

Second: The consolidation of our position on the Hai, from December 13th to January 4th.

Third: The operations in the Khadairi Bend, from January 5th to 19th.

Fourth: The operations against the Hai salient, from January 20th to February 5th.

Fifth: The operations in the Dahra Bend, from February 6th to 16th.

Sixth: The capture of Sannaiyat and passage of the Tigris, from February 17th to 24th.

Seventh: The advance on Baghdad, from February 25th to March 11th.

Eighth: The operations subsequent to the fall of Baghdad, from March 12th to 31st.

PRELIMINARY PREPARATIONS: AUGUST 28TH TO DECEMBER 12TH.

3. It was of paramount importance, in view of the approach of the rainy season, that no undue delay should take place in regard to the resumption of active operations, but before these could be undertaken with reasonable prospect of success it was necessary:—

(a) To improve the health and training of the troops, who had suffered severely from the intense heat during the summer months.

(b) To perfect our somewhat precarious lines of communications.

(c) To develop our resources.

(d) To amass reserves of supplies, ammunition and stores at the front.

It was therefore considered desirable to retain General Headquarters at Basrah till the end of October, in order to systematise, co-ordinate and expand (b) and (c), whilst (a) and (d) continued concurrently and subsequently.

4. Steady progress was made on the lines so carefully designed and developed by my predecessor, Lieut.-General Sir Percy Lake, K.C.B., K.C.M.G., to whom my warm thanks are due for the firm foundations which had been laid for the ensuing winter campaign. The growth of Basrah as a military port and base continued, and the laying of railways was completed. The subsidence of the floods and the organisation of local and imported labour removed obstacles which had hitherto hindered development, although conversely the lack of water in the rivers and consequent groundings of rivercraft gave rise to anxiety from time to time. The Directorate of Inland Water Transport was created, and accessions of men and material arrived from overseas, as well as additional rivercraft; whilst the influx of adequate and experienced personnel for the Directorates of Port Administration and Conservancy, Works, Railways, Supply and Transport and Ordnance enabled these services to cope more adequately with their responsibilities in maintaining the field Army. Hospital accommodation was reviewed and still further expanded, whilst the Remount and Veterinary Services were overhauled and reconstituted. Changes were also made in the organisation of the Army, the grouping of formations and units was readjusted, and alterations were made in the system of command. The line of communication defences were recast and additional lines of communication units for administrative pur-

poses were provided. Establishments for all units, whether on the various fronts or on the L. of C., were fixed, whilst the provision of mechanical transport and an increase in animals and vehicles enabled the land transport with the Force to be reconstituted.

5. During the latter part of October the Army was fortunate in receiving a visit from the incoming Commander-in-Chief in India, General Sir Charles Monro, G.C.M.G., K.C.B. His Excellency made an extended tour of the theatre of operations, and his advice and comments on various matters were of the greatest value to myself personally, whilst the Army hailed his visit with the liveliest satisfaction, feeling that he would assume his office with first-hand and sympathetic knowledge of our needs and difficulties.

6. Matters had by this time developed so satisfactorily that during His Excellency's visit General Headquarters were moved to the front at Arab Village. Before joining there myself I carried out short tours of inspection on the Karun front at Ahwaz, proceeding as far as the Oilfields, so as to make further provision for their local security, and on the Euphrates front at Nasariyeh. At both places satisfactory conditions prevailed.

By the end of November preliminary preparations were well advanced. A steady stream of reinforcements had been moving up the Tigris for some weeks, and drafts were joining their units, making good the wastage of the summer. The troops had shaken off the ill-effects of the hot weather, and their war training had improved. Stores, ammunition, and supplies were accumulating rapidly at the front, our communications were assured, and it seemed clear that it was only a matter of days before offensive operations could be justifiably undertaken. Training camps which had been formed at Amarah were broken up, and the general concentration upstream of Sheikh Sa'ad was completed.

7. At the beginning of December the enemy still occupied the same positions on the Tigris front which he had occupied during the summer. On the left bank of the Tigris he held the Sannaiyat position, flanked on one side by the Suwaikieh Marsh and on the other by the river. In this position he had withstood our attacks on three occasions during the previous April. Since then he had strengthened and elaborated this trench system, and a series of successive positions extended back as far as Kut, fifteen miles in the rear. The river bank from Sannaiyat to Kut was also entrenched.

On the right bank of the Tigris the enemy held the line to which he had withdrawn in May when he evacuated the Sinn position. This line extended from a point on the Tigris three miles north-east of Kut in a south-westerly direction across the Khadairi Bend to the River Hai, two miles below its exit from the Tigris, and thence across the Hai to the north-west. There was a pontoon bridge across the Hai near its junction with the Tigris which was protected by the trench system in that vicinity. These defences also covered the approaches from the east and south to another pontoon bridge which the Turks had constructed across the Tigris on the eastern side of the Shumran peninsula. The enemy occupied the line of the Hai for several miles below the bridgehead position with posts and mounted Arab auxiliaries.