



FIFTH SUPPLEMENT

TO

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THURSDAY, 20 FEBRUARY, 1919

War Office,

20th February, 1919.

The Secretary of State for War has received the following Despatch, addressed to the Chief of the General Staff, India, by Lieutenant-General W. R. Marshall, K.C.B., K.C.S.I., Commanding-in-Chief, Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force.

General Headquarters,

Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force,

1st October, 1918.

SIR,—

1. I have the honour to submit herewith a report of the operations carried out by the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force during the period extending from April 1st to September 30th, 1918.

My previous despatch ended with the narrative of the operations which culminated in the capture of the Turkish forces opposed to me on the Euphrates about Khan Baghdadi, and the subsequent pursuit to Haditha, Ana, and beyond.

2. In my previous despatch I alluded briefly to the murder of the political officer at Nedjef, but not to the motives which had prompted

such an unprovoked crime. The reasons for it have been traced to enemy agency, and amongst the evilly disposed inhabitants of Nedjef a conspiracy, fostered by German gold, had been organised, the heads of it calling themselves "The Committee of Rebellion." The roots of this conspiracy were in Nedjef and its branches extended both up and down the Euphrates Valley. To put down this conspiracy, therefore, and to mete out stern justice to those actually concerned in the murder was from every point of view an urgent necessity. It was not desired to treat the city, which contains one of the most holy shrines of the Shiachs, and is surrounded by a very high wall, in an ordinary way, *i.e.*, by shelling or by direct assault.

A strict blockade was therefore ordered and the outside water supply cut off. Picquets were established round the town with barbed wire connecting them and these effectually stopped ingress or egress. There were two attempts of the insurgents to break out through the blockade line, but these were effectually stopped; dominating mounds were assaulted and held by our troops and gradually the blockade line closed in and occupied the bastions of the walls as well as holding the en-

France gates. Every consideration was shown to the holy Ulema and to the theological students (most of whom were Persian subjects), and had it been necessary to proceed to extremities all these would have been given an asylum. The loyal inhabitants, under the guidance of the Ulema, determined, however, to rid themselves and their sacred city of these evil-doers, and eventually by 13th April the proscribed persons had been handed over and the blockade was raised. The instigators of the murder and the actual murderers were brought before a military court to answer for their deeds, and as a result of the trial eleven were condemned to death and duly executed, seven others were sentenced to transportation and three were deported; in addition a number of undesirables were sent out of the country. The firmness with which the situation was handled, the fairness with which the law-abiding inhabitants were treated and the scrupulous care which was taken to avoid damage to holy persons and places created a most favourable impression on all the surrounding tribes and contributed in no small degree to the subsequent establishment of friendly relations with the somewhat recalcitrant tribes of the Shamiya, Rumeitha, and Shatra districts.

For this eminently satisfactory ending to a delicate and somewhat difficult situation my thanks are due to the acting Civil Commissioner, to Brig.-General G. A. F. Sanders and the troops under his command, and also to the political officer on the spot, Captain F. C. C. Balfour, M.C.

I subsequently visited Nedjef myself and was received with every token of honour. I attended a meeting at which were assembled the Ulema, the Shaikhs of the district and the notables of the town, who one and all expressed the most lively gratitude for the measures which had been adopted and their loyalty to Government.

3. On the Persian border certain tribes, notably some sections of the Sinjabis, were inclined to be troublesome (another result of German intrigue and gold) and as this tribe has its habitat just to the north of the Qasri-Shirin-Kermanshah road it became necessary to give them a lesson. The Guran confederation (which includes the Kalkhanis) was reported on the 19th April to be about to take action against the pro-enemy sections of the Sinjabis. I decided therefore to support these friendly tribesmen in their action and despatched a small column of all arms to cooperate. On the 25th April a brief action took place with eminently satisfactory results. The Sinjabis were defeated and suffered heavy casualties (as well as losing large numbers of animals) and our aeroplanes turned their retreat into a rout.

The effect of this small operation, carried out in severe conditions of weather, has been far-reaching. The pro-enemy chief of the Sinjabis, who was known to be in German pay, was himself wounded and the German agents were thoroughly discredited; whilst among the surrounding tribes a profound impression was created in favour of the British and our line of communications into Persia was safeguarded from serious raiding.

