

CHAPTER XV.

THE OPERATIONS NORTH-EAST OF BAGHDAD.

MEANWHILE the transfer of troops to which I have referred had begun, a transfer which necessitated the temporary suspension of active measures in the Hillah area.

On the 6th August signs of unrest in the area north-east of Baghdad had showed themselves. These were followed by attacks on the railway line, and from the 9th August the train service from Baghdad to Qurraifu and Kingarban ceased. As the railway line at Baqubah had been cut, and the presence there of insurgents in some strength was reported, I sent from Baghdad, on the 10th, a small mixed column under Brigadier-General H. G. Young, commanding the 7th Cavalry Brigade, the despatch of which removed my last reserve from Baghdad.

The moment was an inopportune one for weakening the garrison of Baghdad, as reports, to which I have already alluded, had been received of possible attacks not only from the west but from the north. The police, too, had selected the 12th August for the arrest of certain agitators, and on the night of that date an outbreak was predicted, and the internal defence scheme was ordered to be put in operation. It was important, however, if possible, to nip in the bud the first signs of insurrection in an area which had so far escaped contamination. Brigadier-General Young's column consisted of—

“A” Battery R.H.A., Chestnut Troop (one section).
1st King's Dragoon Guards (about one hundred sabres).
7th (P.R.) Dragoon Guards (about one hundred sabres).

OPERATIONS NORTH-EAST OF BAGHDAD 153

16th M.G. Squadron (one section).
50th Pack Battery R.G.A. (one section).
1st Battalion Rifle Brigade.
1/94th (Russell's) Infantry (one and three-quarter companies).

The concentration of this force at Baqubah—except the 1/94th Infantry, which was already there—was delayed owing to railway difficulties; but before daylight on the 12th August the column, less the 1st Battalion Rifle Brigade, which I ordered to be left at Baqubah Station, whence it was intended to entrain it again for Baghdad at 6 P.M., had started on its mission.

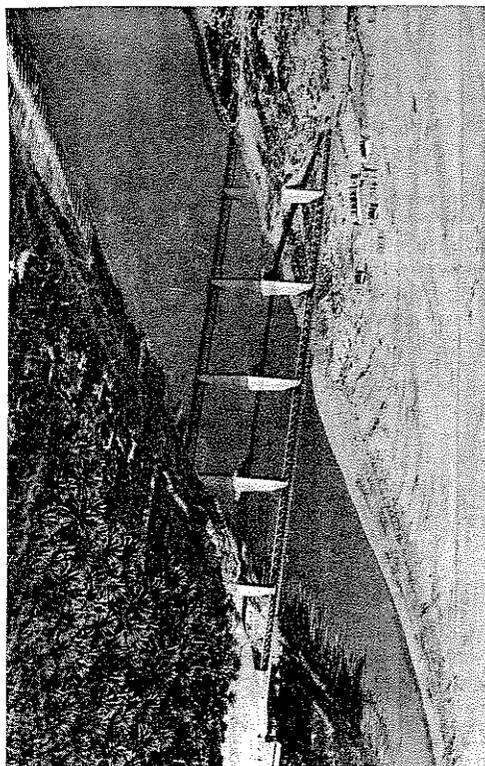
To the cavalry, under Lieut.-Colonel J. Williams, 1st King's Dragoon Guards, and a sub-section of the 16th Machine-gun Squadron, was entrusted the duty of destroying the offending villages, which proved to be eighteen miles distant from the railway. In rear, in support of the cavalry, followed the remainder of the troops under Brigadier-General Young, consisting of the section of the Chestnut Troop, the section of the 50th Pack Battery, one and three-quarter companies of the 1/94th (Russell's) Infantry, and a portion of a medical unit, whose destination was to be Marut, which is eleven and a quarter miles from Baqubah Station.

Doubts arose as to the trustworthiness of the guide, as difficulty was found in maintaining the proper direction, and the march was not to pass off without an incident which roused suspicions of an ambush. For, with four miles still to be accomplished and about an hour before dawn, some of that portion of the infantry which formed the rear of the column was fired into by a party of mounted Arabs. This was too much for the men's nerves; they became panic-struck, and caused the mules of the 50th Pack Battery to stampede through the ambulance and horse artillery, resulting in many other animals following suit with their vehicles. For a time, and until dawn at 4.30 when the column re-formed, there was almost complete chaos, the horse artillery being then able to move

only by dismounting all detachments to replace team-horses killed and missing.

Half an hour later a large volume of smoke was observed to the south-east, from which it was inferred that Colonel Williams's column had reached its objective and carried out its mission; and at 5.30 A.M. some two to three hundred Arabs, mostly mounted, began to appear to the north-east and south. As they seemed to be gathering for an attack, and as the infantry had not recovered from its surprise and could not be relied upon, a message was sent by ear for two companies of the Rifle Brigade to come up in support. But the guns of the section of the Chestnut Troop and the one serviceable pack battery gun now shelled the tribesmen with good effect, and by 7 A.M. they began to disappear. Brigadier-General Young then advanced, and came in touch with the cavalry, who, helped by the fire of the guns, joined him half an hour later. From Colonel Williams he learnt that on the return journey the mounted Arabs had closely followed up for eight miles, and that the cavalry had been constantly engaged with them. Meanwhile a search round the place where the stampede had occurred resulted in the recovery of a considerable quantity of material. By 8 A.M. the junction between the two small columns was effected, and Baqubah was reached at noon, the Rifle Brigade having been informed some time earlier that its support was no longer needed.

At 3 P.M., after the combined columns had gone to their bivouac across the Diyalah river, the road and railway bridge over which was guarded by the 1/94th Infantry, the local Assistant Political Officer reported that a heavy attack was imminent on Baqubah, which lies about a mile east of the river, and asked for help to protect the civilians there. This request was refused, as the troops were under orders to return immediately to Baghdad, and he was ordered to evacuate the town, which should have been done much earlier. This operation was effected with the help of the Rifle Brigade; and all troops, except the bridge guard, which was left with rations for ten days, withdrew across the river by 7 P.M. An hour later the Rifle Brigade



Bridge over Diyalah river near Baqubah.



