

in 1907 won the Stock Exchange walk to Brighton and back, and had covered at the Stadium one hundred and thirty-one miles in twenty-four hours. Though very far above my form as a pedestrian, we agreed that if later a chance came we would tackle the rugged mountain facing Kernanshah, one ascent of which he had already made.

Next evening found us at Quraitu, whence, after a hot night journey, we reached Baghdad, where the inhabitants were more gaily clad than usual owing to the Muhammadan festival of the Id-ul-Fitr, which takes place on the termination of the fast of Ramzan or Ramahdan.

During the morning I discussed affairs with the Acting Civil Commissioner, who maintained that unless the troops in the country were at once reinforced from India the administration could not be carried on. As I had no reason then to fear a combination of the tribes, having no idea that our system of Government deliberately tended towards such an end, and as I was convinced that the London Temple of Janus would never open its gates until, to put it vulgarly, "the fat was in the fire," I continued to maintain an optimistic attitude. Moreover, as I have already pointed out, I did not place great faith in the reports that came in steadily and voluminously, and if even for a time we lost the Euphrates railway, it could be regained; while as a line of communication the Tigris river, which could not be tampered with, would still remain. Indeed, should the tribes be foolish enough to cut the railway line, the extremists in Baghdad, who were greatly responsible for the unrest in the country, would, with the population, be the earliest sufferers, for all our steamers on the Tigris would be required to feed the troops. In such a case the extremists would have good reason to put pressure on the tribes, provided, as shortly occurred, the whirlwind they were about to raise did not get beyond control. Any thought of obtaining an addition to my troops was limited by the knowledge that I was expected in the autumn to effect a reduction of a brigade of infantry and two regiments of British cavalry, provided I could get rid of several encumbrances, which I shall now proceed to mention.

CHAPTER VII.

MILITARY ENCUMBRANCES.

SOME of the troops under Brigadier-General F. E. Coningham, who had been engaged for several months in the Upper Euphrates area, had by now begun their long march back to Baghdad. These, when they arrived, would give me a useful addition to my small reserve there, and I had arranged also to withdraw one battalion from the Kirkuk area—the 45th (Ratray's) Sikhs—whence it could be spared, and make there other small reductions in garrisons. But no sooner did I make savings in one direction than my hand was called upon to go into my pocket again. The Acting Civil Commissioner was now asking for a detachment to hold Tel Afar, which is rich, and offered a tempting revenue, and proposed in return to dispense with troops at Zakhō, where for a long time no tribute had been raised. The question of revenue was, as usual, uppermost, for credit or discredit depended on success or failure in its collection. As Major-General Fraser, who commanded the 18th Division in the Mosul velayat, held strong views about giving up Zakhō, with which I agreed, I went to his headquarters by air on the 21st June, returning on the 22nd, and being piloted by Flight-Lieutenant F. Nuttall, one of our best pilots and mechanics, who, I regret to say, crashed and was killed in Persia a few weeks later. The result of my visit was that arrangements were made to garrison Tel Afar, and as both the Political Officer, Colonel Nalder, a most efficient and knowledgeable officer, and General Fraser were strongly opposed to giving up Zakhō, which might lead to fresh trouble on the border, I agreed to maintain the little garrison there.

During my brief absence from Baghdad the civil administration had, with the help of troops and armoured cars, which were sent to Karbala, arrested ten out of thirteen men who had been conspiring against the Political Officer, and sharing in an agitation which was in progress there. These arrests were, I imagine, somewhat belated, more particularly in the case of one of them; and it seems probable that if, even at the eleventh hour, the chief agitators had been seized and hanged or otherwise appropriately dealt with, the insurrection which was now at hand would not have taken place. In such matters it is impossible to speak with certainty, but I heard some months later of one shaikh of importance who, with tears in his eyes, had pressed when in Baghdad that such action should be taken, as otherwise he would find himself, having no quarrel with the Government, in the unenviable position of being forced to take up arms against us, so as to save his life at the hands of his tribe. I fully sympathised with men who were placed in so difficult a position, and later did my best to have them treated leniently.

I had previously tried to get rid of one of my encumbrances, the 14,036 Turkish prisoners, a number of whom had succeeded in escaping, and were roaming about the country, no doubt doing nothing which would tend towards its pacification. I now once more took up the matter, but it was inevitable that they should remain on my hands for some time longer.

Besides these prisoners, there were the camps of the Assyrian and Armenian refugees, a military encumbrance, of which I shall have more to say later on, which cost our country £90,000 a week. The question of their repatriation was a thorny one and difficult in the extreme to solve, and as far as could be judged there was no prospect of their immediate departure to their former homes or elsewhere. It was easy to foresee that in the event of an extensive rising these refugees, amounting in all to fifty-seven thousand of all ages and sexes, would become a considerable cause of anxiety.

But a far greater one lay in the large number of British

women and children in the country—the families of officers, non-commissioned officers, and men, not to speak of the wives of Political Officers and others who were scattered about the country, in some cases in places where only levies formed the garrison. So far as I was able to ascertain, the number amounted to five hundred and fifty-one women and three hundred and seventy-seven children.

It may here be of interest to touch upon the question of the presence of the British women and children, as the matter is one which during the insurrection caused a good deal of comment in the Press at home, some of it extremely ill-informed.

So far as I have been able to ascertain, the idea of allowing the wives and children of officers to come to Mesopotamia was first considered in the spring of 1919. In the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force there were then a number of officers, chiefly among those quartered at Baghdad and Basrah, who had been separated from their families throughout the whole course of the war, and who saw little or no prospect of obtaining leave from the country in the near future. These officers, who remind one in an inverse sense of the mountaineers and Muhammad, were naturally anxious to solve the difficulty by obtaining permission for their wives to join them, and the latter, it may be assumed, desired to bring the lengthy separation to an end. The country at this time was to outward appearances quiet, and that a little more than a year later it would become unsafe throughout its length and breadth was not foreseen.

The first reference home regarding this domestic matter took the somewhat unromantic but solid form of an assertion to the effect that the Director of Works had been authorised to begin making arrangements to provide furniture for ladies coming to Mesopotamia in the autumn. What occurred in the interval I do not know, but there was the usual delay in getting a reply. This is explicable by the fact of the necessity of referring a matter, which involved the expenditure of a considerable sum of money, to several branches of the War Office.

On the 30th June, however, one of these branches, other

than the one concerned with furniture or finance, telegraphed that the provision of passages for wives of officers, as well as those of other ranks, was under consideration, and views from Mesopotamia on the subject were solicited. It was pointed out that it appeared, from a letter which had been received from the Inspector-General of Communications at Basrah, that permission had already been accorded to wives of officers to proceed to Mesopotamia, but no sanction for this procedure had been given by the Army Council. This led to further exchanges of telegrams, and by September 1919 the matter had gone so far that the War Office was told that families could be accommodated in camps, and that a hill-station was available in the Persian hills where those among them who would not or could not go to India during the hot weather could be located. The War Office, commendably anxious for the welfare of the married families, seem to have had a little suspicion of the scheme, for, on the 20th September, the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief was informed that the Army Council would not give permission for families to accompany or follow units in which their husbands were serving, without a clear and authoritative statement that good and sufficient accommodation for the whole twelve months of the year was available both for officers' families and those of other ranks.

