

these disadvantages were considered to be outweighed by the advantage that would result from possessing the power of evacuating casualties, carrying medical comforts, water, and supplies, as well as furnishing a mobile hospital for exhausted men or those who fell victims to heat-stroke.

On the morning of the 21st July, after marching into the town with a representative column, which included the 2nd Battalion Royal Irish Rifles, the 1/10th Gurkha Rifles, some Royal Artillery and Royal Engineers, the evacuation of the garrison was carried out, and the whole force fell back to the ground where it had fought two days before.

On the 22nd, after more delay owing to a locomotive breaking down, the force moved northwards at 5.30 A.M., the Arabs keeping at a respectful distance, but opening fire on three sides. About two hours later, under cover of a dust-storm, a large party of tribesmen fell upon the rearguard, which was formed of the 87th Punjabis. The disorganisation which ensued, and which disturbed the formation of the 45th Sikhs, was increased by the cavalry, who, without warning, galloped through the rearguard so as to clear its front. For a brief space the column was in great danger, more especially as its commander could see nothing for the dust; but three companies of the 2nd Battalion Royal Irish Rifles, under Lieut.-Colonel A. D. N. Merriman, were hastily despatched to restore the situation and re-form the rearguard, while the train and transport moved on to the midway halting-place. After this affair the Arabs, who have a preference for fighting within their own tribal boundaries, ceased to harass the column, which was assembled at Diwaniyah by the 25th July.

CHAPTER X.

THE DISASTER TO THE MANCHESTER COLUMN.

My intention, which had been communicated on the 19th to Major-General Leslie, who commanded the 17th Division, was to send a column of two battalions of infantry and other arms from Hillah to Kifl as soon as possible after Fumathah was relieved. These troops would be followed by others from Diwaniyah; and the relief of the detachment of the 108th Infantry at Kutah, which I had declined to strengthen to the equivalent of a battalion on the appeal of the Political Officer, and which included some smaller detachments from other places whence they had fortunately been withdrawn in time, would be undertaken. The fact of having a garrison at Kufah was, as in the case of most detachments, a disadvantage from a military point of view, as, should it become invested, its relief would interfere with initiative. The town itself lies thirty-three miles south of Hillah, and for twenty-one miles of that distance a two-feet six-inch gauge railway ran as far as Kifl; but the line had only a small quantity of rolling-stock, and was of comparatively little use for military purposes. On every account I was anxious to remove the garrison to Hillah, but that procedure, undesirable at first for political reasons, soon became impossible on military grounds. To have done so would have removed a restraining influence upon the city of Najaf, and would certainly have hastened the hostile intervention of the tribes on this section of the Euphrates. Moreover, so long as the operations for the relief of Rumai-thah were in progress, the withdrawal of the detachments would have uncovered, though at a considerable distance,

one flank of the line of communication which was vital to the relief column. Kufah affords a good example of the difficulties that arise where military and political interests clash, or do so in part, for in this case there were advantages and disadvantages from both points of view in having a garrison there.

The Political Officer, I have noticed on many occasions, and I refer to the soldier qua-political, seems to lose all sense of military principles soon after he joins the civil administration—assuming that he knows them—although the self-same principles apply to administrative, diplomatic, and military affairs. If permitted, he would like to scatter broadcast the forces, often small in number, which are available for the maintenance of order. In fact he sees no harm in being weak everywhere and strong nowhere. He seems to overlook the fairly obvious fact that isolated troops generally require large forces to rescue them if they become beleaguered, and relies on his political prestige and acumen, such as they may happen to be, to effect their release from a dangerous situation before it becomes quite hopeless. I would warn those who may have to deal with situations such as arose in Mesopotamia in 1920, to be on their guard, for they may expect to receive daily, sometimes oftener, urgent appeals to send troops here, there, and everywhere, which, it is represented, will achieve by their presence what an army later could not do. Sometimes a response to these appeals—and I do not for a moment doubt their *bona fide* nature, though there were cases where the necessity for help was exaggerated, or proved to be so owing to the temperament of the individual who applied for it—would help to stave off greater trouble. They must, however, be treated with discrimination, and with the motto *fastina lente* in one's mind.

As early as the 11th July the stationmaster at Kif had reported that attacks on the railway station, permanent way, and telegraphs were probable, and on the same date the railway authorities ordered the staff of the line to withdraw, arrangements, however, being made to run such trains as were required. Next day, at the instigation of

the Political Officer at Hillah, the staff returned to Kif; but on the 23rd the station was attacked, and the staff captured, and a train which had left Hillah on the morning of that date was stopped by the Political Officer and ordered to return, the line then being definitely abandoned.

Three days earlier Kufah was known to be practically invested, and on the morning of the 23rd I told the General Officer Commanding the 17th Division, who had come to Baghdad to see me, that the situation was far from satisfactory, and that the mixed column, which I had arranged should proceed to Kif, must be increased by two battalions, these being furnished from the troops of the Rumaiethah Relief Column. I impressed on him, as I had before done in writing, the urgent necessity which existed for concentrating at Hillah, with the utmost speed, all troops which were south of that place, excepting possibly the detachment which, if circumstances should develop satisfactorily, I might decide to leave at Diwaniyah. It had been my intention to operate against the Daghahah tribes which inhabit the country immediately east of Diwaniyah, and which had given much trouble by frequently cutting the railway line. The situation, however, did not permit of time being spent on what was really a subsidiary operation while the seat of the evil still remained untouched.

At this time there were at Hillah, which is some sixty miles from Baghdad, and was the base for operations undertaken in the direction of both Rumaiethah and Kif, two squadrons of the 35th Sennel Horse, the 39th Battery R.F.A. (six guns), a sapper and miner company (less one section), a portion of a bridging train, three companies of the 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, and one company of the 32nd Sikh Pioneers.

On the 23rd Colonel R. C. W. Urkin, the officer commanding, was very strongly pressed by Major Pulley, the Political Officer of the division, to send a detachment from the small garrison in the direction of Kif. Every argument that could be adduced was brought to bear, more especially the usual one that a show of force would keep the wavering tribes in order, and that those who had already taken

the field in the area near Hillah were, so far, few in numbers. Under the circumstances, and in view of the expected early arrival of troops from Diwaniyah, a force, commanded by Brevet Lieut.-Colonel R. N. Hardcastle, moved during the afternoon to a point some six miles south of Hillah. The force in question, which was known as the "Manchester Column," was composed as follows:—

35th Scinde Horse (two squadrons).

39th Battery R.F.A.

2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment (less one company).

1/32nd Sikh Pioneers (one company).

24th Combined Field Ambulance (one section).

The telegram approving of the movement, which was sent by the divisional general, laid down that the night camp of the column was to be entrenched, and that no further move towards Kifl was to be permitted.

So far no actual harm was done, for even if a sudden rising of other tribes took place, the detachment would be within reach of Hillah, whose garrison, it must be noted, were, owing to its absence, quite inadequate to defend that place against attack.

A question which, when the proposal to detach the small column was first mooted, would seem to have caused some doubt among those arranging the move, was that of water. The route which it was to follow is usually well supplied with that essential, but the first regular halting-place is not at six miles' distance but a good deal further off. Two Assistant Political Officers had been sent to make inquiries, which seem to have satisfied all concerned when on their return they reported that there was an ample supply for men and animals. On reaching the camping ground,¹ however, the commander of the column found, and reported to Hillah through the medium of an officer of the Irrigation Department, that the water in the wells was brackish, and that the animals would not drink it, but that there was a good supply at a distance of rather

¹ See Fig. 7, page 183.

over a mile. Normally there should have been plenty of water in the Mashadiah canal, a branch of the Amriyah canal, both of which were in the vicinity of the camp. But the low level of the Hillah branch did not allow of water entering those two canals.

