

tary operations at the first favourable opportunity.

The main Fur army, estimated at between 4,000 and 6,000 riflemen, well supplied with ammunition, and an unknown number of auxiliaries armed with spears, remained at El Fasher, whither the Sultan recalled most of his provincial garrisons, other than those with whom our troops had been engaged, and who had been withdrawn to Burush and Um Kedada, where they were slightly reinforced. It was also probable that the Sultan would not risk a serious engagement with our troops at a distance from his capital, and intended to keep his army intact and concentrated at El Fasher until the advent of the rains, when the state of the country would be favourable to guerilla warfare and to raids upon our extended line of communications.

The immediate problem with which Colonel Kelly had to deal was concerned with the provision of the requisite water and other supplies for the troops and convoys operating in the country, at this time of the year almost waterless and denuded of food supplies, which extends for nearly 300 miles to the west of rail-head at El Obeid. On the establishment of regular communications and the rapid conveyance of supplies over this inhospitable tract depended the safety of the force actually in Darfur and the course of all future military operations. I therefore conceived the plan of supplementing the camel transport, on which the troops in the field would have to rely throughout, by a mechanical transport service from rail-head to Nahud; and ordered a number of motor vehicles to be ready against the time that a make-shift motor road could be prepared. At the same time preliminary surveys and preparations were made with a view to the construction of a motor-road, capable of bearing light mechanical transport, from Rahad (on the railway) *via* Taweisha to El Fasher, a distance of about 460 miles, which will eventually bring the latter town to within four days' journey of the railway.

At the beginning of April minor enemy concentrations were reported at Burush, Um Eisheishat and Um Kedada, whilst a small force which had been previously posted at Taweisha, on our left flank, was withdrawn to Tulu. A reconnaissance in force of the country as far west as Abiad was therefore undertaken with a view (1) to supplement the water supply available for our troops and the increasing number of transport animals—a pressing necessity; (2) to disperse the enemy forces at Burush and Um Kedada; and (3) by denying to the enemy the important wells at Abiad, to secure in its entirety the main, and until the advent of the rains, the only practicable line of communication between Nahud and El Fasher.

On 3rd April a force composed of 2½ companies Mounted Infantry, 4 guns, 6 maxims, and the XIIIth Sudanese left Jebel el Hella and occupied Burush, whence a Fur Cavalry patrol was driven out, at midday. Our advance on Um Kedada on the day following was opposed by some 700 of the enemy, a section of whom were well entrenched in front of the wells, but were driven off by our guns. On the 8th April the reconnaissance was continued to Abiad, which was reached on the morning of the 9th idem and had been evacuated by the enemy on the previous evening. A detach-

ment of four companies of Sudanese Infantry with 4 guns was left at this place, where they successfully beat off enemy attacks on the 14th and 19th April. By the end of the month the whole Line of Communications was adequately garrisoned, with strong detachments at Abiad, Um Kedada, Burush, Lugud, Jebel el Hella and Um Shanga, and preparations for a further and final phase of the operations could be proceeded with without fear of serious disturbance by enemy attacks.

During the month a complete system of intelligence and observation posts was also organised along the frontier from Gabr el Dar (Dar Homr) and Hafir Ogr, in S.W. Kordofan, to Shebb, W.N.W. of Halfa. Two hundred and sixty native "friendlies," armed with Remington rifles, were employed on this duty in Kordofan alone, under the direction of El Miralai (Colonel) Beshir Bey Kembal, whilst an additional 200 men of the Kababish tribe, under their Nazir (or head sheikh) Ali el Tom, were detailed to occupy Jebel Meidob, in N.E. Darfur, as a special observation post to watch the Arba'in road between Darfur and the northern (Senussist) oases.

My original scheme of operations, which was influenced by considerations other than those of the local military situation, had envisaged the necessity to consolidate our hold on the districts actually occupied by our troops and to defer the further and inevitable advance and occupation of El Fasher until later on in the year. But the state of the local water supplies, coupled with the information we had gained of the enemy's dispositions, necessitated a careful reconsideration of the matter and an immediate decision. The *pros* and *cons* to the question were summarised in my telegraphic despatch of the 24th April, 1916, wherein I stated that the sole advantage to be gained by delay consisted in the greater certainty of success that might be afforded by the employment of a considerably larger force than was permitted by the existing (dry weather) conditions of water supply and transport. The question, briefly, was whether under these existing conditions, which enabled us to pin the enemy down to his chosen place of concentration, we could bring up a sufficient force of all arms (and supply it from rail-head 400 miles distant) to defeat the Sultan's army and to occupy his capital, without risk of a reverse or an inconclusive battle, which might entail a rapid and disastrous retreat. After full consideration, and with the entire concurrence of Colonel Kelly, I decided that an advance on El Fasher during the full moon in May offered a reasonable prospect of the rapid attainment of our aims, and fully justified the risks inseparable from the enterprise. My opinion was further strengthened by the knowledge, which was communicated to me shortly afterwards, that the French military authorities in Wadai would be prepared to co-operate to the full extent of the limited means immediately at their disposal, an undertaking which was very amply discharged by the French occupation of Dar Sula, which was effected soon after the entry of our troops into El Fasher.

The early days of May were spent in reconstituting the line of communications, the garrisons on which were for the most part drafted to the front and partially replaced by reinforcements from Khartoum; in assembling the supplies and transport services for the advance