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WEDNESDAY, 10 MAY, 1916.

War Office,
10th May, 1916.

The following despatch from General Sir John Nixon, K.C.B., on the operations in Mesopotamia in October, November, and December, 1915, has been forwarded by the Government of India for publication:—

General Headquarters,
I.E.F. "D.," 17th January, 1916.

From

General Sir John Nixon, K.C.B., A.D.C.,
General, Commanding Indian Expeditionary Force "D."

To

The Chief of the General Staff,
Army Headquarters,
India.

Sir,

I have the honour to forward a report on the operations in Mesopotamia during the months of October, November and December, 1915.

2. In my last despatch I described events up to October 5th. On that date the Turkish Army under Nur-Ed-Din, which had been

defeated at Kut-Al-Amarah, had reached a previously-prepared position astride the Tigris at Ctesiphon, where it received reinforcements; and our advanced troops under Major-General Townshend reached Aziziyah (30 miles east of Ctesiphon).

3. During the next six weeks reinforcements, supplies, and transport animals were brought up to Kut and Aziziyah preparatory to a further advance up the Tigris. These preliminary movements were inevitably slow on account of the difficulties of navigation during the low water season, which delayed the passage of shipping.

4. Throughout this period of preparation frequent skirmishes took place with the enemy, who had pushed out advanced detachments to Zeur and Kutunie, seven and 14 miles respectively above Aziziyah.

5. The Cavalry Brigade and one Infantry Brigade advanced from Aziziyah on 11th November, and occupied Kutunie without opposition.

On the 18th November General Townshend had concentrated the whole of his force and the shipping at Kutunie.

6. On the 19th November the advance was continued, moving by both banks of the river,

and Zeur was occupied. The enemy's advanced troops withdrew towards Ctesiphon after offering slight opposition. On 20th November the force on the left bank reached Lajj (nine miles from Ctesiphon); the shipping and the right bank detachment arrived on the 21st, the latter crossing the river and joining the main body on the left bank.

7. The Turkish position at Ctesiphon lay astride the Tigris, covering the approach to Baghdad, which is situated some 18 miles to the north-west. The defences had been under construction for some months. They consisted of an extensive system of entrenchments forming two main positions. On the right bank the front position extended from the river for about three miles in a S.W. direction; the second line trenches lying some five miles further upstream. On the left bank a continuous line of entrenchments and redoubts stretched from the river for six miles to the north-east; the left flank terminating in a large redoubt. On this bank the second line was about two miles behind the front position and parallel to it for three miles from the Tigris, thence it turned northwards to the Dialah River. Close to the Tigris, on the left bank and midway between the two defensive lines, was situated the Arch of Ctesiphon—a prominent landmark.

A mile in rear of the second line of trenches a bridge of boats connected the two wings of the Turkish Army. Further in rear, the Dialah River, near its junction with the Tigris, was bridged at two points, and entrenchments commanded the crossings.

During General Townshend's concentration at Aziziyah accurate information had been obtained by aerial observation regarding the position of the Turkish defences.

8. The officers employed on these reconnaissances displayed the same intrepidity and devotion to duty that has been commented on in previous despatches. Unfortunately during the actual period of the battle at Ctesiphon a series of accidents deprived the Royal Flying Corps of several officers and machines. Among those forced to descend within the enemy's lines was Major H. L. Reilly, a Flight Commander of exceptional ability, who has much distinguished service to his credit.

9. It was reported that the enemy had over 13,000 regular troops and 38 guns in the Ctesiphon position. There were reports of the early arrival of further reinforcements. Though information on this point was indefinite and lacked confirmation, it was advisable that there should be no delay in attacking and defeating Nur-Ed-Din before the arrival of possible reinforcements.

10. General Townshend, after a night march from Lajj, on 21st/22nd November attacked the hostile position on the left bank at the centre and on the north-east flank. A severe fight lasted throughout the day, resulting in the capture of the front position, and more than 1,300 prisoners.