4. Again with the object of making the Persian line of communication more secure, I considered it advisable to drive the Turks out

of the Kara Tepe—Kifri—Tuz Kermatli area and to hold both Kifri and Tuz for the future.

5. The general plan of operations decided upon was to simulate a converging attack upon Kara Tepe and Kifri, but in reality to strike first at the more distant objectives of Abu Gharaib and Tuz Kermatli, with the intention of cutting off and dealing subsequently with any hostile forces south-east and east of these places. This plan was to be carried into effect by means of various columns. Preliminary movements were delayed by rain in the middle of April, but all columns were concentrated at their respective positions of assembly by the 25th of that month. Secrecy was well maintained, and the Turks appeared to be in ignorance of the impending attack. The operations were entrusted to Lieut.-General Sir R. G. Egerton, K.C.B., K.C.I.E., and by the morning of April 26th he had completed the deployment of the troops selected for the operation.

A small column was sent up the Adhaim River to induce the Turks to strengthen and hold their Abu Gharaib defences. On the right a small mixed column, with which were some irregulars, demonstrated on the upper Diala. At Mirjana another small column of all arms was concentrated, and the 6th Cavalry Brigade moved to Umr Maidan and bridged the Lesser Naft River above that place. The main column consisting of the majority of the 13th Division with attached troops under Major-General Sir W. de S. Cayley, K.C.M.G., C.B., was at Nahrin Kupri, where the bridge, which had been destroyed by the Turks in their hurried retreat last December, was rapidly put in repair. This column detached forces towards Abu Gharaib and the Lesser Naft, the last named with orders to move to Abu Alik before dawn on April 27th in order to head off any enemy movement from Kara Tepe in a north-westerly direction. Although the Turks must have been aware of these movements, they evidently failed to appreciate their significance, as they did not commence their withdrawal from Kara Tepe until evening of 26th April.

The night of 26th-27th April was very stormy, and torrential rain fell, making the night march of the detached forces an exceedingly difficult and arduous one. However, in spite of inky darkness, boggy ground and flooded streams, they reached their objectives by daybreak on 27th. The Abu Gharaib position had, however, been abandoned by the Turks, and its retreating garrison was discovered and bombed by our aeroplanes. The detached force on the Lesser Naft came in contact with the Turks retreating from Kara Tepe and fulfilled its mission by heading them off from their direct line of retreat.

The 6th Cavalry Brigade, under Brig.-General P. Holland-Pryor, C.M.G., D.S.O., M.V.O., after an arduous night march overtook the Turks who had retreated from Abu Gharaib and had taken up a defensive position at Kulawand, covering Tuz Kermatli from the south-east. Feigning a frontal attack, whilst gradually working round the enemy's right flank, our cavalry cut the enemy's lines of retreat and then charged right through his infantry, killing some 200, including two battalion commanders, and capturing 565 prisoners, a mountain gun and considerable booty. After reconnoitring the Ak Su with cavalry and light armoured motor-cars, and finding the trenches south of Tuz Kermatli strongly held, the cavalry fell back on the main

column which was bivouacked four miles south of Kulawand. This retrograde movement was made with the object of inducing the Turks to believe that our forces, as in previous operations, would retire to their original positions. The move evidently had the desired effect, completely deceiving the enemy and inducing him to remain in his position at Tuz Kermatli and even to reinforce it by bringing up troops from Kirkuk.

The small columns operating on the right had conformed to the general forward movement on the 27th, and before darkness on that date had reached Chaman Kupri and the right bank of the upper Diala respectively. Kifri was occupied unopposed on the 28th, where some 70 sick Turks were found. The coal mines had been flooded, but were otherwise undamaged.

The attack on the enemy position was arranged for the 29th, and was fought in two main parts, viz., on both banks of the Ak Su. On the left bank a detached force attacked the enemy and drove him with loss across the river to Tuz Kermatli, whilst some prisoners and a machine gun remained in our hands.

