

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