Baqubah—Railway station in foreground.

left by rail for Baghdad, other troops following as trains became available, while the cavalry and horse artillery returned by road, arriving on the 14th August.

The mishap which had occurred during the night march of Brigadier-General Young's column was known later not to be attributable in any degree to treachery on the part of the guide. It appears that a raiding party of some fifty Arabs, in ignorance that operations were in progress in the neighbourhood, was making its way to Bagdubah in the hope of looting that place, and on suddenly meeting a body of troops opened fire on them. It is possible that had this night encounter not taken place the spread of the insurrection to the Diyalah district might have been delayed for a few days. As it was, however, it undid any good effect which the punishment inflicted by Colonel Williams's force might have brought about, and not only served to exasperate and encourage the tribes east of the Diyalah river, but precipitated the rising. The time at which the operation was undertaken could not, as I have pointed out, have happened more inopportunistly, and the absence of troops from Baghdad caused me much anxiety, as the temper of the inhabitants was such that the forces left behind were quite inadequate to control them should an outbreak occur. Moreover, the large depots and stores on the right bank of the Tigris offered a temptation to the tribes in the neighbourhood, who for a long time gave annoyance by the numerous small raids they made in order to pilfer them.

Meanwhile the attempt to arrest several of the agitators to which I have referred proved a failure, and probably did more harm than good. I have been told that the intentions of the civil police were known not only to those whose liberty was threatened, but to many others in Baghdad. In consequence the police met with opposition, and there were a few casualties among the populace; and under cover of the disturbance those who were "wanted" made good their escape, and afterwards were constantly heard of in different parts of Iraq doing their best to keep the fires of insurrection burning.

By the 10th August the third infantry unit of the reinforcements from India—the 1/15th (Ludhiana) Sikhs—had landed at Basrah, and had been hurried by river to Kut, and thence by rail to Baghdad, where it arrived on the afternoon of the 13th. I had known this distinguished regiment on the North-West Frontier in 1897-8, and was particularly glad to have it under my command.

Early next morning it was sent to reinforce the small garrison at the railway bridge over the Diyalah near Bagdubah, and protect the wireless station near that place. Here also was the large Assyrian refugee camp, which, in my despatch dated 8th November 1920, I credited with being in a far better position to take care of itself than I have since learned was actually the case.

Except two hundred modern rifles with only ten rounds apiece, there were no weapons at the camp beyond some hundreds of 1866 Winchester repeaters, which were of little practical value. Unfortunately the camp, which had a perimeter of nearly seven miles, and in which were living the officer in charge, Lieut.-Colonel F. Cunliffe-Owen and his wife, offered an easy target to the Arabs, who for three days harassed it on all sides with their fire, much of it at close range. In consequence, among the hospital patients alone there were from forty to fifty casualties, and many also among those guarding the animal camp, which had necessarily to be near the river, from the left bank of which much of the fire was directed. After three or four days a consignment of rifles and small arms ammunition was sent from Baghdad, but the insurgents derailed the train which was carrying it, four miles from the refugee siding west of Bagdubah. Thereupon a mounted party under Lieut.-Colonel Cunliffe-Owen left the camp, and driving off the Arabs, prevented the ammunition from falling into hostile hands, and conveyed it safely back.

But the Assyrian riflemen repaid with interest all the unpleasant attentions which they and their families received. On one occasion, annoyed beyond endurance by the firing, a party crossed the river and took heavy toll of their tormentors, raiding four villages and bringing back

two hundred and fifty sheep and seventy head of cattle. On the 17th August, too, when a train-load of Assyrians was on its way from the camp to Baghdad, it happened to draw up near a village which was friendly. But the Assyrians make no fine distinctions where an enemy or loot is in the wind. In a trice the train emptied itself, and no efforts could prevent men, women, and even children from making for the village, which, in retaliation for the firing into the camp and the fact that a train had at one time been derailed in its vicinity, was quickly cleared of all the portable property which it contained.

The unrest north-east of Baghdad now spread, and by the 25th August practically all the tribes north of the Diyalah became implicated in the rising, and lawlessness and disorder spread as far north as Kirkuk, and later on to Arbil. One of the results of this was that several of our outposts on the Baghdad-Quraitu line and the branch line to Kingarban were attacked and temporarily cut off. But this state of affairs was not allowed to continue without efforts being made to suppress it. Though troops were not available to check the rising in its initial stages, the energetic action of Colonel J. H. F. Lakin, the Officer Commanding the Persian Line of Communication, who made the utmost use of the very small force which he hastily collected, prevented the spread of the disorders beyond our border into Persia.

The disturbed condition of Mesopotamia in July began to reflect itself by increased uneasiness among the tribes within the Persian border. The new Governor-General of Kemanshah had signalled his appointment by following the time-honoured custom of discharging several subordinate officials and replacing them by others, who no doubt paid heavily for the privilege of serving him, and made those under them pay too. Ill-feeling had in consequence been aroused which spread to the tribes, and in the first week of August two isolated attacks had been made on convoys on the Hamadan-Kasvin road, which resulted in the death of several persons. But the prompt action of the British Assistant Political Officer at the former

place, whereby the leader of the assailants and three others were killed and some taken prisoners, had a salutary effect on that area. The next part to be affected was that which lies west of the Kernanshah-Karind road, where it was reported that the wrath of the tribes might vent itself on the occupants of our camp at the latter place. Nothing came of this threat, and the trouble, as we have seen, now transferred itself to the route between Bagdabah and the frontier. On the 15th August all rolling-stock north of that place was ordered to be collected at Khanakin Road and Quraitu, which, being a railroad for our troops in Persia, demanded special care for its protection.