Meanwhile the Political Officer at Hillah was again bringing strong pressure to bear on the commander of the garrison to push the column, which had been despatched that afternoon, further towards Kifl. The arguments employed included an anticipated early attack on the Hindiyah Barrage, the generally critical situation in the district, and the disturbing reports which had arrived from Assistant Political Officers, who could no longer remain in safety at their posts. All these indications of further trouble pointed to the urgency of striking a blow which would discourage a rising on the part of the neighbouring tribes, doubtless a perfectly sound political conclusion. It was alleged, as an inducement to despatch the little column nearer Kifl, that the tribesmen on either side of the route were entirely friendly, and in case of an advance on our part might be trusted to keep the road and railway open behind the force. Last and most cogent was the assertion that hesitation to send the troops forward might drive the friendly tribes into the arms of the insurgents.

The upshot was that the commandant at Hillah ordered the column to advance at dawn next morning to the spot mentioned as possessing a water supply, and telegraphed at 12.15 A.M. on the 24th to the divisional general for approval of the action proposed. The telegram did not reach Divisional Headquarters at Diwaniyah till about 8.30 A.M. that day, by which hour it was assumed that the column must have reached or be near its destination. As will be seen, this was not so, but on the assumption that the march had begun as ordered at dawn and had proceeded in a normal manner, the permission that had been asked for was given.

It should here be mentioned that, in the order for the further move, Lieut.-Colonel Hardcastle was told that he was to act as the advanced guard of a force. In addition,

the order stated, "If opposed by large hostile forces, you will avoid becoming so involved as to necessitate reinforcements, and should occasion arise you will fall back on the position you now occupy." The reference to the rôle of the force being that of an advanced guard evidently referred to the original idea of eventually sending a strong column to Kifd. The commandant at Hillah, however, had presumably not yet been informed of my order that, owing to the altered situation, that column was to be twice as large as was at first intended.

Before describing the further movements of the column, it should be mentioned that after the insurrection several shaikhs and others were tried before military courts for participating in the rising, and from the proceedings of one of these courts some information regarding the occurrences on the 23rd and 24th July may be gleaned.

On the former date Sheikh Ibrahim-as-Samawi of the Khafajah tribe, who was tried on a charge of "War rebellion," found guilty, sentenced to death, and reprieved, accompanied the column to its camping-place, and on arrival there was permitted to spend the night at his home. Water being the urgent question of the moment, the Assistant Political Officer, Captain Tozer, was that evening searching for a supply, and while so engaged met several small bands of tribesmen carrying arms. On inquiring whether they were bound, they stated that the shaikh in question had ordered them to assemble in order to protect their lands from a possible attack by the Shamiyah tribes, whose country lies further to the south, and who, it will be remembered, had raised their war banners on the 14th of the month.

Next day on meeting Ibrahim-as-Samawi, Captain Tozer asked him at what place he had ordered the concentration of his fighting men. Thereupon the shaikh denied all knowledge of what his followers had stated, and alleged on his trial that early the same morning he had made a tour of his sarkals or leaders of small tribal groups and warned them that troops were coming into their country and were not to be molested.

During the 24th the shaikh remained with the column

except for two hours about noon, when he appears again, somewhat unwisely, to have been allowed to absent himself. At 5 p.m. the Assistant Political Officer went to see the commander of the column, and before doing so gave orders that the shaikh was not to leave the camp. When he returned an hour later he found that he had gone.

How far this shaikh acted in a treacherous manner is difficult to say, and at his subsequent trial he was acquitted of the charge, though found guilty on another count. On that occasion he explained that he left the camp when the attack began, as, being in Arab dress, he feared that if recognised with the British he would be murdered by his men. The fact, however, of his denial of all knowledge of the concentration of his retainers as reported by them, and of his twice asking for leave to go to his home and finally quitting the camp contrary to orders, seems to justify the charge of treachery which was brought against him, and which for lack of evidence could not be proved. It is reasonable to conclude that he took advantage of the knowledge which he had gained on the 23rd as to the strength and composition of the column to call up his followers; and, armed with the further information acquired on the 24th regarding the camp and disposition of the force, profited by Captain Tozer's absence to escape and share in the attack.

The information of the second advance reached my headquarters on the 24th after it had taken place, and caused me much disquietude of mind, for I felt that nothing in my power could avert what, at the best, would mean a fight, the issue of which would be extremely doubtful. A general warning had been sent out earlier to guard against incurring the risk of a reverse, no matter how small, at a time when the least success on the part of the insurgents would add materially to their numbers in the field; and now, at a moment when General Coningham's force was still far south of Hillah, the tribesmen, who are quick to recognise mistakes, were being given an opportunity which they could hardly fail to see.

It has been mentioned that on reaching their camp the

animals with Lieut.-Colonel Hardscastle's column would not drink the water, which was brackish. In consequence they were not watered that afternoon. Next day at 4.45 A.M., under the guidance of an Assistant Political Officer, they were led to the watering-place on the Nahr Shah canal, and got back at 8.15, having satisfied their requirements, after a march of several miles. The delay in their return was mainly due to the impossibility of watering at one time a large number of animals owing to the steep banks of the canal, and the numerous dried-up canals and irrigation channels which had to be crossed in single file. Although, before leaving Hillah, it was recognised that a march at this season would be most trying, no special arrangement for carrying water, beyond what was in the water-carts and men's water-bottles, was considered necessary.

At 9.15 A.M. the head of the column moved off and reached the Rustumiyah canal at 12.45 P.M., all ranks being much affected by the great heat, especially the Manchester Regiment, of whom sixty per cent were so exhausted as to require, in the opinion of the medical officer with the column, a complete rest for twenty-four hours. A troop of the 35th Scinde Horse was now sent to reconnoitre towards Kiff, the single minaret at which place overlooks the date-palm groves which border it, and is clearly visible from the banks of the Rustumiyah canal.

The troops meanwhile settled down in their camp, which was sited to the east of the road in the angle formed by it and the canal, a post of observation being placed on a mound a short distance to the west. The spot chosen for their resting-place was artificially strong, and had the advantage of a plentiful supply of water close at hand. On three sides of it were bunds or artificial banks a few feet above the ground level, which served on the southern side to retain the Rustumiyah canal, a water-channel about ten feet broad, while on the east was an irrigation cut of lesser width. The protection on the third side, which bordered the road, consisted of a dry ditch with a low bank on both sides of it. Beyond this side to the west,

and making an acute angle with the road, outside the perimeter selected for the camp, runs a line of mounds, or what seem to be the remains of the bank of an ancient canal, of which all other traces have disappeared. From their highest point, about ten feet above the plain, they offer an extensive view in all directions; and as they dominate the site of the camp their occupation in case of a possible attack was an obvious precaution. Only the fourth side

