

CHAPTER XII.

THE OPERATIONS AT HILLAH.

THE effect of the reverse of the 24th July soon made itself felt at Hillah, but fortunately not until the defences of the place were put in order. So far the number of tribesmen who had risen had increased to 85,000 armed men, of whom rather less than half carried serviceable rifles, of which one in ten was a modern small-bore weapon. Others now hastened to join the insurrectionary forces, and by the 30th August, when all who wished or had been forced to take up arms had done so, the numbers with which we had to deal were as follows:—

Armed men, 131,020. Modern rifles, 59,805.

It must, however, be understood that the number of armed men does not actually represent those in the field, but the total strength of tribesmen who took part in the insurrection, all of whom, if not possessing modern rifles, carried old but serviceable weapons of that type.

The difficulty of keeping under arms a conglomeration of different tribesmen, even though bound together in some degree by religious feelings, must have been great, and so far as is known it was effected by the following means:—

The shaihs were given glowing accounts of the assistance in arms and money which Turkey was said to have promised, and some of the more wealthy among them, as well as the *saiyids*,¹ provided cash for the upkeep of the *harbiyaks* or armies, and for the necessary purchases of arms and ammunition.

¹ Reputed descendants of the Prophet.

But the funds which were required came mainly, if not entirely, from Iraq, where every available means of raising them was resorted to by the insurgents. Some of the methods employed were the following:—

(a) After the political evacuation of a district the tax-farmers were summoned by the shaihs and forced to surrender all taxes which had been collected. Thus Karbala alone handed over Rs. 70,000 (£8700 at this time).

(b) All existing tolls continued to be strictly enforced, and in many cases payment was accepted in lieu of money.

(c) A heavy tax was placed on cereals carried to Najaf for the consumption of the populace, which exceeded 30,000.

(d) Public subscriptions were opened in various towns, and the Ulama of Karbala and Najaf exhorted the populace to contribute for religious and patriotic reasons.

Sometimes, when engaged at a distance from their homes, tribesmen received one rupee per day for subsistence. But this expenditure put too heavy a strain on the war-chest to last for long, and in certain cases the insurgents were fed by the inhabitants of that part of the country in which they happened to be operating.

We must now turn again to Hillah, which is about three miles south of the ruins of Babylon, and stands among date gardens on both banks of the river, here about one hundred yards wide, and crossed by a bridge of fifteen boats. The main portion of the town is situated on the right bank, and was formerly surrounded by a brick wall, sixteen feet high, of which it is difficult now to find any trace. The population, which numbered 30,000 souls, had begun after the Manchester affair to show signs of restlessness. In consequence a proclamation was issued whereby their freedom of action and movement was restricted; and a perimeter, six miles in extent, which included the town, railway station, resources' wharf and aerodrome, was held. Outside the town and south of it, on the Kih road, the 2nd Euphrates Levy, with whom was Major C. A. Boyle, 11th (K.E.O.) Lancers, Inspector-General of

Arab and Kurdish Levies, had been doing useful work, besides ensuring the safe retreat of a number of stragglers from the Manchester column. By 6 P.M. on the 25th July the 2nd Battalion Royal Irish Rifles had arrived by train from Diwanayah, and the garrison of Hillah now consisted of the following troops:—

- 32nd Lancers (two squadrons).
- 35th Seinde Horse (two squadrons).
- 39th Battery R.F.A.
- 67th Company (2nd Q.V.O.) Sappers and Miners.
- 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment (240 rifles).
- 2nd Battalion Royal Irish Rifles (350 rifles).
- 8th Rajputs.
- 108th Infantry (3 British officers and 154 men).
- 2nd Euphrates Levy.

Of these troops the 32nd Lancers had been withdrawn on the 15th July from Kirkuk in order to take part in the operations.

On the 26th July the detachment of the 108th Infantry and a section of sappers and miners were sent to strengthen the garrison of Jarbuiyah bridge; and on the 28th the 131st (How.) Battery R.F.A., and the 116th Mahrattas (two companies) arrived from Diwanayah. After the 28th, it will be remembered, the cutting of the line south of Jarbuiyah prevented the evacuation of the force at Diwanayah until General Coningham himself brought it in.

As, after the action between Hillah and Kiff, it seemed unlikely that I should be in a position for many weeks to move any troops to or beyond Diwanayah, I had ordered that place to be evacuated, but the post at Jarbuiyah bridge was to be maintained. That bridge, a wooden structure, would, I was informed, take months to repair if seriously damaged, and the retention and protection of it by a force, so small that it could be spared without affecting major operations, would show the tribes that a return in that direction was intended. Later, as will appear in the narrative, I was obliged by circumstances to give it up.

On hearing that Hillah was now strongly garrisoned I felt no further anxiety for the place; and in order to keep the troops in good spirits, more especially after what had occurred to some of them on the 24th, I ordered the defence to be carried out with activity. Nothing particular happened there until the night of the 27th/28th July, when a feeble attack was made. Four nights later, on the 31st July/1st August, fortunately after the arrival of an ammunition train—the last train to get through from Baghdad for some weeks—a more serious effort was made by the insurgents.

During this attack, which had probably been arranged in collusion with the townspeople, the tribesmen, being repulsed on the northern face of the defences, which was on the right bank of the Hillah branch of the Euphrates, forced their way about 4 A.M. into the south end of the town, between a piquet of the 8th Rajputs and another of the Levy.

The latter piquet became enfiladed, and was forced to retire, which it did in good order, being taunted for fighting on the Government side by insurgents of the same tribes from which it was recruited. For a time heavy firing went on in the town, until a portion of the 8th Rajputs, under Colonel L. H. Abbot, came up, whereupon a counter-attack was made which led to the ejection of the intruders and the restoration of the situation.