Colonel Lakin now sent one of his staff, Major D. B. Edwards, Central India Horse, with seventy British and eighty-eight Indian ranks, three Vickers and two Lewis guns, to Khanakin Road, which was reached on the evening of the 14th. Here the Assistant Political Officer with his family arrived for safety, and no sooner had he left the town than it was sacked and his offices were burned. At the same time an attack on the engine-shed at the station was driven off.

Next day, while all the railway personnel that could be spared were being evacuated by rail to Quraitu, Major Edwards made a reconnaissance down the line, and after crossing the bridge, which had been badly burned, and entering a cutting, the train was fired on by a party of some forty mounted men, who were dispersed.

On the 16th August a body of tribesmen some two hundred strong, coming from the direction of Khanakin town, made a determined attack on the station. Two and a half hours of serious fighting followed, during which the Vickers gun teams of No. 2 Light Armoured Motor Battery and the Lewis gun sections of the 1st Battalion Royal Irish Fusiliers particularly distinguished themselves, and drove off the assailants, who left behind them fifteen dead.

But more troops were now approaching Quraitu. On the 18th August I had ordered the 1st Battalion Royal Irish Fusiliers to be sent from Kasvin in motor-torries, and

besides these troops Colonel Lakin had collected the 13th British Pack Battery from Karind, a section of which covered seventy-two miles in seventy-three hours, a creditable performance, as the heat was great. The Assistant Political Officer, too, at Kernanshah had placed at his disposal two hundred and fifty Sinjabis and two hundred Kalhur and Guram horsemen, who were concentrated for use on the Persian frontier.

When Colonel Lakin arrived at Quraitu on the 17th August, Kasr-i-Shirin town was in a state of panic, and the road crowded with refugees who were flying to the Persian hills. A column, under Lieut.-Colonel H. S. Gaskell, the Chief Engineer Officer on the line of communication, was at once formed, which consisted of the 13th Pack Battery R.G.A. (less one section), and the 79th Garnatie Infantry (four hundred rifles), and this force reached Khanakin Road without opposition on the morning of the 19th. Punishment was inflicted on the villages, the inhabitants of which had taken part in the previous attack, and repairs to the railway were begun. On the 20th Khanakin town was reoccupied by a small force, and the Assistant Political Officer reinstated. By the 23rd the small columns under Major Edwards and Colonel Gaskell were amalgamated into one force, under the command of the latter, to which was added the remainder of the 13th Pack Battery, the 65th Sapper and Miner Company, and some details.

Next day Colonel Gaskell, with two guns and two hundred and fifty rifles, marched to relieve Karaghah, where the railway from Baghdad bifurcates, one branch leading to Quraitu and the other to Kingarban. The post at Karaghah had been cut off for some days, and its state and that of other posts on the Kingarban branch had caused some anxiety, as the rising in that area had come with such suddenness that the garrisons were ill supplied to stand a siege.

Near Khanakin Road station a considerable body of tribesmen was driven off by Colonel Gaskell's column and severe punishment inflicted, with the loss of only two wounded to our troops; and later in the day the post

at Karaghan was relieved and some additional rolling-stock which was recovered there sent back. The relieved garrison, consisting of one hundred and thirty rifles of the 1/94th (Russell's) Infantry, under Lieutenant J. H. D. Hunter, had made a fine defence, driving off repeated attacks by tribesmen in the neighbourhood, whose numbers were estimated at six hundred.

On the 25th a small force under Major R. M. Medill, Royal Artillery, in conjunction with two hundred and fifty Sinjahi mounted men under Captain J. B. Moore, Assistant Political Officer, made a night march and destroyed the stronghold of a local leader. On the same day, while a post to cover the bridge between Khanakin Road and Kizil Robat was under construction, two sections of the 65th Sappers and Miners were attacked by some three hundred tribesmen. Lieut.-Colonel Gaskell, who was present superintending the work, broke through the insurgents on an engine under heavy fire, and made for Khanakin Road, whence he brought back with him one hundred and thirty rifles. With these he relieved the little garrison of sappers who, under Captain Scott-Ruffie, had held their own for two hours, and the insurgents were driven off with forty casualties.

On the 27th, reinforced by part of the garrison of Karaghan, Lieut.-Colonel Gaskell advanced in two columns to Kizil Robat, where it was reported that the strength of the insurgents had greatly diminished. Although opposed, the town was reached and the railway repaired, after which the force withdrew.

On the 28th Lieut.-Colonel F. A. Greer, commanding 1st Battalion Royal Irish Fusiliers, who had arrived from Kasvin with part of his battalion, took command of the operations, which, though small in proportion to others, were of much importance, as, in conjunction with other operations about to be described, they served to open up the railway route to Persia.

On the 20th August the Acting Civil Commissioner had informed me that the forces in the disturbed area with which I should have to deal might soon rise to ten thou-

sand men, that quantities of arms were being bought in Persia by the insurgents, and that the tribes across our border in that country would in all probability join forces against us.

As the situation was one which might conceivably involve the safety of the whole of the married families at Karind and Sar-i-Mil, or in any case create alarm locally and elsewhere, I ordered these camps to be concentrated at the former place, arrangements for defence to be made, and supplies to be collected locally. As regards defence there were one thousand British troops, mostly young soldiers, at Karind, and there was no cause for anxiety regarding supplies, which are readily obtainable in Persia.

It was in these circumstances that I decided to transfer the troops at Hillah and reopen the Persian line of communication, and defer the relief of Kutlah. The plan, from a military point of view, was unsound, as it involved the postponement for some weeks of the despatch of troops to an area where their presence was essential as speedily as possible to wipe out the memory of the mishap of the 24th July. Moreover, early success south of Hillah would react to our advantage in other parts of Mesopotamia, and would help to stay the insurrection which still showed signs of spreading. Nevertheless, the shelving for a time of the Kutlah operation was unavoidable, and fortunately the arrangements which were made to neutralise the ill effects of its postponement, and to which I shall presently refer, proved adequate.

