

HISTORY OF THE  
**FIRST  
WORLD  
WAR**

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# GENOCIDE

# 1915

'After all who remembers today the extermination of the Armenians.' *Adolf Hitler*



# HISTORY OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Volume 3 Number 16

This week's contents:

1321 Genocide in Turkey

A. O. Sarkissian

1328 Relief of Küt – The First

Attempt F. W. Woodhouse

1332 Relief of Küt – The Last

Chance A.J. Barker

1340 Townshend: Surrender,

Capture and Disgrace

Donald Clark

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Editor: Peter Young

Ottoman rule over their Christian subjects had always been characterised by sporadic outbreaks of brutality and massacre. At least one 19th-Century British statesman made a large part of his liberal reputation in denouncing the Turks for their outrages. But by the time the First World War broke out, the Turks had lost their Christian provinces in Europe. Within Turkey, however, existed a Christian minority—the Armenians—who although prosperous and diligent subjects remained very much second class citizens in the Empire.

When war came, Enver and Talaat Bey took advantage of the isolation caused by war to fall upon the Armenians, uproot them from their homes, and massacre them. A thin excuse was offered that the Armenians were aiding the Russians, but this carried little credibility even to the Turks. In all some one and a half million Armenians died in this so-called 'deportation', and the event is described this week by A. O. Sarkissian, himself an Armenian.

From the moment that Townshend retreated from Ctesiphon to Küt, his fate seems to have been written on the wall. It was hardly to be expected that he would resist the temptation to repeat his success at Chitral under similar conditions in Küt, and it seems equally inevitable that this attempt should have failed. Low in all essential materials, and apparently unable to make any accurate assessment of the amount of food available to him, Townshend's conduct during the siege was vacillating, bombastic, and self-pitying. The story of the surrender of Küt is told this week by Major Clark, and the attempts to relieve it are described by F. W. Woodhouse and A. J. Barker.

## Imperial War Museum, Lambeth Road, S.E.1

The Imperial War Museum records and displays all aspects of warfare in the 20th century in which Britain and the Commonwealth have participated. Its collections include the actual weapons, vehicles and paraphernalia of warfare, works of art, photographs, films, books, and documents. The Museum receives well over half a million visitors a year, is a centre of international research and offers a growing educational service for students from schools, universities and staff colleges.

The Museum urgently needs more money to develop its services and collections so that it can meet the growing demands made upon it. To provide this, the Imperial War Museum Trust, which is registered as a charity, has been established. Donations will be most gratefully received and acknowledged. Cheques or money orders should be made out to the Imperial War Museum Trust and addressed to the Imperial War Museum, Lambeth Road, London S.E.1.

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# GENOCIDE IN TURKEY

The Armenians, a Christian and relatively prosperous minority within the backward and Islamic Ottoman Empire, became in 1915 the target of the first 'final solution' in modern history.

Under the pretext that the Armenians were aiding Russia, the Turkish government ordered the mass murder and 'deportation' of the bulk of the Armenian population within Turkey.

Approximately 500,000 were killed in the last seven months of 1915, and the majority of the remainder were 'deported' to desert areas and there either starved or died of disease.

At the lowest estimate, 1,500,000 died as a direct result of this carefully-laid plan.

A. O. Sarkissian. Below: An Armenian priest officiates at the burial of massacred Armenians





The genocide of the Armenian people in Turkey during the First World War constitutes one of the most shocking and horrifying single episodes of that war, and stands as the first such international crime in modern history.

Most of ancient Armenia was overrun by Sultan Selim in the year 1515 and the bulk of the Christian Armenians were thus placed under the Ottoman Turks. The Turks did not welcome having a large body of non-Moslems in their newly-conquered border provinces, and were determined to bring about changes in the composition of the population there. The process of change was initiated under Sultan Selim. First he appointed a Kurd (Idris Hakim by name) as governor of the country and gave him a free hand. The governor then caused the transfer of large groups of nomadic Kurds from their strongholds in the south (some even from northern Mesopotamia) to these Armenian provinces, offering them free land. These Kurds were also granted immunity from taxation on condition that they act as organised militia.

By a second move the governor rendered the Armenian majority impotent; he divided the country into small administrative units (called *Sanjaks* in Turkish) and appointed Kurdish chieftains as heads of these units. These Kurdish chieftains considered themselves privileged characters, even above the law, and acted as the undisputed overlords of the Armenian peasantry. The peasants, though more numerous than the Kurds and other non-Christian elements combined, were placed at the

mercy of the latter because the Armenians were not allowed, by the terms of the implicit 'contract' with their conqueror, to own or bear arms even in self-defence. This crippling disability, plus certain discriminatory measures, such as the inadmissibility of their testimony in courts, and an unfair system of taxation, reduced the Armenians to the status of second-class subjects of the Sultans.

In the course of subsequent centuries the Armenians were never able to rise above that inferior and degrading status, though by working hard as farmers and businessmen they could attain a degree of prosperity. In some ways they would be better off than many Turks and Kurds, but they could not attain even the semblance of equality with the Moslem subjects of the Sultans. In reality the relative and temporary economic well-being of many Armenians was looked upon as a standing insult to many poverty-stricken Turks, and served as an inducement to the lawless Kurds to plunder Armenian homes. The number of the Armenian inhabitants was reduced through the years by emigration, by forced conversion to Islam, and by periodic massacres, yet they still constituted perhaps more than one-third of the total population there at the outbreak of the First World War.

#### Appeals to the Sultan

Late in the 19th Century Armenian community leaders presented innumerable petitions to the government in Constantinople and appealed to the Sultan for the

betterment of their kinsmen's lot in eastern Asia Minor. They pleaded with the authorities and literally implored the government to do something for the well-being and safety of Armenians against the brigandage of armed Kurds. They also asked for some reforms in the administration of justice in these border provinces. But the Sultan showed no sympathy for the suffering Armenian peasantry, and was not disposed to enact any reforms. On three distinct occasions during the four decades prior to 1914 (in 1878 by the Treaty of Berlin, in 1895 by the May Reform Plan, and in 1914 by the February Reform Project), Ottoman authorities were induced by pressures from European governments to sign international agreements pledging to introduce certain clearly stipulated reforms in the eastern provinces of the Empire. Unfortunately no serious attempt was made to introduce any of the stipulated reforms and the Ottoman government aired its resentment over Europe's intrusion in its domestic affairs by allowing (if not actually instigating) various massacres of the Armenian people. The Turks felt that since these foreign 'intrusions' in their internal affairs were occasioned, especially after the three above-mentioned instances, by Armenians clamouring for reforms, they wanted to see an end put to such clamours by getting rid of the Armenians root-and-branch.

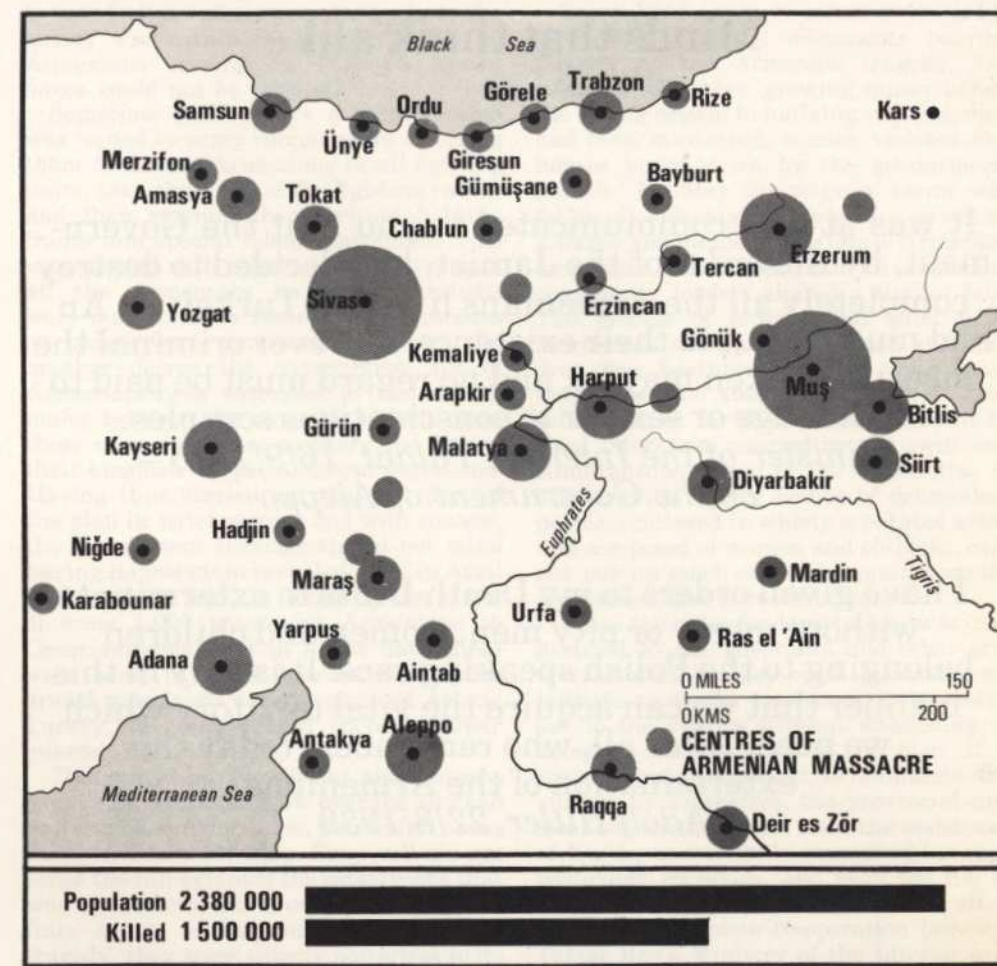
The first large-scale massacres had taken place in 1896 under circumstances of revolting brutality—'not merely massacres', in the words of Lord Rosebery, 'but hor-

rors unutterable, unspeakable, unimaginable by the mind of man'. The government of Turkey showed in this way its resentment of being 'saddled' with the May Reform Plan of 1895 by giving 'the signal for massacres which on the lowest estimate made 80,000 victims in a single year'.

On February 8, 1914, the signing of the third and last international agreement bearing on the fate of the Armenian people in Turkey—the February Reform Project for the eastern provinces of Asia Minor—was hailed by one of its principal signatories (M. Gulkevich of Russia) as ushering in 'the dawn of a new and happier era in the history of the Armenian people'. It now seems, in fact, that even before the Ottoman government signed the agreement on February 8, 1914, Young Turk leaders had vowed to exterminate all Armenians in the Empire, and that the First World War provided them with the opportunity to implement their plans.

Under wartime exigencies the Turks would seal off the country from the world outside, and they could restrict rigidly the movements of neutral aliens within the country. They could also warn the ambassadors and consular officials of neutral governments that they should not voice comments critical of the Turkish government, particularly comments bearing on

▷ The major centres of Armenian population in eastern Asia Minor, the historic homeland of the Armenian people; the reduction of the Armenians by massacre and starvation in 1915  
 ▽ Starvation, the reality behind Turkey's policy of mass deportation of Armenians





## Minds that think alike

It was at first communicated to you that the Government, by the order of the Jamiet, had decided to destroy completely all the Armenians living in Turkey . . . An end must be put to their existence, however criminal the measures taken may be, and no regard must be paid to either age or sex nor to conscientious scruples.

*Minister of the Interior, Talaat, 16/9/1915 –  
To the Government of Aleppo*

I have given orders to my Death Units to exterminate without mercy or pity men, women and children belonging to the Polish speaking race. It is only in this manner that we can acquire the vital territory which we need. After all, who remembers today the extermination of the Armenians?

*Adolf Hitler, 22/8/1939*

that government's treatment of the non-Moslem peoples in the Empire. This being purely and simply an internal matter, the representatives of neutral governments were expected to refrain even from expressing opinions in public on such matters. Other steps could also be taken, such as encouraging the Kurds in eastern Asia Minor and other elements in many parts of the country to do their 'duty' against the Armenians in return for plunder.

The planned procedure of deportations and massacres of nearly 2,000,000 Armenians called first for the swift elimination of Armenians from the armed forces and their quick extermination. Under the plan these conscripts, numbering some 100,000, were marked as the first batch of victims for outright massacre. Then simultaneous arrests of all Armenian community leaders throughout the country were to be effected. Many of these were marked down for summary hanging in public on some trumped-up charges, while the rest were to be marched off from prisons to their death at the hands of their guards in remote places. Finally, there was to be the uprooting of all Armenians (except those fortunate ones in Constantinople and Smyrna, who were to owe their salvation to the effective protest of the US Ambassador, the late Henry Morgenthau) from their homes and their deportation to desolate and sun-scorched deserts of Mesopotamia and Syria. Such

*Left: Turkey, 1915, and Germany, 1939. Below left: Armenian Christians hanged in Jerusalem by the Turks. Below right: 'Suffer the little children'*

was the carefully planned procedure of deportations and massacres. Its execution was entrusted to the Ministry of the Interior headed by Talaat Bey.

On October 29, 1914 Turkey entered the war, and in December the Turks launched their military operations against the Russians in the Caucasus. Initially they were successful and made considerable advances under Enver Pasha. By the middle of January, 1915, however, their luck seemed to have run out, and soon they were in full retreat. During this fighting along the Caucasian front the Turks faced certain Armenian units (composed of Armenian subjects of the Tsar) fighting in the Russian ranks. The fact that these Armenians of the Caucasus were fighting for Russia and against Turkey served as positive proof for Enver Pasha of the alleged Armenian treachery within Turkey.

### Treasonable acts?

Soon Enver Pasha was in Constantinople and became the instigator of the rumour that the defeat of the Turks in the Caucasus was caused by the treasonable acts of Armenian fighters on the Russian side. Then, in his feigned fury, he brought an official charge against the Armenians by declaring that Armenian 'draft-dodgers' in Turkey had crossed into Russia and were fighting against the Turks. This allegation became a powerful weapon in the hand of the government, and at once proved the most effective propaganda in rousing and inflaming the fanaticism of the Turks against the Armenians. Thenceforth government officials and other Turks who

believed this allegation held that the enemy was within the country, that the Armenians serving in Turkey's armed forces could not be trusted.

Sometime in February a secret decree was issued to army commanders directing them to disarm Armenians in all fighting units, take them out of the fighting ranks, and then regroup them behind fighting fronts into special labour battalions. This was effected with relative ease, whereupon all the Armenians in these battalions were massacred by their former comrades on orders from commanding officers. By another decree the conscription age of Armenians was extended to include all males between the ages 15 and 60. Soon these conscripts were to share the fate of their kinsmen in special labour battalions. Having thus carried out the first part of the plan in strict secrecy and with success, the government thenceforth did not mind having its intention revealed. Late in April it showed its hand by ordering the arrest of some 1,000 prominent Armenians in Constantinople, and in a few days these were sent, in small batches and under armed guards, to various parts of Asiatic Turkey, to be murdered there by their guards.