The main attack, however, was made on the right bank against the Yanijah Buyuk position, and was carried out with great dash by the 38th Infantry Brigade, supported by artillery, machine guns, and low-flying aeroplanes. The Turks made a stout resistance, but the infantry advanced under heavy artillery and machine-gun fire with the greatest rapidity and in the most perfect order. By 7 a.m. the position was carried, and the Lancashire men, pressing on in pursuit, entered Tuz Kermatli, capturing the major portion of the Turkish forces. The cavalry and cyclists took up the pursuit of the remnants, who were endeavouring to get away through the hills, and captured many prisoners and much transport. The enemy suffered severely, over 200 dead being buried by us alone, whilst 1,300 prisoners, 12 field guns, 20 machine guns and large quantities of ammunition fell into our hands. Reconnaissances carried out on the 30th showed that the Turks further north were retiring on Kirkuk and had withdrawn from Tauq. The task which I had set the troops was therefore satisfactorily completed, and the whole area competely cleared of the enemy.

However, on receipt of instructions to continue the pressure and to capture Kirkuk (130 miles distant from railhead), some readjustment of the troops became necessary in order to make the supply situation at all possible. Further action was also delayed by the state of the weather, which was very stormy and wet during the first week of May; indeed, on the 7th torrential rain caused heavy floods in the rivers, which washed away the temporary bridges. Notwithstanding this difficulty, reconnaissances were pushed forward, and on the 5th May found the Turks holding a position at Taza Khurmatli, but this force, evidently a small rearguard, withdrew at dusk, and the place was occupied by our troops on the 6th. The cavalry pushed on ahead and got astride of the southerly road leading from Kirkuk to Altun Kupri. Some opposition was encountered, but the Turks continued to withdraw, and our main body that night bivouacked seven miles north of Taza Khurmatli after having done a 28-mile march. During this period the First Corps, to which was attached

the 7th Cavalry Brigade, continued to threaten the Turkish positions on the Tigris and to hold the enemy there to his ground.

On the 7th our leading troops entered Kirkuk unopposed, the Turks having retired from it during the night of 6th-7th, leaving behind them 600 sick and wounded soldiers who were in a deplorable sanitary condition, and were suffering greatly from malnutrition. A large amount of ammunition and equipment was also captured. Cavalry patrols pushing forward got into touch with the Turkish rearguard, but the state of the ground precluded any large movements. On the 8th our main body reached Kirkuk, and the Turks withdrew across the Lesser Zab, having prepared the bridge at Altun Kupri for demolition.

7. Difficulties of supply, due to distance and state of the ground, now made it imperative to stop further pursuit. Kirkuk was in an indescribably filthy condition, and starvation was rife amongst the inhabitants; our troops therefore were kept very busy in sanitary measures, town control, salvaging and destruction of military material, as well as in the evacuation of prisoners and refugees. For a time a small mobile column was left as a garrison after the main force had been withdrawn, but, though it was politically desirable to continue in occupation of this centre of Kurdistan, military considerations made this impracticable—all possible transport was required to fulfil the rôle allotted to us in Persia, and on the 24th May the last of our troops withdrew from Kirkuk. Before the final withdrawal all those of the inhabitants who feared the return of the Turks were evacuated as refugees by their own express desire. Those who took advantage of our offer numbered nearly 1,600, and included Chaldeans, Armenians and Mohammedans.

Owing to the distance covered by these operations, and to the bad weather which prevailed throughout, the work of the troops was very arduous, and I have nothing but admiration for the good work put in by all arms and the excellent co-operation which was maintained between them. In prisoners alone over 3,000 Turks were taken, whilst our total casualties only amounted to 26 killed and 210 wounded. My thanks are greatly due to the able manner in which the whole sweeping operation was conducted by Lieut.-General Egerton, his staff, and the troops under his command.

8. The rain had continued much later in the year than is usual, and the road into Persia had therefore been impracticable, so that, in spite of urgent calls, I had been unable to send in that direction more than small detachments. The demoralised Russian troops were retreating to the Caspian, and with the exception of Lieut.-Colonel Bicherakov's Partisan Detachment there was nothing to prevent anarchy breaking loose in Persia.

A state of famine prevailed over the whole length of road from Kerind to Kasvin, and the Mission under Major-General L. C. Dunsterville, C.B., was largely engaged in relief work. The Persians, who had suffered greatly from both Turks and Russians, were, rather naturally, averse to yet another belligerent entering into their country, and this point of view was sedulously fostered by enemy agents and propagandists. A great deal of good and useful relief work was undertaken by the Dunsterville Mission, and much of the prevailing

distress was thereby alleviated. In this connection I would like to bring to notice the excellent work done by Mr. and Mrs. Stead (American Missionaries) in the neighbourhood of Kermanshah; there is no doubt that they saved many hundreds of lives by their devotion.