While the necessary forces were being concentrated, Lieut.-Colonel Greer's troops began a forward movement. His column consisted of—

- 13th Pack Battery R.G.A.
 - 1st Battalion Royal Irish Fusiliers (less two companies, which joined later).
 - 79th Carnatic Infantry (one hundred and fifty rifles).
 - 1/94th (Russell's) Infantry (three platoons).
 - 15th Light Armoured Motor Battery (one section).
 - Fifty Irregular Horse (Persian Kurds).
- Some sappers and miners and details.

Mirjanah was reached on the 1st September after some opposition, and useful work was done in the repair of the railway line.

The 1/15th Sikhs, in the meantime, under their energetic commander, Lieut.-Colonel H. S. E. Franklin, in anticipation of the arrival of the troops from Hillah, had occupied Bagdab and the railway station, expelling, after fighting under difficult conditions owing to the thick undergrowth, a number of insurgents who had taken possession of the palm gardens round the town.

On the 22nd August the construction of blockhouses between Baghdad and Bagdab and on the Baghdad-Kut railway was begun. The work on the latter line, which was my main line of communication, and which had already received attention in so far as the protection of the important bridge over the Diyalah river was concerned, was to begin simultaneously from both ends. This could only be carried out slowly at first, posts being placed at the railway stations, but, as troops arrived from India, I was able to allot for the work the 1/12th Pioneers, the 2/89th Punjabis, and the 2/96th Infantry.

I had hoped to begin moving from Bagdab by the 1st September, and, in order to help the administrative arrangements of the 17th Division, had sent some of my own staff to that place; but the single line of railway and the small amount of rolling-stock made the concentration of troops from Hillah, who had to detrain at Baghdad West, cross the river and entrain again, a painfully slow process. On the 5th September, however, the 34th Brigade column, under Brigadier-General Coningham, was assembled immediately south of the Diyalah railway bridge, and began its advance next day. It consisted of the following troops:—

32nd Lancers (less two squadrons),
35th Scinde Horse (less two squadrons),
97th Battery R.F.A. (less one section),
132nd (How.) Battery R.F.A.,
Bridging train (one section),
1/15th (Ludhiana) Sikhs,

45th (Rattray's) Sikhs,
1/99th Infantry,
1/10th Gurkha Rifles,
and details.

A smaller column, the 75th Brigade column, under Brigadier-General G. A. H. Beatty, C.M.G., D.S.O., and composed of—

45th Pack Battery,
9th Company 2nd (Q.V.O.) Sappers and Miners,
3/9th (Bhopal) Infantry,
2/119th Infantry,
122nd (Rajputana) Infantry (a small detachment),
1/12th Pioneers (two companies),
and details,

was entrusted with the care of the Persian line of communication within our border.

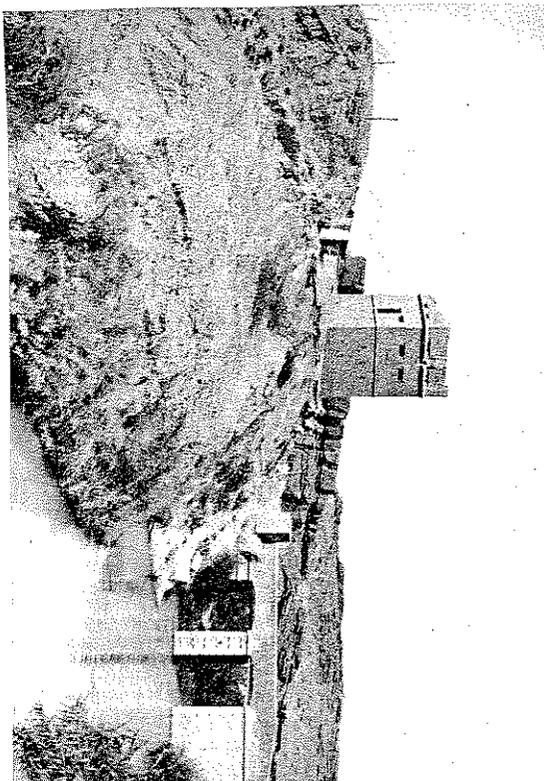
Of the tribes in the Bagdab - Quraithi area—generally called the Diyalah tribes, from the name of the river which waters the region they inhabit—it may be said that they had risen as the result of propaganda. Reports had been sedulously spread among them by agitators from Baghdad and elsewhere to the effect that the British had begun evacuating the country; and when Bagdab was left by the Political Officer on the 12th August, the truth of what they had been told seemed evident. The opportunity was one which promised loot, and was therefore not to be disregarded. The tribes in question are none of them large, and belong to no great confederation, as is the case with the Muntafiq, Shamiyah, Bani Lam, and others, and so lack the cohesion and fighting qualities of those in the Euphrates valley. Moreover, they are not so well armed as are the latter.

Before the advance began a proclamation had been issued calling upon them to cease hostilities, and whether this injunction, the fear of reprisals, or the knowledge of their inability to oppose a strong force actuated them, the resistance encountered by General Coningham on his march was almost negligible.

On the 8th, between Abu Jisrah and Sharabhan, a force of six hundred insurgents was encountered who were holding the Marut canal, which carries a portion of the waters of the Diyalah to an area west of Balad Ruz. These, evidently thinking that they had only a small force to deal with such as had operated from the direction of Quraitu, began advancing from their position with some boldness. No sooner, however, had our main body come in sight than hesitation was displayed, and the 32nd Lancers, galloping forward, crossed the bridge, routed a portion of the force, and turned the flank of the remainder, who withdrew in haste.