Our troops pressed on and penetrated to the second line, capturing eight guns and establishing themselves in the enemy's trenches. Here they were subjected to heavy counter-attacks by fresh troops. The captured guns changed hands several times. Finally they had to be abandoned, as shortly before night-fall it was found necessary, owing to diminished numbers, to order the withdrawal of our troops from the forward positions to

which they had penetrated back to the first position.

11. On the 23rd November our troops were reorganised in the position they had captured, and the work of collecting the numerous casualties was continued.

Owing to heavy losses in killed and wounded it was inadvisable to renew the offensive.

There is no doubt that the Turkish troops who had fought on the previous day were in no condition to resume the fight. The battlefield was littered with their killed and wounded, and many of the trenches were choked with dead. The 45th Turkish Division which had held the front trenches was practically destroyed. But reinforcements came up, and heavy attacks were made all along General Townshend's line throughout the night 23rd/24th November. These were repulsed, and the enemy must have lost heavily.

12. On the 24th November wounded and prisoners were evacuated from Ctesiphon to Lajj, where the shipping flotilla was banked in; and General Townshend consolidated the position he had taken up on the battlefield. His left flank, which had been near the Ctesiphon Arch, in advance of the main position, moved back into the general alignment. Owing to the interruption of a water channel which had supplied the trenches on the north-east flank our troops there suffered from want of water; so the right flank was brought nearer the river. This movement was successfully effected under the cover of an offensive movement pushed out from the centre of the position. The enemy displayed little activity throughout this day, except for shell fire. Most of this came from guns on the right bank, which prevented the steamers advancing upstream from Lajj.

13. On the 25th November the remainder of the wounded were sent back to Lajj. Up to this time it appeared from hostile movements to their rear—reported by air reconnaissance—that the Turks contemplated a retirement from their remaining positions. But apparently they received fresh reinforcements on the 25th. During the afternoon large columns were seen advancing down the left bank and also inland, as if to turn our right flank; while hostile cavalry threatened our rear.

14. General Townshend was nine miles from his shipping and source of supplies at Lajj, faced by superior forces of fresh troops. He decided to avoid an engagement, and, under cover of night, withdrew to Lajj.

Here he remained during the 26th.

15. A position so far from bases of supply, with a vulnerable line of communication along the winding shallow river was unfavourable for defence. It was necessary to withdraw further downstream to a more secure locality until conditions might enable a resumption of the offensive.

16. General Townshend withdrew unmolesed during the night of 27th/28th to Aziziyah.

On the 29th the Cavalry Brigade, under Brigadier-General Roberts, east of Kutunieh engaged and drove back the enemy's advanced mounted troops who were attacking a stranded gunboat. The 14th Hussars and the 7th (Hariana) Lancers made a successful charge. Some 140 casualties were inflicted on the enemy.

17. On the morning of 30th, continuing the retirement, the main force halted at Umm

Al Tubal; a mixed brigade under Major-General Sir C. Melliss pushing on towards Kut to deal with hostile mounted troops which had interrupted the passage of steamers at Chubibat about twenty-five miles below Kut.

18. The troops had to remain at Umm Al Tubal as the ships were in difficulties in shoal water in this vicinity and the enemy's whole force came up during the night. They attacked in great strength at daylight on 1st December.

A fierce fight ensued, the Turks losing heavily from our artillery fire at a range of 2,500 yards. General Townshend took advantage of a successful counter-attack made by the Cavalry Brigade against a column which attempted to envelop his right flank, to break off the fight and retire by echelons of Brigades. This was carried out in perfect order under a heavy shell fire, and by mid-day the enemy had been shaken off. General Townshend reports that it was entirely due to the splendid steadiness of the troops and to the excellency of his Brigadiers that he was able to repulse the enemy's determined attacks and extricate his force from the difficult situation in which it was placed.

The mixed Brigade, commanded by General Melliss, consisting of:—

30th Infantry Brigade,
1/5th Hants (Howitzer) Battery R.F.A.,
and the 16th Cavalry,

which had been despatched to Chubibat on the morning of 30th November, was recalled on the night of 30th November/1st December. This Brigade marched 80 miles in three days, including the battle of December 1st. At the end of it their valour and discipline was in no way diminished and their losses did not include a single prisoner.