However, by the end of May the road to Hamadan became possible, and, the matter being urgent, I sent forward troops in Ford vans as far as Kasvin to take over that place (which covers Teheran from the north and west) from Colonel Bicherakov, whose detachment comprised the rear-guard of the Russian troops evacuating Persia.

9. We were now embarked on an operation of great difficulty. From railhead to the Caspian and Enzeli is, by the road, nearly 700 miles, and this road, west of Hamadan, is unmetalled and traverses rocky passes, swift-running streams, and broad alluvial valleys—bridges had been broken and blown up, so that temporary expedients for crossing had to be devised. One at least of the passes is over 7,000 feet, and the rocky nature of the ground encountered on many stretches of the road wore out tyres with alarming rapidity. The country in the immediate neighbourhood of the road was famine stricken, and not only was the food situation an anxious one, but much transport was required for the supply of petrol, oil, spare parts, ordnance stores and the many and varied articles of equipment necessary for maintaining a force in the field.

On June 1st General Dunsterville's Mission arrived at Kasvin, then occupied by Colonel Bicherakov's partisans, some 1,200 strong, together with weak British detachments. On the 8th June the Russians marched from Kasvin with the intention of proceeding to Enzeli and thence by ship to Baku. A small British detachment accompanied them. On reaching Mandjil three days later this force found the bridge at that place held by a Gilan tribe named the Jangalis, with whom were several German officers. After a vain attempt to parley on the part of the Germans, the Russians attacked, and after capturing the Mandjil bridge pushed on to Resht and Enzeli, assisted by our light armoured cars.

The moral effect of this small action was out of all proportion to its military importance, and for a time kept in order the Jangali leaders, who had previously been bolstered up by a fictitious prestige. The closely-wooded nature of the country round Resht which they inhabit gives them a sense of security which they endeavoured to turn to account by sniping at our convoys which were being sent to Enzeli, but no serious trouble arose until July 20th, when they attacked a small British detachment at Resht, together with the British Consulate and Bank at that place. After some hand-to-hand street fighting the attack was beaten off and over 100 Jangalis were killed. Our Hampshire and Gurkha troops fought extremely well, and the Jangalis have not only given no more trouble but have made an agreement not to assist the Turks any further.

10. During June small detachments were despatched to Bijar and Miane to keep an eye on the possible activities of the Turks against my lengthy line of communications in Persia, and to establish friendly relations with the local tribes. A further reference will be made to minor operations in these districts (see paras. 15 and 16).

11. On July 3rd Colonel Bicherakov sailed from Enzeli for Alyat, 35 miles south-west of Baku. He had previously accepted the post of Commander-in-Chief of the Red Army of the Caucasus. At this time the Government of Baku was purely Bolshevik, and strongly opposed to British intervention. Various small actions were fought near Baku during July between the Tartars and Turks on one side, and the Russians and Armenians on the other; but, owing to existing disorganisation, the resistance offered, with the exception of Bicherakov's troops, was ineffectual, and proved powerless to prevent Baku being seriously threatened. On July 26th a coup d'état took place, the Bolshevik Government being overthrown and its place taken by a Centro-Caspian Dictatorship. The latter at once appealed for British aid, but before it could arrive Bicherakov was convinced that the fall of the town was inevitable, and in consequence of repeated acts of treachery on the part of the Red Guards, drew off his detachment to the north and moved along the coast of the Caspian towards Derbend.

12. What news filtered through from Baku was now very meagre, but the Turks were slow to make the most of their opportunities in occupying the town, and, though a landing of British troops now seemed impracticable, a small mission of British officers with one platoon as escort was despatched to report on the situation. These landed in Baku on August 4th. For the time being the appearance of even this small party of British troops, which received an ovation on marching through the town, seemed to have an electrical effect on the citizens and government of Baku, and a Turkish attack on the following day was repulsed with heavy loss.