From Mesopotamia came the reply that excellent family camps had been arranged by units for all ranks until April, when families would move to a camp in the Persian hills. Some unit commanders and other more senior officers disliked the idea of the families coming to the country, but their wishes in the matter were not consulted or were overruled. Thus the families began arriving in Mesopotamia in January 1920, and after staying for a few weeks in camp at the various stations where British troops were quartered, moved to Karind, in the Persian hills, in April.

The question of the desirability of allowing families of married soldiers, as distinct from those of officers, to come to a country such as Mesopotamia is one on which I hold a strong opinion, and which differs from that of my pre-

decessor, who had left the country before my arrival. I have the advantage of actual experience on the subject, as when he left the married families had not arrived. My opinion, though it is much strengthened by the abnormal occurrences of last year, is based on the fundamental unsuitability of Mesopotamia as a place of residence for white women and children. The country, unlike India, is devoid of all the ordinary amenities of life, and possesses no hill-station—unless by the favour of the Shah of Persia. I will not dilate further on this matter, as my official opinion with my reasons for it are recorded at the proper place.

I cannot speak too highly of the arrangements which were made for the comfort and wellbeing of the families before I came to Mesopotamia. No complaint ever reached my ears, and I think there was no cause for any, though trivial points came up, all of which were rectified at once. Before leaving England I happened to hear of the project for sending married families to the country to which I would shortly be bound, and the idea was most repugnant to me. In the spring, however, when a telegram came to me from India inquiring whether I would care to retain there for the summer months the families who were then arriving in that country *en route* for Mesopotamia, I declined. My reasons were that I was new to the country, and did not, any more than my predecessor, consider that the local unrest, which was then but slight, would reach dangerous proportions; and I realised what a bitter disappointment it would be if, at the eleventh hour, I incurred in the continued separation between man and wife. In fact, the matter had gone too far, and I felt bound to accept a scheme of which I strongly disapproved.

Not long after I reached Baghdad the families began moving to Karind, which I had twice visited with General Hambro, my senior administrative staff officer, who had been responsible for the arrangements for their comfort there and elsewhere.

The hill-station, which is not in any way comparable to the Indian hill-stations, where the families were to pass the summer, as well as certain troops, mention of whom has

previously been made, is situated on the north side of a valley which is enclosed on both sides by high hills whose sides are in places precipitous. The valley averages about five thousand feet above sea-level, and opens out at Sar-i-Mil, where it is less than a mile in width, to from five to six miles near its eastern end, sixteen miles towards Kernanshah.

The hills rise gently from the plain, and the débris from them forms the principal component of the surface soil of the valley, through which outcrops of rock penetrate here and there. The soil generally on the slopes is very absorbent, and so keeps the surface dry. In spring and early summer the valley is tinged green by grass and herbaceous plants. Here and there are wild flowers, such as anemones and poppies, which give the scene, at those seasons only, a somewhat pleasing aspect.

Near the little town of Karind, where water is available, fruit-trees, vines, vegetables, and grain grow freely. In other parts of the valley small plants shrivel up and die from drought under the heat of the summer sun. Except for a few trees near Karind there is nothing of that nature beyond a belt of bushes and shrubs, chiefly stunted oak, which lines the borders of the valley, and climbs some little distance up the hills.

The climate proved healthy, and would undoubtedly have been more so had there been quarters for the occupants to live in, more or less free from dust, in place of tents, the temperature in which sometimes rose to 94 degrees Fahrenheit.

Sar-i-Mil, which I have mentioned, and which is about four miles from Karind, was selected as a Headquarters camp. It is a few hundred feet higher than Karind, and, like that place, escapes the scourge of the malarial mosquito, although three-quarters of a mile west of it the inhabitants are infected by that pest.

To Sar-i-Mil the greater portion of my staff had already gone, while representatives of the several branches remained at Baghdad. It was intended to give the officers and clerks in turn a change of air, and as this was the first attempt to open a hill-station for the force, I proposed myself to inaugurate it. And here I may mention one of

the peculiarities of Mesopotamia, which is that, unlike every other station of the British Army, there are no facilities either for leave in the country or for creating a sanatorium for those who are sick or convalescent, or whom it is desirable to spare the great heat of the plains. In 1920 we utilised Karind in Persia, which was flattered with the name of "hill-station," but the reduction of troops made the guarding of the route there impossible in 1921. Consequently those quartered in Mesopotamia must either wait until they have been long enough in the country to entitle them to take leave to the United Kingdom—an expensive journey in these days—or go through the Persian Gulf and back, at the hottest season of the year, and travel across India to the hills at a time when train-journeys are best avoided. With regard to sick, convalescent, and certain others, as it would obviously be dangerous to transfer them home or to India during the hot weather, they are obliged to bear as best they can the heat of the country, which enjoys, in the towns at any rate, a fictitious reputation for cool nights.

Before leaving Baghdad I told the Acting Civil Commissioner that, if there were any matter outside the ordinary routine work with which my staff who were left there were incompetent to deal, I could be at that city in a few hours by aeroplane, as a landing-place close to my camp in the hills had been arranged, or, if he preferred it, he could come to me.

I make no secret of the fact that I disliked the idea of remaining at Baghdad throughout the hot weather, where it was not easy, except for an hour or two in the late afternoon, to obtain sufficient exercise to preserve health. On the other hand, Sar-i-Mil was only a short distance from Karind, where there were troops of all arms and excellent ground for training, which would afford plenty of occupation outside office hours.

On the night of the 24th June I left Baghdad for Sar-i-Mil, which I reached next day, and where neither I nor my staff were to remain for long, since the threatened insurrection was at last on the point of breaking out.

CHAPTER VIII.

STATISTICS AND OTHER MATTERS.

I REGRET that, for a proper appreciation of much that follows, it is unavoidable that amongst other matters the somewhat dry subject of figures should be touched upon. The exposition will be as brief as possible, and details relegated to an appendix (No. IV.); but the misconception in the public mind at home as to the fighting strength of the forces in Mesopotamia demands an explanation.

At the time that the outbreak occurred the troops under my command, exclusive of those in Persia, in transit, and sick (who amounted approximately to 4800 British and 8000 Indian), numbered in round figures 7200 British and 53,000 Indian soldiers, or, in all, some 60,200 men. In the grand total are included 3000 British and 23,000 Indian troops, who were employed on non-combatant duties in various departmental services, and whose numbers, as in the case of guards, had been cut down as low as possible. To have reduced them still further, desirable as it was, would have been to accept unjustifiable risks, and amongst other things encourage speculation on an even more extensive scale than that from which we suffered. Appeals for the provision of regular departmental personnel had, owing to recruiting difficulties at home, been made in vain; and, unsatisfactory as it was to find over a third of one's combatant force locked up where their services, though necessary, were useless in the field, the situation had to be accepted.