19. After a march of 30 miles, Shadi was reached on the night of 1st/2nd December, and on the morning of 3rd December General Townshend was installed at Kut-Al-Amarah, where, it was decided, his retirement should end.

20. The Naval flotilla on the Tigris operated on the left flank of the troops throughout the operations that have been described.

From November 22nd to November 25th the gunboats from positions below Bustan (two miles east of Ctesiphon) were engaged against hostile artillery, particularly against concealed guns on the right bank which prevented ships from moving above Bustan.

21. During the retreat from Ctesiphon to Kut the gunboats under Captain Nunn, D.S.O., Senior Naval Officer, rendered valuable services in protecting the steamers and barges and in assisting when they grounded. The Naval gunboats were employed at this work day and night, frequently under fire from snipers on both banks.

Owing to numerous loops and twists in the course of the river, it was impossible for the flotilla to remain in touch with the troops during the retirement.

22. On the evening of the 28th November, "Shaitan" went aground about eight miles above Aziziyah and could not be refloated. Throughout November 29th, "Firefly" and "Shushan" salvaged "Shaitan's" guns and stores under heavy sniping from both banks, until the situation was relieved in the afternoon by the action of the Cavalry Brigade which has already been referred to.

The hull of "Shaitan" eventually had to

be abandoned, as the Turks opened fire with guns on the ships which had remained behind.

23. On the occasion of the Turkish attack on the morning of December 1st, at Um Al Tubal, "Firefly" and "Comet" made good practice with lyddite at a large body of Turks at a range of 3,000 yards. The ships came under a heavy and accurate shell fire, and, at 7 a.m., a shell penetrated the boiler of "Firefly," disabling her. H.M.S. "Comet" (Captain Nunn) took "Firefly" in tow, and in endeavouring to turn in the narrow river, both ships took the ground. "Firefly" was got clear and sent drifting downstream; but "Comet" would not move from the bank, against which she had been wedged by "Firefly."

24. "Sumana" came up and made several unsuccessful attempts to drag "Comet" off the bank. The enemy's fire increased in intensity; they brought up several field guns to short range; the ships were surrounded by Turkish troops and fired on at a range of 50 yards. "Comet" and "Firefly" were badly damaged and on fire. They were abandoned after the guns had been rendered useless and the crews were taken on board "Sumana," which succeeded in effecting her escape.

Subsequently "Sumana" did most valuable work in salving shipping which had got into difficulties further downstream.

25. Throughout these operations Captain Nunn, Lieutenant Eddis, who was wounded, and all officers and men of the Naval Flotilla behaved with great coolness and bravery under most trying circumstances.

26. The valour of the troops who fought under General Townshend at the battle of Ctesiphon is beyond praise. The 6th Division exhibited the same dauntless courage and self-sacrifice in the attack that has distinguished it throughout the campaign in Mesopotamia.

The dash with which the Indian troops (enlisted from all parts of India) have attacked a stubborn foe in well-entrenched positions, I attribute largely to the confidence with which they have been inspired by the British battalions of the Force.

When forced by greatly superior numbers to act on the defensive, and during the retreat to Kut, under the most trying conditions, the troops responded to the calls made on them with admirable discipline and steadiness.

They proved themselves to be soldiers of the finest quality.

27. These fine troops were most ably commanded by Major-General C. V. F. Townshend, C.B., D.S.O. I have a very high opinion, indeed, of this officer's capabilities as a commander of troops in the field. He was tried very highly, not only at the battle of Ctesiphon, but more especially during the retirement that ensued. Untiring, resourceful, and even more cheerful as the outlook grew darker, he possesses, in my opinion, very special qualifications as a commander.

He is imperturbable under the heaviest fire and his judgment is undisturbed.

28. With great regret, I have been forced, by reasons of ill-health, to resign the command of the British Forces in Mesopotamia—an appointment I have had the honour of holding during the past nine months.