The column now pushed on and reached Sharabhan. That town had been attacked on the 15th August by a rabble, which included the villagers and tribesmen in the neighbourhood, the whole being led by an ex-Shabanah officer, who had some time before been dismissed for corruption. When the rising took place there was at Sharabhan a small colony of Englishmen, the existence of which was unknown to me until after the incident which I am about to relate took place. The colony included an English lady, the wife of Captain Buchanan of the Irrigation Department; but through the non-reception of a return her name had not been entered in a lately revised statement of the wives of civil officials in Mesopotamia, and the Acting Civil Commissioner was unaware that she had left Baghdad, where she had been in June. The only troops at Sharabhan consisted of a detachment of Levies,¹ numbering some fifty men, under the command of Captain Bradford, with Sergeant-Major Newton and Instructor Nesbitt. These were attacked by greatly superior numbers, whereupon the majority of the rank and file deserted; but the British officer in command, as well as the Assistant Political Officer, Captain Wrigley, the Irrigation Officer, Captain Buchanan, and the few men who remained faithful, gallantly defended the Qishlah or old Turkish Barracks—the Levy quarters, which were situated a short distance to the north, being less suited for defence.

¹ The Levies were not at this time under my command.



Blockhouse and regulator of Ruz Canal.



Sharabhan—Qishlah or old Turkish barracks in foreground.

The little force was assailed by hordes of yelling Arabs, among whom Captain Wrigley, it is said, recognised a local inhabitant of some consequence. Thereupon he called to him by name, and, accompanied by Captain Bradford, made as if to parley with him. For a brief space there was a pause in the fight, and it almost seemed as if the defenders of the Qislah were within an ace of escaping with their lives. Unfortunately some of the Levies of Kurdish origin, who may have failed to appreciate the situation, reopened fire on the Arabs, who, suspecting treachery, resumed the attack. They at length succeeded in forcing their way into the Qislah, where after a final stand all the Englishmen except one perished. The latter, who was severely wounded, and Mrs Buchanan, whose husband had been killed before her eyes, were removed to the house of a shakh in the town, where they remained in captivity until the arrival of the relief column several weeks later.

If may be mentioned that on the date of this lamentable occurrence an aeroplane from Baghdad, which was making a reconnaissance over the freshly-disturbed area, flew over Sharaban, and on its return the observer reported that nothing unusual had been noticed there. Even if information of what was in progress had been forthcoming, no steps could have been taken that would have saved those at Sharaban from the fate which befell them; for the lack of troops, the danger of sending a column along an unguarded line as exemplified by the relief of Rumaitah, apart from the time necessary to organise and transport such a column to a point sixty-two miles from Baghdad, would have prevented the success of any attempt at rescue. It has been suggested that armoured-cars might have succeeded on this occasion in saving some at least of the British. The futility of their employment in a closely-cultivated and, in places, intricate country such as that which lies east of the Diyalah, has been more than once demonstrated in Mesopotamia with disastrous results. Moreover, as was mentioned earlier, the battery of these vehicles at Baghdad was unfit to move except on a road or prepared track.

But to resume the story of Brigadier-General Coningham's operations. On the 9th and 10th September the force halted, as Sharaban, being a centre of intrigue, a fine of rifles had to be collected and other punishment meted out. On the night of the 9th/10th an attack was made by the insurgents on the post at Abu Jisrah station, which demonstrated the necessity for erecting blockhouses at intervals along the line before the withdrawal of the married families from Karind could take place.

This procedure would lead to delay, but no risk could be taken where the lives of women and children were involved. In order to put into force this policy, part of General Coningham's force marched back to Abu Jisrah, and on the 12th blockhouse construction began simultaneously from Abu Hawa, Abu Jisrah, and the Marut canal. So quickly was the work carried out that in three days forty-five blockhouses were built between the station at Abu Hawa and the Balad Ruz canal.

In the meantime Colonel Greer's column, with which Brigadier-General Coningham's force was in communication, had been ordered to push forward through the gorge where the Diyalah traverses the low-lying Jabal Hamrin range; and on the 14th September the column entered it, and the latter officer advanced to meet him, leaving a battalion at Sharaban to cover the construction of blockhouses.

The railway line was repaired, but traffic could not be resumed throughout the length of the line owing to the damage to one important bridge, which took some weeks to restore. Posts, which were later replaced by strong blockhouses, were now established to guard the regulators at the heads of the several canals on the left bank and the Khalis canal on the right bank of the Diyalah, whence the waters are distributed by their agency throughout a very extensive area. By holding the regulators the supply of water could be completely cut off from the cultivators. As it happened, however, that the lands of some of the inhabitants who were well disposed towards us were situated some distance down-stream from the regu-

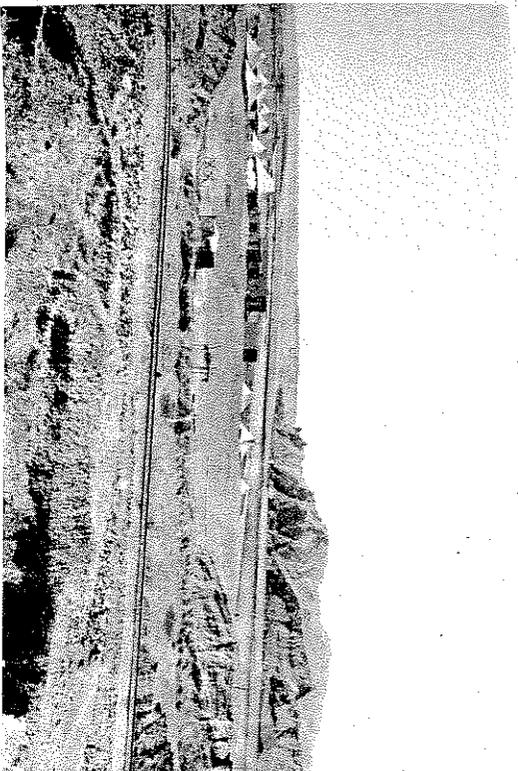
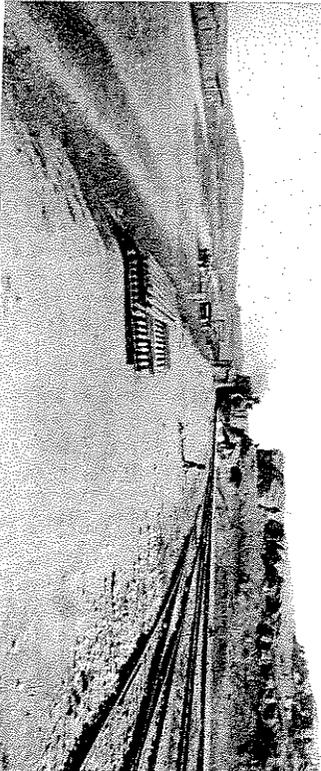


Table Mountain.