Further British reinforcements were sent during the remainder of August, but their numbers were restricted by the limitation imposed by the great length and difficulties of the Persian line of communication. On arrival they took over portions of the defended perimeter of the town, and every effort was made by General Dunsterville and his staff to instil order into existing chaos. The inhabitants of Baku seemed however to think that it was no longer necessary for them to fight now that the British had arrived, and they gave our troops little or no assistance. On August 26th the Turks attacked with considerable determination a pronounced salient in the line; they were well supported by their artillery and charged home with the bayonet. This point was most gallantly held by a British company against odds of five to one, unsupported by local Baku troops who should have been there in reserve. The company suffered heavy casualties before being obliged to withdraw. On August 31st the Turks made two further attacks which were beaten off with heavy loss by British and Russian troops, who were, however, subsequently compelled to give ground owing to the exposure of their flank resultant on the withdrawal of some Armenian battalions. On September 1st further ground was lost, our troops being forced back fighting against heavy odds without any efficient support from our local Allies. During all these attacks the Turks lost heavily, and it was not till the 14th September that they again attacked, after receiving large reinforcements. On this date they succeeded in scaling the heights, driving out the Armenian troops opposed to them with

little difficulty, and thereby causing a readjustment of the British line to save a menaced flank. On this flank three very weak British companies held out all day on the last ridge on the outskirts of the town under heavy shell fire and against repeated attacks by the main strength of the Turks. From this ridge the town and harbour are completely dominated, and its possession was of great importance.

An attack by the enemy on the centre was brought to a standstill by rifle fire. A counter-attack by British, Russians and Armenians in this vicinity failed through the British and Russians losing all their officers as well as sustaining heavy casualties in the ranks, while Turkish artillery fire arrested the advance of the Armenian troops at an early stage. Throughout the day the North Staffordshire Regiment had fought with great gallantry, and were ably supported by the men from the Royal Warwick and Worcester Regiments, as well as by the Dunsterforce armoured cars, which were boldly handled and accounted for large numbers of the enemy.

At 4 p.m. it became evident that the Turks, who had been attacking since dawn, were fought to a standstill, and could do no more than occupy the positions they had gained. Had an effective counter-attack now been possible, it is more than doubtful if the Turks could have withstood it, but every British rifle was in the line, and the Russian and Armenian troops were by this time incapable of any further effective action. The town was at the mercy of the enemy, who occupied all the high ground, and could shell the shipping in the port at ranges of 3,000-5,000 yards.

It was decided, therefore, to evacuate the British detachment. This decision was communicated to the Baku Government. By 8 p.m. all sick and wounded had been carried on board. Troops and guns were then embarked, and by 10 p.m. all were on board the three ships which had, since our arrival at Baku, been earmarked for our use. These three ships sailed without lights, closely followed by another in which it had been possible to collect explosives and ammunition. This latter ship was hit by gunfire from the guardship at the mouth of the harbour, but the others slipped away unscathed, and all four arrived safely at Enzeli.

This British detachment had denied to the enemy for a period of six weeks the town of Baku with its very valuable oil fields, and had caused heavy casualties to the Turks, who were compelled to bring up a force of considerable numerical superiority before the capture of the place could be effected.

13. I referred earlier in the despatch to a detachment at Bijar. A road runs through this place to the Urmia district, where it was known that the Assyrians, Nestorians and Jelus had been successfully resisting the Turks during the earlier summer months. In July it was decided to get into communication with these tribes by aeroplane, and to send them by convoy assistance in the shape of ammunition, machine guns, and money. This convoy reached Sain Kala on 23rd July, but the Assyrians were 10 days late in meeting it, and their eventual arrival coincided with the occupation of Urmia by the Turks, who drove all the Assyrians out, massacring many, and pursuing them along the road to Sain Kala until checked by our advanced troops. The whole of

the Assyrians who survived—men, women and children—then poured along the Sain Kala-Bijar road from August 3rd onwards, and eventually over 50,000 arrived at Bijar, whence they were evacuated unmolested to Hamadan. Large numbers unfortunately died from cholera and privation on the way. After a few days' rest and food all were evacuated in batches of 3,000 at a time down the Persian line of communication to Bakuba, where a large refugee camp had been formed. Men capable of bearing arms were organised into a fighting force, and others were employed at work on the roads and elsewhere. Their feeding on the way threw a great strain on my supply staff, and practically denuded the reserves of supplies which had been collected for our winter use. The able manner in which this undisciplined mob of men, women and children were dealt with reflects great credit on the staff of the Persian line of communication.