In order to complete the record of events during my period in command, I will now give a brief narrative of the operations on the Tigris from the time that General Townshend's Force

reached Kut-Al-Amarah on December 3rd until the date of my departure from Mesopotamia.

29. When General Townshend reached Kut on December 3rd, measures were taken to withstand a siege until the arrival of relief from reinforcements which were coming from overseas.

Defences were improved. Shipping was despatched to Basrah, evacuating the sick and wounded, and also the Turkish prisoners (1,350 were captured at Ctesiphon and all were safely brought away in the retreat).

The armed tug "Sumana" was the only vessel left at Kut.

The Cavalry Brigade and a convoy of transport animals were marched down to Ali Al Gharbi, before the enemy could effect an investment.

The Cavalry left on December 6th. On that day the enemy closed on the northern front, and by December 7th the investment of Kut was complete.

30. The cavalry at Ali Al Gharbi was reinforced with infantry and guns from Basrah. Behind this advanced detachment a force under the command of Major-General F. J. Aylmer, V.C., was collected on the line Amarah-Ali Al Gharbi, for the relief of Kut as soon as its concentration was completed.

31. The entrenched camp at Kut is contained in a "U" shaped loop of the Tigris; the town stands at the most southerly end of the peninsula so formed. The northern defences are some 3,200 yards from the town; the peninsula is about a mile in width.

A detached post was established at a small village on the right bank of the river opposite Kut. East of the town was a bridge of boats, covered by a bridge head detachment on the right bank.

32. On December 8th, the enemy carried out a heavy bombardment from three sides, and Nur-Ed-Din Pasha called upon General Townshend to surrender.

33. On December 9th, our detachment on the right bank, covering the bridge, was forced to retire before a heavy attack. The enemy occupied the right bank at the bridge head.

During the night, December 9th/10th, the bridge was successfully demolished by a party gallantly led by Lieutenant A. B. Matthews, R.E., and Lieutenant R. T. Sweet, 2/7th Gurkha Rifles.

34. During the following days Kut was subjected to a continuous bombardment and several attacks were beaten off. The enemy's losses were heavy, especially in the abortive attacks on December 12th, when, it is estimated, their casualties amounted to 1,000.

35. Operations were then conducted on the lines of regular siege warfare. A redoubt at the north-east corner of the defences became the special objective of Turkish shell fire and sapping operations.

36. On the night of December 14/15th a successful sortie was made against trenches facing the detached post on the right bank, and, on the night, December 17th/18th, two sorties, from the redoubt previously referred to, cleared the enemy's nearest trenches. About thirty Turks were bayoneted and ten were captured.

37. Heavy fire was concentrated on the redoubt during the night December 23rd/24th and throughout the 24th. The parapet was breached and the Turks effected an entrance, but they were driven out by a counter-attack,

leaving 200 dead behind. Attacks were renewed later, and throughout the night of December 24th/25th a fierce struggle took place around the redoubt. The enemy again effected a lodgment, but by morning they had been ejected and the assault was finally defeated.

38. No decisive attacks have been attempted by the Turks since their failure at Christmas, which, it is reported, cost them about 2,000 casualties.

39. On December 28th a movement of troops, which was continued for several days, took place from the Turkish main camp (six miles above Kut) to Shaikh Saad—which had been occupied by enemy mounted troops for some time.

40. On January 4th, General Aylmer's leading troops, under Major-General Younghusband, advanced from Ali Al Gharbi towards Shaikh Saad, moving by both banks.

General Younghusband's column got in touch with the enemy on the morning of January 6th. The Turks were entrenched astride the Tigris, three-and-a-half miles east of Shaikh Saad. An attempt to turn Turkish right flank did not succeed owing to presence of hostile cavalry and Arabs in superior force on this flank.

41. General Aylmer arrived on morning of January 7th with the remainder of his force and ordered a general attack; Major-General Younghusband commanding on the left bank and Major-General Kemball on the right bank.

Very heavy fighting lasted throughout the day. By evening the enemy's trenches on the right bank had been captured and some 600 prisoners and two guns taken.