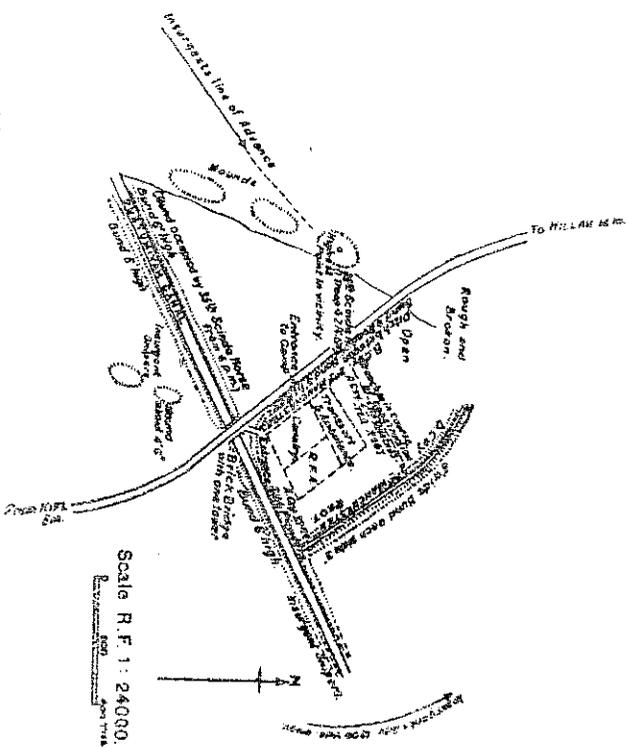


Fig. 3.—Camp of Manchester Column, 24th July 1920.

of the perimeter required attention, a work which was left till the cool of the evening.

The field of fire was good in all directions except on the northern side, where, owing to camel-thorn and the remains of disused irrigation channels, the ground becomes somewhat broken about three hundred yards from the trenches held by the troops.

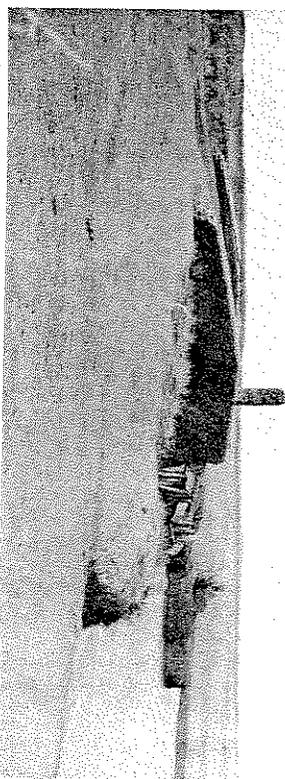
At 5.45 P.M., when the work of digging trenches along the northern side had just begun, the reconnoitring cavalry

reported that the insurgents were advancing from the direction of Kifl. The first information received gave the hostile numbers as ten thousand men, distant only two miles. A few minutes later these figures were modified to only five hundred, but it is probable that the actual number of tribesmen present did not exceed three thousand. An earlier and distant reconnaissance by the whole of the cavalry as far as Kifl, only five miles south of the camp, might have brought news which would have allowed the commander of the column to carry out his orders as to avoiding engagement with superior forces. He now found himself at a distance of fourteen to fifteen miles from Hillah, with the prospect that a retrograde movement would bring down upon him the tribes which lay between him and that place. With fresh troops such an operation carried out by day would have been difficult, unless it were the sequel to a success; but with men exhausted by a hot day's march, which had led to some slackening of discipline, a night retreat, arranged at short notice, could only by a miracle escape disaster.

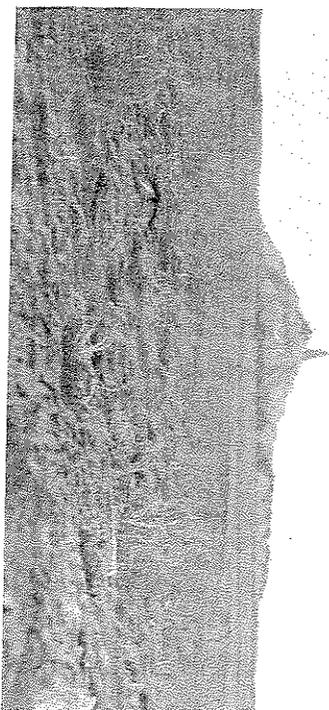
As soon as the insurgents came into view from the camp, the 39th Battery was ordered to engage them, but as its signallers had been taken from their proper work and had been ordered to tap the telegraph wire to Hillah, some time elapsed before the guns could open fire.

The insurgents now began advancing against the flanks of the camp, making use of the broken ground, and at one point established themselves only one hundred and fifty yards from the perimeter.

At 7.50 P.M., while fire was being exchanged by both sides, the two Assistant Political Officers with the column informed Lieut.-Colonel Hardcastle that if the force remained where it was, all the Arabs between it and Hillah would have risen by the following day, and added that those who were now opposing them would continue to do so, while others would push on and capture Hillah. Neither the Political Officers nor the commander of the column was probably aware that within a few hours that place would be reinforced by troops from Diwaniyah,



Camp of Manchester Column from south-east of bridge looking towards mounds.



Birs Nimrud.

whence they were being moved northwards as rapidly as railway conditions would permit. Their counsel, however, had its effect, for a few minutes later, when it was nearly dark, the several commanding officers were sent for, and the situation was explained in the presence of the Political Officers, who corroborated what was said, and emphasised the necessity for an immediate retreat. The outcome of the conference—or, as it might be more correctly called, council of war—was that the force was ordered to withdraw in half an hour. One company of the Manchester Regiment was to act as advanced guard with another on either flank, so as to keep the tribesmen clear of the transport, which was to be at the head of the column. In rear would come the 39th Battery, escorted by the company of the 32nd Sikh Pioneers, and last of all, as rearguard, two squadrons of the 35th Scinde Horse.

At 8.40 P.M. the leading company of the Manchester Regiment moved off, and shortly after the transport, which was close in rear, stampeded. A scene of great confusion followed, the vehicles dashing through the troops, who became scattered into small groups; while the Arabs, making for the transport animals, cut down some of them and their drivers with knives. By the gallant efforts of a few, among whom was the adjutant of the regiment, Captain G. S. Henderson, an officer of well-known courage, who lost his life and won a posthumous Victoria Cross, the road was cleared, and the guns coming into action held the Arabs off. But in the darkness and the general disorder that prevailed a portion of the Manchester Regiment lost its way, for the road, a little-used track, does not follow the railway line, but twists and turns, and being overgrown with scrub, is only recognisable with difficulty after sundown. Those who went astray fell into the hands of the Arabs, some to be killed, while others who were made prisoners were eventually released.

The heavy loss in horses due to the Arab fire greatly impeded the action of the artillery and cavalry. The former fought with their traditional courage in conditions the most difficult imaginable, and the 35th Scinde

Horse, keeping the insurgents at bay, guarded the rear, and helped by several charges to open the way for a withdrawal, which was successfully effected. The officers of the 39th Battery, more especially Lieutenant B. L. De Roebeck, who for his gallantry received the immediate reward of a bar to his Military Cross, and Major H. E. Connop of the 35th Seinde Horse, both of whose British squadron leaders were wounded, behaved like heroes, and it is to their fine example and the discipline of those under their command that a complete disaster was averted. Among other gallant soldiers who distinguished themselves during the events of this night were Sergeants Albert Victor Deering, D.C.M., and Earnest Hinxman of the artillery, and Sergeant John Willis, 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, the first winning a bar to the Distinguished Conduct Medal, and the other two the medal itself.

As might have been expected from the predictions of the Assistant Political Officers, the march of the remnant of the force to Hillah should have been hampered by the action of the tribes around that place. The Arabs, however, did not pursue to any distance, their attention being doubtless diverted by the thought of loot, and the troops reached Hillah on the 25th.

