

front defence line was actually occupied by troops. Nevertheless, as there were no signs of an imminent advance on the part of the enemy, the question of the stationary defences caused me no serious anxiety, though everything possible was done to hasten on their completion. The organisation of the offensive defence, which time has proved to be paramount, was, however, a pressing matter hitherto untouched. Practically nothing had been done towards the organisation of mobile forces. The collection of a large number of riding and transport camels had to be undertaken at once and a plan of campaign to be devised. Moreover, time was short, for it was plain that any offensive on a large scale by the enemy must be commenced before the middle of March. For the force under my command the only possible line of advance was along the northern line from Qantara towards Qatia and El Arish, and the task was at once taken up of examining the possibilities of an offensive on this line and solving the problem of maintaining a considerable force at Qatia during the summer months. The result of these investigations is to be seen in my memorandum of 15th February addressed to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, in which I stated that the first step towards securing the true base for the defence of Egypt was an advance to a suitable position east of Qatia and the construction of a railway to that place.

Up to the middle of February aeroplane reconnaissance was the only active military operation possible, owing to the need for reorganising the units of the Force and for pushing on the work of laying roads, pipe-lines and railways to enable an adequate force to be maintained on, and beyond, the front lines. The magnitude of the latter task may be judged from the fact that, during the period covered by this despatch, 114 miles of road, 154 miles of pipe-lines, and 252 miles of railway were laid. The work of the Royal Flying Corps, most actively and gallantly pursued, enabled me to keep the enemy's posts at Hassana, Nekhl and El Arish under close observation, and neither their reports nor those of the equally gallant and efficient Naval Air Service, which observed by seaplane the garrisons of southern Syria, showed any concentration of enemy troops for a big attack on the Canal. On February 16th the Russian Army entered Erzerum, inflicting a heavy defeat on the Turkish Army opposed to it. It seemed likely then that all the enemy's schemes for attacking the Canal in force must, for the present, fall to the ground, and such has proved to be the case. The garrisons in Syria were gradually reduced, until it was estimated that not more than 60,000 men were available for an attack on Egypt. During the latter half of February the work of reconnaissance beyond the front line began in earnest, especially in the northern section, where the 15th Corps patrolled as far as Bir El Nuss and Hod Um Ugba, establishing the fact that the country was all clear and practically deserted. At this period, too, a reconnaissance was undertaken from Tor. This post, and that of Abu Zeneima, both on the Sinaitic coast south of Suez, were then garrisoned by a battalion of the Egyptian Army—subsequently by the 14th Sikhs—and had, by arrangement with General Maxwell, come under my direction. The reconnaissance from Tor was undertaken against a concentration of

a small body of the enemy at Wadi Ginneh, some miles distant from the coast. This minor operation was in every way successful, though the enemy had fled before their camp was reached, leaving behind their baggage, which was destroyed. The troops then returned without further incident.

4. From March onwards, the rapid embarkation of troops for France depleted my forces considerably. During this month the military operations on the eastern front, if not momentous, were satisfactory. On 6th March a very gallant and successful attack on Hassana was made by the Royal Flying Corps, which resulted in the destruction of the pumping station. Bomb attacks were made on Nekhl and other places in Sinai, and on 24th March Hassana was again attacked in force with bombs. In the northern sector, the preliminary steps were being taken for the advance to Qatia. Week by week permanent posts were pushed further ahead, special reconnaissances were made with a view to testing the water supply, and the broad gauge railway from Qantara to Qatia was being carried forward as fast as possible.

5. On 11th March I received instructions from the late Secretary of State for War that the command of the troops in Egypt was to be reorganised, and that I was appointed General Officer Commanding-in-Chief all the Imperial forces in this country, which added to my original command the command held by General Sir John Maxwell. The preliminary details for carrying this change into operation were fixed at a Conference with General Maxwell held on 13th March, and on 19th March I formally took over the whole command in Egypt, thus ending a system of dual control which had of necessity been unsatisfactory, especially from the point of view of economy. By this change I not only became responsible for the administration of martial law in Egypt and the maintenance of order throughout the Nile Valley and Delta, but I also succeeded to the direction of the operations against the Senoussi on the Western Frontier, which had very appropriately been brought to a triumphant period by General Maxwell by his victories which led to the occupation of Sollum on 14th March, the capture of Gaafer, the dispersal, with the loss of all his guns, of Nuri's force, and the recapture from the enemy of 90 British prisoners taken by hostile submarines. The unification of the command in Egypt made large economies in staff possible, and these were carried out at once. The Levant Base also ceased to exist, General Sir Edward Altham, K.C.B., remaining as Inspector-General of Communications. The work of reorganising the forces and staffs for the Delta and Western Frontier Force was pushed on as fast as possible. I decided to keep General Headquarters at Ismailia, and to establish at Cairo a General Officer Commanding the Delta District, who would also act as Commander of L. of C. Defences. For operations on the west I formed a Western Frontier Force, divided into two sections, a north-western and a south-western, divided by a line drawn east and west through Deirut. These staffs and forces were definitely established and at work by 1st April. The whole force under my command now took the name of Egyptian Expeditionary Force. Towards the end of March, at the request of the Sirdar, I undertook the responsibility for the