This single but significant and ominous event cast a dark shadow over the shocked and stupefied Armenians, particularly over those in Constantinople. They still did not sense the full extent of the catastrophe that was upon them, but even if they had been fully aware of the impending national tragedy, they were utterly powerless to do anything about it.

'In reality,' wrote Toynbee in his study of several hundred documents bearing directly on the Armenian tragedy, 'the situation had been growing tenser before the spring began. In outlying villages, men had been massacred, women violated and houses burnt down by the gendarmerie patrols.' By May the reign of terror was felt in all Armenian communities, in towns, villages and hamlets. The fate of Armenian conscripts was settled, and all Armenian community leaders shared a similar fate. The process of orderly and quiet mass murders of elderly men, women and children was beginning without open mass resistance. The absence of any such resistance (except for the few instances to be cited later) was assured by the swift and simultaneous action of the authorities in all localities. Large bodies of defenceless people, scattered in widely separated areas and composed of women and children, cannot put up much of a fight against armed gendarmes and licensed brigands.

When the order for deportations was telegraphed to the governors and other provincial officials, they were allowed some latitude as to the treatment to be meted out to the victims without weakening or delaying the execution of the plan. If it were deemed expedient to eliminate the victims by massacres, the provincial and local authorities would have the assistance of Kurds, or criminals amnestied for such particular occasions, and even the aid of detachments from the armed forces, since there was complete co-operation between Talaat Bey's Ministry of the Interior and Enver Pasha's Ministry of War. The lati-





tude thus allowed to these officials, however, did not permit them to treat the victims with any humane consideration. This point was brought out in plain language by Talaat Bey himself in a telegram to the Police Office at Aleppo, categorically stating that 'Regardless of women, children or invalids, and however deplorable the methods of destruction may seem, an end is to be put to their existence without paying any heed to feeling or conscience.'

#### Slow-moving death-caravan

The general scheme of deportations called for driving Armenians living in border areas in the east, north-east and north (Van, Erzerum and Trabzon provinces) towards a general south and south-westerly direction. Those in western and northern regions (Adabazar, Ankara, Brusa and Ismid) were to be led to a southerly direction. Another group from central Asia Minor and from Cilicia in the south-west was to join the deportees from northern and western regions. Armenians of other large towns, such as Kayseri, Sivas and Harpoot with their large Armenian communities, were also to be led to a south-westerly direction. All these deportees, or their remnants, were to converge eventually and assemble at certain places in northern Syria, with Aleppo designated as their first halting place. Their next and last halting place was to be the sun-scorched Deir-el-Zor, the desert in south-eastern Syria on the Euphrates, which soon became the mass graveyard of nearly all survivors of these long marches.

Mass deportations and massacres began

almost simultaneously in June in nearly all towns and villages throughout the country, and went on with monotonous regularity through the summer and autumn. On a certain date an Armenian town (or village) would be surrounded by a body of gendarmes assisted by a large body of civilian Turks from neighbouring towns and armed with all sorts of tools, including farm implements. Then the Turkish leader, accompanied by a few gendarmes, would enter the town and order the people there, through a town-crier (whom he brought with him), to assemble at a certain open space, or at the market-place. Once there the people would be informed of the government's decision to have them transported to areas better and safer for them. The people then would be ordered to go back to their homes, take only a few things needed for a short journey and return forthwith to the assembly place. Meanwhile a few ox-drawn carts, commandeered by the government from Turkish villagers, or once owned by Armenians but now driven by Turks, would be there to serve as transports for the elderly and the invalids, while the rest of the people would be forced to straggle along on a prearranged route. Those providing transports were told that the journey would be short, and on their return they would become the owners of Armenian wealth as just compensation for their patriotic service. The other body of Turks who aided the gendarmes in surrounding the town, and who were to accompany the deportees as guards, were also promised booty in addition to the right of selecting as many girls for their homes and

harems as they wanted.

This slow-moving death-caravan did not go far before the number of its deportees was reduced. Some would be disposed of on the way in order to lighten the loads of the ox-drawn carts, others for their failure to keep up with the group. Some maidens would also be taken out of the caravan by gendarmes, raped and then murdered. As the caravan arrived at its destination, usually an isolated place, the deportees would be surrounded and informed of their fate. Then the assassins would select a number of girls for their homes (and some boys), and then in one large mass-murder the remainder would all be slaughtered.

#### Open mass resistance

During this national tragedy there were only a few instances of open mass resistance. Of the four well-known cases, that in Edessa in the south-west, where some 10,000 Armenians engaged in a desperate fight for more than two weeks, was unsuccessful. So was the equally heroic but also abortive resistance of the people in Shabin-Karahisar in north-eastern Anatolia. The story of the two other better known instances is fortunately different. The resistance in the city of Van in north-eastern Asia Minor, a strategic Armenian stronghold for centuries, was courageously maintained for four weeks, and in the end proved successful thanks to the advance of Russian forces there late in May. Six weeks later, when the Russians withdrew, began the mass exodus of all Armenians from Van and neighbouring areas, numbering some 250,000, eventually nearly all of whom

found safety in the Caucasus. Then there was the miraculous success of the resistance put up by a few thousand Armenians in Swediya (near Antioch in north-western Syria), where they went up to a cliff on the coast and defended themselves against Turkish regulars for six weeks until they were rescued by a French warship. This has been vividly told in Franz Werfell's *The Forty Days of Mussa Dagh*.

There were other instances of open resistance. One such involved a large Armenian village named Dendill, with 270 households, in central Asia Minor, between Kayseri and Sivas near the right bank of Kizil Irmak river. In June, when neighbouring villages were being emptied of their Armenian dwellers, the people of Dendill managed to carry a large supply of provisions to a deep rock cave high up on the side of a cliff, and in one night all of them (about 1,000 in all) slipped into it. Perched in this impregnable position they defied the Turks for some six weeks; even a large detachment of Turkish regulars (from Sivas) could not subdue them with powerful artillery. The end came when the water running to the cave was cut off and they surrendered, knowing well what was in store for them.

At the start of the war there were about 2,000,000 Armenians within the Ottoman Empire; about half of these were in the eastern part of Asia Minor, the historic homeland of the Armenian people. Approximately 500,000 were massacred in the last seven months of 1915, and the majority of the remainder were deported to desert areas where their numbers fast dwindled.

Except for a fairly large but unknown number of women, boys and girls (estimated at close to 200,000) who were taken into Turkish homes, the once thriving and relatively prosperous Armenian communities of central Asia Minor were virtually obliterated by a swift and deadly stroke conceived, planned and executed by the Ottoman government.

For the Turks, 'deportation' was a convenient euphemism which served very well to conceal what was in fact the genocide of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. The men who devised this vast scheme of 'deportation' could not have honestly believed that it could have been successfully executed without the accompaniment of mass murders and massacres. Incidentally, there is no clear evidence indicating that the German government was aware of Turkish plans in this respect. The Turks did not want to confide such a secret to their allies. Not until June 1915 did Ambassador Wangenheim hear about it from Talaat Bey. In a dispatch to Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg dated June 17 the Ambassador wrote: 'Talaat Bey . . . openly stated that the Porte wished to take advantage of the opportunity offered by the war to make a clean sweep of their enemies at home without being troubled by foreign diplomatic intervention.' Subsequently when Wangenheim learned of the extent of the Armenian deportations under circumstances of unbelievable brutality, and Ger-

▽ Turkish civilians stand around the corpses of massacred Armenians in Adana, near the Mediterranean coast

man consular reports clearly showed that these 'deportations' really meant the speedy annihilation of the Armenian people throughout the country, he made repeated representations to the Turkish government, but all to no avail. The Turkish leaders first denied the existence of widespread brutality and questioned the veracity of German consular reports; then they deprecated any German interference in their domestic affairs, blatantly declaring that 'they did not consider their allies competent to instruct them in humanity'.

#### Further Reading

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A. O. SARKISSIAN was born in Turkey in 1905. An Armenian, his family was massacred by the Turks in 1915, but he survived to make his way eventually to the United States. There he gained his BA (Syracuse University) in 1929 and his MA and PhD (Illinois University) in 1930 and 1934 respectively. Since 1940 he has been with the Library of Congress as Analyst in International Relations. His publications include *A History of the Armenian Question to 1885*, and *Studies in Diplomatic History and Historiography*.





# RELIEF OF KUT THE FIRST ATTEMPT

By his constant and worrying appeals, General Townshend forced the hand of the relieving force to attack prematurely in January under conditions which invited disaster. Yet, after three desperate frontal assaults and three defeats, the attempts to relieve the fortress of Kut continued regardless of cost. *F. W. Woodhouse*

By December 4, 1915 it had become clear to General Nixon that General Townshend's force was certain to be invested in Kut. General Younghusband, newly arrived from Egypt, was therefore instructed to establish 28th Brigade, together with 6th Cavalry Brigade which was withdrawn from Kut, at Ali Gharbi; from there relief operations could be mounted.

On December 7 Townshend signalled that he possessed only 60 days' rations for his troops. This information, plus the desperate shortage of river transport and the inadequate unloading and storage facilities at Basra, faced Nixon with a difficult decision. The limited time that the Kut garrison could hold out suggested that relief operations should be pushed forward at once, but against this was the condition and numbers of the immediately available troops; it was by no means certain that there was sufficient strength up-river to guarantee a successful relief operation. Military prudence suggested waiting until there was sufficient force gathered at Ali Gharbi to ensure success. Against this was the shortage of river transport, which made it doubtful whether such a force could be gathered in time. In the event Nixon decided that the advance should start as soon as possible, with whatever forces were available, and this was the essence of the orders he gave to his newly arrived commander of the Tigris Corps, General Aylmer, on December 7.

By December 15, shortly after Aylmer arrived at his Amara headquarters, it was estimated that the Turkish strength at and below Kut was about 15,000 men with 54 guns. Townshend had already stated that he hoped to be relieved in ten to 15 days, his ammunition, particularly gun ammunition, being limited and the morale of the Indian troops in Kut being low. All this led Aylmer to the conclusion that Kut must be relieved by January 10 if possible, since he could not rely on the town holding out beyond January 15. In turn this meant that relief operations must start not later than January 3, using the infantry division and cavalry brigade which should be then be at Ali Gharbi. The next development was the movement of a Turkish division downstream from Kut, reported by Townshend. At the same time Aylmer informed Nixon that he intended to advance on Sheikh Saad, some 30 miles upstream from Ali Gharbi, on January 3 with 7th Division and 6th Cavalry Brigade, and that he himself would follow with the rest of his force as soon as possible. In a signal to Towns-

hend on December 30 Aylmer made it clear that he would have preferred to concentrate his force before advancing beyond Sheikh Saad—'By far the best plan would be to advance all together from Sheikh Saad as a combined corps.' Only the urgent need to relieve Kut prevented Aylmer.

Air reconnaissance on January 1, 1916 reported enemy positions at Sheikh Saad, with detachments five or six miles downstream. Arriving at Ali Gharbi on this day and hearing the report, and also finding preparations for Younghusband's advance still incomplete, Aylmer postponed the advance for 24 hours. It is surprising under the circumstances that preparations were as advanced as they were, since there was no proper corps staff and Younghusband's 7th Division staff had not yet arrived from France. To add to the confusion, units were being sent up-river as and when they landed in Basra and this resulted in many of them arriving in advance of their brigade staff and often without much of their equipment. All this was made worse by widespread sickness, barely kept in check by the inadequate medical arrangements. In addition the standard of training in many units was low, and indeed the division had never operated together before.

On January 3 Younghusband was ordered to advance the following day to Sheikh Saad. His command now consisted of 16 infantry battalions, 17 cavalry squadrons and 42 guns. Naval support, under the command of Captain W. Nunn, RN, consisted of the gunboats *Butterfly*, *Dragonfly*, *Cranefly* and *Gadfly*. Enemy strength at Sheikh Saad was, at this date, estimated to be 900 cavalry, 1,100 camelry, two light guns, some machine guns and an infantry battalion. Younghusband's plan was to advance on both banks of the Tigris—General Kembell on the right bank with 28th Brigade, supported by 9th Field Artillery Brigade and with 92nd Punjabis from 19th Brigade in reserve, 6th Cavalry Brigade forming a flank guard on the left; on the left bank was Brigadier-General Rice with 35th Brigade, supported by a battery of guns and a company of Pioneers, 16th Cavalry forming a flank guard on the right. The reserve, consisting of 19th Brigade and the Heavy Artillery Brigade, was to follow this force. In addition, three gunboats were to move abreast of the land force, leading the river transport, and the land transport, what there was of it, was to move on both banks of the river. Younghusband made his headquarters in the steamer *Julnar*, though later he transferred to *Gadfly*.

On the morning of January 4 the start was delayed until 1045 hours because a gale had damaged the bridging equipment. However, eventually the advance got under way and continued until, without having contacted the enemy, a halt was called at 1430 hours. The march continued on January 5, when some Turkish cavalry patrols were sighted, but no action developed; that evening air reconnaissance estimated that 10,000 Turks were now in position around Sheikh Saad. Discounting this increase in enemy strength, Younghusband planned his attack for 0830 hours on January 6, the intention being to continue to advance simultaneously on both left and right banks. He may be criticised for not using the ability to concentrate rapidly on either bank, which his pontoon bridge gave him, in order to defeat the Turks in detail, but throughout this phase of the relief operations the need for speed in reaching Kut was uppermost in all commanders' minds. It must also be admitted that the general feeling at the time was that the Turks were no match for British troops and that they would be swept aside without difficulty.

## Two-pronged advance

Morning came on January 6 with a dense mist covering the whole area of the British attack. Instead of snatching at the opportunity for concealment which this gave, Younghusband delayed his advance until the mist began to clear—it was not until 0900 hours that the troops moved forward. For about four miles nothing occurred and then, at about 1000 hours, as the mist finally dispersed, the troops of Kembell's 28th Brigade, plodding steadily onwards, were able to see a long line of Turkish trenches about two miles ahead; behind them, constantly changing shape in the deceptive haze of the mirage, cavalry could be seen forming up. Whatever surprise there may have been—and the Turks seem to have been well-prepared—was now lost and 28th Brigade came under fire from Turkish guns. Small arms fire was added to the din and the first unpleasant shock for the British was the indication from this that the Turkish line extended much further to the left than they had expected. It soon became evident that the main attack of 28th Brigade, consisting of the Leicesters, 53rd Sikhs and 51st Sikhs, far from outflanking the Turks, was itself outflanked. As the British brigade edged further and further to its left, dangerous gaps opened up between the various units and 56th Rifles, maintaining contact with the river. As the attack developed it came under heavy fire and it was soon very clear that the Turks had no intention of giving up easily, as had been confidently expected by the more sanguine British commanders.