Besides the total of 60,200 combatants, there was in Mesopotamia an almost similar number of Indian followers,

of whom only 5500 formed what are called regimental establishments. The balance consisted of the personnel of Labour Corps, the Inland Water Transport, water-supply stations, electric-lighting and ice-making establishments, and dairy-farms. But the last and largest total amounted to 80,000 souls, all of whom were also rationed by the army. These included the prisoners of war and the refugees already mentioned, and those, over and above true military personnel, who were employed in civil and quasi-civil occupations.

And at this point I must mention that, although the civil administration had relieved the army of the railways throughout the country, there were many establishments which were properly their concern, but the charge of which they were not in a position to undertake. Some of these I have enumerated above, and of them, with the exception of the Inland Water Transport, which had obviously to retain its military character whilst the danger of a rising threatened, I would gladly have washed my hands. But even it had a civil as well as a military purpose, for a large number of additional vessels had to be kept in commission to carry out the work of distribution of nearly nineteen hundred tons a week of all natures of oil, which included fuel oil for railways and power-houses, paraffin for the commoner type of internal-combustion engines, and petrol for aviation and motor-cars. It may create surprise among those who read the preceding sentences to learn that a British Army should be so immersed in concerns which in most countries are controlled either by private enterprise or the local government. But Mesopotamia under the Turks had almost none of the requirements of a modern army, and it had needed the ability and energy of my several predecessors since 1914, not to mention the purses of the British taxpayers, to build up the elaborate system whereby the army may literally be said to have "run the country."

This fact has, I think, been overlooked in some degree by those who have hurled charges of extravagance in military administration in Mesopotamia. War at best is an expensive luxury, and when waged in such a distant

country by a modern army the bill must necessarily be a heavy one. However, I am not concerned to defend such charges, and can only speak regarding my own period of command, when rigid economy, not to say frugality, was enforced.

I have already stated the fact of the inability of the civil administration to assist in the matter of relieving the army of what was a civil burden, and I was anxious, as soon as the necessary knowledge came into my possession, that commercial firms should share in the spoil, provided always that military requirements—and of this I was not satisfied—were met. But the insurrection intervened, and this important matter had to be deferred.

Before I leave this subject I would interpolate, although perhaps somewhat prematurely, what occurred later with regard to it, when the country, after the insurgents had submitted, returned to normal conditions.

In January 1921 the British Chamber of Commerce in Baghdad addressed to the High Commissioner a memorandum in which they expressed the opinion that the heavy military expenditure then being incurred in Mesopotamia was largely avoidable. They stated that in great part the expenditure was not directed towards the legitimate needs of the combatant force necessary to provide for the security of the country and the elaboration and completion of the scheme of self-government already inaugurated. In particular, the Chamber instanced as examples of unnecessary expenditure the Inland Water Transport, the Electrical and Mechanical Section, the Labour Directorate, the Department of Military Works, and the Mechanical Transport Department. In conclusion, the Chamber expressed the fear that the intolerable cost of the army in Mesopotamia would lead to its withdrawal under pressure of public opinion in England, and that such action would be disastrous to long-established British interests in Mesopotamia and the future of British trade in the country.

This memorandum was forwarded to me by the High Commissioner, with the suggestion that representatives of the civil administration and of the army should meet

representatives of the Chamber of Commerce and discuss the points at issue. In reply I stated that I cordially welcomed the proposal, and expressed my entire agreement with the Chamber of Commerce on the general question of the desirability of rigid economy in army expenditure. I added that I was ready to examine any suggestions which the Chamber of Commerce might put forward, in the hope that ways of reducing the cost of the army in Mesopotamia, without impairing its efficiency, might be discovered.

As a result of this memorandum a joint conference took place on the 15th February. It then at once became evident that the Chamber of Commerce had failed to appreciate many of the factors in the problem which the military administrative staff had to solve. For example, in reply to their contention that the mercantile shipping on the Tigris could have carried all military stores at considerably less cost than the Inland Water Transport, it was explained that during the summer of 1920, when the influx of troops to deal with the Arab insurrection caused demands for river transport which the Inland Water Transport had great difficulty in meeting, a contract to deliver two hundred tons of cargo per week at Kut-al-Amarah was let to the largest shipping firm on the Tigris—in fact the only firm which had any considerable fleet. At this time the Inland Water Transport was delivering over one thousand tons daily at Kut. The firm in question failed completely to carry out this contract, its deliveries only amounting to seventy-eight tons per week over several months. The manager of the firm in question was one of the representatives of the Chamber of Commerce at the conference, and while admitting the complete failure of commercial shipping to carry a small fraction of the army requirements in tonnage, he could offer no explanation.

As an instance of the wastefulness of the Military Works Department, the representatives of the Chamber cited the large brick-kilns erected by the army, and pointed out that the expenditure could have been avoided, and bricks obtained more cheaply by local purchase. The cost of bricks from the army kilns as worked out by the Command

Accountant came to Rs. 80 per thousand at Baghdad and Rs. 40 per thousand at Basrah. On the other hand, the local supply is very limited, the bricks are of bad quality, and the cost is Rs. 120 per thousand. When prior to the establishment of army kilns efforts were made to purchase a quantity of bricks in the local market, the price at once rose to Rs. 240 per thousand.

A further instance of waste put forward by the Chamber was that of the money spent on roads in the proposed cantonment at Hinaidi, which, they contended, were on a scale beyond any probable requirements. These roads were constructed by Turkish prisoners who could not be employed as general labourers, and would otherwise have had to be kept in idleness.

A discussion regarding other departments in which the Chamber contended great economies could be effected disclosed conditions similar to the examples given above.

After a very full, frank, and amicable discussion the representatives of the Chamber of Commerce admitted that they had entirely failed to grasp the problems which General Headquarters had to solve, complicated as they were by uncertain and often complete changes of policy, and they admitted their inability to substantiate their criticisms.

It may be observed, and I still refer to a time subsequent to the insurrection, that the army has made strenuous efforts for months to get the Civil Government or some commercial syndicate to take over and run the large electric power-plants at Basrah and Baghdad, which are the sole source of supply of electric power for those places. Their efforts so far have been fruitless.

Charges of waste in connection with Persia and the evacuation of the British force in that country are sometimes made. The force in Persia, as already mentioned, had its headquarters at Kasvin, the length and difficulty of communication with which have been described. The expense of transport on this route in consequence was enormous, for to carry one ton from Kasvin to Qumrahn cost approximately Rs. 1000 (£60 to £120, according to

the value of the rupee). It is obvious, therefore, that at so prohibitive a price there were few stores which it would not be a saving to the British public to destroy or give away on the spot rather than incur the cost of bringing them back to Mesopotamia to swell the accumulation of surplus stores in that country.