To judge by the noise and shouting, which are the customary accompaniments of the martial efforts of the Arab tribesmen, the attack had been made in considerable strength, and it was later ascertained that the assailants were followed by a reserve which remained behind in the date gardens in readiness to exploit success. It was conjectured that the loss on the side of the Arabs must have been heavy, for, although like all semi-savages, they will run considerable risks in order to transport from the field all evidence of failure, one hundred and fifty-six dead were found. Our own loss was insignificant.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RETREAT FROM DIWANIYAH.

MEANWHILE the concentration of troops at Hillah was in progress, an operation on the successful issue of which I felt that our tenure of Mesopotamia and with it our position in North-West Persia hung. The necessity for avoiding delay had been expressly laid down, and had been conveyed in private communications, verbally, and by several telegrams to the G.O.C. 17th Division. I was prepared to sacrifice practically everything at Diwaniyah except those supplies which would be necessary for the force during its march to Hillah, and the ammunition, which could not be left behind. My anxiety to avoid the least delay was natural, and was due not only to the necessity for concentrating at Hillah, but to the danger which the troops might run through the marked predilection which the insurgents were showing everywhere for the destruction of railways. To have moved Brigadier-General Coningham's troops without the aid of the railway would have been impossible for the following reasons. The available road transport was quite insufficient to carry six days' rations for the whole force, which included 1120 railway personnel; while water amounting to 23,000 gallons, the sick, and a large quantity of ammunition, which would have filled three hundred carts and could not be abandoned to the Arabs, must be taken. Moreover, the lack of locomotives and rolling-stock due to the derailment of trains, and the temporary loss, for use between Baghdad and Diwaniyah, of everything of that description south of the latter place, was causing grave inconvenience in any troop or other

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movements which had to be carried out. Great as the task would be, it was within the bounds of possibility that the Arabs might tear up and damage the railway to such an extent that General Coningham's force might find itself marooned midway between Hillah and Diwaniyah, possibly at some waterless spot where the difficulty of further progress would, for much of it, be insuperable.

An axiom in war which I remember reading many years ago in Ropes's 'Waterloo Campaign' is that, "when there is any chance at all of the occurrence of an event which if it does happen will be fatal, it is folly to trust to the improbability of the case: every precaution should be taken; nothing that can avert a fatal calamity should be neglected, no matter how small may appear the chance of its happening." As the sequel will show, the event foreseen did actually occur, but fortunately not in so intense a form as it might have done.

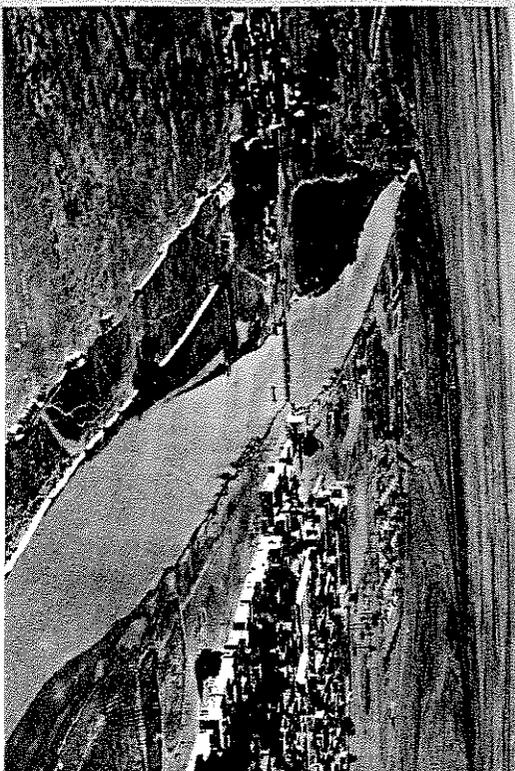
Meantime more railway destruction had been going on south of Hillah through the activities of the Albu Suldian tribe, which had thrown in its lot with the insurgents; and on the 27th a train *en route* from Diwaniyah to Hillah, between which places six trains in all had been derailed, became isolated some twenty-eight miles north of the former place at Guehan station. An effort was made to reach it from Diwaniyah, but the construction train could not get through, and dropped food for the whole force at Khan Jadwal bridge post, which would be the halting-place at the end of the first day's march. Next day an attempt was again made to reach Guehan and bring the isolated train to Diwaniyah, where, owing to the mistake that had been made of pushing forward large quantities of ammunition and supplies, trucks were badly needed; but this again failed, though it was ascertained that the troops at the former place had with them rations for ten days.

On the same day Brigadier-General Coningham—who has since told me that had the urgent need for haste, which had been the feature of my telegrams on the subject of the move, been passed on to him, he could have marched several

days earlier—received orders from the division directing him to withdraw to Hillah, bringing with him whatever he could load on the train which would accompany him.

Late at night he received my telegram, which ran, "Delay has jeopardised situation. Move at once with utmost rapidity consistent with preservation of order." This message had been repeated to his Divisional Commander.

At last the movement was on the point of beginning, and the withdrawal of the Assistant Political Officer, Captain W. F. Webb from Afaj—a small town on the Shatt-al-Dagharrah, near the remains of the ancient Sumerian city of Nippur—which was necessitated by the proposed evacuation of Diwaniyah, had been effected. On the 26th July it had come to his knowledge at his headquarters, which lay about twenty miles east of Diwaniyah, that a plot was being hatched to kidnap him and keep him as a hostage; and on the same date, as I could not spare an aeroplane to bring him to Diwaniyah, he was ordered to make the best arrangements he could to escape. One of the messengers who carried the order to him was killed on the way, and the other arrived at 10 P.M. instead of 6 P.M. The head of the local police was ordered to get the ponies ready and arrange for an escort, but ten minutes later he sent the disquieting news that the five policemen, whom he had thought could be trusted, had deserted, and had informed the local sheikh of the intended departure of Captain Webb. Fortunately the ponies were quickly got ready and brought to Captain Webb's house, which was situated on the left bank of the river opposite the town, and which was later razed to the ground by the insurgents. No time was lost in making a start, for it was not possible for the refugee to carry any of his property with him in his flight. Information of the intended evasion had, however, probably through spies at Diwaniyah, reached certain tribesmen who purposed to waylay Captain Webb at the Yusufyah canal; but luckily before arriving there a man was met who disclosed the position of the ambush. Thus the Assistant Political Officer, who like others had punctly



Diwaniyah and camp.



