

Woodyatt on 21st May that, should Afghan regulars advance into the vicinity of Wana and be joined by the tribes, Wana and the Gomal posts were to be evacuated, the British officers withdrawing with such men as remained loyal. Similar orders applied to the garrisons in the Upper Tochi.

52. On May 24th, the General Officer Commanding the Bannu Brigade, desiring to reassure the tribes of the Upper Tochi, ordered the movable column which is held permanently in readiness at Dardoni (the new cantonment, of Miranshah) to move to Muhammad Khel; but, in consequence of information received that General Nadir Khan in Khost was preparing to move either against Thal or Miranshah, General Sir A. A. Barrett ordered its return to Dardoni, where he considered it would be more suitably placed to meet the threatened attack. On receipt of this order, the General Officer Commanding the Bannu Brigade decided to evacuate the Upper Tochi posts, as in his opinion the withdrawal of the movable column would inevitably be followed by the defection of the militia. On learning of the evacuation of these posts, the Political Agent at Wana decided to evacuate the Southern Waziristan Militia posts as well, as he considered that a general rising of the Mahsuds would be the immediate outcome of events in the Tochi.

53. The withdrawal of these garrisons was an operation of extreme difficulty and danger. The loyal elements of the militia, led by a small but gallant band of British officers who carried their lives in their hands and paid dearly for their devotion, made their way by forced marches to Murtaza and into Zhob. The route was infested by tribesmen who clung to the rear of the party and made it impossible to give the men a rest on the way. Desertions to the enemy were numerous. It was not till the arrival of the party at Moghalkot, forty miles from Wana, that it was possible to call a halt, and by this time the men were utterly exhausted by heat, thirst, and their continued exertions. Up to this point casualties had been comparatively few, but when issuing from Moghalkot in an attempt to reach Mir Ali Khel, the party was heavily attacked and lost four British officers killed and two wounded out of a total of eight. Marching continuously for a further twenty-four hours, the survivors reached Fort Sandeman in the early morning of the 31st. Regarded merely as a feat of endurance, the withdrawal of this party was, of itself, a fine achievement; but taking into consideration the almost insurmountable difficulties which beset them on the road and the dangers through which they emerged, the exploit stands out as one of the finest recorded in the history of the Indian frontier. The success of the operation was due in large measure to the personality of Major G. H. Russell, 126th Baluchistan Infantry, who conducted the withdrawal with remarkable skill, courage and endurance, and set a fine example to those under him. The steadfast fortitude of these men in circumstances before which most would have quailed, is a stirring example of the height to which the devotion of the British officer can rise.

54. On May 26th, I issued orders for the move of headquarters and two battalions of the 43rd Infantry Brigade and a mountain battery to Bannu. The troops of the Derajat Brigade were ordered to concentrate at Murtaza, where

a squadron of cavalry successfully engaged a body of Mahsuds on the 30th. On May 27th, Major-General S. H. Climo, C.B., D.S.O., assumed command of the Waziristan Force (Major-General Woodyatt having been transferred to the command of the 4th Division), and on June 1st, the force was separated from General Sir A. A. Barrett's command and came directly under my orders. The situation on this date was briefly as follows:—

55. (a) *Bannu Area*.—Communication by road between Bannu and Dardoni, which had been interrupted since 26th May, was not yet restored. A column under Brigadier-General J. G. Clarke, C.M.G., Commanding the 43rd Infantry Brigade, was assembled at Bannu to move up the Tochi. There were persistent reports of the presence of Afghan troops in the Upper Tochi and near Pai Makhmad, 8 miles north-west of Miranshah, and strong lashkars of Wazirs and Mahsuds, assisted by Daurs from the Upper Tochi, were reported to be in the neighbourhood of Miranshah and to be threatening Idak. Spinwam had been occupied by Afghan detachments after its evacuation by the militia, and the Bannu Movable Column had been moved out to Kurram Garhi to watch the approaches to Bannu from the north and north-west. On the 1st June, reliable information was received that the Afghan detachments had withdrawn and the Bannu Movable Column was accordingly recalled to Bannu.

(b) *Derajat*.—Consequent on the evacuation of the Gomal militia posts and the considerable quantity of booty which had fallen into the hands of the Wazirs, the Mahsuds had become very restless, and thinking probably that it was our intention to evacuate Jandola, had assembled in large numbers around that place. A force under Brigadier-General P. J. Miles, C.B., had begun to assemble at Khirgi on the 29th May when it became known that communication with Jandola was interrupted. Other posts had also been threatened by Mahsud and Sheranni lashkars, notably Murtaza, Gomal, Manjhi and Zarkani, and many urgent demands for military assistance for posts held by frontier constabulary were received from the civil authorities.

56. There were therefore two problems which demanded immediate solution:—

(a) The opening up of the Tochi from Saidgi to Miranshah and the re-establishment of our posts evacuated by the North Waziristan Militia.

(b) The reinforcing of Jandola.

Major-General Climo decided to deal with the Tochi first, as, with the troops at his disposal, he did not consider that both operations could be carried out simultaneously in view of a possible repetition of an Afghan concentration at Spinwam or in the Lower Tochi, of a Mahsud incursion into British territory from the Khaisora and Shaktu direction, and of the possibility of encountering strong opposition in the Shinki and Hinnis Tangi defiles. The troops available in Bannu for the first operation were three squadrons of cavalry, one section of Indian mountain artillery, one section of sappers and miners, two battalions of Indian infantry, and details of two other battalions which were at Dardoni. Major-General Climo therefore decided to await the arrival of the two battalions of the 43rd Infantry Brigade which were already *en route* for Bannu. Meanwhile, he strengthened the garrison at Saidgi (which was held by the