But to resume. After the reductions which I was forced to make from the fighting troops, the balance that remained amounted to 4200 British and 30,000 Indian troops, which consisted of units many of which were much below strength in men and weak in officers. I had in addition five batteries of armoured-cars, of which one battery was stationed in Persia, the others being distributed at Mosul and on the line of communication between Baghdad and that place, at Baghdad, and on the Euphrates line. These batteries were manned by men borrowed from infantry units, and the cars were old and much the worse for wear, a number being always unserviceable. The personnel only sufficed to man two or three sections in each battery, and seldom could more than four cars from each battery be employed at one time. The cars at Baghdad were of a heavy type, and unsuitable for use except on good roads, a fact which limited their employment to the area of the town and its immediate vicinity.

I had heard of the successful employment in Egypt of this form of military vehicle, and undoubtedly the armoured-car has its uses in certain countries; but I soon learned that in Mesopotamia its employment even in dry weather, for in wet weather it is useless, was strictly circumscribed. In cultivated areas such as the Middle Euphrates, the Diyalah district, and the vicinity of the Tigris, the numerous canals and irrigation channels, most of which are unbridged, or if bridged are only so for light traffic, make movement difficult and often impossible. Moreover, the Arabs had learned from experience that the pneumatic tyres are the Achilles' heel of the cars, and by directing their fire at those spots they had found that they could by a successful shot place the car and its occupants at their mercy. Soon after my arrival in Mesopotamia I had telegraphed home

for a supply of "tanks," for which the country seemed to be entirely suitable, but was informed that none was available, and that there was little prospect of any being provided for several years.

As regards the Royal Air Force, when hostilities began there were two squadrons in the country, the 6th and 30th; but of these there were only three flights at Baghdad, and the personnel of one flight was on its way from Anah on the Upper Euphrates. At that time three-fourths of the 30th Squadron were detached to Bushire on the Persian Gulf, Kasvin in Persia, and Mosul, two hundred and fifty miles north of Baghdad.

With the above-mentioned forces a country with a square mileage nearly thrice that of England, exceeding that of the United Kingdom, and only a little less than that of the Transvaal and Orange Free State Colonies combined, had to be garrisoned and administered. But a reference to superficial measurements or the study of a small-scale map conveys little to the ordinary mind, and what I have earlier stated as to the distances and the time taken to cover them will perhaps give a better idea of the task that lay in front of me.

At this time I had not learned that deductions based on my own well-arranged train journeys were misleading. Although the existence of several railways might lead to the supposition that troops in Mesopotamia can be moved from point to point with speed, this, as I have already hinted, is in fact not the case, owing to the insufficient and inefficient rolling-stock and lack of adequate European personnel for rapid and smooth transit. With the exception of a few miles here and there where embankments are built up, the permanent way—and this is so almost entirely in the case of the Euphrates valley railway—is laid practically on the ground level, and lies on earth and not on metal. Travelling is therefore slow, and made slower by the fact that the locomotives, either by the heat of the country or for other reasons, are compelled to stop every few miles of their run to take in water, a process lasting many minutes. Moreover, some of the Indian drivers are ill-disciplined

and a source of trouble, and the stationmasters appear to have little or no authority over them, or are afraid to exercise it.

As an instance I may quote the experience of a passenger on the Basrah-Baghdad mail train, which is typical of what occurs, and whose testimony is unimpeachable. The train in question was nine hours behind its scheduled time, and had reached a wayside station, where, after standing for about ten minutes and displaying no indications of moving, the stationmaster was asked what the prospects were of the journey being resumed. Although the line ahead was admittedly clear, he seemed to think that there was nothing surprising in the delay, and replied that the train would shortly move on. At the same moment the long-suffering passenger, happening to look towards the front of the train, saw the driver get down from his engine with a bucket in his hand. This vessel he proceeded to fill with hot water, and then, deliberately and in full view of the public, and making a free use of soap, bathed himself from head to foot. This process took some time, and the driver when remonstrated with retorted that there was no one else on the spot but himself who could drive the engine, and threatened to keep the train standing as long as it suited his convenience. At length, having completed his ill-timed ablutions, he consented to perform his duty, and the line, being reported clear, the train again moved on.

Such delays as these were soon to be aggravated by the insurrectionists, who tore up the line, cut off Baghdad from Basrah by the Euphrates route, and made it impossible for rolling-stock which operated from the former place, where there were no workshops, to undergo either periodical repairs or any that became necessary through the exigencies of the insurrection. Indeed, for some months the railway situation was exceedingly serious, not to say almost desperate, and the conduct of operations became difficult, for there were times when not a single locomotive was available at short notice to haul a train with urgently-needed reinforcements. In a country with a temperate climate,

provided with a good system of roads and with water available at regular intervals, suspension of movement by rail for a time, though inconvenient, would not create insurmountable difficulties. In Mesopotamia, however, there are areas where, unless the river line be followed or water for the troops is carried on trains, a procedure which necessitates the protection of the line at frequent intervals, their march becomes a practical impossibility.

But the task of guarding so large a country with so limited a force did not end here, for numerous deductions had still to be made from my troops, who, nominally regarded as two divisions, represented in reality little more than one. In addition to garrison duties throughout the country, guards amounting to a brigade were required for the Turkish prisoners, while the safety of the British women and children, numbering over nine hundred souls, and of the Assyrian and Armenian refugees, had to be ensured. At this juncture, too, the Mixed Brigade, which normally would constitute my only reserve at Baghdad, was still in the Upper Euphrates area, but, as mentioned, was in part in process of withdrawal to the Capital.

Thus on the 1st July I had at my disposal as a mobile force some 500 British and 2500 to 3000 Indian troops, of which a battalion only was in a position to reach the Middle Euphrates area within twenty-four hours.

CHAPTER IX.

THE OUTBREAK AT AND BELIEF OF RUMAITHAH.

THE first few days after our arrival at Sar-i-Mil were uneventful, and no disturbing news passed over the wires from Baghdad; but the calm was not to be of long duration, for on the 30th June an incident, trivial in itself, lighted the fire of insurrection on the Middle Euphrates.