The night retreat which had ended so disastrously had cost us twenty killed, sixty wounded, and three hundred and eighteen missing, and many transport vehicles and animals. Of the three hundred and eighteen reported missing, only seventy-nine British and eighty-one Indians became prisoners with the Arabs. Of the former one died in captivity, while among the latter were a few Indian soldiers taken at Samawah and at other places. Thus the net loss in killed on the 24th was little short of two hundred. One gun, an 18-pr., fell into a deep canal during the night retreat, and, despite gallant efforts to recover it, had to be abandoned.

This unfortunate affair could not have occurred at a more inopportune moment. From the outset the prospect of any advantage being derived from sending out so small a force was more than doubtful. No one with the column

had knowledge either of Arab warfare or the country, and it is probable that the commander did not fully appreciate the general situation and the rocks that lay ahead of him. If, as was apparently intended, the force was meant merely to show itself and avoid fighting, it was much too heavily burdened with transport, and moreover tents were carried. But apart from details, which sufficiently condemn the operation, the two main faults lay in the continued movement on the 24th towards Kif and the night retreat, which was doomed to bring disaster in its train.

CHAPTER XI.

ALARMS AND EXCURSIONS.

SUNDAY, the 25th July 1920, was a day I shall not easily forget. I had been out early, and on my return about 8 A.M., Brigadier-General J. H. K. Stewart, who lived next door, came to see me. This officer, who was the senior General Staff representative at General Headquarters, had passed some four years in Mesopotamia, and his intimate knowledge of the country and its inhabitants, his sound judgment and good sense, were particularly valuable to me during the Arab rising. He produced a telegram to the effect that the detachment of the Manchester Regiment and other troops had been engaged and had been routed; and a little later news came that the remnant had arrived at Hillah, where an attack was thought to be imminent. It was clear that the occurrence on the Kif road would have a marked effect everywhere on the situation; and as the telegram announcing the disaster had unfortunately not come from Hillah in cipher, wildly exaggerated statements, which it was impossible to discount, were soon flying broadcast about Baghdad. The news was followed in due course by the information that all tribes in the vicinity of Hillah had risen, as well as others whose hostility would add to the insecurity of the railway line to Diwaniyah.

I had already decided to withdraw the troops from the latter place, as a report had reached me that the Ramnathal shaihs, who had shown indications of submitting, had come under the influence of the Shamriyah tribes who had broken out on the 14th. It appeared therefore neither necessary nor desirable to hold Diwaniyah any longer. At that place, as already stated, were assembled practically

all the troops available for active operations, and the urgent need for concentrating at Hillah, fifty-three miles to the north, without losing a moment, was now stronger than ever.

I directed Major-General Leslie, who had proposed coming to see me at Baghdad regarding the intended operation towards Kutah, to proceed at once to Hillah and organise the defence of that place. I also reiterated the orders regarding the rapid concentration there of all troops from the south, and directed the Jarbuiyah bridge over the Hillah branch of the Euphrates, a post of vital importance on the railway line, to be made specially secure.

On the 15th July, in order to be in a position to add still further to my reserve, I had warned the troops on the Upper Euphrates to be prepared at short notice to assemble at Fallujah, where they would be within reach if required. Our forces in that area were, comparatively speaking, small, but as they included a cavalry regiment—the 5th Cavalry—and, owing to the lengthy line of communication, a considerable amount of transport, the question of forage for the animals was growing serious. Indeed the situation was rapidly becoming such that a decision would have to be taken between an investment on the one hand and a forced retreat to Baghdad on the other. Needless to say, either of these alternatives would have had the worst possible effect throughout the country. Fortunately at this juncture an arrangement was come to with the Dulaim tribe, whereby their head, Shaikh Ali Sulaiman, in return for a subsidy, undertook to garrison Hit until such time as it could be reoccupied. Both he and Fakhad Beg ibn Haddhal, Shaikh of the Anizah, as well as his son Mahrut, stood loyal to the Government throughout the insurrection, and later on received rewards for their good services at so critical a time. Our troops, thus assisted, remained at Ramadi and Fallujah, care being taken that they were provided with sufficient supplies to maintain themselves for several weeks in case of interruptions on their line of communication.

I may here add that it has recently come to my knowledge that the Muntafiq confederation had their eyes glued to what was going on in the Dulaim area, and had the latter tribe wavered for a moment in its allegiance, nothing could have prevented the former, who, like the sword of Damocles, hung over me for many weeks, from throwing their formidable weight on the side of the insurrectionists. Had this occurred, Baghdad might easily have become a besieged city. Moreover, an outbreak of the Muntafiq would probably have induced two other important tribes—the Bani Lam and Bani Rabia—to rise; and as these border the Tigris, my last and only line of communication would have been imperilled. The great service rendered by Ali Sulaiman in rallying his tribes to the British and so warding off a danger, the extent of which it is difficult to measure, has been neither forgotten nor unrequited. His firm attitude was maintained in the face of many of his relations and adherents, who were bitterly opposed to the policy which his foresight and the wise counsel of the local Political Officer, Major Eadie, led him to pursue, and for several months his life was in imminent danger.

The general situation at this time was so menacing that on the 26th July, in addition to the ten battalions which were understood to be coming as reinforcements from India, I pointed out to the War Office that a second division might be required; and on the 30th added that it should be mobilised. Following this request, it may here be stated that at later dates, as the situation continued to develop in an unfavourable manner, I asked for and was furnished with three British and seven Indian battalions. Besides these troops, a battery of horse artillery, a brigade of field artillery, five companies of engineers, some medical and other units, and an Air Force Squadron were added to my force (see Appendix XI.).

The total combatant troops of all arms which came from overseas were as follows:—

British officers, 323. British other ranks, 3093.
Indian officers, 302. Indian other ranks, 13,200.

and of auxiliary services:—

British officers, 46. British other ranks, 107.
Indian officers, 40. Indian other ranks, 4094.

As it has been stated in public more than once that two divisions were sent as reinforcements to Mesopotamia to assist in dealing with the rising, I take this opportunity of pointing out that the war establishment of a division in Mesopotamia at the beginning of the insurrection was as follows:—

British officers, 386. British other ranks, 3376.
Indian officers, 278. Indian other ranks, 13,636.

or a grand total of 17,676. Thus the figures which represented the strength of a *single* division were only 3529 less than the reinforcements—the so-called *two* divisions—sent to join my force. It is only fair to add, however, that drafts from India to bring up to strength some of my weak units arrived as follows:—

British officers, 587. British other ranks, 723.
Indian officers, 127. Indian other ranks, 6745.

This last set of figures represents little more than the normal reinforcements to replace wastage and casualties, and moreover, it includes a considerable number of officers and men who were recalled from leave.

I should add that the Government of India accepted the patriotic offer of Lieut.-Colonel His Highness The Maharaja Sir Jagatjit Singh Bahadur of Kapurthala to furnish a battalion of Imperial Service infantry, which did useful service in sharing with other troops the responsibility of guarding the Base, and later joined in the field operations.

On the 26th July the Commander-in-Chief in India telegraphed offering to relieve me of a considerable number of Turkish prisoners—an offer which, subject to War Office approval, I gladly accepted. Eventually these prisoners were shipped direct from Basrah to Constantinople, the last contingent sailing on the 15th August. In order to ensure the safe custody of these prisoners, who were dis-

tributed in several localities as working parties, the greater part of a brigade of infantry had been absorbed, but by concentrating them a reduction in strength was effected.