Meanwhile 6th Cavalry Brigade, on the left flank of Kembell's force, was also in difficulties. Prevented from co-operating fully with 28th Brigade by a network of irrigation ditches, by 1300 hours they were engaged by a strong Turkish mounted force aided by Arab irregulars—the ubiquitous *Buddhoos*. This action halted the cavalry about four miles south of Sheikh Saad. By 1500 hours the British advance on the right bank, although within 500 yards of the Turkish front line, had halted.

On the left bank, the British right, Rice's 35th Brigade, had fared no better. Here the exact position of the Turkish trenches was

even less well-known than on the right bank. By 1100 hours Rice's leading battalion, 37th Dogras, was under heavy fire from trenches about 800 yards away; there was no cover, casualties quickly mounted and the battalion started to dig itself in.

It became clear to Younghusband by 1530 hours that no more would be achieved that day (sunset was at 1710 hours) and he ordered all units to stand fast for the night, 28th and 35th Brigades remaining in contact with the enemy. Amazingly, Aylmer, moving forward with his reserve brigades, was not aware of what had happened until the evening of January 6, all contact with Younghusband having been lost. When at last Aylmer did get a report from him, stating his intention of renewing the attack next morning, Aylmer ordered Younghusband not to get involved in serious action without further orders.

In the front lines intermittent firing continued throughout the night and this, coupled with a soaking thunderstorm in the early hours, did not improve the troops' morale. Daylight on January 7 brought another hot, muggy and foggy morning. Once again advantage was not taken of the concealing mist, because of Aylmer's orders, and it was not until noon that action

recommenced. Aylmer directed that a simultaneous frontal attack should be made on both banks.

At 1145 hours Younghusband's force moved forward, 35th Brigade holding on the river bank, 19th Brigade starting its turning movement and 21st Brigade in reserve between the two. Shortly after 1330 hours, 19th Brigade came under heavy crossfire from the west and north-west and the brigade was found to be turning inside the Turkish defences. In the meantime 21st Brigade was ordered forward to close the rapidly widening gap between the two leading brigades, the Black Watch and 6th Jats soon coming under fire. They and the Seaforths from 19th Brigade strove desperately to move forward, but the Turks had waited till the attackers were only 300 yards away and their fire was devastatingly effective. The Seaforths lost 20 officers and 380 men, while the Jats had only 150 survivors of the 485 who started out. Gallantry was not wanting, one small party of Seaforths getting within 40 yards of the Turkish line, where for lack of support they remained pinned down.

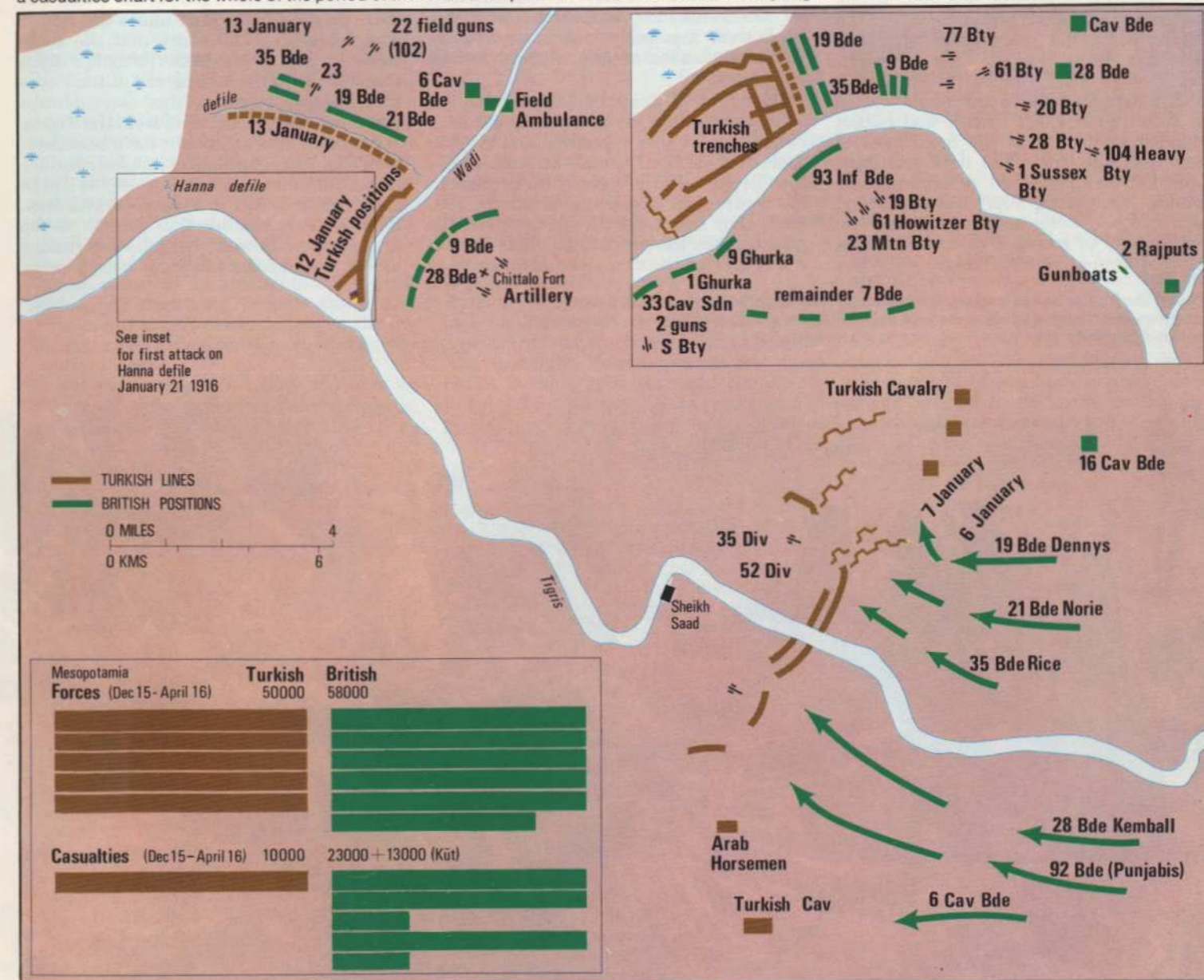
Meanwhile the Turks made an attempt to encircle the British right with a force of infantry and Arab horsemen. This flank

was guarded by 16th Cavalry and to support them Dennys had to swing five of his brigade machine guns towards this new threat. Although concentrated artillery fire, including the guns of HMS *Cranefly*, dispersed the Arabs, the Turkish infantry rapidly dug in only 400 yards from the British line. Fortunately they made no further attack, but their presence was a constant threat.

On the right bank 28th Brigade was more successful. Kembell's attack had started at 1430 hours and by 1600 hours, with considerable dash and gallantry on the part of the Sikhs and the Leicesters, they had captured the enemy's forward positions. Here too, unfortunately, the casualties were very heavy, some 1,000 men having fallen in this brigade; and despite this, the Turkish second line and support trenches were so strongly held that by nightfall Kembell decided not to press on further.

A quiet night followed, although the rain fell in torrents, and the British and Indian troops were glad of the respite. Throughout the night, hampered though they were by mud and rain, wounded were brought in, ammunition was replenished, meals eaten and trenches dug. The next day, January 8, was similar to the two before—hot, humid

▽ The first of the attempts to relieve Kut—the actions at Sheikh Saad and the Hanna defile. Inset in the bottom is a balance of forces and a casualties chart for the whole of the period of the relief attempts—the British lost 23,000 attempting to save the besieged 13,000





and with the mirage playing strange tricks on the still-weary troops. Although the flanking cavalry on both banks of the river had brief skirmishes with Arab horsemen, there was little action; while the generals conferred, water and rations went forward and efforts were made to collect the wounded who still lay on the battlefield.

The next moves took place on the night January 8/9, when Younghusband decided to relieve 19th Brigade, who had suffered most so far, by 21st Brigade, 19th Brigade in turn relieving 35th Brigade. Mud, rain and high winds combined to cause the guides to lose their way, so that it was not until dawn on January 9 that an exhausted 19th Brigade reached 35th Brigade's positions. However, all was in vain, since early morning cavalry patrols found the Turks to be withdrawing. By the afternoon the village was occupied and the action at Sheikh Saad was over. Turkish losses had been some 4,000 plus 650 prisoners, but the bulk of their troops had escaped and they had imposed significant delay on Aylmer's relief force. The price paid for this dubious victory was 4,000 British casualties who could ill be spared.

By now Aylmer's troops were very tired. In addition, the medical arrangements had proved totally inadequate and this was affecting morale, particularly among the Indian troops. While the British soldiers could see that something had gone wrong and could accept it philosophically, the Indians were not being looked after properly. Eleven days after the battle at Sheikh Saad, a field ambulance unit on its way to the front found 1,000 British and Indian wounded still lying in the mud, most of them with only their first field dressings, applied on the battlefield, protecting their wounds. Many died, many had dysentery; there simply were not enough doctors, medical staff or stores to avoid a situation like that of the Crimean War.

Second line Indian troops resting. The Indian troops fought well and incurred high casualties, but their morale began to fall as the medical services collapsed—they simply could not understand why they were not being looked after

The withdrawal of the Turks from Sheikh Saad was not followed up at once, so not surprisingly the enemy stopped as soon as Khalil Pasha, their new commander, realized this, and dug in along the line of the River Wadi, some three and a half miles east of the Hanna defile. This defile lay between the Tigris and the Suwaiqiya Marsh, and if the British could secure it, the Turks at the Wadi would be trapped.

#### 'A most precarious undertaking'

On January 11, aerial reconnaissance revealed the Turkish position at the Wadi, their strength estimated at some 11,000 men. Aylmer determined at once to outflank the Turks and capture the Hanna defile. Nevertheless he did not minimise his difficulties and, while accepting full responsibility for the operation, he described it in a signal to Nixon as 'a most precarious undertaking'. In the Tigris Corps at least, the worth of their enemy was beginning to be appreciated. Aylmer's plan was for Kemball's 28th Brigade to cross the Tigris and deliver a frontal attack across the Wadi, aimed at the Turkish main positions. This was intended as a feint, which would enable 19th, 21st and 35th Brigades, plus 6th Cavalry Brigade, to strike north-east up the Wadi, crossing it to take the Turks in the flank. This move was to be made during the night January 12/13 for an attack at dawn. January 12 was allocated for reconnaissance, but as the available maps were hopelessly inaccurate and the ground almost featureless, little advantage was gained.

The night of January 12 was cold but there was no rain. By 0100 hours January 13 the cavalry was in position and by 0400 hours the infantry had arrived also—35th Brigade on the right, 19th Brigade in the centre and 21st Brigade on the left. Since they had had little enough rest, the infantry may have welcomed the thick mist which greeted the dawn, the advance being

delayed to allow it to clear. Nevertheless, by 0900 hours Roberts's cavalry had splashed across the Wadi and driven off the Turkish cavalry on the other side. The infantry followed soon after and 21st Brigade, the first across, set off for the Hanna defile led by 1/9th Gurkhas; by 1100 hours they were under fire from guns and small arms. While the Gurkhas dug in only 200 yards from the enemy, the rest of the brigade began to move to the right and seeing this 19th Brigade also veered right, following the plan to secure the Hanna defile. But now a fatal delay occurred. Owing to the steepness of the banks the artillery were not yet all across the Wadi, indeed they were not all in action until 1330 hours; why they could not have provided support from the east bank of the Wadi is not clear. However, once the artillery were in action, 21st Brigade was soon fully committed against the Turks occupying a water course running at right angles to their main position on the Wadi. Two battalions of 19th Brigade were drawn into the fight also, and gradually they gained the upper hand, the Turks beginning to give ground.

On seeing the enemy apparently withdrawing Younghusband assumed that his turning movement was almost complete. Accordingly he moved 35th Brigade out to the right, with the intention of closing the gap between 19th Brigade and the Tigris, thus cutting off the Turks at the Wadi. But 35th Brigade soon came under fire and it was not until 1715 hours that the Buffs were in line with 19th Brigade's 28th Punjabis; with the setting sun in their eyes and under a crossfire, they were pinned down two and a half miles from the Tigris. What had happened might have been foreseen—as Younghusband extended his right in his outflanking movement, so the Turks extended their left to keep pace with him. Even so, it is possible that a wider sweep to the flank, followed by a really determined attack, might have caught at least some of

the Turks; regrettably, the two essential elements for success, surprise plus a real determination to push through, were lacking. This was exemplified by the cavalry brigade who, further to the right, had the opportunity to reach the Tigris across perfect going. Roberts had received no definite orders, however, and while they watched the action the opportunity passed.

During all this activity to the north-east, Kemball's 28th Brigade had been holding the ring opposite the Turkish main position. By 1330 hours, as we have already seen, Younghusband was under the impression that his turning movement was successful; acting on this, plus an indication that the Turks were pulling out opposite 28th Brigade, Aylmer ordered Kemball to press home his attack. The gunboats were ordered upstream in support and 9th Brigade, in reserve, moved up to 28th Brigade's original positions west of El Chitab Fort. Far from withdrawing, however, the Turks were soon found to be holding strongly and Kemball's men walked into an annihilating crossfire. The irrigation channel immediately in front of the Wadi confused the attackers and, having crossed the deadly strip between it and the river, they found the latter's steep banks another fearful obstacle. With great gallantry the British tried to storm across, their ranks rapidly thinning, but as darkness fell 28th Brigade withdrew without even reaching the Turkish line.

#### Unexpected withdrawal

With both attacks at a standstill and night having fallen, an uneasy peace descended on the battlefield, broken only occasionally by outbursts of small arms fire. In the bitter cold and rain the British huddled in their forward positions, while the Turks took advantage of the darkness to withdraw to the Hanna defile; a move which the British did not discover till next morning. So the Wadi was gained, by default, and at a cost to the British of 1,600 casualties, 648 from 28th Brigade alone. And once again the Turks had escaped the decisive defeat which could have opened the route to Küt.

Aylmer's anxiety to relieve Küt was no doubt the main reason why the attacks at Sheikh Saad and the Wadi had been so costly—in his impatience to get on he had played into the Turks' hands with repeated frontal attacks. Yet his anxiety had not diminished, for Townshend was once again calling for quick relief in a series of urgent signals. In reply Aylmer made it clear that in his view progress could not be 'anything but very slow'. The signals which then flew back and forth between himself, Nixon and Townshend did nothing to help his immediate problem—the forcing of the strong Hanna defile, its well-protected flanks making another frontal attack inevitable.