14. I had also kept a detachment at Miane, on the Kasvin-Tabriz road, and by the end of August I received information that the Turks in Tabriz were collecting transport, and presumed that their intention was to endeavour to raid my vulnerable line of communication in the direction of Kasvin. I have already recounted the difficulties of sending troops and maintaining them in North Persia, and every man I could spare from there had been hurried to Baku. Consequently I had only extremely weak parties between Kasvin and Tabriz. On September 5th the Turks attacked an advanced post of irregulars on the road some 45 miles north-west of Miane. This was driven in, and during the next few days my advanced troops gradually fell back fighting before superior numbers of Turks, who occupied Miane on 9th September and took up a strong position to the south of it. By this time, however, I had been able to push reinforcements forward, and brought the Turkish advance to a standstill.

15. My relations with the Bakhtiari Khans, to whom are entrusted the safeguarding of the oilfields near Ahwaz, have remained most cordial, and in order to coerce the Kuhgalus, a tribe who had been causing the friendly Ilkhani of the Bakhtiari some annoyance, and at the same time restore security along the Ahwaz-Ispahan road, I placed during June and July a section of mountain artillery at the disposal of the Ilkhani. The results were pre-eminently satisfactory, and it is worthy of record that this section of an Indian mountain battery in the hottest season of the year covered a distance of 395 miles in 28 marching days, and returned with men and animals in excellent condition.

16. The defence of the line of communications on both Tigris and Euphrates have been ably performed. Trouble from riverain tribes is now almost unknown, and I have been able to replace regular troops on the Tigris line to a large extent by Arab police, and thereby release several battalions for more active work in forward areas.

17. In so far as the climate has permitted, progressive military training has been carried out by all formations since the cessation of active operations in May last. A special feature of this has been the development of schools of instruction, not only at General Headquarters, but also by the various formations throughout the force. These schools are

based on the latest models of those on the Western Front, with such special modifications as are desirable for this theatre of war.

In close connection with the above, every encouragement has been given to organised recreational training, and there is no doubt that the health and physique of the men, many of whom are young soldiers, have benefited in no small degree.

18. Uninterrupted progress has been made in the opening up and development of the country. It must be remembered that in the tract of country watered by the Middle Euphrates the tribesmen have never felt the weight of our arms, and, unlike those on the Lower and Upper Euphrates, have never seen our troops in any numbers.

The dredging of the Hammar Lake, which is nearing completion, is likely to open out the Lower Euphrates still further, and the results cannot fail to benefit the whole Euphrates area, which is at present deprived of water communication with Basra for the six busiest months in the year.

From the Hilla district, which is now connected with Baghdad by a broad gauge railway, some 70 per cent. of the cereals available for the force are derived. The extensive agricultural and irrigation projects in this region bid fair to restore to this once fertile tract the prosperity it enjoyed when Babylon was at her zenith.

The manufacture of prepared bitumen and lime continues at Hit on a large scale. Some 4,000 tons of bitumen and 5,350 tons of lime have been exported during the past four months, and it has been found possible, after meeting all government demands, to allow of private enterprise in this industry by the inhabitants. Steps are also being taken to develop and work the large oil-bearing strata at Naft Khana and other places, and to utilise the coal mines at Kifri.

19. The opportunities afforded to the Royal Navy during the period under review have been few, but Commodore D. Norris, and the officers and ratings under his command have invariably displayed a spirit of ready co-operation in accordance with their high traditions, and I confidently look forward to their finding a wider scope for their activities in the near future.

20. The hot weather in Mesopotamia of necessity limits the sphere of activity of the Royal Air Force. Notwithstanding this, many fine long-distance flights have been undertaken and valuable reconnaissances and much photographic work performed. Some idea may perhaps be gained of their wide range of action when I say that since the conclusion of the Kirkuk operations aeroplanes have been employed on various missions at places as widely separated as Samawa, on the Middle Euphrates, and Baku, in Trans-Caucasia. In fact, wherever troops have operated the pilots and observers of the Royal Air Force have invariably contributed in no small measure to their success, and their boldness and intrepidity are fully recognised by the Army.

21. Great progress has been recorded in the development of the port of Basra and in the reclamation of low-lying areas in its vicinity. There is now a continuous wharf 3,300 feet in length, adequately equipped with electric

cranes, and the entire port railway system has been remodelled.