I now decided to dispense entirely with regular guards and replace them with armed labour. Gradually the Director of Labour, Colonel F. B. Frost, to whose energy the credit for the execution of the scheme is due, trained some two thousand five hundred volunteers from Indian Labour Corps, a few of whom had had military experience. These men were regularly attested for a period of six months, and when not required for guarding prisoners, did useful service in certain blockhouses on the lines of communication and in guarding depots and other establishments.

I should here draw attention to the fact that the existence under the Military Authorities of Labour Corps was due to the inability of the civil administration to obtain coolies from India, owing to certain objections made by the Indian Government, which were not pressed where the army was concerned. The introduction of Indian labour had been found necessary during the earlier fighting in Mesopotamia, owing to the scarcity and quality of local labour, and for other reasons. In July 1920 in Mesopotamia and Persia, coolies—Indian, Persian, Kurd, and Arab,—amounting in numbers to thirty-four thousand, were employed by the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force, and these carried out such work as building, road-making, loading and unloading stores. As labourers the Kurds excelled, while as stevedores, as a whole, they would be difficult to rival. It is a common practice for a Kurdish porter to carry a weight of six mannds (480 lb.) and even eight on his back, and the output, in a loading or unloading sense, of a single man in an eight hours' day will amount to from four to ten tons. But even these figures, in a country where Trades Unions are as yet unknown, are sometimes exceeded by Arabs, who have been known to handle as much as twelve tons in a day.

But such cases are exceptional, and the Arab, being of a scheming nature, will, if allowed, do as little work as

possible. The Indian, as a rule, is easier to handle, but as he lacks the sense of humour, which is highly developed in the Kurd and Arab, it is more difficult to rouse his enthusiasm for his work. Moreover, his want of stamina finds him a tired man when his day's work is done. On the other hand, the Arab will, when the hour for relaxation comes, be eager to take part in a looting expedition, while the Kurd will be as ready for the *chasse aux dattes*.

As regards the state of our river defence, at the outbreak of hostilities there were four defence vessels in commission, fully armed and manned. Two of them were on the Tigris, one on the Lower and one on the Upper Euphrates. In addition, there were several vessels of similar type, three of which were used for towing on the Tigris and one on the Upper Euphrates, besides three laid up out of commission. On the 26th July I ordered these vessels to be mobilised, when it was brought to my notice that, except the four first-mentioned vessels, none of the remainder would be fit for service until they had been armed and their more vulnerable parts protected. With the exception of the vessel on the Upper Euphrates, where no dockyard for repairs existed, the remaining six were fitted out and provided with a 12-pr. gun, most of them also with a 3-pr. gun as well, and several machine-guns.

On the 27th, Commander C. H. Jones, who was passing through Baghdad on his way from Persia, offered me his services, subject to Admiralty approval, which was soon forthcoming, and I placed him in charge of the Mesopotamian Floating Defences. I desired him to arrange at once for the policing of that portion of the river which runs from Kadhimain, five and a half miles north of Baghdad, to Khir Depot, which is the same distance below the capital. Both of these places are nearer to the centre of Baghdad by road than by river, but the Tigris has few straight reaches, and twists and turns to such an extent that distances along its banks are fully double those drawn from point to point. Baghdad was at this time undefended, and it was important to have an examination service after dark to control movements from one bank to the other, except by the Mande

bridge, which was guarded. By the aid of several motor bellums and other craft, which were manned chiefly by machine-gunners of the 1st Battalion Rifle Brigade, this service was established, and remained in operation until the exterior situation had greatly altered for the better. A little later two other naval officers, Lieutenants Onslow and Cavendish, who were on their way home after serving in Persia under Commodore Norris, came under the orders of Commander Jones, and the trio relieved me of the task of closely supervising the floating defences of the country.

The Capital itself was the cause of some concern to me at this time. At Baghdad and Basrah, unlike India, where at military stations the European quarters are concentrated and comparatively simple to defend, there is no sanctuary for the white population, whose dwelling-places are fixed according to the dictates of their individual tastes, or, as more often happens, to the available accommodation. In order to protect in some degree the European inhabitants from an internal rising, a defence scheme had been in existence for some time which, by request of the Military Governor, could be put into operation at short notice; but to secure the city and its environs from external aggression was a far more difficult problem. Its inhabitants were known to number about two hundred thousand, many of whom were more or less disaffected, and were only waiting encouragement from outside to rise.

The problem, however, did not end there. Protection was essential for the Citadel, which is situated on the north side of the town, and which was in a somewhat dilapidated condition.

This ancient walled enclosure is unworthy of the sounding name of Citadel, for in 1920 it possessed no feature which resembled a work of such a nature beyond the remains of a ditch on its northern front, which was largely filled with rubbish, and here and there in its walls a few loopholes for rifle fire. It had been selected at the time of our occupation of Baghdad as a suitable place in which to store the greater part of the considerable quantities of gun and small-arm ammunition held in the country, as well as re-

serves of arms, and stores and workshops of all kinds. No doubt it owed its selection to the great cost of constructing fireproof sheds elsewhere, and the impossibility of deciding where to build those sheds until the policy regarding the strength and location of the Mesopotamian garrison was settled. Owing to thefts of small-arm ammunition which had occurred, and the investigations regarding them which had been made, I was familiar with the Citadel. Its interior was overlooked on the east by minarets and houses at less than fifty yards' range, and it was situated several miles, and on the opposite side of the town, from the Baghdad garrison. Bricks, mortar, barbed-wire and canvas screens soon made the place reasonably secure and difficult of access, except through the open gates; and a garrison, which I could ill spare, under Major R. S. Hunt, 1st King's Dragoon Guards, who had served with me as a battalion commander in France, was given the task of holding it against attack.

But besides the Citadel there was a large number of establishments, such as depots and stores of all kinds (some highly inflammable), workshops, hospitals, railway stations, rolling-stock, a large electrical-power station, water-pumping station, and a military dairy. These establishments, which seemed to have been planted, as also at Basrah, on no considered plan, and more on the principle of a jungle than a garden, had sprung up and spread themselves over acres of ground, some of them at a considerable distance from the encampments of the troops, and actually in the middle of a town with a potentially hostile population. To attempt to concentrate them would have cost much time and money, but to protect them one and all was now essential.

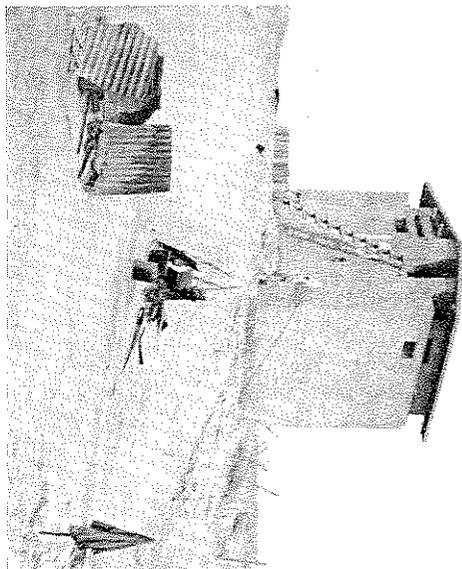
In view of the reduction in the strength of the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force, which it was proposed to effect towards the end of the year, the impossibility of sparing sufficient troops to guard the important military centre of Baghdad, and the necessity for economy, I had decided to take no steps in the matter beyond settling in my own mind, in general terms, how I would deal with the problem

should the necessity to do so arise. I had, however, soon after I assumed command, ordered the aerodrome, which is situated on the opposite side of the river to that on which the troops were camped, and which covered a large space of ground, to be provided with suitable defences and guards, and it was owing to this precaution that an attempt, which I mentioned earlier, to burn down the sheds after the insurrection had begun, failed.