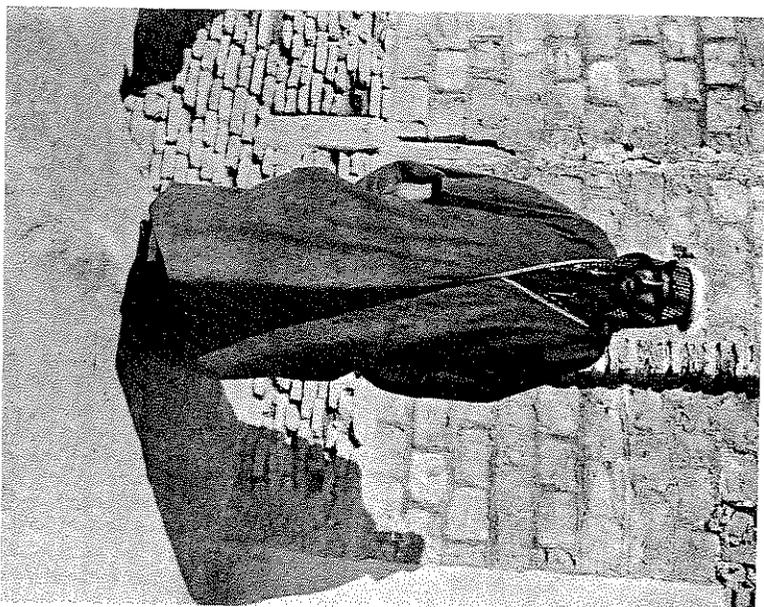
The scene of the trouble was the little town of Rumaitah, with some two thousand five hundred inhabitants, which stands on both banks of the Hillah branch of the Euphrates, about twenty-eight miles above Samawah. Its houses, which are mostly built of mud or sun-dried bricks, are scattered among gardens and date-groves. The circumstances which led to the outbreak were as follows:—

On the 25th June, Lieutenant P. T. Hyatt, the Assistant Political Officer at Rumaitah, had reported to the Political Officer of his division, Major C. Daly, that a long outstanding agricultural loan, some Rs. 800 (at that time about £100), owed by the shalkh of the Dhawalim section of the Bari Hachaim, had to be collected, and he was directed to arrest and send the defaulter to Diwaniyah. At noon on the 30th the man, Sha'alan Abu by name, was sent for, and after the necessity for payment had been explained to him, he was detained for the evening train to Diwaniyah. At 4 P.M. the retainers of the shalkh, however, took the law into their own hands, and following an example set about two weeks earlier at Samawah, fired at the political office, killed the Arab guard, and released Sha'alan. The

remainder of the police ran away, and left the Political Officer alone.

On the 25th June Major Daly had heard that the Dhwaim tribe had their flags out—showing that they considered themselves to be at war with the Government—but he decided that the wisest course was to proceed with the arrest of the defianting shaikh. That the outbreak was not purely local may be inferred from the fact that on the 1st July the railway line south of Rumaihah was torn up in several places, and a bridge destroyed. On the same date, too, a reconnoitring train from Samawah, manned by a few sepoy of the 14th Mahrattas, under Major Kiernander of the railway service, who, as well as Flying Officer G. C. Gardiner, was a passenger travelling from Basrah to Baghdad, became engaged with a large number of insurgents, and with difficulty succeeded in returning whence they came. North of Rumaihah more railway cutting was in progress, but the rising still retained its local character.

Troops, exceeding in number those sent to deal with a disturbance of a more threatening character which eighteen months earlier had been successfully quelled, were, at the urgent appeal of the Assistant Political Officer, at once despatched to the scene from Samawah. Two platoons of the 14th Mahrattas (fifty-six rifles) arrived by rail at 3.45 P.M. on the 1st July, whose commander, Lieutenant J. J. Healey, was informed by Lieutenant Hyatt that the country was very much disturbed, and a general rising of the tribesmen might be expected. Next day one company (less half a platoon) of the same regiment came from Diwaniyah, which raised the strength of the garrison of Rumaihah to one hundred and forty rifles. During the night the civilians were moved into the Political Serai, a two-storied brick building which is on the left bank of the river, and commands at some fifty yards' distance the approach to the bridge of boats, beyond which, on the other bank half a mile away is the railway station. All rations that were available, which included enough for



Shaikh Sha'alan Abu.

OUTBREAK AT AND RELIEF OF RUMAITHAH 75

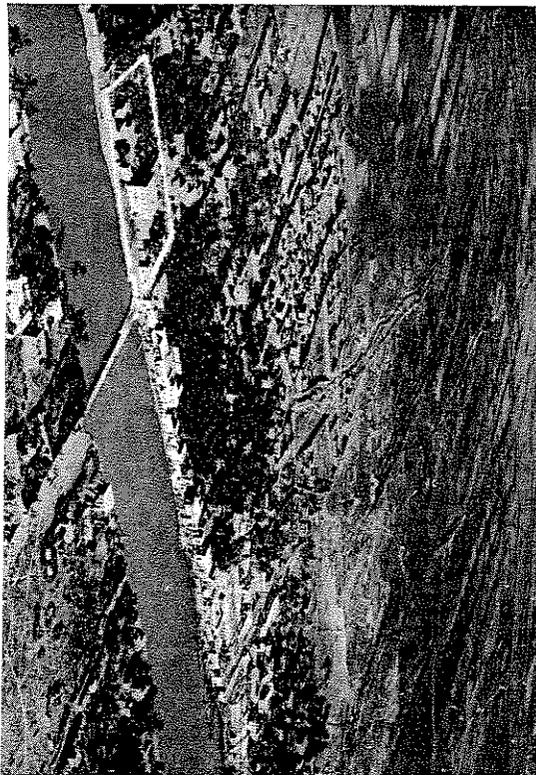
seven days for one hundred Indian soldiers, were also placed in the Serai.

On the 3rd July a company of another unit, the 99th Infantry, under Captain H. V. Bragg, which had been despatched from Hillah on the 2nd and had left Diwaniyah at 3.30 P.M. next day, arrived, and brought with it some railway personnel. This company had had an adventurous journey, during which a wooden bridge that had been burned down by the insurgents was repaired, while the Arabs interfered by firing heavily from the surrounding villages, causing some casualties among the troops and working party.

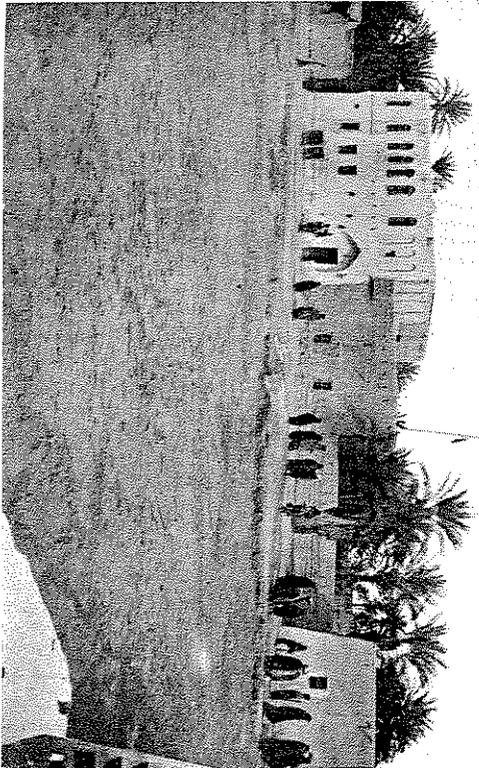
On arrival at Rumaitthah, Captain Bragg, being the senior officer, assumed command of the garrison, and with his own company occupied two Arab khans or caravanserais, one on each side of the village, while the 114th Mahattas and the non-combatants remained in the Serai. The troops at the disposal of the commander amounted to four British officers and three hundred and eight other ranks, together with two British officers and one hundred and fifty-three railway personnel and sixty Indians—in all, five hundred and twenty-seven. The task of providing food for this small force, which had only some two days' rations with it, soon became a cause of anxiety.