Brigadier-General Coningham's column between Ibn Ali and Guhan.

remained at his post until the eleventh hour, succeeded in reaching Diwanivah on the morning of the 27th.

On the 29th July truckage was allotted to each unit and department, besides the railway personnel and some thirteen Circassian and Armenian lady teachers; and a portion of the train was set apart as a hospital for sick and wounded. A few trucks with an engine were converted into a protected train carrying two armoured cars and two machine-guns, which was to accompany the rearguard of the force. By nightfall everything was completed, including the loading of six days' rations and as much water in tanks as could be carried.

The force under Brigadier-General Coningham was composed as follows:—

- 37th Lancers (two squadrons),
- 97th Battery R.F.A. (less one section),
- 131st (How.) Battery R.F.A.,
- 132nd (How.) Battery R.F.A. (one section),
- 45th Pack Battery,
- 61st Company, 2nd (Q.V.O.) Sappers and Miners,
- 45th (Rattray's) Sikhs,
- 87th Punjabis,
- 1/99th (Deccan) Infantry,
- 1/10th Gurkha Rifles,
- and certain details.

It was reinforced as it proceeded north by the following troops:—

- 131st (How.) Battery R.F.A. (one section).
- 114th Maharrattas (one and a half companies).
- 1/116th Maharrattas (one company).
- 1/32 Sikh Pioneers (less one and a quarter companies).
- 108th Infantry (half a company).
- 86th Carnatic Infantry.

These troops were holding posts on the line of march, or were cut off in the isolated train at Guclan.

At 6.30 A.M. on the 30th the withdrawal from Diwanivah began, at which hour two aeroplanes from Baghdad ap-

peared and dropped bombs on some mounted Arabs. Some of the latter, about fifty in number, charged the protected train, not realising the sting which it carried in its tail, and few of these escaped alive. As the force moved off crowds of Arabs, keeping now at a respectful distance, showed themselves, and though a few of them fired into the column at intervals, no incident of importance occurred on this day's march. At 4.30 P.M. Khan Jadwal bridge was reached, and the force halted for the night.

So far the line had not been torn up, but on the 31st, soon after reaching Ibn Ali, after a march of nine miles, word was received that about one and a half miles further on there was a break of three hundred and fifty yards, and beyond that a badly-damaged bridge.

As the force moved north the difficulties increased daily, and on the 1st August the distance marched was only five miles. Hundreds of sleepers and many rails had to be removed by working parties from behind the rear-most train and carried forward to repair the gaps, a labour which, under the burning sun and frequent blinding dust-storms, occupied many hours. Advantage was taken of the slow progress of the column to deal with several villages in the vicinity of the line, the inhabitants of which were known to be responsible for the damage. Some of these villages, those nearest the line, were burned, and others farther off were shelled. The work of repair was at this stage going on from two directions, as the isolated train at Guehan, from the vicinity of which the Arabs had cleared, was slowly working its way south.

By 8 A.M. on the 2nd August the two trains were only a mile apart, and under the able guidance of Major Imbhoek of the railway staff numerous breaks, extending for a distance of four miles, were repaired, and the column with its trains reached Guehan at 4.30 P.M. Here the tanks were refilled, and early next day a force under Colonel McVean of the 45th Sikhs went forward, escorting a construction train which had orders to repair the line as far as possible towards the important Jarbuiyah bridge. Frequent reports

of concentrations of Arabs reached General Coningham as he moved slowly northward, and though indications of an attack were seen, beyond some desultory fire, such as occurred daily and caused a few casualties, no engagement took place. Owing to the considerable number of tribesmen in the vicinity, Colonel McVean's column was ordered back, so that the whole force might be concentrated at night at Guehan; and to protect the now repaired line ahead during the hours of darkness, field and machine-guns were laid, and fired occasionally.

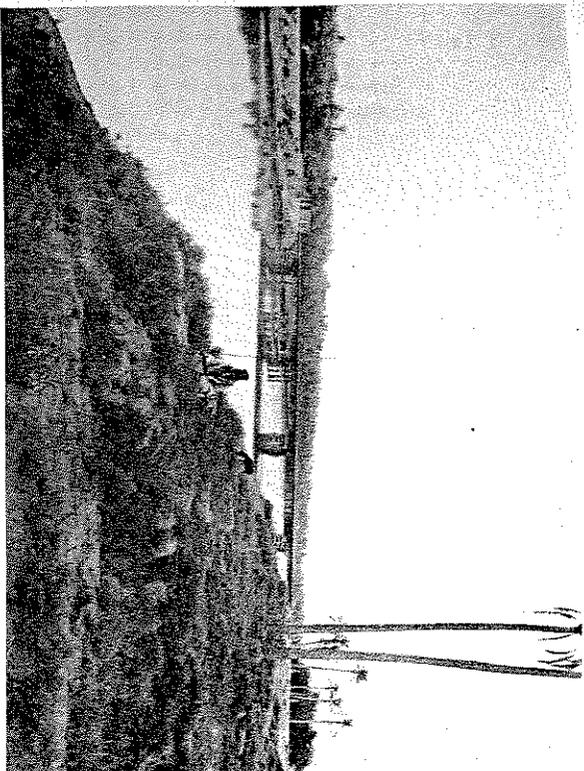
On the 4th the troops moved forward, the combined trains now covering a length of nearly a mile. The line beyond that part which had been repaired on the previous day was, as usual, greatly damaged, and, to add to the difficulties, the heaviest of the locomotives and some waggons left the track, and five and a half hours were required to replace them. The excessive heat and the rapidity with which the construction had necessarily to be carried out had caused the track to buckle, and so brought about the accident. The derailment of the engine proved to be more unfortunate than appeared at first sight, for the insurgents, taking advantage of the delay, tore up portions of the line ahead, which for a distance of some ten miles had not before been tampered with, and the advance of the column was consequently retarded by nearly forty-eight hours. Again advantage was taken of the delay to deal with the villages, and this day for the first time no casualties were suffered. Towards nightfall the force halted midway between Guehan and Jarbuiyah, a point where there is no water, as the river between those two places makes a wide bend, of which the railway is the chord.