Qurain railway station.

lators, while the possessors of those nearer the heads of the canals were hostile, the restriction of supply could not be placed on the latter without inflicting injury on the former. By the 22nd September the first daily train of married families from Karind reached Baqubah. Elaborate and careful arrangements for their comfort had been made;

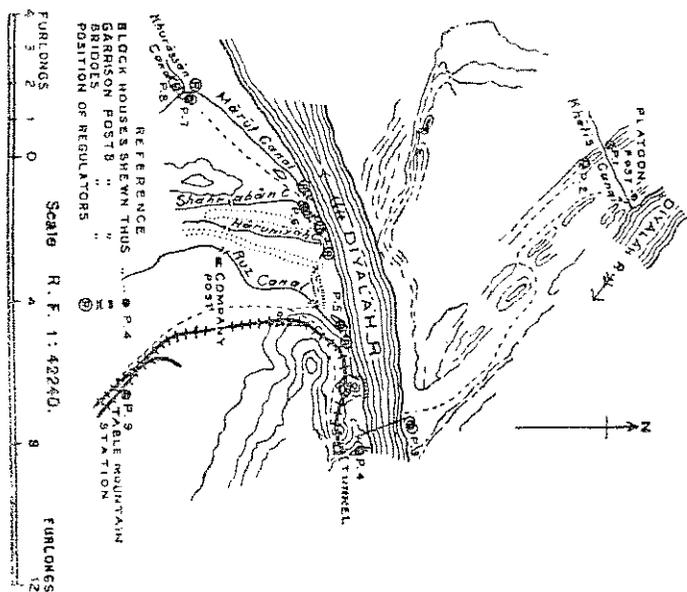


Fig. 6.—Canal Head Defences near Table Mountain.

but, owing to the centre portion of the large bridge just mentioned having been damaged with explosives by the insurgents, a change of trains was unavoidable. Quaint, however, was left daily at such an hour as permitted the transfer of baggage from train to train to take place in the cool of the morning, and while this was going on breakfast was served. By 6 P.M. the train reached Baqubah, where bath, dressing, and dining tents were ready, and

dinner shortly followed. Here the husbands met their wives, and accompanied them as far as Baghdad the same evening or next morning, according to whether the line on any particular date was considered safe for running trains by night or not. From Baghdad the journey was continued without change to Kut, and thence to Basrah and beyond by steamer.

A few days after the date on which the exodus from Karind began, most of the tribes in the disturbed area sent in their representatives and submitted to our terms.

I now began to withdraw the troops to Baghdad, and thence to Hillah, in order to carry out the relief of Kutah, the garrison of which I knew was getting short of food and other requirements. While this movement was in progress—and several days were necessary to complete it—I ordered Major-General Leslie, who had been in charge of the operations above described, to send a small force to Deltawah, a large village which lies ten miles north-west of Bagdubah. This place had for long been a haunt of sedition-mongers from Baghdad, and was the centre of disturbances which affected not only Bagdubah but also the railway line from that place to the Capital. Moreover, the Political Officer, Captain Lloyd, who was justly popular on account of his tact in dealing with the tribes, had been taken prisoner, and it was desirable to establish rule and order in the area. On the 24th, therefore, a column, under the command of Brigadier-General G. A. H. Beatty, composed as follows—

35th Seinde Horse (two squadrons),
97th Battery R.F.A. (less two sections),
132nd (How.) Battery R.F.A. (less one section),
9th Company Sappers and Miners,
1/15th (Lundiana) Sikhs,
2/119th Infantry (two companies),
1/12th Pioneers (two platoons),
and certain details,

marched to occupy the place. The opposition met with was slight, and on reaching Deltawah due punishment was inflicted. There a detachment of two hundred Indian infantry

was left to keep order, the government was again set up, and the submission of the tribes soon followed.

As a fortnight later indications of trouble showed themselves on the Tigris above Baghdad, the detachment at Deltawah was on the 15th October transferred to Sindiyah, where its presence was expected to have a salutary effect, and where, the rainy season being near, when movement across country becomes difficult, it could more easily be supplied from the Capital by river.

To keep order in the area from which I had withdrawn troops I left Brigadier-General Beatty with the under-mentioned force, which included the garrisons of block-houses :—

32nd Lancers (two squadrons and machine-gun section),
13th Pack Battery R.G.A.,
45th Pack Battery,
1/99th (Deccan) Infantry,
2/119th Infantry,

and some details, and also the detachment of the 122nd (Rajputana) Infantry, which shortly left to join its unit in the North Persian Force.

These troops, assisted by armed men of the Labour Corps, who held the blockhouse line and certain posts in the Jabal Hamrin, succeeded to keep the area in order, and furnished a small mobile column, whose headquarters was established at Sharaban. Bagdubah, which had suffered much loss at the hands of raiders and even after Brigadier-General Coningham's advance, was constantly threatened with a recurrence of external attacks, was now defended by a circle of blockhouses, which were held by two companies of the 2/119th Infantry.

On the 17th September Lieut.-Colonel Greer's force had moved towards Kingarban, the branch railway to which place had been considerably damaged by the insurgents. The necessary repairs were effected, and on the 27th September a train reached Kingarban from Bagdubah.

