

municated on the 19th to the General Officer Commanding the 17th Division, in whose area the above described operation took place, was to send a mixed column, including two battalions of infantry from Hillah, to Kif as soon as possible after Rumaithah had been relieved. These troops would be followed by others from Diwaniyah, and the relief of the detachment of the 108th Infantry Regiment at Kufah, which had been placed there to overawe Najaf, and which, in some measure, ensured the safety of the line of communication of the forces employed south of Hillah, would be carried out.

(30) By the 23rd, however, the situation had changed for the worse, and on the morning of that date I told the General Officer Commanding the 17th Division, who had come to Baghdad to see me, that the mixed column which I had arranged should proceed to Kif must be increased by two additional battalions. At the same time I impressed upon him the necessity for concentrating without delay at Hillah all troops which were south of that place.

*Force sent towards Kif.*

(31) On the 23rd July, the Officer Commanding troops at Hillah, on the urgent representation of the Political Officer, that a display of force was necessary to prevent the disaffection spreading to the Northern Bani Hassan, the southern section of which tribe had broken out and occupied Kif, despatched the following troops to a point some six miles south of Hillah:—

- 35th Scinde Horse (2 squadrons).
- 39th Batt., R.F.A.
- 2nd Bn., Manchester Regiment (less 1 company).
- 1/32nd Sikh Pioneers (1 company).
- 24th Combined Field Ambulance (1 section).

(32) The General Officer Commanding the 17th Division, to whom the movement was reported, gave definite orders that the troops were not to proceed further than the distance named, and that their camp was to be entrenched. The column found, on arriving at its destination, that the water was brackish, and its Commander was ordered from Hillah to move next day 8 miles further along the Kif road. The watering of the animals of the column on the morning of the 24th, which had to be done at a distance of from three to four miles from the camp, occupied several hours, and not until 9.15 a.m. was the march resumed. The heat was great, and the troops, especially the British, reached their camping place in a very exhausted condition.

(33) At 5.30 p.m. the insurgents began to appear, and later attacked the camp in some numbers, apparently intending to surround it. The Column Commander, who had been instructed before leaving Hillah to retire, in order to avoid becoming engaged with superior forces, and who was pressed to do so by the Political Officer, who stated that the tribes in rear would now rise, unwisely decided to withdraw.

(34) By the time the necessary arrangements had been made it was dark, and as the column filed out of the camp it was attacked by the tribesmen, who were reinforced from every village in the neighbourhood. The transport stampeded and much confusion ensued, and the Arabs, closing in, inflicted heavy casualties. Many of those of the 2nd Bn., Manchester

Regiment, who formed a flank guard, lost their way, and fell into the hands of the Arabs. The rearguard, composed of the 35th Scinde Horse and a company of the 1/32nd Pioneers, held the insurgents at bay, and the 39th Batt., R.F.A., with its guns firing in turn in every direction, fought with the utmost gallantry. The column was followed to within nine miles of Hillah, when the Arabs drew off and allowed it to continue its march unmolested.

(35) Our losses consisted of 20 killed, 60 wounded, and 318 missing, many horses and much transport. The majority of the casualties occurred in the 2nd Bn., Manchester Regiment. One 18-pounder gun fell into a deep canal, and though every effort was made to extricate it it had to be abandoned, and fell into the hands of the Arabs.

*The General Situation at Baghdad and elsewhere.*

(36) The news of this reverse, which spread rapidly far and wide, increased the gravity of an already serious situation. All tribes in the vicinity of Hillah at once rose, as well as others, whose hostility added to the insecurity of the railway communication with Diwaniyah.

I had decided on the 23rd to withdraw from that place, as information had reached me that the Rumaithah sheikhs, who had shown indications of submitting, had come under the influence of the Shamiyah tribes, which had broken out on the 14th. It appeared, therefore, no longer necessary or desirable to hold Diwaniyah. There, as I have already stated, were assembled practically all the troops available for active operations, and the urgent need for concentrating them at Hillah, 53 miles to the north, without a moment's delay, was now stronger than ever.

(37) On the 25th July I directed the General Officer Commanding the 17th Division, who had suggested coming to Baghdad to see me regarding the proposed operations towards Kufah, to proceed at once to Hillah and organise the defence of that place, and I reiterated my orders regarding the rapid concentration there of all troops. I also ordered the Jarbuiyah bridge over the Hillah branch of the Euphrates, which was a post of vital importance on the railway line, to be made specially secure.

(38) At this time the safety of Baghdad had become a matter of concern to me. In order to protect the European inhabitants from an internal rising, a defence scheme had been in existence for some time, which, by request of the Military Governor, could be put into operation at short notice; but to secure the city and its environs from external aggression was a far more difficult problem. Its inhabitants were understood to number approximately 200,000, many of whom were more or less disaffected and were only waiting encouragement from outside to rise.

(39) The problem, however, did not end there. Protection was essential for the Citadel, which is situated on the north side of the town and which was in a somewhat dilapidated condition, as also for a large number of scattered establishments, such as depôts and stores of all kinds (some highly inflammable), workshops, hospitals, railway stations, rolling stock, a large electrical power station, water pumping station, and the military dairy.

(40) In view of the reduction in strength of