On the 4th the first signs of the coming siege showed themselves, when it was noticed that the Arabs were constructing a trench system north-west of the town, and carrying out regular reliefs—an indication that ex-Turkish Army officers were probably in control. On this date, complaints having reached the Assistant Political Officer that the occupants of the village of Abu Hassan, which is about one and a half miles south-east of Rumaitthah, had taken to looting the bazaar at the latter place, and were terrorising the inhabitants, it was decided that a reconnaissance through the bazaar in the direction of the seat of the trouble should be made. In consequence, the two platoons of the 99th Infantry, whose advance was covered by fire from the top of the two khans held by the 114th,

proceeded to carry out this mission under Lieutenant Marriott of the former regiment, who was accompanied by the Assistant Political Officer. The latter urged the subaltern not to be bound by the letter of his orders, but burn the hostile village before he returned to camp. This rather rash advice was to prove costly, for, owing to some delay in getting the men to advance, the Arabs, numbering it is said from fifteen hundred to two thousand, began arriving from every side. The two platoons were overwhelmed, forty-three being reported missing, or most likely killed, while one British officer, one Indian officer, and fourteen Indian other ranks were wounded. The usual result of a set-back, small as this one was, occurred. The townspeople and the tribesmen in the neighbourhood became unmistakably hostile, and opening fire on the khans from all quarters of the village, killed six men and wounded fourteen others. This led to the withdrawal of every one to the Serai, to which building the 114th fought their way along a wall-enclosed road over a distance of one hundred and twenty yards, escaping with the loss of two men wounded. The question of food, with the inhabitants openly hostile, now became prominent, as also that of ammunition, which was running short, and medical requirements, which were entirely lacking. Raids were therefore planned and carried out on the bazaar, which consists of a narrow street roofed with reed matting, some two hundred and fifty yards long, running across the village from east to west with the usual ramifications. Here are numerous diminutive shops, typical of such Eastern marketing centres, the majority of which are owned by dealers in grain and vendors of other food-stuffs. These raids succeeded to the extent of securing supplies sufficient for the garrison for a few days. As the process of getting water for the garrison in the Serai from the river was attended with considerable risk, and three men had lost their lives in doing so, wells were dug which, though only ten feet deep, furnished a sufficient supply for the besieged. The ammunition difficulty had been reported by heliograph through Samawah to Baghdad,



Rumaiithah—Buildings defended are within white line.



Rumaiithah—Political Serai.

and could only be overcome by attempting to drop a supply in boxes from aeroplanes. This was tried on the 8th, when aeroplanes arrived and dropped three boxes. One box fell into the river, another among date-palms a hundred yards from the Serai, and the third reached its goal but fatally wounded a Naik (L/Cpl.) of the 99th Infantry and an Arab prisoner. Through the bravery of Mr E. W. L. Harper of the railway service, who had already distinguished himself at the repair of the burnt bridge and in the withdrawal from the village on the 4th, and who went out with two men, the box that was dropped into the river was recovered. That which fell into the date-palm grove was secured by Sepoy Hardat of the 99th Infantry, who had to climb three walls seven to eight feet high under the fire of the insurgents, and approach to within fifty yards of the houses held by them.

By the 12th, although a sortie by the 99th Infantry secured some food, supplies were again running short. A raid on a large scale, in co-operation with bombing aeroplanes sent from Baghdad, was organised, the results of which were highly satisfactory, and may be said to have saved the situation and gained time for a force to effect the relief of the garrison. On this occasion two platoons of the 114th Maharrattas acted as covering party, while the remainder of the garrison, except a small piquet, furnished with bags, tins, and blankets, collected sufficient food for twelve days, consisting of half a ton of grain, besides some sheep and chickens. The covering party were equally successful in another sense, and killed twenty inhabitants with no loss to themselves.

Meanwhile orders had been issued for a small column to proceed to Rumaitah, and by the evening of the 6th July the force, which was accompanied by a train carrying ammunition, food, and water, had reached a point about six miles north of its destination, after meeting with considerable opposition and being much delayed through the necessity of repairing the railway line and removing trucks that had been derailed.

The column was composed as follows :—

Commander—Lieut.-Colonel D. A. D. McVean, D.S.O.
 37th Lancers (one squadron).
 45th Pack Battery¹ (one section).
 45th (Rattray's) Sikhs.
 99th (Deccan) Infantry (H.Q., and five platoons).
 Thirty Kurdish Levies.

On the 7th, directly the advance began, the insurgents appeared in large numbers, which were estimated at from three thousand to five thousand men, and opened a heavy fire from the bed of a dried-up canal which lay at right angles to the line of advance of the column. A gallant attempt was made to break through and reach Rumaithah, but the small force was greatly outnumbered, and the tribesmen began closing in and working round its flanks. Lieut.-Colonel McVean, with his small force isolated and his communications with Diwaniyah, thirty-two miles to the north, only lightly guarded, now found himself in a precarious situation. Fortunately his resolution and courage did not fail him at this crisis, and he wisely decided to break off the action, in which the safety of his force was becoming jeopardised. By 11 A.M., taking advantage of a dust-storm, he was able to withdraw, and had gained a start of a mile before his retirement was discovered. Then the Arabs hurried after him, and fighting went on until dark, when the column halted. On the following day Imam Hamzah, eighteen miles north of Rumaithah, was reached, where for the present the force remained. The casualties in proportion to the numbers engaged had been heavy, amounting to—

Killed.

British officer, 1. British officer, 1.
 Indian other ranks, 47. Indian other ranks, 166.

Wounded.

As it seemed possible as early as the 3rd July that more

¹ During the insurrection the change in nomenclature from mountain to pack artillery occurred. The latter term has been followed throughout the narrative.

troops might be required, should the situation on the Middle Euphrates not improve, I had ordered the reserve battalion (45th Sikhs)—whose operations have just been described—to be replaced from the 18th Division, and on the 4th warned Major-General Fraser to hold the garrison of Tekrit in readiness to move by rail to the capital. Troops were not available for guarding the railway communications throughout their length, but on the 4th July all important bridges were ordered to be guarded.

On the 7th July I proceeded from Sar-i-Mil to Baghdad, and on the following day heard of the failure to relieve Rumaithah. Aware that any reverse, no matter how slight, would at once be grossly exaggerated by the tribes, I telegraphed on the 8th to the War Office (repeating the telegram to Army Headquarters, India) requesting that an infantry brigade and a battery of field artillery (howitzers) might be held in readiness for despatch to Basrah (see Appendix X.). I was informed in reply, to my dismay, that the force I desired could not embark before the end of July. When I thought of our rapid mobilisation at home in 1914 I felt something more than disappointment at the delay that must elapse before help could come from India, but I understood later that shipping had to be taken up and men recalled from leave.

On the 8th July, too, the 87th Punjabis of the 18th Division, who were guarding Turkish prisoners of war, were replaced by some sappers and miners, and were sent to Hillah, the 1/116th Mahrattas of the same division from Tekrit being ordered to replace that battalion at Baghdad.

