

encamped on the left bank of the Tigris, above the Wadi River; the advanced troops were in touch with the Turks entrenched in their Umm Al-Hannah position. General Aylmer was actively engaged in reorganising his force for a further advance with the least possible delay. He fully realised that an immediate advance must involve some deficiencies in his organisation and fighting strength, but was influenced by the following factors:—

(i.) General Townshend's reports as to the limit of his food supplies, and the influence of food supply questions generally on the operations of the relieving column.

(ii.) General Townshend's anxiety about the sufficiency of his ammunition supply and the condition of some of his troops.

(iii.) The rapidity with which the Turks might be able to reinforce the troops opposed to General Townshend, and the desirability of forestalling them.

It was, I understand, those three considerations that had mainly influenced my predecessor in ordering General Aylmer to advance as early in January as possible with the force which would then be concentrated at Ali Gharbi.

It was not until after the heavy fighting for the Hannah position on January 21st that General Townshend's report of January 25th, 1916, to the effect that as regards food supplies he could hold out for another 84 days, reached General Headquarters.

5. The difficulty experienced in pushing up reinforcements, supplies and munitions of war to the front seriously affected the operations.

The number of steamers available in January, 1916, for river transport purposes was practically the same as when in June, 1915, the first advance up the Tigris took place. Additional river craft had from time to time been demanded, as augmentations to the force in Mesopotamia were decided upon, but owing to the peculiar conditions which vessels intended for the intricate navigation of the Tigris have to satisfy, the provision of these vessels was a difficult problem, necessarily entailing long delays, and the supply was never able to keep pace with the requirements of the force.

In consequence of this it was never possible during the period now under report either to concentrate at the Tigris front the whole of the forces available in the country or to equip such forces as could be concentrated there with sufficient transport to make them mobile and enable them to operate freely at any distance from the river.

It was always necessary therefore for General Headquarters to balance most carefully the flow of reinforcements and supplies, so that the former should not outrun the latter.

*1st Phase.—19th to 23rd January.*

6. After the battle of Wadi River General Aylmer's leading troops had followed the retreating Turks to the Umm-Al-Hannah position, and entrenched themselves at the mouth of the defile, so as to shut the enemy in and limit his power of taking the offensive.

7. The weather at this period was extraordinarily unfavourable. Heavy rains caused the river to come down in flood and overflow its banks, and converted the ground on either bank into a veritable bog.

Our bridge across the Wadi was washed away several times, while the boisterous winds

greatly interfered with the construction of a bridge across the Tigris, here some 400 yards in width.

8. It was essential to establish Artillery on the right bank of the Tigris so as to support, by enfilading fire, the attack of our Infantry against the Hannah position.

9. Guns and troops were ferried across, with difficulty, owing to the high wind and heavy squalls of rain, but by the 19th all troops allotted to the right bank had crossed over and were established in the positions from which they were required to co-operate with the main force on the left bank.

10. Meanwhile the leading Infantry Brigades on the left bank had pushed nearer the enemy. January the 20th was devoted to a systematic bombardment of his position, and during the night the Infantry pushed forward their advanced line to within 200 yards of the enemy's trenches.

11. On the morning of the 21st, under cover of an intensive Artillery bombardment, our Infantry moved to the attack.

On our right the troops got to within 100 yards of the enemy's line, but were unable to advance further. Our left column, consisting of the Black Watch, 6th Jats and 41st Dogras, penetrated the front line with a rush, capturing trenches which they held for about an hour and a half. Supports were sent forward, but losing direction and coming under heavy fire, failed to reach them. Thus, left unsupported, our previously successful troops, when Turkish counter-attacks developed, were overwhelmed by numbers and forced to retire.

12. Heavy rain now began to fall and continued throughout the day. Telephone communication broke down, and communication by orderly became slow and uncertain.

After further Artillery bombardment the attack was renewed at 1 p.m., but by this time the heavy rain had converted the ground into a sea of mud, rendering rapid movement impossible. The enemy's fire was heavy and effective, inflicting severe losses, and though every effort was made, the assault failed.

Our troops maintained their position until dark and then slowly withdrew to the main trenches which had been previously occupied, some 1,300 yards from those of the enemy.

13. As far as possible all the wounded were brought in during the withdrawal, but their sufferings and hardships were acute under the existing climatic conditions, when vehicles and stretcher-bearers could scarcely move in the deep mud.

14. To renew the attack on the 22nd was not practicable. The losses on the 21st had been heavy, the ground was still a quagmire and the troops exhausted. A six hours' armistice was arranged in order to bury the dead and remove the wounded to shelter.

15. I cannot sufficiently express my admiration for the courage and dogged determination of the force engaged. For days they bivouacked in driving rain on soaked and sodden ground. Three times they were called upon to advance over a perfectly flat country, deep in mud, and absolutely devoid of cover, against well-constructed and well-planned trenches, manned by a brave and stubborn enemy approximately their equal in numbers. They showed a spirit of endurance and self-sacrifice of which their country may well be proud.