By now the weather had turned really bad with gales and heavy rain; the whole area had turned into a sea of glutinous mud, in which to walk was exhausting and to run impossible. The Tigris itself had become a roaring yellow torrent and the pontoon bridge, never very strong, had no sooner been moved up nearer the front and re-erected, than a steamer broke it, the wreckage being carried away by the gale. With no immediate prospect of replacing the bridge Aylmer's one tactical advantage over the Turks, the ability to operate on either bank of the Tigris at will, was

severely limited. The only bright spot in an otherwise gloomy scene was the news that Townshend had found additional supplies in Küt; relief was no longer quite so urgent. Nevertheless, Aylmer decided to press the advance, and to attack the Hanna position on January 21. As surprise was impossible and a frontal attack inevitable, adequate artillery support was essential. For this task Aylmer had 46 guns, plus two gunboats, each of whose heaviest armament was a 12-pounder gun—by Western Front standards poor support indeed for a front a mile long. However, using the few guns he was able to ferry across the Tigris, Aylmer could engage the Turkish positions in enfilade. 7th Brigade and 33rd Cavalry were also ferried across the river and, commanded by General Keary, whose 3rd Division Headquarters had recently arrived, occupied Arab Village, south-west of the Hanna position.

On the night January 19/20 7th Division, in preparation for their attack on January 21, advanced their forward trenches to within some 500 yards of the enemy. There had not been time, however, to construct adequate communication trenches from front to rear, so that supporting troops following-up the initial assault would be faced with a 2,000 yard advance virtually without cover. By dawn on January 20, 7th Division was in position. A short bombardment of the Turkish line, starting at noon on January 20, had little effect, despite the enfilade fire from the right bank. Owing to the flat terrain, any slight rise in the ground gave concealment for hundreds of yards and made observation of direct fire very difficult. To overcome this gunner observation officers used special ladders known as 'pulpits', but even the use of these did not always result in effective fire against the deep, narrow trenches at which the Turks were so adept.

#### Black Watch obliterated

Aylmer's original orders were that the attack on January 21 should be preceded by a bombardment starting as soon as possible after first light. However, as the grey dawn broke, a thick mist shrouded the enemy lines and action was delayed till this had cleared and the gunners had registered their targets. Fire was opened at 0745 hours and as the barrage fell on the Turkish front line the Black Watch on the left began their advance, slogging through the thick mud at little more than a slow walk. The bombardment was clearly ineffective since the Turks were already shooting back to some effect. When the guns lifted their fire onto the second line, some of the Black Watch did manage to reach the enemy front line, but most fell before getting there. With a few Jats who had managed to join them, the Highlanders tried to broaden their narrow foothold. The Turks they had driven back soon counterattacked, advancing up the communication trenches to right and left, hurling grenades as they came. The British were forced out and suffered even more casualties as they withdrew. Two officers and 15 men of the Black Watch survived this encounter and to all intents and purposes the battalion ceased to exist.

The rest of the attack was also effectively at a standstill, although 9th Brigade had moved forward to support the hard-pressed 35th Brigade. On the right 19th Brigade

was doing no better and of the two assaulting Dogra battalions only 25 men reached the Turkish wire. Despite the losses, more and more men were flung into the battle. The Seaforths had some limited success, but apart from this no progress was made.

Not least of the factors contributing to this débâcle was the lack of control from divisional headquarters. As so often in this campaign, communications broke down almost at once. At 0850 hours the impression at divisional headquarters was that all was going well, although 19th Brigade was checked. By 1115 hours it became clear at headquarters what had been painfully obvious to the forward troops for an hour or more—the attack had failed. To cap it all the wind rose and with it came pouring rain. Nevertheless, a fresh attack was ordered for 1300 hours, and although it started, the men, soaked, numbed by the wind and exhausted by their previous efforts, could not go on. At 1315 hours the operation was abandoned, and with it all immediate hope of breaking through the Hanna line. Younghusband ordered his division back to their original positions, judging the conditions impossible for a renewed attack; the more sanguine Aylmer, reluctant to surrender the few gains made, tried to countermand this order, but he was too late—the withdrawal was completed during the night.

So ended the first battle of Hanna. Of the 7,600 British rifle strength, 2,741 were casualties. The Turks, who had about 9,000 infantry, suffered some 2,000 casualties. The increasingly torrential rain precluded any immediate renewal of the offensive and the next few days after the battle were devoted to reorganization and to collecting the wounded. Their situation was, if anything, worse than at Sheikh Saad and the Wadi. Many were left out all night on January 21 and although the truce arranged for January 22 enabled most to be brought in, this was not achieved without opposition from the *Buddhoos*; they stripped every body they could find, alive or dead, and even attacked the bearer parties. Conditions at the field ambulances were chaotic and are described in grim detail in Candler's *The Long Road to Baghdad*. The troops seemed to be losing confidence in their higher command, judging by this cynical verse which circulated in Mesopotamia at about this time:

'W stands for the wonder and pain  
With which we regard our infirm and insane  
Old aged generals, who run this campaign  
We are waging in Mesopotamia.'

#### Further Reading

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[For F. W. Woodhouse's biography, see Volume 2, page 783.]

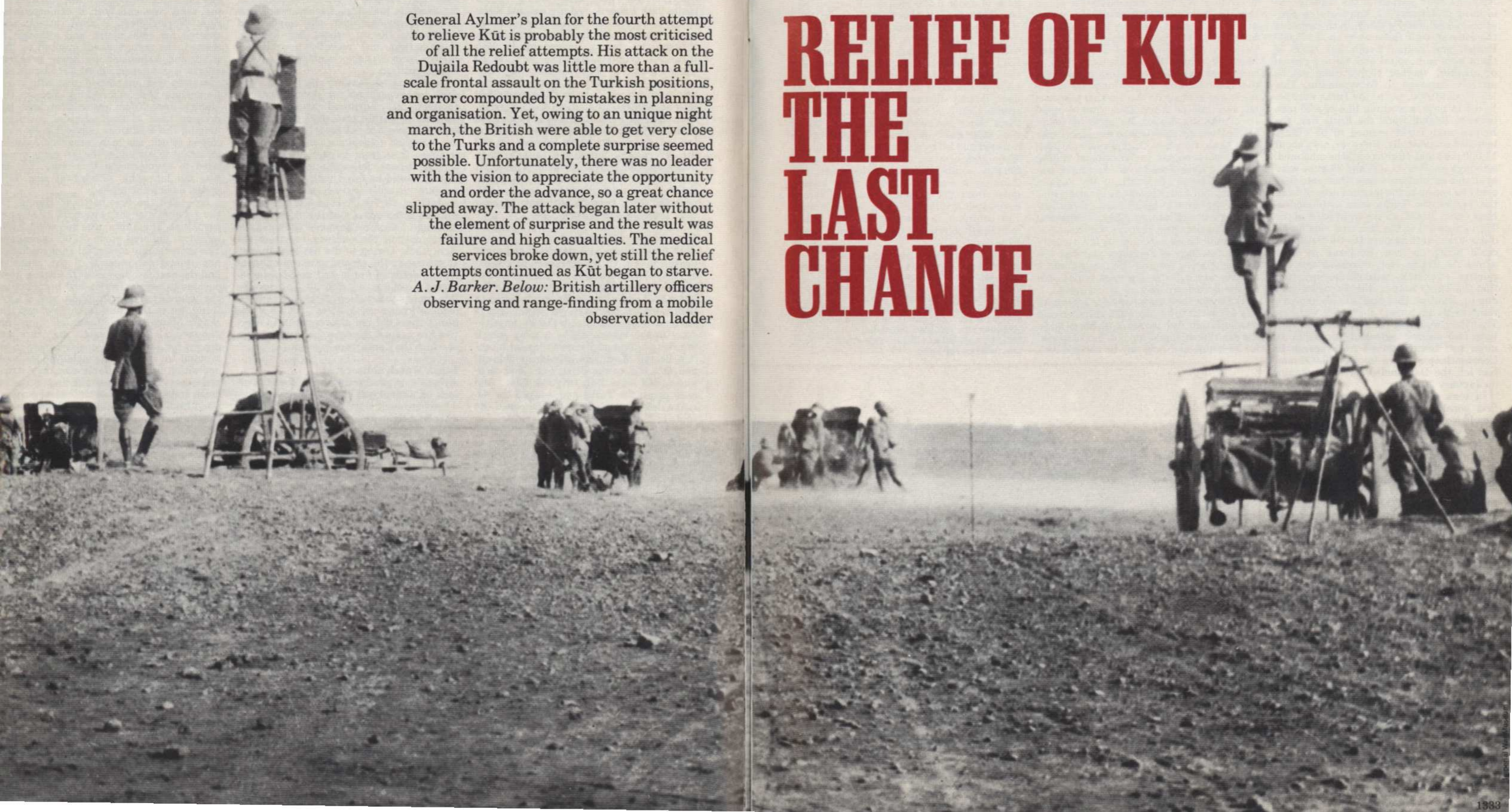


Imperial War Museum



General Aylmer's plan for the fourth attempt to relieve Kūt is probably the most criticised of all the relief attempts. His attack on the Dujaila Redoubt was little more than a full-scale frontal assault on the Turkish positions, an error compounded by mistakes in planning and organisation. Yet, owing to a unique night march, the British were able to get very close to the Turks and a complete surprise seemed possible. Unfortunately, there was no leader with the vision to appreciate the opportunity and order the advance, so a great chance slipped away. The attack began later without the element of surprise and the result was failure and high casualties. The medical services broke down, yet still the relief attempts continued as Kūt began to starve. *A. J. Barker.* Below: British artillery officers observing and range-finding from a mobile observation ladder

# RELIEF OF KUT THE LAST CHANCE





On January 24 — three days after the battle of Hanna — General Lake, who had relieved Nixon, sailed to the front to see for himself how things were. En route he learned that Townshend had declared a second reassessment of the food stocks in Kūt which now made him self-sufficient for 84 days and not the 22 he had originally forecast. Since the Hanna battle Townshend had been making a reappraisal of his position, in which the question of his breaking out had again become a major consideration.

Unlike his predecessor, Lake did not rule out the possibility of Townshend's fighting his way out of Kūt, but he signalled 'I still hope to effect your relief.' Seen from Aylmer's headquarters at the Wadi on the evening of January 27, however, the situation looked pretty gloomy. In the whole of the Persian Gulf there were about 63,000 British and Indian troops but 8,000 of them were in hospital and, for one reason or another, another 15,000 could not be actively deployed in Mesopotamia. This left about 40,000, and as the Turks were believed to have something like 35,000 men between Baghdad and the firing line, the British and Turks seemed to be evenly matched numerically. However, only about 14,000 men and 46 guns could be mustered, although another 11,000 and 28 guns were available as reinforcements when once they could be got up to the forward area. Facing the 14,000, the Turks were estimated to have about 10,000 on the right bank of the Tigris, forward of the Hai, and this figure did not take into account the reserves they could bring up from Shumran or ferry across the Tigris. Nor, in considering the relative strengths, must it be forgotten that the Turks were on the defensive, well dug in, and that they had already shown a remarkably propensity for trench warfare. That they would be reinforced before very long also seemed extremely probable as news had been received from agents in Constantinople that a force of 36,000 men had left the Dardanelles for Mesopotamia on January 20.

In view of all this, presumably Lake's first consideration was whether Aylmer should carry on trying to break through to Kūt or whether he should order Townshend to try to break out; apparently he never wavered in his decision to adhere to the first alternative. At this point it becomes clear that Lake no longer trusted Aylmer completely. Probably some straight talking took place between the evening of the 27th and the morning of the 29th of January, and Aylmer was not exactly brimming with confidence about his ability to get through to Townshend. Aylmer was left in command of the Tigris Corps but Gorringer, who had recently been knighted for his earlier actions, was appointed his Chief-of-Staff.

Aylmer's plan for the next attempt to get through to Townshend has probably been the most criticised action of all the tragic attempts to relieve Kūt. The idea was to attack up the right bank and take the strongly defended Es Sinn position from where the town of Kūt was plainly visible. Except for the mounds of ancient canal banks the country was as flat as a table, with one notable exception, the Dujaila depression. This depression ran from the right bank of the Tigris for some distance upstream of Magasis past the tomb of Imam-al-Mansur and it contained the strongly entrenched position which became known as the Dujaila Redoubt. The depres-

sion itself was about 150 yards wide and six feet below the level of the surrounding countryside, and was covered with a stunted thorny acacia shrub which gave cover to hosts of partridges, jackals and wild cats. (Later in the campaign the cavalry collected a pack of hounds together to hunt the jackals and many of the officers were in the habit of getting in some shooting at the few survivors of the partridges that remained after the battle of March 8.