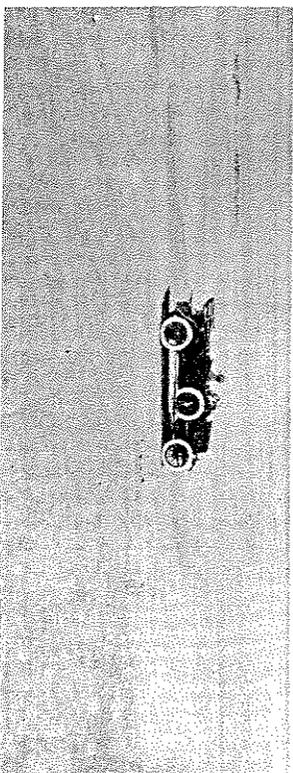
On the 26th and 27th July, accompanied by my Chief Engineer, Major-General E. H. de V. Atkinson, I fixed upon the approximate sites for a series of earthworks round the city. By the middle of August, thanks in great part to the fireless energy of Lieut.-Colonel A. V. Carey, Director of Military and Public Works, some forty brick blockhouses, which replaced the earthworks that had been constructed at short notice, had sprung up on a perimeter of sixteen miles, and as material became available the whole was enclosed by a continuous and formidable wire obstacle. Besides blockhouses round Baghdad others were built in the town to guard particularly vulnerable points such as bridges. The blockhouse system had a marked effect on the demeanour of the inhabitants, and served to diminish crime, not only in the city itself but in its immediate vicinity. Moreover, instead of requiring several battalions for the defence of the place, I was able to reduce the garrison considerably, and spare more troops for active operations.

In order as much as possible to restrict the area enclosed by the blockhouses, I terminated the tenancy of the Daurah cantonment, which was situated on the right bank of the Tigris some twelve miles below Baghdad, and opposite that at Hinaidi; and in forty-eight hours shifted the many thousands of tons of stores there, ordnance and other, to safer quarters within the defended area.

The original idea as regards the quartering of the troops at Baghdad had been to purchase ground and construct cantonments at Chaldari, which site lies a few miles north of the city. Here were to be lodged an infantry division, a cavalry brigade, and army troops. In January 1919



Blockhouse No. 19, Baghdad.



Typical Mesopotamian scenery (one mile east of Baghdad).

the cost of the scheme, as put forward from Mesopotamia, lay between six and eight millions sterling, of which sum it was proposed during that year to expend one million pounds, an amount which, so far as I have been able to determine, did not include the price of the land to be acquired. Three months later a change of commanders led to a change of policy, and a proposal was brought forward to transfer the projected cantonment at Chaldari to sites south of the capital. Hinaidi, it was stated in the letter which explained the proposed change, would be better than Chaldari for many reasons, one of which was that at the latter place "all amenities of life would be tinged with the gloom of the circle of embankments," twelve feet high at least, which, on account of the rise of the river at certain seasons, would be necessary for the protection of the cantonment against flooding.

Thus it came about that, though no money had as yet been granted for the purchase of land, Daurah was in military occupation, and such troops as were quartered there were under canvas.

Both Daurah and Hinaidi had, prior to my arrival in Mesopotamia, been laid out in a manner which vividly recalled to my mind the ground plan of New Delhi, a city in embryo which I had the advantage of seeing in company with its distinguished designer. Wide avenues for motor-driven vehicles, bordered by narrower roads for transport carts and equestrians, formed part of the grandiose design, and in order to carry the power necessary for illuminating the roads, lighting the barracks, and working a tramway line, a tall row of steel standards would eventually spring up along the centre of the main approach. At intervals the straight line of these approaches was broken by circles which, if less spacious than the great *rond point* on which the Arc de Triomphe de l'Étoile at Paris stands, clearly betray a source whence the architect may have drawn his inspiration. In one of these circles it was proposed to erect a statue of Lieutenant-General Sir Stanley Maude; and for others a cathedral and campanile with a peal of bells, a club and a soldiers'

institute were planned. Although the whole scheme did credit to the imagination of its author, I trembled to think what, leaving everything else out of consideration, the metal alone necessary for the roads, which cover many miles and bear high-sounding names, would have cost the long-suffering British taxpayer.

Both of the projected cantonments are dreary, dusty, or muddy according to the season, and distant from human habitation; and from the point of view of amenities, for which they were to some extent chosen, seem to possess no advantage over Chaldari. It is true that in the proximity of Daurah, on the river front, there are some date-palm plantations, but beyond these there is nothing which is restful to the eye. The same remark might be applied to almost any part of Mesopotamia, for shade and grass, as we know them at home, are things almost non-existent. In course of time, however, when those same streets and avenues, fatiguing in their straightness, might be expected to be metalled and even shaded by the numerous but sickly saplings which at present border them, it is possible by a considerable stretch of the imagination to conjure up a picture less desolate and uninviting than in those regions now presents itself.

The price of the land at Daurah, approximately £500,000, was in my opinion prohibitive, and I gladly seized the first excuse to hand it back to its owners; while as regards Hinadi, by transferring the site for cantonments a few hundred yards southwards, the ground, which was to have cost at least £132,000, was secured for nothing.

Having settled the question of Daurah, I arranged for the bridge of boats which connected the two cantonments to be moved closer to Baghdad, so as to allow of the quick transfer of troops from one bank of the river to the other, and make it possible to avoid the long circuit through the town and across either of the existing bridges.

On the 27th July I recalled from leave all officers except such as had been in Mesopotamia for two continuous years. This involved eleven per cent of the officers under my command, and created some heart-burning, as several of them

had only arrived back in England a few days before the order came for their recall. The Indian ranks, too, were ordered to rejoin. In a country so far distant as Mesopotamia, probably the most remote of all our foreign garrisons, the replacement of officers, staff or other, or those who may be sick, absent or otherwise non-effective, is a lengthy process; and with the prospect of large reinforcements coming from India which would make heavy demands on the staff, and the weakness of my own units, to have delayed a day longer to recall the absent would have been unwise.

At this time I took certain steps to impress the inhabitants of Baghdad and the vicinity. These consisted in marching through the city and beyond from time to time variously composed contingents of troops, and in the despatch of small mounted columns in several directions to overawe marauding villagers. The Arab, as I mentioned earlier, is prone to exaggerate anything he sees; and as the city was frequented by visitors from without, I hoped by this procedure, which smacked of the stage with its reappearing suppers, to engender and disseminate the belief that our forces were not so depleted as in reality they were. As the internal condition of the city was not satisfactory, military courts were established and proclamations issued prohibiting the holding of seditious meetings, and restricting movement in the streets after dark.

The position of Baghdad both within and from without, prior to the construction of defences, was highly dangerous. As I walked or drove daily through the principal street, accompanied by my British or Indian aide-de-camp, I could see scowls on the faces of the numerous truculent-looking Arabs, whose custom it is to sit on benches and drink coffee in front of the refreshment shops while discussing business, or more probably retailing to one another the latest news or gossip. With an assumed air of indifference or perhaps a smile on my face, I would look fixedly at them, when I generally noticed many nervously toying with the beads of the rosary which seems to be the habitual accompaniment of the mass of the Muhammadans of Iraq.