On the 5th progress was slow, owing to the handiwork of the insurgents on the previous night, for much time was consumed in repairing the many breaks which occurred at intervals along the line. It was expected that the Arabs would make a stand on the south side of Jarbuiyah bridge, as, once beyond that point, no special obstacle would lie between the column and Hillah. Reports, which I sus-

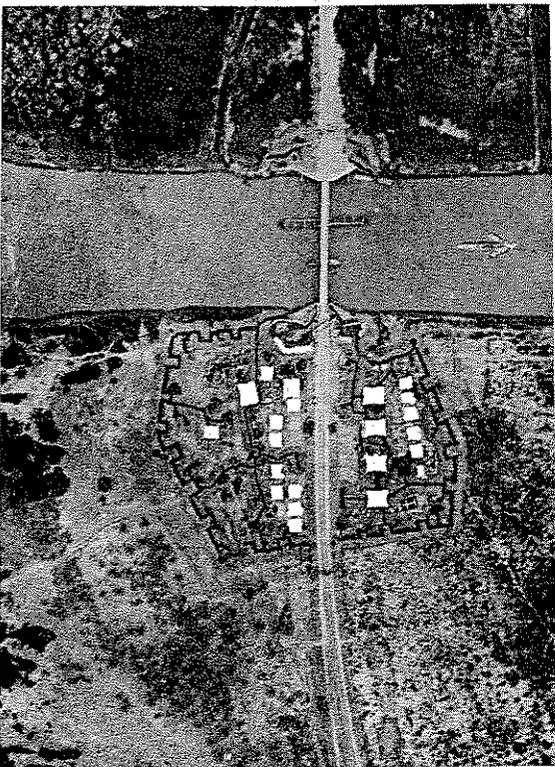
pected were exaggerated, had come in of an attack on the garrison at the bridge, which consisted of four British officers, six Indian officers, and two hundred and ninety-seven other ranks of the 108th Infantry and 32nd Pioneers, besides ninety-four followers, the whole under the command of Major H. S. Mitchell of the latter regiment. These reports, which seem to have been believed at Hillah, had caused a message to be sent to Brigadier-General Coningham directing him to send part of his force in advance of the remainder to the bridge, with supplies, of which the garrison was running short. A copy of the telegram had come to my headquarters, as, after the Manchester affair, the delegation of authority for movements of troops was much restricted; and as there was no proof of an Arab repulse, nor that, as was stated, the tribesmen had "no more stomach for the fight," I counter-ordered the instructions contained in it by wireless telegrams to Hillah and General Coningham.

What had actually occurred at Jarbuiyah was that an attempt had been made on the night of the 24th July to destroy the bridge by floating burning logs down the river with the intention of setting light to the wooden trestles. The garrison, who later stretched a cable up-stream of the bridge to prevent further attempts to damage it, had done well in defeating the evil purpose of the insurgents, more especially as the bridge, like other places on the line, was ill-sited from a defensive point of view. In this small affair, which became exaggerated into a serious fight, in which the ground in front of the post was stated to be littered with Arab dead, Major Mitchell, who behaved with creditable coolness, and seven of his men were wounded.

As General Coningham's force approached the bridge the cavalry reported that numbers of Arabs were holding the Jarbuiyah canal, which runs roughly parallel to and west of the line of march along the railway, and that several bunds or banks and a village on the eastern flank were held in force. Two hours of reparation work still remained to be done before the night camp could be reached, and



Jarbuiyah Bridge, looking down-stream.



Jarbuiyah Post, 4th August 1920.

in the meantime the enemy between it and the column must be driven off. The 87th Punjabis were now left to guard the train, and the remainder of the force was distributed as follows by its commander:—

One squadron 37th Lancers, the 45th Pack Battery, and the 99th (Deccan) Infantry were ordered to move under Captain O. Masters, 99th (Deccan) Infantry, along the Hashimiyah canal, and make good its junction with the bank at (a).

The 86th Carnaticos were directed to form a right flank guard, and close on the advanced guard, which was under Lieut.-Colonel Scott, 1/10th Gurkha Rifles, and capture Shurufah village.

The advanced guard, consisting of the 1/10th Gurkha Rifles, two and a half companies of the 114th and 1/116th Maharattas, was ordered to secure the river bend at (b) and the bank where it crosses the railway at (c).

The artillery was to assist the advanced guard and fire on all villages where the insurgents were reported to be concentrated; and the 45th Sikhs remained in reserve.

At 8.45 A.M. the advance began, and half an hour later Captain Masters reported that seven hundred tribesmen were closing on his left rear—the usual Arab tactics—and asked for artillery support, which was promptly given.

Meantime the advanced guard reached, without opposition, a point a thousand yards from the river, while the 86th Carnaticos pushed on, being fired into from their right.

At 11 A.M. the advanced guard had secured the river bank, and the 86th Carnaticos had occupied Shurufah village, when Captain Masters reported that he had surprised three hundred Arabs, and catching them at close range with Lewis guns, had inflicted on them seventy casualties.

The Maharattas were sent at 11.30 A.M. to capture the bank at (c), which they effected an hour later. The 10th Gurkhas then crossed the river, and occupied the village of Diyar-albu-Said, killing some fifty Arabs in the process, while many more, flying before them, fell to the Lewis guns of the Maharattas.

six locomotives and two hundred and fifty-one vehicles, reaching that place at 10.15 P.M. Next day the remainder of the column, which had halted for the night, continued its march to Hillah, where it arrived without incident.