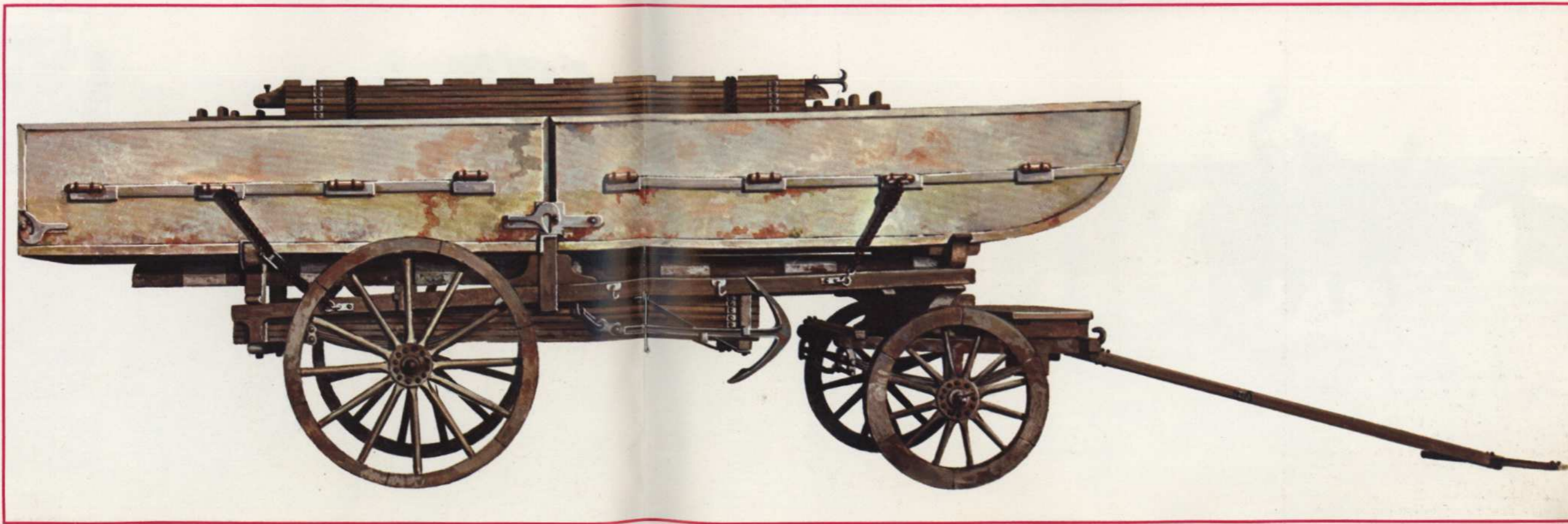
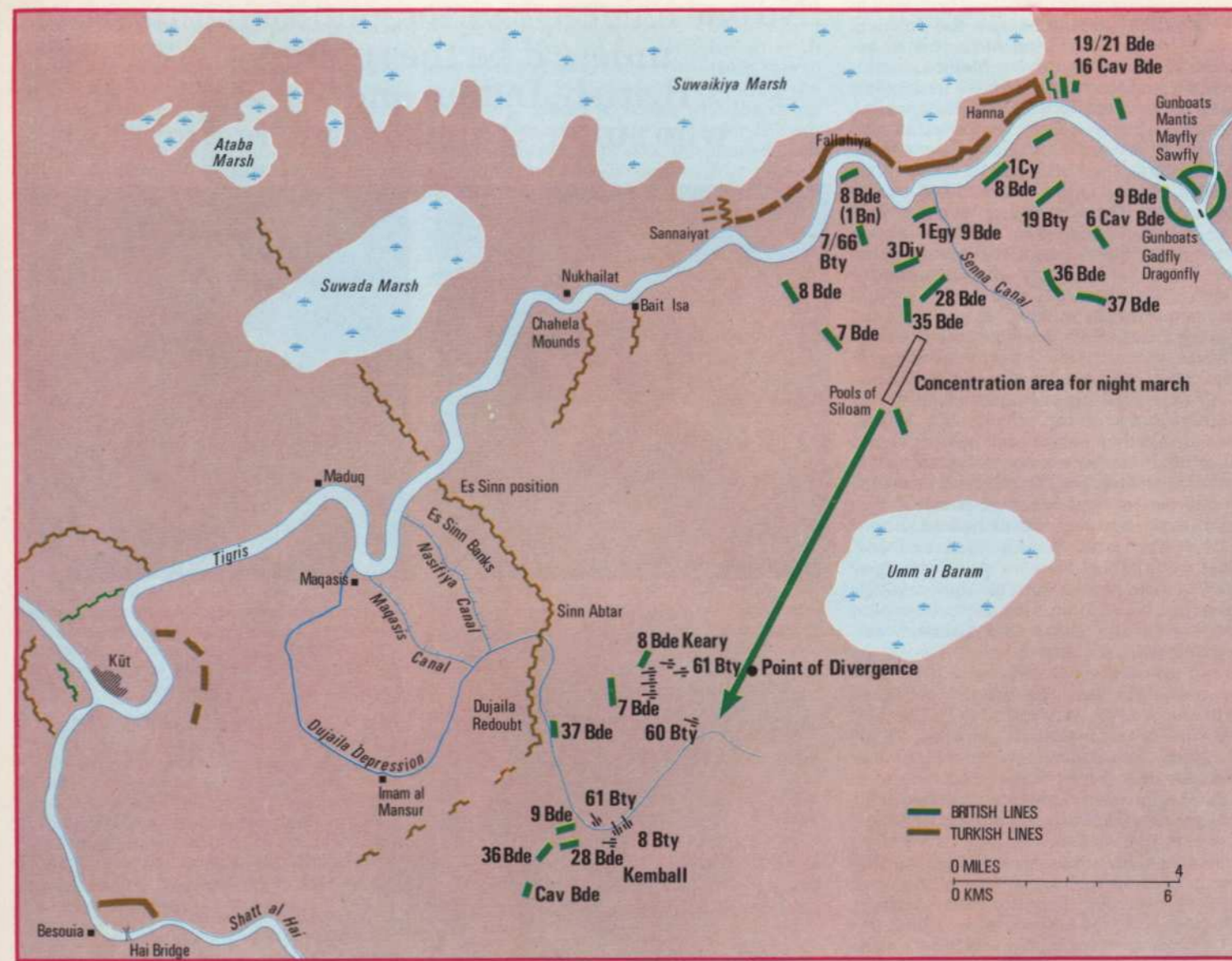
The Dujaila Redoubt was the key to the whole position and Aylmer's plan was to carry this first and then pivot round it towards the Turks' rear, in order to cut their communications and make the right bank untenable. By this manoeuvre he hoped that the Turks would be compelled to evacuate the left bank, leaving him the command of the river and an open door to Kūt. Between the beginning of February and March 7, when the attack took place, a consistent pressure was maintained against the Hanna defile. A continual bombardment was kept up on the Turkish positions but this had no other effect than to make the Turks dig deeper, for guns by themselves were not sufficient to force the Turks from their trenches. On February 26 Aylmer sent a signal to Townshend telling him what he proposed to do. An attack was to be made on the south of the Dujaila Redoubt and Townshend was to send troops across the river to help as soon as he saw Aylmer's attack taking effect. Townshend replied to the effect that his 'full co-operation' could be expected. Rain fell steadily in the last days of February and first few days of March, turning the ground into a morass which became almost impassable for the British troops.

'D' Day for the attack had been set originally as March 6, but the state of the ground was such that Aylmer made up his mind on the 4th that it would have to be postponed for 24 hours, and next day he decided on a

further postponement; this meant that zero hour was not until dawn on the 8th. Townshend suggested later that the delay was fatal, and no doubt the Turks did know that a major offensive was in the offing. But, in view of what happened, it seems unlikely that they were aware of when it was to be launched or the exact point.

What Aylmer's plan amounted to was nothing less than a full scale frontal assault of the Turkish positions on the right bank of the river, employing virtually the whole of the Tigris force. The main assault was to be made while Major-General Young-husband with two brigades (19th and 21st) and a cavalry regiment (16th Cavalry) — a force of about 6,500 men in all, supported by 24 guns — kept the Turks busy in the Hanna positions across the river. Three columns of infantry A, B and C, together with the cavalry brigade, were to march on the Dujaila depression by night and assault the redoubt, and the Turkish line running back to the river from it, at dawn next day. Twenty thousand men were to assemble quietly at the Pools of Siloam about three miles due south of the Hanna position after dark on March 7; from here, directed and led by a small party moving on a compass bearing, they were to advance roughly south-west across the desert in columns of four. At a point some seven miles from the assembly area the force would split into its four component columns and continue to advance towards their individual objectives, until, at dawn, they

▷ The attack on the Dujaila Redoubt. The flanking night march was successfully achieved, but surprise was lost with fatal results.  
 ▽ Part of a pontoon bridging train. Each pontoon could be carried on one cart, plus a section of the bridging material. To put up a bridge the pontoons were floated out, anchored at regular intervals, and the jointed bridging material was then laid over them crosswise and secured





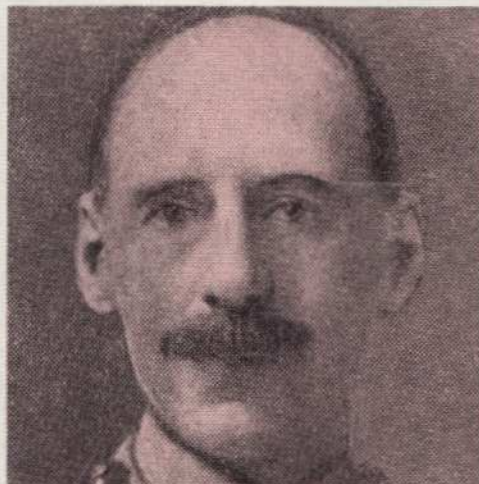
would have arrived at locations from which they would be able to assault the Turkish lines. The main striking force was to be Columns A and B, under Major-General Kemball and they were to make for a point south of the Dujaila Redoubt. Meanwhile, Column C under a fiery Irishman, Major-General D'Urban Keary, was to veer a mile or so towards the north, whilst the cavalry brigade went in the other direction to 'operate' on the left flank, because they were given no definite objectives these cavalry operations were to become little more than a swan round the open desert.

#### An unique night march

The organisation of the force was the first mistake, and one which was to have a profound effect on the operations. Columns A and B were made up of brigades from three different formations which had never worked together before and neither Kemball, the commander, nor his staff, were known to the troops. The choice of Kemball as commander was made because of the qualities of dash and vigour he had shown in the attacks of Sheikh Saad and the Wadi, but the fact that he was a stranger to the troops was a serious shortcoming. There had been no time for any proper preparation for the attack and although extremely detailed orders were issued it turned out that these were only to have a paralysing effect on the subordinate commanders. A final limitation lay in the fact that the brigades moved with all their transport, ambulances and guns—not behind, as one might have expected in a night march which involved crossing difficult ground and which might have developed into a night attack.

Because the units converging on the assembly area were given only a bare two hours to cover the distance between their bivouacs and the rendezvous, which in some cases meant a seven-mile march, it is not surprising that some of them were over an hour and a half late. In spite of an allow-

## 'No one emerged with reputation unscathed, unless it be the soldiers — British, Indian and Turkish — who suffered appalling privations'



**Above left:** Lieutenant-General Aylmer, Commander of the Tigris Corps. He lost the confidence of General Lake (commander of the IEF in Mesopotamia) when he expressed doubts as to his ability to get through to Townshend

**Above right:** General Goringe, Chief-of-Staff to Aylmer. He was appointed by Lake when the latter began to lose confidence in Aylmer

**Left:** Major-General Kemball, commanding general in the attack on the Dujaila Redoubt. 'With diseased pedantry' he threw away the element of surprise in this attack by insisting on adhering rigidly to plan

**Below:** British troops watering horses in the shallow waters of the Tigris. The Indian troops were later the subject of some controversy: Townshend called them 'armed bands', but most commanders valued them highly

ance of an hour's margin for accidents this delay—which may be regarded almost as inevitably in the nature of things—was never made good. Nevertheless, the night march was remarkable and probably unique in British military history. In view of the fact that the only reconnaissance for it had been by air and of the extraordinary difficulties inherent in such an operation it was astonishingly successful. The troops set off about 2130 hours. The going was slow and there was a succession of halts as the compass parties, on whom everything depended, stopped to check their bearings. Distances were checked by means of a bicycle wheeled by one man of each compass party; as the column stepped out two men checked the revolution of its wheels whilst another counted steps as a means of comparison and yet another swung a pace stick as a further countercheck; thus an aggregate distance was estimated.

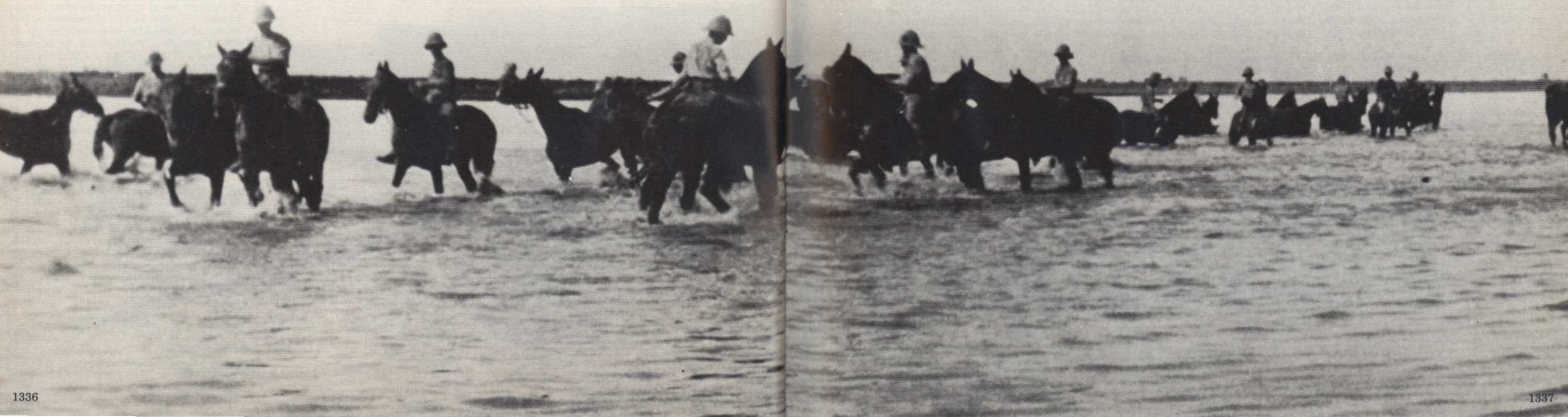
Eventually, shortly before dawn the force arrived at the point where they were to split up. As planned the two leading columns then turned south along the Dujaila depression whilst C veered north, to face the Dujaila Redoubt from the east. Columns A and B continued along the depression as far as a bend two miles southwest of the redoubt—subsequently known as Kemball's Corner—where they formed up for the attack. It was nearly sunrise by this time but the Turks had given no sign of having spotted the British force; the few Turks who could be seen were merely standing on the parapet of their trenches yawning and shaking out their blankets. It seemed as if complete surprise had been attained and a reconnoitring patrol which went forward and entered the redoubt confirmed an earlier report received from a daring young officer, one Major Leachman, who was working as a political officer. (Disguised as an Arab he had wandered through the Turkish lines during the night and found the strongpoint to be completely deserted.) Unfortunately, although these

reports were accepted as being authentic, the prearranged programme—which was of a very detailed nature—included an artillery bombardment before the attack was to be launched. Still more unfortunately the occasion produced no leader with the vision to seize the opportunity and order the advance. Instead, word was telephoned back to Aylmer's headquarters with a request for orders and the reply came back 'Stick to programme'. In retrospect, it seems unquestionable that if the Dujaila Redoubt had been occupied at dawn on March 8 not only would Küt have been relieved, but the safety of the whole Turkish army on the left bank of the Tigris would have been imperilled. Three precious hours were wasted before any forward move took place and not only this, when the artillery moved up it was allowed to register in a leisurely manner and so the whole advantage of the surprise which had been attained was lost.

As soon as Kemball's force had advertised its presence with the bombardment, Turkish reinforcements poured into the trenches of the redoubt, and at 1000 hours when the advance started again Khalil's men were ready to meet the attack. Three thousand of them had come from the Magasis Fort to strengthen the line and more were being ferried across from the left bank in native coracle-like *mashufs* and on skin rafts towed by motor-boats. An air reconnaissance estimated that at least another 3,000 of them came across the river during the day. Some were caught by the British artillery as they marched across the open ground in close order, but most were unharmed by the gunfire and when once they got to the line of well concealed trenches south of the redoubt they disappeared from view and were safe. Then, as the line of British infantry advanced it was met with heavy rifle and machine gun fire at a range of about 700 yards. By noon Kemball's men had gained only 200 yards and in doing so they suffered very heavy casualties. The advance slowed to a halt,

but whilst they were frantically digging in orders were given for the advance to be continued and for an assault.