As the townsmen were in close touch with the leaders of the insurrection outside, and as combined action was far from improbable, I issued orders on the 26th July for the 53rd Infantry Brigade, less the 1/3rd Gurkha Rifles who were at Baiji on the line of communication to Mosul, to be sent to the Capital forthwith, where, as a general reserve, it would be more suitably placed.

I have referred before to the effect of moving troops from localities where the inhabitants had been accustomed to see them, and the danger of disturbance to which such a course was apt to lead. But the risk had to be accepted, as, with no prospect of reinforcements for some time to come, troops to keep in check the insurrection and prevent it from becoming general must be found. It was with some misgivings that I had almost stripped of guards the railway line to Shergat, for, should the rising spread to the tribes north of Baghdad or raids on the railway such as had occurred in May be repeated, the troops at Mosul would be cut off and left with supplies only sufficient to last for a few weeks. There was no prospect of my having sufficient troops with which to effect the relief of the Mosul garrison in the event of its being cut off, and to withdraw that force to Baghdad and so add to my reserve would have been an operation of such difficulty, and would have required so many troops to effect it, that, even if for military and political reasons it had been desirable, it could not be seriously contemplated. That this was so is due to the fact that from Shergat, some seventy miles south of Mosul, to Baiji, fifty-three miles nearer Baghdad, the railway and road beside it run at a distance of some miles west of the Tigris, from which they are separated by the Jabal Hamrin range, and pass through a waterless district. Unless therefore the railway be strongly guarded, troops cannot travel by that route, while along the river at the time of the insurrection there was no road suitable for wheeled traffic. This omission, I may mention here, has since been rectified, and a good motor road now runs from Baiji to Shergat. Not the least of the advantages of this alternative route from Mosul is that, between that place

and Fathah on the Tigris at the southern end of the Jabal Hamrin, the population is sparse, and the colonies of Jubur tribesmen, which are scattered along both sides of the river, number only five hundred rifles on the right bank and three hundred on the left, and moreover are not likely to give trouble.

My readers will readily appreciate the nature of the situation in which we now stood. With long and easily assailable lines of communication, to guard which adequately troops were not available; with garrisons scattered about the country and in possession of only small stocks of supplies, while the central force at Baghdad, when it arrived there, would suffice for little more than to defend that place, there was room for much anxiety. This situation had resulted from a too hasty reduction of the force after the Armistice, while the tribes were still dangerous and an unknown factor; and I draw attention to it in order to furnish myself with an opportunity of laying stress on the fact that that situation was saved through the resolution and endurance of the troops under my command.

The supply situation at this time was one on which much depended, and in regulating which I was ably helped by Brigadier-General Hambro, who had a most efficient assistant in Colonel H. G. Burrard, who had only recently arrived in Mesopotamia, but had quickly grasped the difficult problem before him. Although a total of sixty days' supplies, which, during the insurrection was increased by War Office authority to seventy-five, was held for the whole force in Mesopotamia, each garrison or small detachment was not of course in possession of that quantity. It was now necessary to add as quickly as possible to the supplies at those places where a shortage, through the rupture of communications, was most likely to occur. This involved the reduction of the reserves maintained at Basrah and Baghdad to a low level, and at the last of these centres there was always the possibility of the inhabitants being thrown on my hands for their daily food. Orders were issued that at Mosul and Kirkuk, or wherever food and forage could be purchased, advantage should

be taken of local resources to build up further supplies that would enable the garrisons to hold out for not less than six months. I was determined that there should be no repetition of the Kut episode, even on the smallest scale, and thanks to my administrative staff and the energy of those who effected the delivery of supplies, no garrison had to undergo the risk of almost certain death which a surrender would have carried with it, although one at least among the many that were besieged was forced to await relief for over eighty days.

Under normal conditions it takes a considerable time to replenish reserves of supplies, but in the situation that obtained the difficulty was increased by several factors:—

(a) The necessity of having to dispense with the Euphrates valley railway line from Basrah to Baghdad and rely solely on the river route to Kut, and thence by rail to Baghdad, involved an almost radical change in the supply arrangements. The small Supply Depot at Kut was suddenly called upon to deal with nine hundred tons a day. Barges had to be rapidly off-loaded there and the supplies transferred to trucks, which were not available on the single-line railway to the Capital in numbers sufficient to carry all that was required. On account of the low water at this time of year in certain reaches above Kut, even if the barges could be spared to proceed to Baghdad, they could not, owing to the question of draught, have taken full loads; and to have despatched them up-stream with reduced cargoes would have been false economy.

(b) The daily feeding strength was suddenly increased by the arrival of large reinforcements, so that for a short period in September the reserves decreased, as the supplies being brought up river were not sufficient for the daily maintenance of the troops, and the truckage available could not cope with the required tonnage.

(c) The failure of the supplies normally purchased locally in affected areas, especially such bulky items as wood and forage, brought an additional strain on the carrying capacity of the barges and trucks. Not only had the consumption risen through the increased strength of the force,

but the deficiency from the failure of local resources had to be made good from the Base.

(d) The movement of troops, ammunition, and important stores had to be given priority over everything else, so that, even though the supplies were at the Base ready to be transferred, several days' delay sometimes occurred in bringing them up-country.

Indeed if the Kut line had been interrupted during August and September the supply situation in Baghdad would have been critical; and yet for several months I was compelled to leave that line wholly unprotected.

Closely connected with the question of supply was another important matter. The main artery to Baghdad is the river Tigris, on which, as just mentioned, the feeding of the force depended directly the Euphrates line was cut. On this river plied the vessels of the Inland Water Transport, a great organisation built up for the supply of the forces which were kept at Baghdad and elsewhere in Mesopotamia. Could the safety of the railway line from Basrah to Baghdad have been guaranteed the reduction of this fleet of vessels—including several Thames penny steamboats which had made the adventurous voyage to Basrah—might for supply purposes have been dispensed with. But as was exemplified by the early cutting of the Euphrates valley railway, the Inland Water Transport, as Brigadier-General Hambro graphically put the matter to me, was "as essential to the Army as the Navy was to England." Indeed, if the safety of the hundred-mile-long railway line from Kut to Baghdad could not be ensured, it would be necessary to double the carrying power of the fleet, as the distance between these places by river is more than twice that by rail. In June 1920 this fleet, the personnel of which two years earlier had attained the huge figures of 799 officers and 42,169 other ranks, was carrying 316 tons per diem from Basrah to Kut and beyond, but under its able head, Brigadier-General R. H. W. Hughes, these figures, to meet the requirements of the additional troops coming to Mesopotamia, swelled to 590 per diem in July, 750 in August, and 878 tons in September. In addition to this

tonnage, supplies of coal and oil fuel amounting to 400 tons, figures which include the requirements of the fleet itself, were borne daily on its barges. That this was possible was due to the opposition which was made soon after my arrival in Mesopotamia to the early sale of the vessels, at what were undoubtedly ruinously low prices, and I shall not readily forget the foresight of my adviser in the matter.