The operation of withdrawal, owing to the time required for repairing the railway, had taken eleven days, an average of only five and a half miles being covered daily. The prolongation of the time allotted in the plan for the march might have proved serious, for only a supply of six days' rations for the whole force was carried, and an additional day's supply, as mentioned, had been sent to Khan Jadwal. But the delays which soon made their appearance showed that the food available must last for several days longer than was anticipated, and issues were at once restricted.

The weather had been most trying, shade temperature averaging 107 and rising sometimes several degrees higher; and as no cover had been carried for the troops, who were for some twelve hours daily exposed to the full glare of the sun's rays, it speaks well for their endurance that, under such conditions, the number of sick was small.

The withdrawal had been much helped by the daily appearance from Baghdad of aeroplanes which bombed the tribesmen who followed the column, and dropped information concerning concentrations which threatened it with attack, as well as the state of the railway ahead. The complete success of the operation, however, was mainly due to the resolution and resource displayed by its commander, and the confidence which all ranks had learned to repose in him. Even the Arabs seem to have been inspired by feelings of respect and awe. There were some among them who are credited with not having understood how the force with its trains a mile in length moved across the desert. Only tribesmen near the line had shared in the tearing up of the permanent way, and when these others saw the wide spaces innocent of rails and sleepers and heard that the train had crossed the desert, the man who led the column was regarded as a wizard.

My feelings at this time may perhaps be of interest to those who served in my command, so I record them here.

From the date when the news was received of the disaster to the Manchester column until the message came announcing Brigadier-General Cunningham's arrival at Jariyah bridge, a period of twelve days, I can recall in my military career no cycle—and I use that word advisedly—of quite such tense anxiety, not that it cost me one single hour of sleep. From 1914 to the Armistice, except for an occasional brief spell of leave, I was never absent from the Western Front, and my troops often held ground which in the parlance of the time was called "unhealthy." But these twelve days at Baghdad in 1920, days that seemed like years, surpassed all earlier ones in the mental strain which they imposed. Presumably a soldier should possess a soul above anxiety, but I have never read or heard of such a being. One can steel oneself to hide one's real feelings and appear somewhat as Napoleon said a general should be—"neither elated by good news, nor depressed by bad." Even that is not always easy to achieve; but I think that beyond Brigadier-General Stewart, who knew my inmost thoughts at this most trying time, no one guessed the strain to which I was being continually subjected. Not only at this period but for several weeks the situation of affairs was critical, and visions of the siege and fall of Khartum sometimes fitted through my mind.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RECOVERY OF THE HINDIYAH BARRAGE.

IN anticipation of the return of Brigadier-General Coningham's column to Hillah I had given orders for certain operations to begin directly that event occurred. With this object two columns were prepared as follows:—

55th Brigade Column, under Brigadier-General H. A. Walker, O.M.G., D.S.O.,
 32nd Lancers (less two squadrons),
 97th Battery R.F.A. (less one section),
 131st (How.) Battery R.F.A. (less one section),
 45th Pack Battery,
 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment,
 8th Rajputs,
 87th Punjabis,
 Details of the 114th and 1/116th Maharattas,
 1/32nd Sikh Pioneers (one company),
 and certain details.

The second column was commanded by Lieut.-Colonel H. L. Scott, D.S.O., M.C., 1/10th Gurkha Rifles, and consisted of—

35th Scinde Horse (two squadrons),
 97th Battery R.F.A. (one section),
 131st (How.) Battery R.F.A. (one section),
 1/99th Infantry,
 1/10th Gurkha Rifles,
 and certain details.

Both columns contained troops taken from General Coningham's force, which was badly in need of a rest.

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The situation, however, was one that admitted of no delay, and the first column assembled on the northern outskirts of Hillah on the afternoon of the 9th, the date on which General Coningham's column arrived at that place; that under Lieut.-Colonel Scott following in the same direction on the 10th.

I had decided to operate next in a northerly direction for the following reasons. I anticipated that the insurgents would conclude that my next effort would be the relief of the garrison of Kutah, which had been invested for nearly three weeks, and that they would not be found in strength north of Hillah. Kutah I knew had a fair supply of rations, and also, through the foresight of the Political Officer, Major Norbury, other comestibles, such as dates, which though possibly unpalatable after a time, would at least serve to keep the garrison alive until the troops arrived for its relief. I therefore felt no immediate anxiety for its safety, and had determined that, come what might, I would not start premature operations, but that when they began they must be carried on without fail to a satisfactory conclusion.

In another direction, that of Baghdad, the defences were still incomplete, and even after the arrival there on the 10th August of the first reinforcing battalion from India, the 2/7th Rajputs, which had landed at Basrah on the 6th, the Capital would be inadequately garrisoned. Frequent reports had come in regarding concentrations on the right bank of the Tigris, which, it was understood, were a prelude to an attempt to capture Baghdad; but I neither felt justified in hazarding my limited force at a distance from the Capital, nor in exposing the latter to the risks of a *coup-de-main*. It was essential, too, to repair and blockhouse the railway line from Baghdad to Hillah before putting into execution the plan for the relief of Kutah, as supplies of all kinds would be required at Hillah for that operation, besides a bridging train from Baghdad to ensure a passage across the Euphrates, which at Kutah is two hundred and fifty yards in width.

But the main reason which actuated my decision as to

the locality of the coming operations was the importance of securing the Hindiyah Barrage and the town of Musayrib, which lies some eight miles further up the river. The capture of these two places, besides giving me water control, would secure command of two important crossings over the Euphrates, the possession of which had allowed the insurgents to conduct with impunity raids against the railway from the country which lies to the west of the river.