On the left bank our troops were entrenched opposite the enemy, who still held their positions on that bank. Attempts to turn their left flank had been checked by counter enveloping movements from the north.

42. The troops were very fatigued next day and little progress was made.

On January 9th, the Turks were forced to abandon their remaining positions and retired upstream, followed by General Aylmer's force. But heavy rain now fell, making the alluvial soil of the roads almost impassable, and prevented active operations for the next two days. It is estimated that the enemy's losses during the three days' fighting at Shaikh Saad amounted to 4,500.

43. The enemy fell back about ten miles, to the Wadi—a tributary which joins the Tigris on the left bank. They took up a new position behind the Wadi and on the right bank of the Tigris, opposite the mouth of the Wadi.

44. General Aylmer concentrated his whole force on the left bank and attacked the Wadi position on the 13th. After hard fighting the Turks were driven out on the 14th and retired five miles further west and entrenched across a defile bounded on the north by a marsh and on the south by the Tigris. They were followed to this position by General Aylmer's force.

45. Throughout these operations the weather was very bad. The heavy rain and high wind caused great discomfort to the troops and made movement by land and by river most difficult. Up to January 17th there was no improvement in the weather and active operations were at a standstill.

46. As, owing to ill-health, I am about to relinquish command of Indian Expeditionary Force "D" I desire to place on record my

warm appreciation of the able and devoted assistance afforded me by the Staff at General Headquarters and Officers of the various Administrative Services and Departments.

I wish specially to bring forward the names of the following officers who have rendered very valuable services:—Major-General G. V. Kemball has proved himself to be a very gallant officer and has the true offensive spirit. As a commander of troops in the field I consider him to be a leader of great ability and power.

I am indebted to Major-General M. Cowper for the assistance which his knowledge of administrative staff work and organisation has afforded me.

Major (temporary Lieutenant - Colonel) W. H. Beach is at all times a hard-working, capable and thoroughly reliable Staff Officer whose services have been invaluable to me. As head of the Intelligence Branch he has shown exceptional powers of insight and organisation.

Major (temporary Lieutenant-Colonel) H. R. Hopwood has performed his important duties in a highly satisfactory manner. He is thoroughly capable and full of tact and resource; in fact, possesses all the qualities that go to make a good Staff Officer.

Major R. A. Cassels has in the field proved himself to be a bold and resourceful Staff Officer, and the manner in which he has acquitted himself of duties falling to hand outside the ordinary scope of his work is highly satisfactory and of value to the State.

Major W. C. Croly, R.A.M.C., has been in medical charge of the Staff at General Headquarters and has shown himself always the right man in the right place, and to have taken the keenest interest in his work and care of those whom he had in charge.

To my Personal Staff I am under great obligations for their willing and able assistance in quarters, on the march, and in the fight, and I draw attention to the recommendations for rewards which I have already made:—

Captain L. G. Williams,
 Captain E. J. Nixon,
 Lieutenant G. B. Walker.

The Medical Services have had to face very trying and unusual conditions. On more than one occasion the number and severity of the casualties have thrown the greatest strain on them, but the organisation and efficiency of the arrangements have ensured as speedy an evacuation of the wounded as the means placed at their disposal permitted. In this connection I wish to bring forward the name of Surgeon-General H. G. Hathaway.

The work of the Royal Engineers has been excellently carried out under the able direction of Brigadier-General J. C. Rimington, and I take this opportunity of expressing my appreciation of the valuable assistance rendered by this branch of the service as a whole.

The British General Hospital has throughout been in charge of Lieutenant-Colonel D. J. Collins, R.A.M.C., whose zeal, energy and organising power have rendered it a model hospital of its kind. Credit is also due to Lieutenant-Colonel G. B. Irvine, I.M.S., for his devoted and careful supervision of the Indian General Hospital.

I have before expressed my indebtedness to Major-General K. S. Davison and his Staff, and I must now do so again for their able and efficient management of the lines of communication under the most difficult and trying cir-

cumstances. In Captain J. C. Macrae he has a good and able Staff Officer.