22. The Directorate of Signals and Telegraphs has had many difficulties to contend with, more especially in connection with the extension of the area now controlled by the Force. These have been promptly overcome, and communication well maintained at all times. During the period, no fewer than 850 miles of telegraph line, carrying 1,700 miles of wire, have actually been erected, while 375 additional miles are now under construction.

There has been, too, a considerable extension in the use of wireless telegraphy and a complete chain of wireless stations has been established throughout the area now in occupation.

23. Surveys and the Map Compilation Section have always risen to the occasion, and have continued to produce a large output of admirable work.

24. The period April 1st to July 13th shows a distinct improvement in the health of the troops as compared with the corresponding weeks of last year:—

	Last year.	This year.
Average weekly admissions on account of sickness. Ratio per cent. of ration strength...	1.73	1.45.
Average weekly wastage (death and invaliding) on account of sickness. Ratio per cent. of ration strength ...	0.31	0.16

These figures indicate a very considerable saving to the Force, which has been achieved by unremitting care paid by the Medical Authorities to sanitary and medical requirements, and to the constant devotion to duty shown by the Nursing Services.

The Red Cross Society has continued to attend to the needs and comfort of the sick and wounded in a most praiseworthy manner.

Ministration to the spiritual welfare of the troops by Chaplains of all denominations continues satisfactorily, and the work of Indian Assistant Chaplains is much appreciated amongst Indian Christians.

Considerable progress in the recording of Christian graves has been made and cemeteries are being well maintained.

The Bishop of Lahore paid a welcome visit to the country in June which was much appreciated, and many candidates received confirmation.

26. The physical and moral recreation of the Force is being attended to, and I am satisfied that the steps taken in forming a Central Recreational Committee will have a beneficial result.

Concert parties and cinema performances are universally provided and much appreciated by the troops.

In this connection, and on behalf of the Force my grateful thanks are due to:—

Indian Comforts for the Troops Fund (H.E. Lady Chelmsford).

Women's Branch Bombay Presidency War and Relief Fund (H.E. Lady Willingdon).

Sind Women's Branch of Bombay Presidency War Relief Fund (H.E. Lady Willingdon).

Mesopotamian Comforts Fund (Marquess of Sligo).

Indian Soldiers' Fund (Sir Tredrevyn White).
Lady O'Dwyer's Punjab Comforts Fund
(Lady O'Dwyer).

Central Provinces Comforts Fund (Lady
Robertson).

Shanghai Comforts Fund (Mrs. Sausmarez),

who have so generously provided gifts of money
and in kind for the benefit of the troops.

In April we had the honour of a visit from
Their Excellencies Lord and Lady Willingdon,
who have, throughout the campaign in Mesopotamia,
done so much for the benefit of all
members of the Force. Their visit was a source
of genuine pleasure to all, and they were
enabled to see for themselves some of the results
of their unremitting labours on our behalf.

27. The difficulties of the administrative
departments and services have naturally in-
creased with the extended area now occupied
by the Force.

Local Resources have been developed in a
very satisfactory manner, and good results
achieved. The activities of this Department are
many and varied, and demand much ingenuity
and tact in dealing with the local inhabitants.
The most important part of its functions during
the past summer has been the preparation for
the collection of the harvest: the success at-
tained redounds to the credit of the staff of
this Directorate in carrying out this arduous
duty at a most trying part of the year.

The harvest, though later than was anti-
cipated, has been bountiful, and it is confidently
expected that in the future the Force will be
self-supporting as regards barley and fodder.

Supplies have been satisfactorily main-
tained, and delivered to the troops with a
regularity which is worthy of all praise, when
it is remembered that not a single metalled road
exists throughout the length and breadth of
Mesopotamia.

The work of the Transport, particularly of
the Mechanical Transport, has been extremely
arduous. Immense wear and tear to vehicles
has been caused on the Persian road, and it
reflects great credit on all concerned to have
kept so many vehicles in working order. It is
safe to say that a line of communication of
such a length has never previously been kept
up. The strain thrown on the personnel of the
Mechanical Transport branch has been very
considerable, but the demands on them have
been met with unfailing regularity and will-
ingness.

The development and opening up of new
lines by the Railway Department during the
period has been most marked. Allusion has
already been made to the broad gauge line to
Hilla. A narrow gauge extension thence to
Kifl on the other branch of the Euphrates has
since been opened to traffic. In the forward
areas also much time and labour has been ex-
pended in extending both standard and metre
gauge lines, and the service of trains has been
well maintained.