With regard to the first of these places, the Hindiyah Barrage, it is necessary at this point to make a somewhat lengthy digression. This great dam, which stands some sixteen miles north-west of Hillah, at the point where the Euphrates divides into two branches, which are known by the names of Hindiyah¹ and Hillah, was erected by the Turkish Government between 1910 and 1913 on the advice of Sir William Willcocks. Here, by a system of regulators, the waters of the Euphrates can be directed down either branch at will. I had been impressed with the desirability of maintaining a post at the bifurcation, so as to have control over the point where the water distribution was carried out by officers of the Irrigation Department; but, as I have already stated, this would have involved another detachment, and I received no encouragement from the civil administration, who may have imagined that military control might militate against the payment of revenue. When news came that the irrigation officers had been forced to leave their posts owing to the rising of the tribes, I made more inquiries as to any evil results that might follow, and was informed, correctly as it turned out, that the last thing the Arabs would do would be to damage the structure. Apparently the custom was for the water to be allowed to flow down each branch alternately for a week at a time, a routine which allowed of the crops of various natures along or in the vicinity of one branch of the river being irrigated, while those near the other branch sustained no damage until they in turn

¹ Sir William Willcocks identifies this branch as the Ghion mentioned in Genesis ii. 13.



Hindiyah barrage from the west.



Hillah from the south-east.

received their share of the water. On studying the 'Hand-book of Mesopotamia,' however, I found it stated that "the branch could be deprived of all its water at any season by closing of the regulators." That is to say, by closing the regulators at the top of the Hillah branch, not only all the water could be cut off from the town of that name, but the stations on the railway thence to Baghdad would, through the drying up of the canals leading to them from the river, suffer equally. This was not all, for, if Kutlah were to be relieved, the route that would be followed by the troops was watered by canals leading from the Hillah branch. The early recovery of the barrage was clearly most desirable, but it was thought by those who had knowledge of the subject that the tribes would, even in our absence from the regulators, continue to carry out the routine of water-flow to which they were accustomed. Both the Tigris and Euphrates were, however, very low in 1920, and it was not impossible that, in order to force the troops to give up Hillah, the tribes might sacrifice part of their crops, though the dissensions that would certainly have followed would have led to feuds among them.

Until the barrage was recovered alarming reports came in from time to time from Hillah as to the expected lack of water, or abundance which would break the river banks and flood the town and country. But neither of these evils occurred. There was a time, however, when I thought it possible that I might have to withdraw the garrison at Hillah and station it at Musayib, where it would be situated on the river and on the direct road between Baghdad and Karbala.

With the object then of recovering the barrage, the 55th Brigade Column moved on the 10th August to Khan Mahawil *en route* for Musayib, and next day the small force under Lieut.-Colonel Scott marched along the railway, repairing it and carrying out punitive measures, while it covered the construction of blockhouses at intervals of half a mile. Hillah was left with a garrison of two squadrons of the 37th Lancers, the 39th Battery, the 132nd (How.)

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Battery, the 2nd Battalion Royal Irish Rifles, and the 45th Sikhs.

The movement of the two columns took place during the hottest season of the year—a season, be it remembered, during which no continuous operations in Mesopotamia

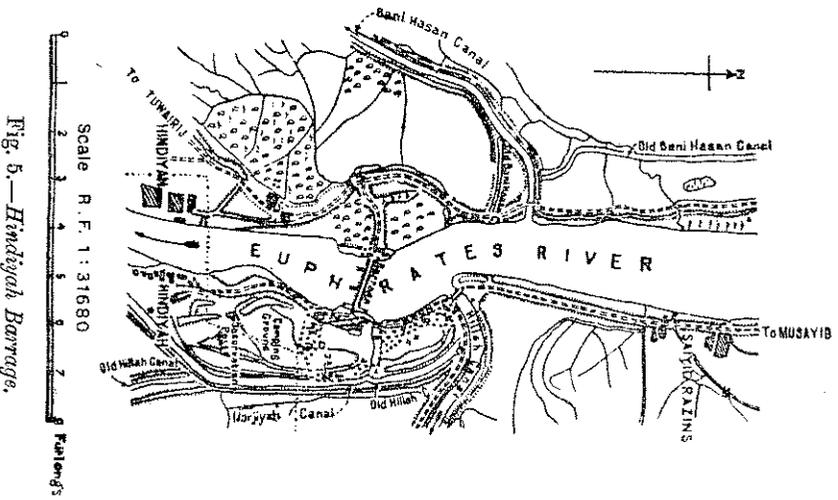
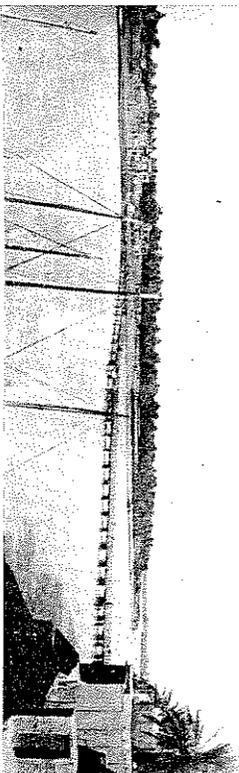
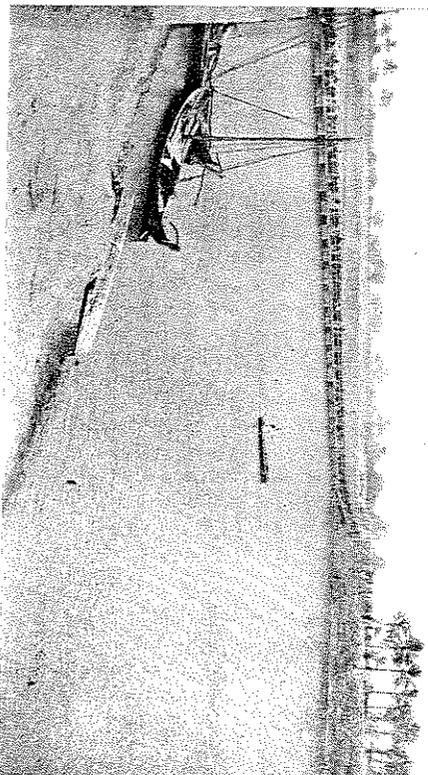


Fig. 5.—Hindiyah Barrage.

since our arrival there in 1914 had taken place. But the selection of the season did not lie with us, nor could the operations be postponed. These facts were evident to the troops engaged, and were accepted in the proper spirit. To add to the discomfort of the column on the first day of movement, it was found that the Arabs had cut off the



Bridge at Musayib from left bank.