Major-General Fraser was also directed to send to Baghdad from Tekrit the headquarters of the 55th Infantry Brigade, one battery Royal Field Artillery (howitzers), two Indian battalions, and certain details. The British battalion of that brigade, the 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, was ordered to be held in readiness to follow, which it did as soon as trains were available, and both it and the 2nd Battalion Royal Irish Rifles,¹ which had arrived from

¹ This unit was later rechristened the Royal Ulster Rifles, but its old nomenclature has been followed in the narrative.

Karind, moved to Hillah. The 1/10th Gurkha Rifles were at this time marching from the Upper Euphrates to Falujah *en route* for Baghdad, whilst the 86th Carnaticos, who had arrived from India in relief, were sent to Hillah, and the 13th Rajputs on their way to the base were detained at Baghdad.

On the 10th July the last of the units at Karind, the 1st and 7th Dragoon Guards, were ordered to move to Baghdad, leaving at the former place to guard the married families a composite detachment of young British soldiers.

The movements stated above were demanded by the urgent necessity of relieving the garrison at Rumathah, the state of whose food supply and ammunition was uncertain, and who were reported as unlikely to be able to hold out for more than a few days. Some delay was, however, inevitable, as the movement of the necessary troops had to be carried out by rail during one of the hottest months and over the narrow-gauge Euphrates valley railway, the capacity of whose vehicles is not equal to that of the normal gauge. This delay was accentuated by the shortage of rolling-stock and the lack of foresight in certain quarters, which led to the disregard of a well-known military canon, that of not concentrating troops or supplies too far forward. Thus trains from Baghdad, which should have gone no further south than Hillah, where the advanced depot was ordered by General Headquarters to be formed, were recklessly pushed on to Diwaniyah, fifty-two miles nearer Rumathah. This procedure led to a considerable delay in returning rolling-stock required for the movement of troops, and caused supplies to be collected too far to the front, which, as will presently be seen, had a malign influence later on.

Meantime the garrison of Rumathah had reported to Samawah by helicopter that their rations would only last till the 12th July, and that the food obtained by local raids was exhausted. It was in consequence of this report that the action already mentioned was taken. A raid by nine aeroplanes was carried out on the following day, when it

was arranged that the garrison should force their way into the bazaar, and endeavour there to supplement their stores. The raid was successful, and information came back that rations and forage sufficient to last until the 23rd July had been secured. There now seemed every prospect that, despite the delays which had occurred, the relieving force could reach Rumathah before lack of food had compelled a surrender and the massacre that would almost certainly follow. That force, which was placed under the command of Brigadier-General F. E. Coningham, commanding the 34th Infantry Brigade, who for several months had been engaged in the operations on the Upper Euphrates, consisted of—

37th Lancers (one squadron),
 97th Battery R.F.A.,
 132nd (How.) Battery R.F.A. (less one section),
 45th Pack Battery,
 61st Coy., 2nd (Q.V.O.) Sappers and Miners,
 2nd Bn. Royal Irish Rifles (51st Infantry Brigade),
 45th (Ratray's) Sikhs (52nd Infantry Brigade),
 87th Punjabis (55th Infantry Brigade),
 99th (Deccan) Infantry (less one company) (34th Infantry Brigade),
 1/116th Maharattas (55th Infantry Brigade),
 1/10th Gurkha Rifles (51st Infantry Brigade),
 17th Machine Gun Battalion (two sections),
 besides details.

The column, it will be seen, was made up of units from four brigades. They did not all even belong to one division, and two only formed part of Brigadier-General Coningham's former brigade (the 51st Infantry Brigade), which he had just handed over on proceeding to Hillah. This organisation, though unsound, was unavoidable, not only because, to save time, the troops nearest at hand had to be used, but because, as I have already said, my reserve brigade, which normally would have been at Baghdad and available to proceed as a whole on any operation required, was, except for one battalion, still on the Upper Euphrates.

The communications of the force which was to carry out the relief could not be held in such strength as to make them safe. Troops for the purpose were not available to guard at close intervals the line from Hillah to Diwaniyah and further south towards Rumaihah, nor was the line from Baghdad to Hillah, sixty-four miles in length, held by troops at any point. Even if it had been possible to provide the necessary posts, the mere supply by a single-line railway of food, water, and materials for making defences put such arrangements at that time out of the question. The General Officer Commanding the 17th Division arranged that the seventy miles from Hillah to Imam Hamzah, where the 45th Sikhs still remained, should be organised in double-platoon posts two to four miles apart. For this purpose two battalions had to be used, and their detachments were frequently but unsuccessfully attacked. Such protection was, of course, inadequate, and marauding parties under cover of darkness made numerous raids on the line between the posts and tampered both with it and the telegraph wires.

At this time it was evident that the operation which was about to be carried out was of an extremely hazardous nature, and that even if successful, which was uncertain, the risk would still remain. I was committing practically all the mobile force on which I could lay hands, without denuding to danger point other areas, to an undertaking which involved its transfer to a distance of one hundred and fifty miles from Baghdad, with ill-guarded communications and with every prospect that those tribes which had not risen or which bordered the line of march would do so before the Rumaihah garrison could be extricated. The fact, too, of the failure of the first attempt to relieve Rumaihah and the certainty that the *morale* of the insurgents around that place must, by that failure and the consequent delay, have risen, was not calculated to encourage optimistic hopes regarding the coming operation. Indeed there was a prospect of the force being cut off, and having to fight its way back to Hillah during the hottest season of the year, while embarrassed by almost insurmountable

food and water difficulties. The operation, naturally, was not one that commended itself to the divisional general, who shortly moved his headquarters to Diwaniyah, and though obliged to maintain an optimistic attitude, my secret sympathies lay with the view he took. I did not then know Brigadier-General Coningham, whom I had not met, but had I done so and had I known his qualities as a leader, any misgivings which I felt regarding the outcome of the operation or the scratch nature of the column would have been greatly lessened.

These misgivings and the gradual extension of the area of disturbance prompted me on the 15th July to ask for the despatch, as soon as possible, of the troops which I had demanded on the 8th, and I added a request that a full division might be held in readiness. On the 18th July, from motives of economy, I qualified my earlier telegram in so far as to suggest that the remainder of the division should not be embarked until demanded. This suggestion unfortunately led to a misunderstanding which was later rectified, as the War Office, assuming the whole division would not be required, countermanded all but my demand made on the 8th July.

By the 16th July the relief column was concentrated within sixteen miles of Rumaihah. Some of its units were weak, the 2nd Battalion Royal Irish Rifles and the 1/10th Gurkha Rifles being only equivalent in strength to one battalion, while the 45th Sikhs had recently been engaged and had suffered loss. A train accompanied the force on which were carried reserve ammunition, water, rations, and medical requirements. As, however, circumstances might arise which would make it impossible to move the train forward with the column, all army transport carts that could be spared had been collected at Diwaniyah, and on them were loaded two days' reserve rations for the whole force, one day's food and an emergency ration being carried by the men.