The Ordnance Services have kept up their
high standard of efficiency. Supplies of cloth-
ing, stores and ammunition have been satis-
factory, and the needs of the troops promptly
met.

The responsibilities of the Department of
Works have increased during the period under
review, and though this Department has had
to contend with a shortage of supervising and

subordinate personnel as well as of actual
material, the work has been of a consistently
high order.

The Board of Agriculture was constituted
some three months ago, and has already proved
of value in co-ordinating with the Political
Department the work of the two recently estab-
lished Directorates of Irrigation and Agricul-
ture. Considerable irrigation projects are in
hand with the object of increasing the food
development of the country, but the scope of
these is limited by the labour available for the
works and the number of cultivators available
for the ultimate production of crops. Circle
officers have been appointed in order to stimu-
late agriculture and to improve the methods
hitherto employed by the natives. In addi-
tion, both Government and demonstration
farms are being started.

The Directorate of Labour has to contend
with ever-increasing demands for roads, rail-
ways, works and irrigation, for all of which the
requirements in personnel are always inade-
quate. The necessary steps are being taken to
cope with the situation, and it is hoped that
the advent of additional Labour Corps from
India will ease matters.

The Remount and Veterinary Departments
continue to be administered in a satisfactory
manner. It has been recently found possible
to supplement drafts of horses from overseas
by local purchases. The condition and health
of the animals of the Force has been most satis-
factory during the past summer as compared
with the summer of 1917.

The work performed by the Inland Water
Transport has, as always, been of a high order
in spite of the hot weather and the difficulties
of navigation during the low river season.

The Postal Service is successfully competing
with the demands made upon it, and these
have been especially heavy during the summer
months, when individuals have more leisure for
writing.

28. The period under review has been, owing
to the extreme heat during the greater part
of it, one of inactivity for the large majority
of the troops, and I was enabled to send a large
number of officers and men on leave to India.
Leave camps at various centres had been kindly
arranged for by Army Head-Quarters in India,
to which the British troops were sent; the
Indian troops were, of course, able to visit their
own homes. The General Officer Commanding
Ceylon also made arrangements for the recep-
tion of a large number of British officers, and
his efforts in this respect have been much ap-
preciated.

Urgent cases (treated for precedence on their
merits) were granted leave to the United King-
dom, but transport difficulties naturally con-
fined this privilege to a selected few.

The country has gone ahead, and is being
further developed, and the inhabitants are
showing by their behaviour that they appreciate
the blessings of a just and sympathetic govern-
ment.

29. I have been throughout most ably and
loyally served by my subordinate commanders,
staff and technical advisers, and take this
opportunity of recording my most sincere
thanks for all their good work.

In addition to the names already mentioned I wish to bring to your notice those of:—

- Major-General G. F. MacMunn, K.C.B., C.S.I., D.S.O., Inspector-General of Communications.
- Major-General W. Gillman, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., Chief of the General Staff.
- Major-General The Honourable A. R. Montagu Stuart-Wortley, K.C.M.G., C.B., D.S.O., Deputy Quartermaster-General.
- Major-General F. F. Ready, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., Deputy Adjutant-General.

A further list of names of officers, ladies, non-commissioned officers and men who have been deemed to have earned special distinction is being forwarded to you on a separate list.

30. This despatch would not be complete without a reference to the valuable services rendered by Lieut. - Colonel A. T. Wilson, C.M.G., C.I.E., D.S.O., acting Civil Commissioner, and the political officers working under his direction. His advice has always been of

the greatest value to me, and I tender him my warmest thanks for the whole-hearted and vigorous support which I have received from him throughout.

31. In addition to the foregoing, and in pursuance of the authority delegated to me as Commander-in-Chief, I have made the following immediate awards for gallantry and distinguished service in the field during the period covered by this despatch:—Distinguished Service Order, 8; Military Cross, 29; Bar to Military Cross, 4; Distinguished Conduct Medal, 10; Bar to Distinguished Conduct Medal, 1; Military Medal, 60; Indian Order of Merit, 3; Indian Distinguished Service Medal, 16.

I have the honour to be, Sir,
Your obedient servant,

W. R. MARSHALL,
Lieut.-General,
Commanding-in-Chief,
Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force.

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