Bridge at Tuwairij from right bank.

water west of Khan Nasiriyah, where the force passed a trying night.

On the 11th and 12th some opposition was encountered, but a bold advance by the 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, which, though weak in numbers after its trying experience on the 24th July, had been added to the column, forced the insurgents to retire with loss, and Musayib was occupied on the latter date.

Here, as before mentioned, is a crossing over the Euphrates, at this point two hundred to three hundred yards wide, consisting of a bridge of boats which is much used by pilgrims and others on their way from Baghdad to Karbala; and the town, which is surrounded by palm gardens, presents a pleasing aspect, which is due to the trees and its situation on both banks of the river. About one-third of the bridge of boats was found to be burnt, and as the passage here across the Euphrates was not required for military operations, repairs were not undertaken for some time, and orders were shortly after issued that all communication and the transmission of goods between the town and Karbala must cease.

At Musayib the 8th Rajputs were left as garrison, and on the 13th the insurgents, who stood between the column and the Hindiyah Barrage, were driven off, and that important place was occupied, the 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, with two 18-pr. guns, being allotted as garrison.

The position at the bifurcation of the Euphrates at Hindiyah was one of great strength for passive defence even before the barrage was constructed. But since that great work came into existence the double wet ditch on the eastern side, formed by the Hillah branch and the Jarjiyah canal, and the improbability of attack by a force armed with guns, made the site with a little labour impregnable. Few more favourable spots could be chosen for a double bridgehead, for on the eastern side the heaped-up spoil from the barrage excavation provided an elongated mound some thirty to forty feet in height, from which point of vantage the flat country for several miles on all sides is overlooked. The barrage itself, which would serve

to connect the defensive works on both sides of the Hindiyah branch, by which name the main river is called from this point for some distance southwards, is a broad brick dam and bridge combined, which could not easily be damaged or destroyed. The great advantage offered by the position was the ease and speed with which it could be made defensible, and the small size of the garrison required to hold it.

The necessary work was soon executed by the 2nd Manchester Regiment; infantry posts, which were protected by barbed wire, being held by a minimum of men by day, but at night in strength.

In addition to the two 18-pr. guns left with the defence, I sent later a 6-in. howitzer and a 60-pr. gun from the 5th Battery R.G.A. at Baghdad, a section of which battery did useful work in conjunction with the 15th Sikhs in the defence of the Diyalah bridge near Baqubah. These heavier weapons were employed to harass the insurgents and support the isolated post which was later made near the head of the Husainiyah canal.

As a place of temporary rest for troops fatigued with operations the barrage served a useful purpose, for the defence duties were light and the chances of attack remote; while the river, with its facilities for bathing and fishing, appealed equally to all ranks, British and Indian.

The occupation of Musayib and the barrage gave us control, as a means of communication between those places, of the broad embankment which follows the left bank of the Euphrates, and has a command of several feet over the surrounding country. This bank was made by the British between 1917 and 1919 with the object of keeping the river within bounds on its eastern side.

On the 14th August, the day following the capture of the barrage, punitive measures were undertaken along the left bank of the Husainiyah canal, which leaves the Euphrates three miles up-stream from that point. This canal carries water to Karbala, which is sixteen miles distant to the west on the edge of the Syrian desert, and the greatest of the Shiaah centres of pilgrimage. Its chief

shrine is that of Husain, the son of 'Ali, whose tomb, as well as that of his half-brother Abbas, is here. At Karbala, which is a hotbed of sedition, ten agitators, who included the son of the premier mujtahid,¹ Muhammad Mirza Taqi, had been arrested on the 22nd June, some infantry and a section of guns having been sent from Hillah to overawe the city while the police did their work.

As Karbala was responsible in no small degree for the insurrection, I was anxious to seize the regulator, which is some two hundred yards from the river, and make the inhabitants feel the discomfort of being deprived of water; but unfortunately it was considered that the force available was insufficient to admit of the detachment of even a platoon, and not until a month had passed was the regulator closed and guarded by blockhouses. When I inquired later as to the effect this action had produced I was informed that, by digging wells in the canal bed, sufficient water of a slightly brackish nature was obtainable, but that the inhabitants had felt some inconvenience and their supply of vegetables had suffered. Nevertheless, though my informants on the spot did their best to pooh-pooh my efforts to make their holy city "dry," I have strong reasons for believing that the effect of closing the regulator fell little short of my expectations. Apart from the hardships endured, the moral pressure exerted on the inhabitants by this demonstration of my power to deprive them of what was vital for their existence must have been considerable, for the posts guarding the regulator were attacked with determination on several occasions, on one of which Lieutenant G. H. Seater of the 8th Rajputs was killed. A small column, which operated on the 14th August on the right of the canal, in combination with the left-bank column, among the troops of which the 32nd Lancers did particularly well, met a considerable number of insurgents, who suffered so heavily that no attempt was made to interfere with the withdrawal of both columns.

Meanwhile Lieut.-Colonel Scott's force carried out daily

¹ Shiaah religious leader.

operations of a similar nature while covering repairs to the railway and the construction and occupation of forty-five blockhouses.

From Baghdad also an organisation, under Brigadier-General G. A. F. Sanders, commanding the 53rd Infantry Brigade, which eventually comprised the garrisoning by five battalions of some three hundred blockhouses and twenty-five railway stations, distributed along two hundred and fifty miles of railway, began working on the 6th August on the Hillah line.