Before leaving the question of river transport, I must say a few words regarding the two main rivers of the country, for the water supply of the Euphrates and Tigris is one which gravely affected the administrative services of the army. Of these two rivers the Euphrates as a waterway for military purposes is negligible. I had been led to suppose that such places on its banks as Rumaihah and Samawah could be reached without difficulty by small steamers towing barges. As regards the first of these places, I had hoped to use, on the left flank of the force allotted to relieve it, one of the defence vessels from the Upper Euphrates. I found, however, that the information given me on the subject was incorrect, and that, on account of the various earth-dams laid across or partly across the stream, the project was impossible. Later on I was to find that, in the event of the inhabitants being hostile, the enclosed nature of the banks of the Euphrates, which is bordered in many places by groves of date-palms and other fruit trees, would make movement on the river, unless supported by troops on shore, who would have to fight their way through enclosed country, so difficult as to be out of the question. In fact the Euphrates has almost ceased to be a channel of commerce except for that carried on by small boats, and has become a great canal-like river, whose purpose is to furnish the necessary irrigation for the country near its banks.

On the other hand, the Tigris still serves as the main waterway of the country, and even when it is at its lowest, the narrowing of the channel causes the water to scour the silt which collects at the bottom and so maintains a depth sufficient for steamers having a draft of from three

to six feet. Yet in 1920 its waters fell to an abnormally low level, and for some time I felt anxiety as to its carrying capacity, for the narrowing of the channel by shifting shoals and sandbanks made towage difficult, and caused numerous vessels to run aground. But apart from that feature of the river, its safety as a line of communication is greatly diminished by the fact that, except during the flood season—between January and June—its banks usually overlook the stream by from twenty to twenty-five feet, and at the curves of the river the channel for steamers closely hugs the side. This would allow of ill-disposed persons living on its banks firing on vessels as they proceeded up or down, and as not one of our steamers was bullet-proof, the transport of troops on barges would have led to serious loss. Moreover, at the very season when the river is at its lowest the tribes are most prone to give trouble. But besides the chance of loss of life, even the carriage of supplies would be precarious, as ships, liable to be riddled by bullets and have their cargoes water-logged, would in time founder, apart from the danger that their personnel would run. In this respect the most dangerous portion of the river is that known as the Narrows, which extend for a distance of twenty-eight miles between Qalat Sakh and Ozler or Ezrah's Tomb. Between these places the country on both sides is a swamp, and the whole region is known as the Marshes. Navigation is difficult owing to the shallow and sharp bends and shoals, which are liable to change their size and situation. Fortunately in 1920, although reports of possible trouble from tribes camped along the banks were not infrequent, nothing beyond the waywardness of the river occurred to interfere with navigation. On some sections of the river the pacific attitude of the inhabitants was, it is believed, due to the fact that they had realised that to join hands with the insurgents meant the loss of all water for their flocks, which thus would become hostages for the good behaviour of their owners.

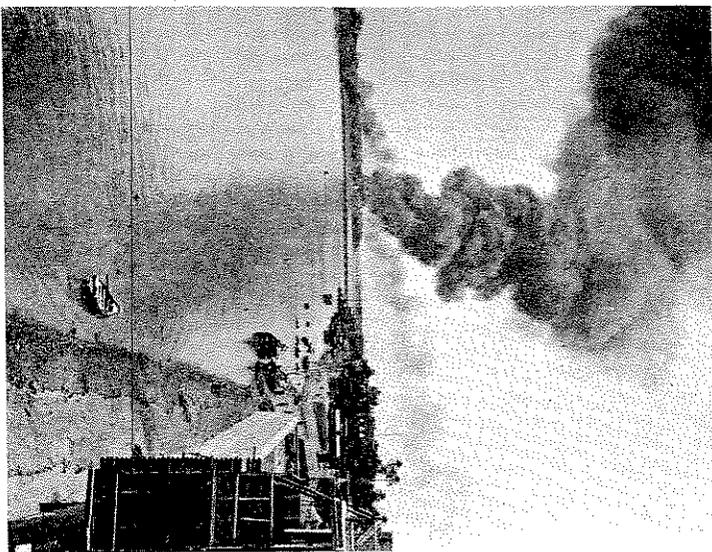
I will conclude this chapter of digressions by referring to an incident which occurred on the 3rd August, and

which capped the various reports which came in from almost every quarter. Shortly after noon on that date volumes of black smoke, interspersed with flames, began to issue from a series of buildings on the right bank of the Tigris a little up-stream from General Headquarters. Which particular buildings were on fire no one for the moment could identify, but word soon came that the Advanced Mechanical Transport Depot, where almost all requirements for motor-cars and mechanical vehicles of all kinds were stored, was seriously involved. The inflammable nature of the contents was such that I question if even the presence of the London Fire Brigade could have done more than prevent the flames from spreading to the adjacent houses. By the efforts of their Baghdad prototype, aided by a river float, the fire was at length got under, when it was found, as had been anticipated, that all stores in the building had been destroyed.

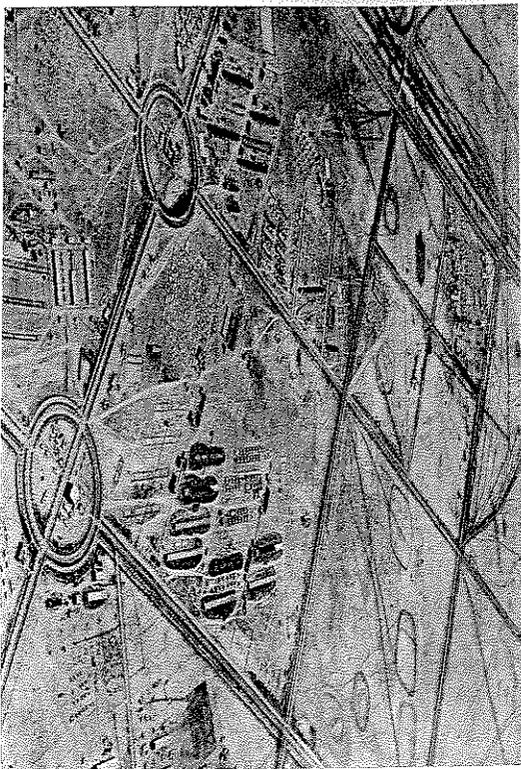
How the conflagration arose was never ascertained, though searching inquiries were instituted by the military and police. It seems that the labourers, Indian and Arab, who were employed in the depot, where there were in force strict fire regulations, had left the building at noon, at which time nothing unusual had been noticed. A quarter of an hour later an officer, on entering the depot, observed smoke issuing from three sheds, and from the rapidity with which the fire, which had then taken a firm grip of its surroundings beyond possibility of extinction, spread, foul play was suspected.

The actual loss was a serious matter, as it threatened to paralyse all movement except by horsed vehicle, rail, or river. Fortunately some small consignments of mechanical transport stores had then arrived at Basrah, and a portion on its way to Baghdad had reached Kut; so that with the exercise of the most rigid economy, the dangerous period was bridged over until replacements could arrive from overseas.

This fire, which had occurred in spite of careful preventative measures, so necessary in a country where rain does not fall for six consecutive months and the scorching



The Fire of 3rd August—Baghdad.



Part of Hinaidi Cantonment, looking east.

rays of the sun turn wood to tinder, was followed by attempts of incendiaries against the Supply Depots, which were frustrated. It is probable that such acts, which created a feeling of insecurity that lasted for some time, were instigated by the insurgent leaders; but when they proved to be unsuccessful they ceased. The golden rule of never keeping all one's eggs in the same basket was now more strictly observed, but an increased number of guards inevitably followed the greater distribution of stores.

A further precaution consisted in discharging all Arab labourers from Government employment throughout the country, and this, though it bore hardly on the majority, served as a warning which probably bore fruit. Shortly afterwards it was found necessary to re-employ skilled Arab labour, and in due course all Arabs were allowed to resume their work under the Government.