It must be remembered that as a port Basrah has no facilities for the discharge of stores or the disembarkation of troops and animals. The officers of the Royal Indian Marine consequently have had no easy task in improvising wharves and berths, and dealing with the large number of transports which have recently arrived and have had to be unloaded with the utmost expedition. They have, nevertheless, overcome these many difficulties, and the greatest credit is due to them for what they have accomplished.

The officers and crews of the Tigris steamers belonging to Messrs. Lynch Brothers and of the other river craft have always displayed gallantry of a high order in bringing their ships on, often under heavy fire, and it is not too much to say that without this assistance, and the indefatigable manner in which they have worked, that the movements of troops and supplies would not have been possible.

I cannot praise too highly the work done by the Telegraph and Postal Departments, the state of completeness of which has done much to promote the general efficiency of the force.

All demands made on the Telegraph Department have been rapidly and effectively met at the cost of much hard labour under trying conditions and at great personal risk, which reflects the greatest credit on Mr. L. Bagshawe and the important department over which he presides.

The exigencies of field service has thrown a great strain on the Postal Department, but owing to the hard work done and the excellent organisation built up by Mr. E. Clerici and his staff the results have been most satisfactory.

Finally, I am very grateful to Lieutenant-Colonel Sir P. Z. Cox for his able co-operation and willing assistance. The Force has largely profited by his deep knowledge of local conditions and peoples, and by the tact and bold resource which he has displayed in all he has undertaken.

The names of the following officers, all of whom have performed good service, are brought to the notice of His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief in India:—

Booth, Brevet Major F.
 Branson, Captain L. H.
 Dick, Major R. N.
 Duffy, Deputy Commissary and Captain T. A.
 Goad, Lieutenant-Commander C. R., R.I.M.
 Greenstreet, Major C. B. L.
 Gribbon, Major W. H.
 Hamilton, Captain W. H., I.M.S.
 Huddleston, Commander (temporary Captain) W. B.
 Kinch, Lieutenant A. G., R.I.M.
 Marsh, Lieutenant B. C., R.I.M.
 More, Captain J. C.
 Mowat, Captain J. S.
 Parsley, 2nd Lieutenant W. C.
 Queripel, Major (temporary Lieutenant-Colonel) L. H., D.S.O.
 Shah, Lieutenant A. S.
 Thompson, Captain R. C.
 Whittall, Captain G. E.
 Winter, Major (temporary Lieutenant-Colonel) C. B.

47. As soon as postal communication is established with General Townshend I have no doubt that he will have further names to bring to notice.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

JOHN NIXON, *General*,
Commanding Indian Expeditionary Force
"D."

From the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies
Station, to the Secretary of the Admiralty.

"Proserpine,"
10th January, 1916.

Sir,

With reference to the operations on the Tigris comprising the attack on Ctesiphon and subsequent withdrawal, be pleased to acquaint the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty that I consider much credit is due to Captain Wilfrid Nunn, C.M.G., D.S.O., for having effected this retreat in the face of a much superior force with so little loss.

The abandonment of "Comet" and "Firefly" was unavoidable, and was accomplished in a highly seamanlike manner under heavy fire.

2. In connection with the above I have the honour to bring to Their Lordships' notice the names of the following Officers and men:—

Lieutenant George E. Harden, R.N.

Sub-Lieutenant Lionel C. P. Tudway, D.S.C.,
R.N.

Acting Sub-Lieutenant John G. Wood,
R.N.R.

Engineer Driver, 1st Class, Saidu Hoosein, of
"Comet."

Petty Officer, 1st Class, James Keay, O.N.
167367, of "Firefly."

Petty Officer, 1st Class, H. John Wheeler,
O.N. 179098, of "Sumana."

Seaman Ernest Guy, O.N. 7679 A., R.N.R.

Signalman Frederick J. Hanson, O.N. 313904,
of "Espiegle."

I have, etc.,

(Signed) R. H. PEIRSE,

Vice-Admiral, Commander-in-Chief.

The Secretary of the Admiralty.