It was known that there was a fair number of wounded in Rumaihah, and for these and others that might result from the operation for relief, arrangements had to be

the infantry advanced, but suffered from the heavy enfilade fire which came from the left; and when the assault was made three and a half hours later by the two leading battalions—the 45th Sikhs and the 116th Mahrattas—it failed to dislodge the insurgents, who held their ground tenaciously.

Another hour passed, when fortunately the 1/10th Gurkha Rifles arrived, under Lieut.-Colonel H. I. Scott, as well as a section of field-guns and another of machine-guns. This detachment, which was intended to form part of the main column, had been delayed owing to the Gurkhas not having reached Baghdad from the Upper Tigris; but on the 18th they had proceeded as far as Diwaniyah with the divisional general. Thence they were pushed on at once; and the sound of guns reaching his ears, Colonel Scott pressed forward, and, arriving at a critical moment, was ordered to drive the insurgents from the vicinity of the river and secure the left or further bank. But the tribesmen knew what the deprivation of water must mean to the column after a long day under intense heat, and the Gurkhas failed in their efforts to reach the river.

As night closed in and the tribesmen began to make repeated attacks on the 45th Sikhs, all of which were driven off, the situation of the force aroused considerable anxiety in its commander's mind. Cut off from water, with a strongly-posted force in front which the guns and an infantry attack had failed to dislodge, with ammunition insufficient for a second day's action, an unknown number of wounded to be tended, and with no prospect of reinforcements, there was every reason to be anxious.

But situations are seldom so grave as they appear to be, and General Coningham was not the man to falter because outward appearances looked black. He was in communication with Diwaniyah, whence a train with water, ammunition, and medical dressings was despatched during the night, and reached the column at 8.45 A.M. on the 20th.

On that date the 1/10th Gurkha Rifles, supported by one section of the 97th Battery, R.F.A., one machine-gun section, and the 37th Laners' Hotchkiss troop, began

operations at dawn. By 6.15 A.M. three platoons of Gurkhas, the water reaching to their armpits, had crossed to the left bank of the river on a front of five hundred yards, driving back the Arabs, who suffered from the Lewis-gun fire directed on them. Soon after the Gurkhas had established themselves on the left bank of the river, patrols of the 45th Sikhs reported that the main position, which had defied all efforts on the previous day, was unoccupied, a fact which was confirmed by aeroplane. The practice of leaving under cover of night ground which had been held tenaciously during the day was, I believe, a noticeable feature of the tactics followed by the Turks in the earlier fighting in Mesopotamia, and that this procedure was repeated on the present occasion by the tribesmen, made assurance doubly sure that some of those who had served with the Turkish Army were now leading them.

By 6.45 A.M. three battalions of infantry were established in the position, and a quarter of an hour later an aeroplane reported that many Arabs had been seen in the villages four miles to the south, while others were holding some small ravines three miles from Rumaitah. Another party of from six hundred to a thousand strong was stated to be moving to the north-west of the ground which our troops occupied, and entrenchments were seen in course of construction on the left bank of the river. But the ammunition had by this time arrived, the animals had been watered, and the cavalry having moved south at half-past eight, all was ready for a further advance.

The 116th Mahrattas were left to guard the train and transport until the railway track, which had been badly damaged, was repaired, and General Coningham moved forward without opposition. At 3.45 P.M. word came that the cavalry had entered Rumaitah thirty-five minutes earlier, on receipt of which news all motor-ambulances were sent there, and some thirty of the more seriously wounded were evacuated to the train.

The relief operation had cost General Coningham's force three British officers and thirty-two Indian other ranks killed, and two British officers and one hundred and fifty

Indian other ranks wounded, while the casualties of the Rumaiṭhah garrison during their sixteen days' investment totalled approximately one hundred and forty-eight all ranks, killed, wounded, and missing.

While credit is due to all who shared in the operation, Brigadier-General Coningham imputed its satisfactory outcome mainly to the valour and dogged determination of the 45th Sikhs under their gallant colonel, notwithstanding the heavy losses which befell them, especially in Indian officers and non-commissioned officers; and to the dash of the 1/10th Gurkha Rifles, who, in spite of the depth of the river—a serious obstacle for soldiers of their small stature—established themselves on the far bank.

Through the Political Officer I intimated to the insurgents that their severely wounded would receive treatment if taken to Samawah, as I felt that the tribesmen had been misled by their religious and other leaders, and that having effected the relief of Rumaiṭhah hostilities might possibly be brought to a conclusion, provided those implicated in the local rising submitted. A month later, in order to regularise the position as regards any Arabs that might be captured, I issued an order that the usual laws and usages of war were to be observed, but that a clear distinction was to be made between those who fell into our hands in action and those who behaved in a treacherous manner.

The news of General Coningham's success lifted a weight from my mind, as the situation in several other areas was becoming threatening, and tribesmen numbering thirty-five thousand were now in arms against us. The defeat of the insurgents at Rumaiṭhah would give a moment's breathing space, and would strengthen the hands of those tribal leaders who were striving to keep in check unruly members.

Unfortunately, desirable as it was to leave a garrison at Rumaiṭhah of a strength sufficient to dominate the country round about, and one whose line of communication was safeguarded, neither the situation elsewhere nor the troops available made such a project possible. The relief force must be withdrawn without delay to be employed nearer

Baghdad, for until my man-power was increased the distance from the Capital at which operations could be safely carried out had to be kept within strict limits.

On looking back many months after the events above narrated and reviewing the situation in a calmer atmosphere, the more convinced I feel that, had a single unit less been used to save Rumaiṭhah, failure with consequences of the gravest nature would have resulted.

The Arabs who had been engaged against both relief columns were well armed, extremely mobile, and ready to take considerable risks where loot was the reward. It was evident that they were directed by skilled brains, well versed in the power of the modern rifle, as well as in the limitations and weak points of our modern army. Their dispositions for defence had been skilful, and there was evidence of considerable cunning in the selection of time and place to interfere with water supplies, and with the railway and the line of march. Fortunately their ammunition supply was limited, and as each round costs them an appreciable sum, a target was seldom engaged unless the chance of hitting it was good. Like all semi-savages, they had shown themselves particularly bold when following up a retiring force, and were to be trusted to display marked skill in taking immediate advantage of a fault in positions.

In the march to and from Rumaiṭhah General Coningham had adopted either a square or a diamond formation, which served to guard the transport, and was largely used in later operations. For the benefit of other commanders who had not the advantage of his experience, I caused to be drawn up by him and Lieut.-Colonel Scott of the 1/10th Gurkha Rifles, who earned a bar to his D.S.O. on the 20th for the gallant way in which he helped to save the situation, some notes which will be found in Appendix IX.

The question of taking a train with the column had been carefully considered. It must necessarily lead to tying troops to the railway, and so hampering their freedom of manoeuvre, and when the line was found to be broken halts to effect repairs would be unavoidable. All