Meanwhile, in accordance with the original orders, D'Urban Keary's column on the east of the redoubt was waiting for Kemball's attack to start before joining battle. It was supposed to have deployed at 0530 hours but it had been another hour before the correct point in the Dujaila depression, a mile short of the bend where the deployment was to be made, was reached. Even then the infantry were still mixed up with mules, artillery wagons and ambulances, and the guns with the column had yet to get into action. Surprise now was out of the question and because D'Urban Keary's column had held back, the last hope of carrying the position was gone. In his despatch following the action, Lake blamed the failure on Kemball's delay although this was not the full story. As Aylmer and Goringe were both with D'Urban Keary, part of the responsibility must lie with them. A lightly held gap in the Turkish defences yawned in front of Keary's men and, if they had been allowed to go in, the redoubt could still have been taken. But they were held back, the preconceived plan was adhered to and the chance was thrown away. When once it did get moving again Kemball's column in the south still made very little progress in the face of the deadly small arms fire from the concealed positions to the left and in front of the redoubt. A series of attacks preceded by artillery fire were made throughout the day but the troops never really got to grips with their enemies, and they took heavy punishment, without hardly sighting the Turk. So far as they were concerned, the assault on the redoubt proper, which was still a mile away, was now out of the question, and by 1430 hours it became clear that any advance in this direction would entail the annihilation of Kemball's whole force. Once again it had been shown that the paltry bombardment of prepared





positions with but a few field guns – which were not firing high explosive anyway and for which there was no aerial observation – was an ineffectual screen for the infantry to advance under. Every advantage lay with the Turks, although the numbers involved were probably evenly matched. Those who were occupying the Dujaila Redoubt were the pick of the Ottoman army, fresh troops flushed with the success of the Dardanelles and strongly entrenched in a secure position which dominated the plain to be crossed by the attackers.

By 1630 hours, when Kemball's attack was completely spent, Aylmer decided to rely on Keary's column to batter a way through on the east side of the redoubt. The Manchesters and the 59th Rifles formed up with the 2nd Rajputs in support and the tired waves of infantry shook out into formation and started to tramp steadily forward into the sunset. But this last attack, which the troops had been ordered to push home at all costs, had little hope of success for as soon as they got a third of the way across the 3,000 yards that they had to cover, a rattle broke out from the redoubt and the advancing lines were caught in small arms fire from both flanks. At the same time Turkish guns, untouched by the British artillery, put down a heavy barrage in front of the line on which they were advancing. Despite this the Manchesters and the 59th Rifles managed to gain a foothold in the redoubt and two lines of trenches were occupied. No sooner had they broken in, however, than a counterattack was launched and a whole mass of Turkish infantry, hurling grenades in front of them as they came, threw back what was left of the assaulting force. British and Indian discipline was good and the thin line of infantry withdrew in good order under this intensive fire, to halt for the night 3,000 yards from the redoubt. It was all over and Aylmer had lost about half of his men. The 8th Brigade alone, which had gone into action with 2,300 men, came out with 1,127; 33 British and 23 Indian officers fell in the attack and the 2nd Rajputs lost all their British officers and 12 out of the 16 Indian officers; a company and a half of the 1st/2nd Gurkhas who went in with them were practically annihilated. Casualties in the whole force during the action

were close on 3,500, including 123 British officers and 23 Indian officers.

The cavalry, who had been given the job of looking after the left flank, can be said to have had absolutely no effect on the battle at all. Like the cavalry, the garrison in Küt contributed nothing to the battle. The force deputed to cross the river, when the Relief Force was seen to be coming round the south of the Dujaila Redoubt, assembled in the palm groves south-east of Küt early on the morning of March 8. Altogether it comprised about two weak brigades and each man carried about 150 rounds of ammunition and one day's rations. Through the haze the attack on the redoubt could be seen developing, but as the relieving force came no nearer Townshend made no attempt to cross. In his opinion 'co-operation was of little practical use' at this stage.

During the night Aylmer's men withdrew to Kemball's Corner, their morning assembly area. The Turks followed them up but made no attempt to attack although they shelled the British rearguard and there was a good deal of sporadic sniping in the dark. However, at dawn the ubiquitous local Arabs again appeared on the skyline to fall upon the wretched wounded, bayonetting and stripping them of their equipment and clothing. Next day the retirement was continued back to the positions from which Aylmer's men had set out. Nothing had been gained and the troops were weary and dejected. The official explanation of their retirement as relayed through Reuter's channels was that Aylmer's men had retired 'through want of water'; when the British troops heard of it they greeted the announcement with blasphemy and derision; they knew they had been beaten. They had not lost morale but they had lost confidence as a result of what they regarded as the ineptitude of their commanders. They had suffered heavy casualties and what they felt they needed was effective generalship.

After the battle of Dujaila the Tigris Corps spent the rest of March licking its wounds. Apart from an occasional thunderstorm the weather was fine and clear and it was not so cold now. But, as the melting snows in the Caucasus poured into the headwaters of the Tigris, the river steadily

rose and swamps spread out from it to cover the land. As this happened the length of the front line contracted before them and the troops on both sides had to work hard repairing the *bunds* along the river bank in order to stop the trenches from becoming water pits. The artillery was immobile and what fighting there was came as the result of patrol actions or occasional flare-ups resulting from attempts to eliminate Turkish snipers. Everybody on the British side – everybody except the Army Commander and his staff, that is – felt that the relief of Küt was fast becoming a hopeless proposition and the atmosphere was one of despondency.

Preparations for the next operation, which once again was to be *the* one that would open the door to Küt, went steadily ahead. During this period conditions in the firing line had stabilised into trench war-

### By the end of March the relief of Küt was fast becoming hopeless . . .

fare, akin in many respects to that in Flanders – but with modifications.

'O-four, five five ack emma', on the morning of April 5 was fixed as zero hour for the first phase of the new operation – the capture of Hanna. Despite the fact that the fine weather had broken on March 30 every possible preparation had been made that could be made; so far as could be foreseen absolutely nothing had been left to chance. Guns had been massed on both banks of the river, the barbed wire entanglements in front of the Turkish positions had been shelled and shelled again in order to break them down and the guns were now all ready to pulverise the actual trenches. The 13th Division, whose arrival it had hoped had been kept a secret from the Turks, had rehearsed its operational rôles on a scale model; every unit knew its tasks and its place. The first lines of the Hanna trenches were to be assaulted 'silently', there was to be no artillery bombardment until the attack was well under way. The trenches,

it was hoped, would be carried by surprise – infantry, bombers and bayonets finishing the job when once the assaulting waves had reached their objectives. Only when the first line had been taken would the guns open up, and then registering on the third line while the attackers were pushing on to take the second position. Behind the 13th Division the 7th was to mop up and be ready to move forward to help if this became necessary; on the right bank the task of the men of the 3rd was to pin down the Turks facing them and to shoot up any Turks across the river who were trying to move forward from the Fallahiyeh position. For all this to go well, all that was wanted was the initial surprise.

An element of surprise was achieved on this particular occasion and the attack got off to a good start. But within a few hours it had again bogged down and in two actions

### . . . and the possibility of Townshend breaking out was reconsidered

at Fallahiyeh and Sannaiyat the 13th Division who bore the brunt of the fighting suffered over 3,600 casualties – 46% of the actual troops engaged. This was an appallingly high casualty rate, even for an attritional battle. The tempo of the fighting may also be judged from the fact that five Victoria Crosses were won in these two actions. To make matters worse the weather turned against the British with devastating violence, and the Turks broke down the *bunds* to assist the work of Nature. In spite of everything yet another attack was planned for April 13. This time the initial objective was the Turkish position at Beit Aisa. When it was launched – two days late, because of the state of the ground – the result was the same as before: nothing gained and appalling casualties. Faced with the same stalemate Gorrington shifted his attention to the left bank of the river and on April 20 yet another attack was staged. The objective was Sannaiyat and once more it was a failure.

By this time it is doubtful whether the action at Sannaiyat, even if it had been a success, could have saved Townshend. The fate of Küt was said to have hung on its outcome, but after Sannaiyat the Relief Force would still have had to fight its way through the Es Sinn position, and 'flesh and blood could do no more'. The Tigris Corps casualties, in the three weeks from April 5 to April 23 were just under 10,000 men; this was 25% of the force and in some formations the percentage was much higher. As an example – taking into account the reinforcements they received during the period – one particular brigade lost over 100% of its strength and 190% of its British officers. In Küt there were about 12,500 men, and in the efforts to relieve them the Tigris Corps lost 23,000 in battle casualties alone in the four months between January and April 1916; there were also large numbers of sick but these are not included in this figure. Corresponding Turkish losses during this period are estimated to have been about 10,000.

The garrison in Küt was now on minimum rations, and to complete the sorry story the details of the last desperate attempt which was made to reprovision it must be recounted. At 2000 hours on April 24 the paddle steamer *Julnar*, which had been specially prepared and loaded with 270 tons of supplies, made a most gallant attempt to force the blockade. The mission was a forlorn hope, bitterly criticised, but a magnificent adventure in the best British naval tradition. Lieutenant H. O. B. Firman, R.N., was given command and Lieutenant-Commander Cowley, who had been commanding the *Mejidieh*, appointed pilot. Cowley, a most unusual piratical character, had been in the service of Euphrates and Tigris Navigation Company for many years and because of this he was regarded by the Turks as one of their subjects. Knowing that they looked upon him as a renegade and that he would get short shrift if he was captured, the fact that he volunteered for the job in spite of it makes his actions even more outstanding; he did so because he knew the river and the *Julnar* well, and probably he was the man best suited to this suicidal operation. Owing to the floods, the Tigris was then at its highest level and the darkness

and the shifting shoals would have made the venture risky enough even with friends on both banks. But with a gauntlet of guns to be run for some 25 miles of river and unknown obstacles to be navigated in the shape of mines and booms, the chances of the *Julnar* getting through were pretty remote. In the hope of distracting the Turks, her departure was covered by all the artillery that could be brought to bear by Gorrington's force, but the Turks were too alert to be caught unawares.

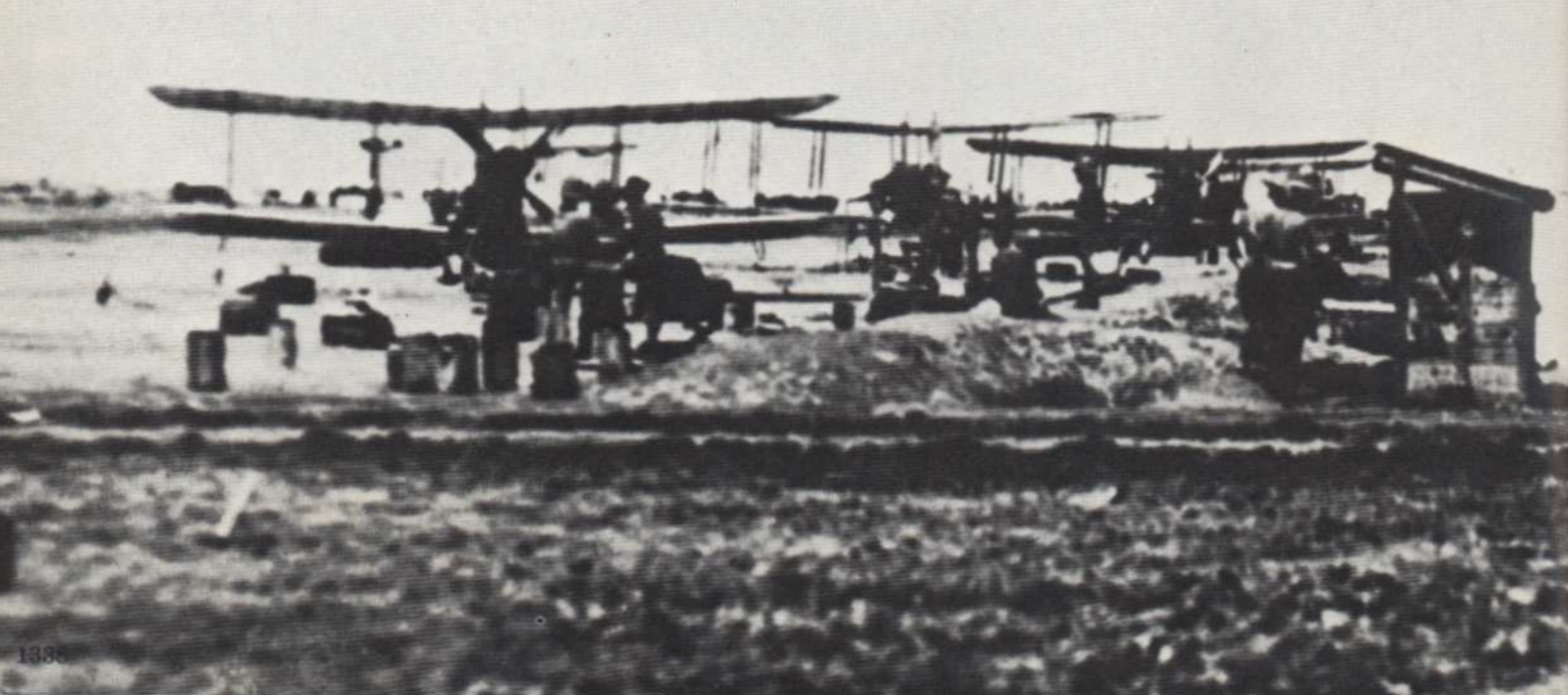
It was moonlight when the *Julnar* set off. Any hope of maintaining surprise for more than a few minutes was, of course, impossible and as soon as she came opposite the first Turkish lines there was a fusillade of rifle and machine gun fire from both banks. As she passed through the Sinn position the Turkish barrage intensified, but the *Julnar* had been fitted with armour plates and sand-bagged and she steamed on. Disaster came as she was nearing Magasis, about four miles off Küt (eight and a half miles by river). Steel wire hawsers had been stretched diagonally across the stream and when the ship's rudder became tangled in one of these she was held. There the Turks were waiting for her; it would hardly be surprising if her arrival had not been expected, since she had been prepared for the voyage at Amara, a known hot-bed of spies. After a quick and intense bombardment in which most of the crew were either killed or wounded, a boarding party administered the *coup de grace* and next morning the *Julnar* could be seen from Küt lying alongside the river bank by the Magasis Fort. Those of the crew who were still alive were hauled off into captivity; all that is, except the wretched Cowley who was executed.

#### Further Reading

- Barker, A. J., *The Neglected War* (Faber & Faber 1967)
- Candler, E., *The Long Road to Baghdad* (Cassell 1919)
- Moberly, Brig.-Gen. F. J., *Official History of the Great War – The Campaign in Mesopotamia 1914-1918, Vol I* (HMSO 1923)
- Townshend, Maj.-Gen. Sir Charles, *My Campaign in Mesopotamia* (Butterworth 1920)

[For Lieutenant-Colonel A. J. Barker's biography, see Vol I, page 434.]