In order to maintain pressure on the inhabitants in and around Hillah during the absence of my main force north-

170 THE INSURRECTION IN MESOPOTAMIA

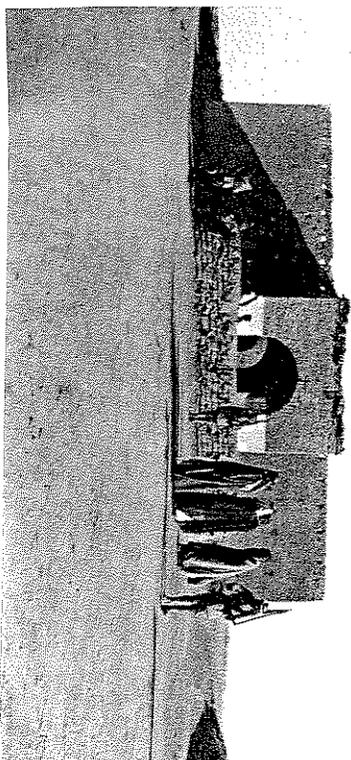
east of Baghdad, I had ordered Brigadier-General Walker's 55th Brigade column to be maintained in that area, but in considerably reduced strength. The column thus was limited to the following troops:—

- 37th Lancers (two squadrons).
- 39th Battery R.F.A. (one section).
- 131st (How.) Battery R.F.A.
- 2nd Battalion Royal Irish Rifles.
- 1/116th Maharrats.
- 17th Machine Gun Battalion (a detachment).
- 39th Combined Field Ambulance (a detachment).

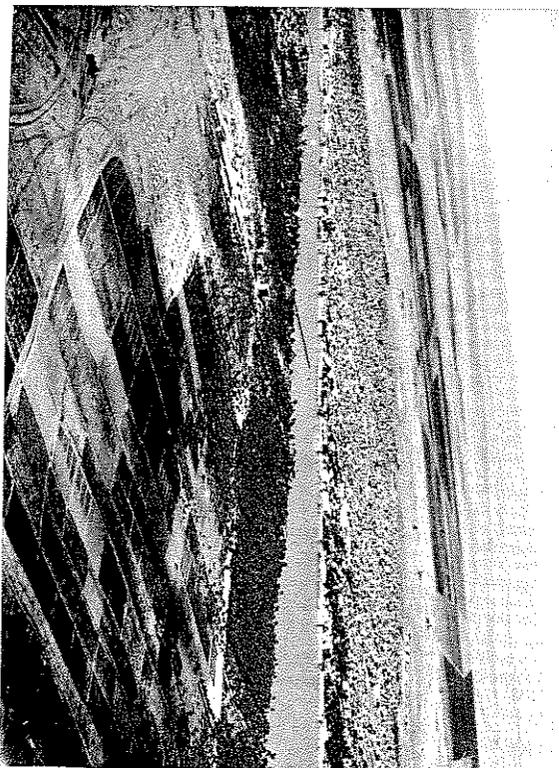
I considered that this force would, with the power that could be exercised by our possession of the Hindiyah Barrage, suffice to occupy the attention of the insurgents, and I further ordered that the Husainiyah canal, which supplies Karbala with river water and which had not been blocked when the barrage was occupied, should be closed and a post established at its head. To ensure safe access to Musayib from the railway and so facilitate supply, a line of blockhouses was constructed.

Brigadier-General Walker's column carried out some punitive operations against the tribes east of the railway who had interfered with the despatch of supplies to Hillah. These measures were successful, the shaikhs implicated surrendering unconditionally, and on the 23rd September the column returned to Hillah, having fully justified my hopes as to its utility.

Further north, on the Tigris, the Zoba tribe, which for several weeks had trembled on the brink of insurrection, had risen on the 14th August, and two days earlier had murdered at Khan Nuqtah Lieut.-Colonel Gerald Leachman, the Political Officer of the Dalain Division. On the 12th that officer had directed Shaikh Dhari of that tribe to meet him at Khan Nuqtah, which is one of two lonely caravanseri about midway between Baghdad and Fallujah. About 10.30 a.m. the shaikh arrived, accompanied by two of his sons, two nephews, and a few followers, and while waiting for Colonel Leachman sat smok-



Khan Nuqtah.



Baghdad from the south-west.

ing in the doorway of the khan, which was occupied by shabarah or police. About 12.30 Leachman drove up in his car, having with him only his servant and driver, and joined Dhari at the entrance to the khan, discussing with him until 2 p.m. matters connected with crops and revenue. About that hour a motor-car with a party of Arabs arrived, and stated that they had been stopped and robbed about two miles from the khan in the direction of Baghdad. Leachman at once sent a shabarah officer and ten men, as well as five of the Zoba, to arrest the robbers, but ordered the party not to proceed further than two miles from the khan. During their absence Dhari and the remainder of his men left the khan, after, it is believed, a heated discussion regarding the reported robbery, for which the Zoba were considered responsible; but soon returned, when Dhari asked the sentry to grant him admission in order to speak to the Political Officer. Orders were given to admit him, upon which two of his followers, one of whom was his son Sulaiman, fired at and severely wounded Colonel Leachman. As he fell to the ground Dhari came into the khan, and Leachman asked him why he had shot him, as he had never done him an injury. Thereupon Dhari drew his sword and killed him.

The loss at this juncture of such a man came as a shock to every one, for he was possessed of great courage and resource, and had an intimate knowledge of the people and the country. From the action at Shaibah in 1915 until the surrender of Mosul by the Turks in 1918 he had been present at all the principal engagements, and had only escaped capture at Kut by leaving that place with the cavalry a few hours before it was surrounded.