On an urgent appeal from the Assistant Political Officer at Mahmudiyah, a village and railway station on that route, twenty-five miles from Baghdad, which was followed by almost daily reports of an alarming and exaggerated nature, two companies of the 13th Rajputs had been sent on the 29th July to garrison that place. Further appeals were made for reinforcements, but they were not met. Gradually the blockhouses from both termini approached that station, and by the 16th August met at Khan Hiswah, when the trains—after a cessation for three weeks of all communication except by wireless telegraph or aeroplane—ran through from Baghdad to Hillah with a selection of the articles most needed. Shortly afterwards, as it came to my knowledge that propaganda, to the effect that Hillah and Kutah had been captured by the Arabs, was being spread among the Muntafiq to our disadvantage, it was arranged to run a train weekly for ordinary passengers from Baghdad to the former place and back.

On the 23rd and 24th August respectively the columns returned to Hillah, after having carried out punitive operations of a thorough nature, which included the destruction of thirty-three mud villages, all of which were known to have harboured insurgents and those who had cut the railway line.

Hillah in the meantime had, as before, not been left alone. It is a place which is difficult to defend, owing to the dense palm-groves and gardens, some enclosed within high mud walls, which surround it, and it was found necessary to make clearings of considerable extent. Eventu-

ally a defended perimeter, comprising thirty-two blockhouses connected by a wire entanglement, was constructed, and these, although frequently attacked, were never taken.

The principal effort of the insurgents had been made on the 21st August, when it became evident to the garrison that an attack in force was contemplated and impending. On the morning of that date, while the work of clearing the palm-groves was in progress to the south of the town on the left bank of the river, a covering party of the 45th Sikhs became engaged. At first only a few tribesmen opened fire, but in the afternoon they appeared in greater strength, and advanced with unusual boldness. The 45th Sikhs, however, with their customary stubbornness, held their ground, and as the Arabs offered good targets they were severely punished. Simultaneously an attack was delivered on that portion of the southern face of the perimeter which was situated on the right bank of the river, where only a few men of the 2nd Battalion Royal Irish Rifles were posted. Here also the insurgents, who were reinforced by others from the left bank when the attack there failed, made no impression, and were repulsed by gun, rifle, and machine-gun fire.

Besides their losses in this affray and those inflicted by the columns that had operated under Brigadier-General Walker and Lieut.-Colonel Scott, the Arabs south and north of Hillah would soon, through our possession of the barrage, begin to feel the inconvenience of the policy of water domination, for the rice crops of the considerable Shamiyah tribes could be deprived of irrigation and be ruined; while the Bani Hassan and Jarirah canals, which water the land west and east respectively of the Hindiyyah branch, were blocked at the same central point. Along the railway line, too, the General Officer Commanding the 17th Division arranged that all canals, except the Khan Mahawi, were closed where they were commanded by the line of blockhouses on the railway, and the water was where possible diverted down the line. Thus all the country east of the railway, except that watered by the last-mentioned canal,

whence supplies were being brought in by the inhabitants, was deprived of water.

I was now in a position to operate for the relief of Kutah, and from a purely military point of view I should have preferred to continue putting pressure on the insurgents who inhabit the country south of Baghdad, in which that place lies. Here it was clear that the focus of the insurrection was to be found. Events elsewhere, however, made it advisable and indeed imperative to transfer the troops to another area where I proposed to begin operating on the 1st September.

While preparations for this operation were in progress such troops as could be spared were given a few days' rest, and on the 26th August I moved the 34th Brigade Column, under Brigadier-General Coningham, from Hillah in a south-easterly direction. The column, which contained two battalions that had taken part in the operations which led to the capture of the Hindiyah Barrage and had only returned to Hillah two days earlier, was composed as follows :—

37th Lancers (less two squadrons),
 39th Battery R.F.A.,
 131st (How.) Battery R.F.A. (less one section),
 67th Company, 2nd (Q.V.O.) Sappers and Miners,
 45th (Rattray's) Sikhs,
 1/99th (Deccan) Infantry,
 1/116th Mahraffas,
 1/10th Gurkha Rifles,
 1/32nd Sikh Pioneers (one company),
 17th Machine Gun Battalion (one section),
 2nd Euphrates Levy (three troops),
 and certain details.

It will be remembered that I had left a post at Jarbuiyah to protect the important railway bridge at that place; but I now found myself, not altogether unexpectedly, in no position to spare troops to hold it, nor was transport available with which to keep the post supplied with rations which would have to be sent to it from time to time. More-

over, the continued spread of the insurrection and the proclamation of a Jihad or holy war about the 6th August showed that this project would have to be deferred for some months. I therefore ordered the withdrawal of the post.

Brigadier-General Coningham's column found that the railway line had been still more damaged than was the case at the time of the withdrawal from Diwaniyah. The country at one point had been flooded, and the only road possible was the slight railway embankment, which had to be improved and used as a causeway. This resulted in delay, and it was not found possible to reach Jarbuiyah in one day. Some opposition was expected, as the Arabs well knew the value of the bridge, and doubtless hoped in time to starve its garrison into surrender. But no determined resistance was met with, and a force of some two thousand Arabs, which had thrown itself across the line of march, was outflanked by the cavalry, with which worked the three troops of the 2nd Euphrates Levy, and disappeared before the guns and infantry arrived.

On the 27th Jarbuiyah was reached, where it was found that the 86th Carnatic had at first been harassed by the insurgents, but, after causing them the loss of seven killed and four wounded, no further attacks had been made. On the following day a halt was made in order to deal with the large village of Imann Hamzah. This was attacked and captured with little difficulty, for the Abu Sulhan tribe, in whose territory it lies, and who have some reputation as warriors, showed no keenness for the fray, and melted away before the fire of the artillery.

On the 29th the column arrived at Hillah, enlivening its march by dealing with the villages *en route*.