The camp of the 30th Squadron, RFC, at Sheikh Saad. After the army's failure to reach Küt, desperate remedies were tried – air drops, and a suicidal attempt to sail up river





# TOWNSHEND: SURRENDER CAPTURE & DISGRACE

The surrender of Küt was an inglorious end to a sad chapter of British military muddle. The Turks, having closed the ring around Küt, were content to fight off the relief attempts while waiting for the town to starve into submission, yet during this time of waiting Townshend made no attempt to break out or join up with the relieving force. Nor did he immediately conduct a thorough assessment of his force's food supply. Certainly Townshend's conduct, his character and personality, are at the centre of the controversy which surrounds the surrender of Küt. *Donald Clark.*

*Below: A personal signal from Townshend, only two days before the surrender. Revealingly, it is loaded with self-pity and devoid of self-criticism*

leon and maintained a high regard for those generals who he felt measured up to his own ideas of professionalism. He judged von der Goltz to be Europe's leading strategist and his respect for him was such that he angrily ordered the immediate ceasefire of an artillery piece attempting to hit a group of German Staff Officers, including von der Goltz, who were visiting the Turkish positions outside Küt on January 16, 1916. There can be no doubt that he was convinced of the correctness of all his major decisions throughout the siege, and the tone and content of some of his telegrams to his superiors during this period leave the impression that he doubted the correctness of theirs.

Finally, Townshend's relationship with his 'beloved 6th Division' was curiously ambivalent. Throughout the siege he informed his force of the situation by means of communiqués. He believed these to be a sound method of maintaining morale, yet many of them have the tone of an apologia and some, distressingly, a publication of others' faults. The wisdom of the communiqués has been questioned by some of his own subordinates. Beloved though his division was, he drew sharp distinctions between his British and Indian troops. There is no doubt that the Indian element of the force had many deficiencies in leadership, morale and training, but remarks like 'they are proved to be utterly unfitted for modern war conditions in periods of stress, as now constituted. In the stress of siege they lose spirit very quickly' do not reflect either the whole truth or mature judgement. Elsewhere he describes his Indian battalions as 'armed bands'. Overall the impression to be gained, from both Townshend's memoirs and his biography related by his cousin Erroll Sherson, is of a leader giving comfort to the led and not just receiving but needing the adulation they gave him in return.

Townshend says he determined to defend Küt as a river line, using the entrenched camp as a pivot of manoeuvre, with a defended bridge to throw his principal mass to either bank in offensive action against any isolated fraction of the enemy—'I should manoeuvre as if I were fighting a defensive/offensive battle.' Lack of time to establish a fortified bridgehead, owing to the priority he felt he had to give to preparing the almost non-existent main defences, is the reason Townshend gives for failing to establish a bridge: 'Such dispositions would have made all the difference in the world. As it was I was forcibly pinned down to the passive defence.' This time factor, combined with the further complication of the amount of bridging equipment available, warrants a closer study. Townshend's inability throughout the siege to cross the Tigris rapidly and in strength was to become a much discussed topic between himself and the relieving forces. Had he been able to do so, his defensive posture, his ability to support the relieving forces and his ability to escape would all have altered.

Brigadier-General Rimington, GOC Küt prior to Townshend's arrival, was instructed to build a bridge connecting Küt to Woolpress village, while the 6th Division were arriving in the area from Ctesiphon. No bridge was built—Rimington's report stated that only 250 yards of bridging were available whereas the distance to be covered was some 450 yards. There seems some doubt about the accuracy of this statement

since, in addition to the remains of the 6th Division's bridging train and the old Turkish boat bridge now in British hands, a large quantity of bridging material had arrived by river in Küt on November 28. Townshend's initial orders on taking command required a bridge to be built south of Küt where the river varied in width from 450-600 yards. On the right bank it was to be protected by a bridgehead of three redoubts and entrenchments. However, events show that the first construction was made on December 5 in the north-east corner of the entrenched camp by the fort. On December 6 the Cavalry Brigade left Küt by this bridge. Thereafter the bridge was dismantled and re-erected on a new 270-yard wide site east of Küt! The new bridge was completed on the evening of December 8 but the time for preparing the defensive bridgehead had run out. A detachment of Indian troops about to commence digging were driven back across the river on December 9 by Turkish attackers who had closed up on the garrison, and the bridge was severed on Townshend's orders on the night December 9/10. Attempts to save parts of the bridge failed and they were destroyed by gunfire. This loss of materials precluded any hope of a further attempt at constructing a permanent bridge.

Had the divisional bridging train been ordered to build initially in the second position east of Küt, a minimum of four

The Turkish investing forces commenced heavy shelling of Küt on December 8, incidentally destroying considerable stores of food in the fort. Shelling continued on December 9 and this bombardment preceded an assault during the night December 9/10 which brought the Turks to within 600 yards of the British forward line. By first light on December 10 the Turkish infantry had apparently disappeared—unfortunately only a reminder for the garrison of how well the Turks had learnt to dig in rapidly. The next two days saw a slight advance of the Turkish positions again to the accompaniment of heavy shelling followed by a further attempt at assault on the night December 12/13. The attack was repulsed with heavy casualties to the Turkish forces estimated to be 2,000.

The casualties and morale of the besieged were already beginning to worry Townshend—some 618 had been killed or wounded in the period December 9/13 while in a telegram on December 10 to General Aylmer, he says, 'I had to relieve one unit out of trenches last night, as the Brigadier-General said he could not guarantee the safety of his sector unless it was taken away at once.' The garrison thereafter enjoyed a period of comparative calm until December 24. Calm is hardly an accurate word to describe ceaseless digging and wiring in extremely unpleasant conditions subjected to intermittent shelling and continuous rifle fire. The force on the peninsula now had contact with the right bank of the river only by barge or launch owing to the earlier failure to establish a secure bridgehead. The battalion garrisoning Woolpress was supplied by these vessels at night. As a deterrent to Turkish encroachment in the area surrounding Woolpress a sortie was organised on December 14. A further sortie, on this occasion in the area of the fort, took place on the night December 17/18 to destroy Turkish sapping operations. This latter action, successful as it was, is ironically the only resemblance between Townshend's defence at Küt and his earlier action at Chitral which he had proposed to emulate.

## Close-quarter fighting

Probably against the instructions of von der Goltz, the Turks launched their final and most serious attack against Townshend's defences on Christmas Eve. This attack by the newly-arrived 52nd Division developed into a sustained thrust against the fort at the north-east corner of the British first line, after a bombardment lasting from 0700 hours until 1200 hours. The heavy shelling rapidly crumbled the walls of the fort and the assaulting Turkish infantry effected a lodgement on the walls. Close-quarter fighting continued for some two hours and only the prompt support given to the immediate defenders of the bastion and north-east wall of the fort by the Volunteer Artillery Battery saved the situation. The attack was renewed at 2000 hours and fighting continued until 2400 hours. At one time it appeared that the Turkish infantry in the north-east bastion of the fort would break out of their lodgement area, but by desperate measures, with pioneers and sappers thrown in to aid the hard-pressed and much reduced infantry, the enemy were contained. A third attempt to press home the assault commenced at 0230 hours on Christmas Day but rapidly petered out. Townshend re-

## A noble feat or a shameful disgrace?

days would have been available for preparing a defended bridgehead to include the so-called East Küt Mounds—a line of old canal embankments ten to 15 feet high. A bridgehead properly established in this area would have protected shipping as efficiently as the Woolpress position and denied Turkish observation on the right bank of the river. The attack on the second bridge, albeit at a difficult moment, seems an inadequate reason for jeopardising the *raison d'être* of the force. Townshend's reiterated view of his rôle was to detain as many Turks as possible; at least as many as his own garrison. In this he failed and the failure may have been largely owing to the Turkish knowledge that a break-out was unlikely thereafter on the southern flank.

Despite the bridge fiasco, other defence works progressed speedily. In his despatch of March 10, 1916, he refers to the early period—'I wish here to make the truth perfectly clear that Küt was absolutely without defences, not a single trench was dug . . . the fort and chain of blockhouses a great drawback'—which conflicts slightly with Nixon's signal to the India Office on December 2, 1915, noting that the position across the Küt peninsula was practically finished. This apparent lack of rapport between Townshend and his superior, the commander of IEF 'D', pervades the history of the siege. Notwithstanding the exhaustion of his troops and the imminence of the Turkish forces, Townshend managed between December 5 and 25 to complete his defensive preparations and at the same time ward off all attempts by the Turks to capture Küt by conventional assault.

8-1320c. (Established May, 1909) NAVAL SIGNAL. (Revised January, 1917)

FROM H.Q. Küt.	TO H.Q. B.E.F.	P.O. OF WORK READ BY REPORTED BY PASSED BY LOGGED BY SERIES DATE TIME
To Sir Wilfred Gert. G. H.Q. Personal.		24/12/15 9-15-45
<p>Write Alice tell her the hole I am in here through the fault of others. When I think, tell her how all conduct of operations was put on to me. I got no word of praise &amp; no thanks for all I have done through out this campaign. I had only one desire that to leave the Army as soon as peace comes. I am ill and weak but a little better today. Tell her I have some 500 or seven hundred pounds pay at which I will construct there to send her. If I have to go into captivity, it will kill me.</p> <p>Charles Townshend 24/12/15</p>		

The siege of Küt al Amara has been variously described as a noble feat of endurance, a shameful episode in the history of the British army, the stand that saved Mesopotamia and the Middle East oil supply for the Allies, and the cause of much loss of British prestige in the Arab world. In parts it was all of these things. Even before the siege had ended knives were being sharpened in Whitehall and India and suitable scapegoats selected. No one emerges from its history with reputation unscathed unless it be the soldiers—British, Indian and Turkish—who suffered appalling privations during the five months' campaign. For the British it was, both politically and militarily, a campaign of errors. The 6th (Poona) Division and its commander undoubtedly exhibited fortitude of the highest order, certainly the Turkish forces were denied access to the Basra vilayet, but the cost in lives, lost prestige and embarrassment was high.

Except for two comparatively weak attacks on Woolpress village, one in late January and one in late February, concerted efforts by the Turks to capture Küt by storm had ceased by Christmas Day 1915. On December 20, 1915, von der Goltz had decided that the garrison must be starved out and that the bulk of the Turkish force must be used to deny access to the relieving troops. This, in fact, was exactly what happened. Nevertheless, the events leading to the success of the Turkish plan show that success was not inevitable.

Townshend was to become the centre of the controversy that arose concerning the loss of Küt and his division, and this controversy remains alive, if muted, to the present day. An accurate appraisal of the defence of Küt cannot be made without some knowledge of Townshend as a soldier. A serious student of military history, he habitually compared contemporary actions with those of the past. He was devoted to the principles of war laid down by Napo-

Imperial War Museum



marks that 'the Turkish officer who commanded the assault should not have been pardoned for his failure. In an attack of this nature the reserves should be crammed on the heels of the storming parties. It was no time to think of loss of life, for if you cannot afford to lose heavily you should not try an assault.' The defenders suffered 382 casualties and Turkish losses were estimated at 2,000.

The period December 25 to 31 was quiet except for shelling, troops in the north-east sector after the Christmas Eve fight had to acclimatise themselves to the smell of decomposition, but this was a trifling matter which was submerged beneath the atmosphere of optimism inside Küt. All defences were complete, damage to the fort had been repaired, the repulse of the Turks on December 24/25 had done much to restore confidence, trench mortars and periscopes had been fabricated by the sappers, full rations were still in issue, there were few signs of a breakdown in health and many were confident of coming success for Aylmer's relief force which was even then assembling at Ali al Gharbi.

At this stage in the Küt operations Khalil commanded the investing forces. In his diaries he mentions the lack of suitable artillery as a severe handicap and that, after the first assault on the fort had been beaten back, this contributed to von der Goltz's decision to order the starvation tactic. As the investment of Küt proceeded the Turks were able to reduce the forces

surrounding Townshend, and Khalil remarks that by the time his preparations were completed only two regiments remained. Khalil, a nephew of Enver Pasha, had been sent to the Turkish *Sixth Army* to resurrect a military career that had suffered an unpropitious start in the Caucasus theatre; Lawrence judged him as energetic rather than bright. Nevertheless, he was soon (on January 10) to replace Nur ud Din as overall commander of the Turkish forces in the Tigris Campaign.

Probably the greatest controversy surrounding Townshend's conduct of the siege centred on the quantity of supplies available to the garrison. It can easily be seen that the time available to the relieving forces to concentrate and prepare their attack could be dependent upon the survival time of Townshend's force. The confusion that arose on this one point was owing in no small way to Townshend's neglect in ensuring that the supply situation was known from the beginning by both Nixon and Aylmer. How crucial was this error is debatable but the inability of each of the three headquarters to understand the intentions of the others compounded the problem. In simple terms Townshend estimated his food supplies on six dates between December 3 and January 24:

- On December 3 one month's British rations, two months' Indian.
- On December 7 two months' British rations, less meat, and two months' Indian.
- On December 11 59 days' British rations, less meat, and 59 days' Indian.
- On January 16 21 days' British rations, 18 days' Indian.

- On January 21 14 days' rations for all.
- On January 24 22 days' rations but can last longer by commandeering food and eating horse flesh (3,000 mules and horses available).

All these estimates place Townshend's limit of survival between February 4 and February 10, except the last which pointed to February 15, but left the situation open-ended. On January 25, after a preliminary signal saying 22 days' worth of some rations existed and 34 days of others, Townshend informed Aylmer and Lake that he, in fact, had 84 days' food plus meat on the hoof! Aylmer's views were modestly expressed in a signal of the same date: 'It must be acknowledged that Townshend's telegrams throw a completely new light on the situation and I am delighted. I quite recognise there are other factors besides food . . . but this new information, had it been communicated to me before, would have certainly modified much of what I have unsuccessfully attempted to do.'

Whatever Townshend's views might have been on the tactical competence of Aylmer it must be admitted that the latter's hurried preparations for the initial attempts at relief were caused by anxiety over the Küt food supply. Townshend says in his despatch on March 10 that on arrival in Küt he had instructed that 'a list of all supplies had to be furnished to me, including those available in the town, which would be commandeered if necessary'. In his memoirs he mentions that his orders to commandeer food had not at first been carried out. Lake, when forwarding Townshend's account of the siege to the Chief of the General Staff in Simla remarked, 'I cannot acquit General Townshend of a serious error of judgement in neglecting to

acquaint either GHQ or OC Relieving Column with a true state of supplies.' Townshend's argument was that as he fully expected relief within six weeks, for which period there could be no possible problem of supplies, he saw no need to enquire closely into the matter. After Aylmer's signal he replied that much of the additional food was obtained from within the town. To obtain these supplies meant upsetting yet again an already hostile population, some 6,000 in number, who, incidentally, remained in Küt after Sir Percy Cox had pleaded with Townshend not to evict them. Townshend asserts that one of the two things that struck him throughout the operation was that 'our people were always a month late in their plans and a division short in numbers'.