The result of the rising of this tribe was to cut off from Baghdad the troops which held Fallujah and Ramadi. Although the garrison had, as already mentioned, been furnished with supplies, and Major J. I. Badie, who had assumed political control, was doing admirable work in maintaining the *status quo*, I felt that some movement, however insignificant, towards reopening communication would, while my main force was north-east of Baghdad,

occupy the attention of the tribes west of that place, who were still reported from time to time to be concentrating with a view to attempting a raid on our supply depots.

Moreover, in addition to the murder of the Political Officer, this area was responsible for one of the several mishaps which had occurred on one of the six days from the 10th to the 15th August. So closely did the job-like reports of these mishaps, some of which have yet to be described, and all of which arrived from widely different areas, follow one another, that my equanimity was sorely tried. On the 10th came the news of the grounding of the *Greenfly*; on the 11th the ambiguous affair near Tel Afar; on the 12th the misfortune to Brigadier-General Young's column, the failure to arrest some extremists at Baghdad, and the murder of Lieut.-Colonel Leachman; on the 13th the loss of Khidhr railway station with two armoured trains and the isolation by land of Samawah and its garrison; on the 14th the massacre of the British at Sharabam, and on the 15th the loss of several vessels on the Upper Euphrates. Misfortunes seldom come alone, and those enumerated above, added to the disaster to the Manchester column ten days earlier, truly a heaping of Ossa on Pelion, were calculated almost to make one feel that the gods were not fighting on our side. Nevertheless, through having been in what are called "tight" places more than once before in my life, I not only felt confident that we should weather the storm, but could even sometimes laugh at the black clouds overhead. They had their slyer lining in the recapture of the Hindiyah Barrage on the 13th, and in the fact, most vital of any, that my troops were not cut off at Diwaniyah as they might so easily have been.

As regards what had happened in the area where Colonel Leachman had held sway, Brevet Lieut.-Colonel L. G. Williams, 5th Cavalry, who was in temporary command of the 51st Infantry Brigade, being dissatisfied with the state of his forage rations, decided to send some steamers from Ramadi to Fallujah to supplement his stores at the former place. With this object three ships, including a hospital ship, left Ramadi at 6 A.M. on the 15th, and were fired on,

first at five miles from that place, and again more heavily five miles further towards Fallujah, where there is much cover in the scrub on the river banks. No opposition had been anticipated, as on the 12th troops had moved by road and river along the same route without incident; but as a precaution a defence vessel, with a section of the 67th Company, 2nd (Q.V.O.) Sappers and Miners, under Lieut. A. W. H. Woods of that unit, on board, escorted the convoy, on two of whose steamers were five men of the 1/80th Carnatic Infantry.

About 7 A.M., when the firing opened for the second time, two of the steamers ran hard aground, and owing to the steersmen of the other two being hit by rifle fire, they also were carried by the current on to the mud, and could not move. Until ammunition ran short at noon, fire was maintained from the defence vessel, which, as well as the other steamers, was shortly boarded by some three hundred to four hundred Arabs. A few casualties occurred, but most of them probably earlier, for the marauders were bent on getting loot; and after securing it and setting fire to the vessels, made off, leaving the crews untouched.

Next day two squadrons 5th Cavalry, one section 96th Battery R.F.A., and two companies of the 2/6th Jat Infantry, under Major A. C. Norman, 5th Cavalry, marched from Ramadi at 4.30 A.M. to punish the villages whence the attack had come on the previous day. The enclosed nature of the ground, which at that season was overgrown with thick thorny scrub from three to five feet high, and intersected with deep irrigation channels, made movement for the troops difficult. Though opposed by the villagers, who took full advantage of the cover in the vicinity of their dwellings, the column carried out successfully the work assigned to it, and at 11.30 A.M. the return march began, Ramadi being reached some time later. Our casualties were three men slightly wounded, while of the insurgents seventeen, exclusive of those who fell from rifle fire, were bayoneted.

As mentioned earlier, the capture of the steamers, which were later salvaged, furnished useful propaganda among an

ignorant population, and led them to believe that the British Fleet had been destroyed.

It was in view of the preceding circumstances, and in order to avoid an appearance of passivity west of the Capital, which was highly undesirable, that I directed Brigadier-General G. A. F. Sanders, who had ably carried out the arrangements for the defence of Baghdad and the construction of blockhouses along the several railway lines which diverge from it, to undertake the operation of reopening communication with Fallujah. So much work of this nature was in progress at this time, and the supply of troops so limited, that not until the 3rd September could any attempt be made to reopen road and rail communication. On that date the 11th Company Sappers and Miners, with a labour party, protected by the 2/116th Mahrattas, two pack artillery guns, and some armoured cars, began work. Opposition was met with daily at long range which caused some inconvenience, but only once did the insurgents come to close quarters during daylight, when they were punished by the mountain-guns. By the 20th September the party which had been reinforced by one 6-in. howitzer and two companies of the 1/12th Pioneers shifted camp from Baghdad to Khan Nirqah, and next day the fort of Shaikh Dhari was razed to the ground, and all water cut off from his crops. This action led to the dispersion of the hostile elements in the neighbourhood, and facilitated the work on blockhouses. On the 24th Fallujah, which was already in communication with Ramadi, was reached by the armoured construction train, and the entire line was provided with blockhouses and garrisons by the 28th. Shortly afterwards I directed the troops at Fallujah to take over the garrisons of the blockhouses between that place and Baghdad, and to construct a post to command the regulators of the Sak-lawiyah canal. By securing control of this important point I should be in a position to prevent the insurgents from flooding, as the Turks had done in 1917, the country west of Baghdad, a procedure which would have caused considerable inconvenience, and made the movement of troops in

that area impossible. The restoration of communication with the Upper Euphrates had a beneficial effect not only on the tribes of that area but also on those who were settled between Samarrah and Baghdad.

Three days earlier the last of one hundred and seventy-three blockhouses on the Kut-Baghdad line was completed, and as certain defences had by this time been constructed at important points on the Tigris, the main line of communication from Baghdad to the Base, after having been for three months exposed to the risk of being severed, could now be regarded as secure.