#### Floods, frost and falling morale

The months of January, February and March were difficult and depressing for the garrison. Colonel Hehir, Townshend's senior medical officer, in his submission to the Mesopotamia Commission stated that Küt was the most insanitary town that IEF 'D' had yet entered. Throughout January and February the temperature fell to freezing point every night. There was a continuous night frost from January 15 to February 8 and for three days in January the trenches were flooded with icy water. On January 21 the first line of defence in the north-west sector had to be abandoned as a considerable area was inundated. Abandonment by day brought casualties, and repair work on flood damage had to be done at night. The morale of the force fell. No assault came to relieve the monotony of being shelled and sniped at by the Turks. No sortie or other offensive action was taken to excite flagging spirits. Occasionally the sound of sustained gunfire from down-river raised hopes that

relief was at hand. Units stood by to co-operate with the relieving force when the word was given, but it never was. Bursts of hope were followed by communiqués explaining the latest failure, exhorting all to further efforts and holding out faith in the future.

From February 13 onwards the garrison was further plagued by the German aeroplane which had previously operated in a reconnaissance rôle, and which now commenced to bomb the town, seemingly taking some care to attack the General Hospital, set up in a bazaar, where numerous casualties occurred.

Although rations were not an immediate problem there had never been any fresh vegetables available and gradually the resulting imbalance in diet took effect. Men gathered local herbs and grasses to eke out their food; lack of knowledge of these plants contributed to an increase in enteric complaints and some deaths, including that of Brigadier-General Hoghton. On January 21 Townshend considered it necessary to reduce the ration issue by a half and thereafter the results of a poor diet became more obvious. In the case of the Indian troops their refusal to eat horsemeat led in the latter stages of the siege to a more rapid breakdown in their health. By the time sufficiently strong action had been taken to make them eat this otherwise forbidden flesh it was too late to recoup their strength. Brigadier-Generals Melliss and Delamain both considered that the communiqués issued by their superior contributed to the Indian soldiers' belief that relief was just around the corner and that there was no need to eat horseflesh. Having taken the precaution of obtaining a dispensation for this action from Muslim and Hindu religious leaders in India, Townshend did little to persuade his troops to take advantage of it and strict measures were taken too late in the day.

The complete passivity of Townshend's defence during this period has received

much comment. It was deplored by the General Staff in India who were singularly lacking in understanding of the affair. Three types of action could have been taken—a major effort to co-operate with approaching relief units, a breakout, and local offensive action. The credibility of the offensive/defensive rôle became suspect when Townshend destroyed his bridge. Any move to the right bank was hazardous especially if there was no intention of abandoning the Küt peninsula. The time factor here was critical. Too small a force mustered across the river was valueless and in danger. A larger force needed more time and, should the Turks have advance knowledge of the move, would leave the landward perimeter without reserves. Offensive action on the landward side was made difficult by the extremely poor going between the British and Turkish trenches, although this disadvantage applied equally to the Turks. Operations on either bank might just have been possible provided that timely and accurate information of Turkish moves and strengths had been available.

Townshend accounted a breakout attempt to be a mistake as well as 'a terrible thing to leave behind me the wounded and sick . . . and abandon them like a thief in the night'. To remove all his men and stores from Küt would take 14 days—possibly six working round the clock—and in his diary Townshend says 'it would want a Maskeleyne and Cook to get out of the place and if I could get away with 3,000 . . . it would be a miracle, and there are no miracles in war'.

Whether Townshend could have co-operated with Aylmer and Gorringer is a moot point. He was certainly prepared for the contingency—flying bridges were constructed to cross the river and ramps made to cross entrenchments should relief come via the left bank. On March 8, at the time of Aylmer's last attempt at relief, the Turks thought that the 6th Division might co-operate with the Tigris Corps. Probably an effort at this stage, even at the risk of the bridgehead being finally driven in, would have pulled Turkish reserves north to Küt,

The effect of Turkish shell fire on Küt. The population of Küt, estimated at 6,000, was hostile to the British, although, ironically, many of those who tried to escape were shot by the Turks





but Townshend was only willing to move when guaranteed a junction with the relief. Aylmer certainly expected help and signalled Kūt asking for news of the 6th Division's moves. Townshend, on the other hand, held back as he felt his strength insufficient to help and because the crossing of the Tigris could never have been a rapid manoeuvre. Furthermore, he feared the hostile population of Kūt who, apart from any direct action they might take, were in contact with the enemy. The latter, Townshend thought, would know all his moves including the work on bridge preparation. The continual passage of informers into and out of Kūt calls in question the value of Townshend's communiqués which in some cases may have provided information of value to the Turks.

**Disease and hunger**

By February 29 more than 800 of the besieged had been killed or died of wounds, twice that number were wounded and there had been 443 deaths from disease. Gastroenteritis, diarrhoea and malaria affected the British troops whilst dysentery, pneumonia and scurvy were the more prevalent causes of Indian deaths. Both alike suffered from frostbite and trench rheumatism.

The investing forces, of course, suffered no less than the besieged through the cold spell. Inundations of the Turkish advanced trenches and saps were sufficiently bad to cause their abandonment, and Khalil's front line opposite Kūt was withdrawn some 1,500 yards and remained there after the land dried out in February. Although on interior lines of communication, the Turkish force also lacked supplies. Mesopotamia provided little and Turkish priorities were for the *Third Army* fighting the Russians. The *Sixth Army* was often short of food and clothing, and suffered unreplaced losses from sickness.

On March 10 Khalil wrote to Townshend suggesting the unlikelihood of relief after the failure of Aylmer's attempt on March 8 and, in view of the disease and hunger reported by deserters, proposed that the garrison surrender to the Turks. Townshend rebuffed this suggestion but signalled Gorringe, now OC Relief Force in place of Aylmer, on March 11 asking if negotiations with Khalil might start while preparations for further relief attempts were under way. He considered that negotiations would be more successful with food in hand as a bargaining factor. Estimates at this time showed the garrison could exist at starvation rates until April 17. Townshend asked that his suggestion be put before the government 'in his own words', should Lake agree to act, to prevent any misunderstanding of his meaning. Townshend's argument in this case was that Kūt had served its purpose after three months. Lake disapprovingly forwarded the request and Townshend had his reply within a few days: he was to take no steps towards negotiations without authority from India. The War Office had considered the matter and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff signalled India 'deprecating' Townshend's proposals. Deprecation or not the suggestion must have sparked off a train of thought somewhere because Lake received a signal on March 29 saying that Captain T. E. Lawrence was due at Basra on March 30 to try and purchase a Turkish leader to facilitate the relief of Kūt.

A number of the communications with

Gorringe and Lake show a lowering in Townshend's own morale and in his faith in his own forces and those trying to relieve him. Thus, on March 11: 'If the Army Commander could authorise me definitely to tell all in Kūt that on relief, they will be sent back to India to refit, it would have a most beneficial effect on their spirits and also lessen desertion.' On the same day he complains again of the conduct of his Muslim and Hindu troops and, three days later, after discussing with GHQ the plans for using his artillery to support the next relief attempt, he says '... anxious you bring your absolute maximum for it is plain that if the next effort fails we shall be lost'. Townshend's request for a respite in India for the 6th Division was refused by Lake, who considered that 3rd and 7th Divisions who had earlier fought in France were equally as deserving as the garrison of Kūt.

Throughout March the scale of issue of food had to be decreased. Reductions made on the 8th and 18th of the month weakened the troops and disease became more prevalent. Discussion of the supplies in Kūt continued between Townshend and GHQ. On March 15 and again on March 18 he confirmed that the garrison could last until April 15. Troops in Kūt had now started to faint whilst on sentry duty, many fatigues were impossible as the soldiers no longer had enough strength to do them, and scurvy amongst the Indians had reached a total of 580 cases by the end of March. They had still to be persuaded to eat horseflesh, and Turkish propaganda, in the form of broadsheets, added to their poor state of morale. Even more discomfort was caused by the annual Tigris floods reaching Kūt by the middle of the month. Two of the redoubts were abandoned and communications with the fort were possible only by a raised track.

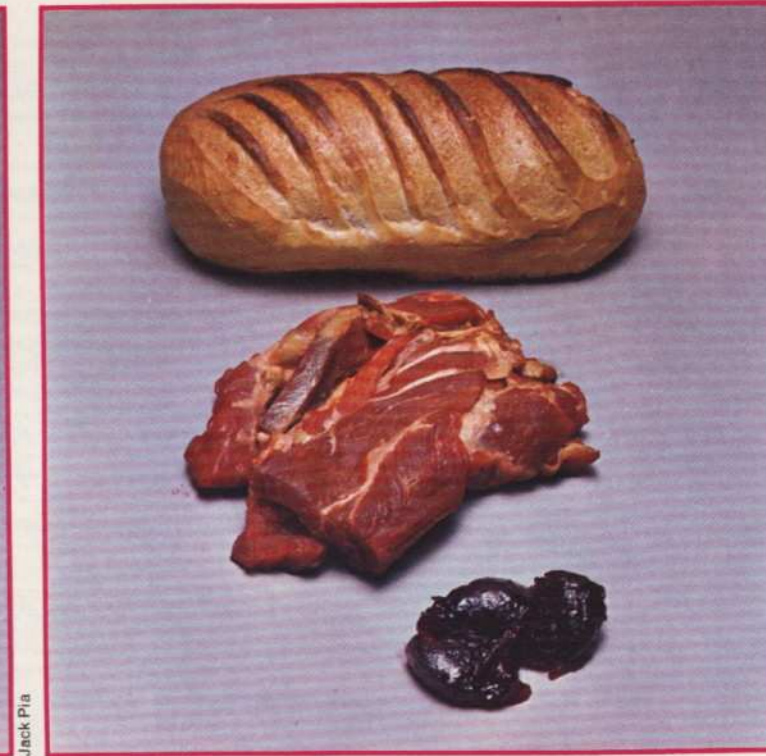
**The beginning of the end**

Quickly now the garrison in Kūt was approaching the end. It is doubtful if more than a few thousand were capable of sustained physical effort by the beginning of April. Food issues became even less, reaching their lowest ebb on April 10 when the grain ration for all was reduced to 5 ounces, which, with horseflesh, was all that was left. Co-operation with Gorringe was out of the question whichever bank he advanced on. The effort of ferrying or building flying bridges was beyond the garrison and the landward front remained inundated - Turkish trenches had become dykes 11 feet deep and six feet wide and these inundations reached into the defended perimeter of Kūt. Desperate measures were considered, and some tried, to keep the garrison from starving. Lake suggested that eviction of the 6,000 local inhabitants might save the day. Townshend replied that eviction by land was impossible because of the floods, while there were insufficient *mahailas* to send even half the native population by river. Moreover the Turks had taken to shooting all Arabs attempting to escape from Kūt: they would rather the locals consumed the food that would otherwise prolong the garrison's resistance. Lake also suggested an attempt by the Royal Navy to run the gauntlet and reach Kūt with a loaded supply ship. The navy considered the task suicidal but agreed to take it on providing no other means existed at all and as a last resort.

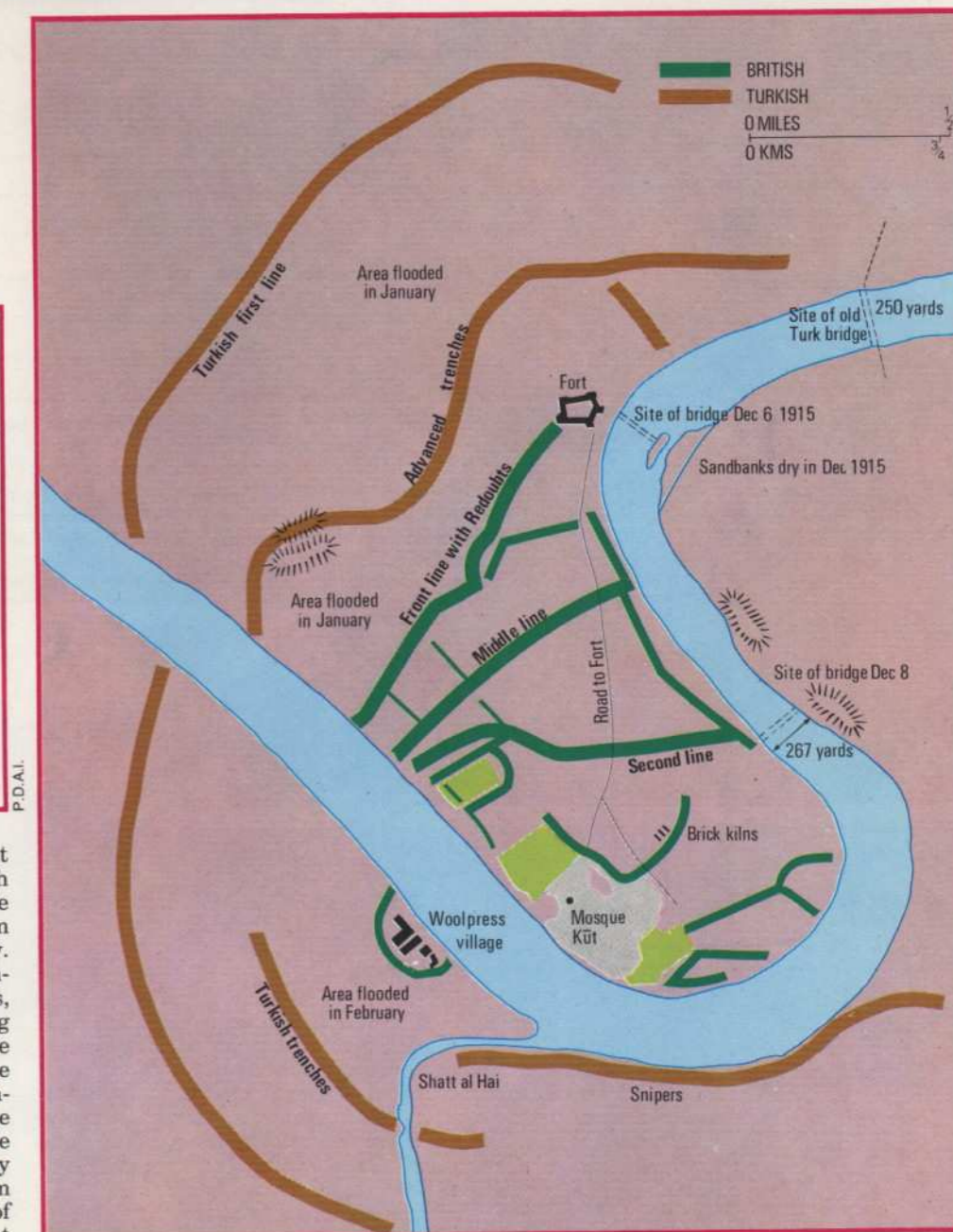
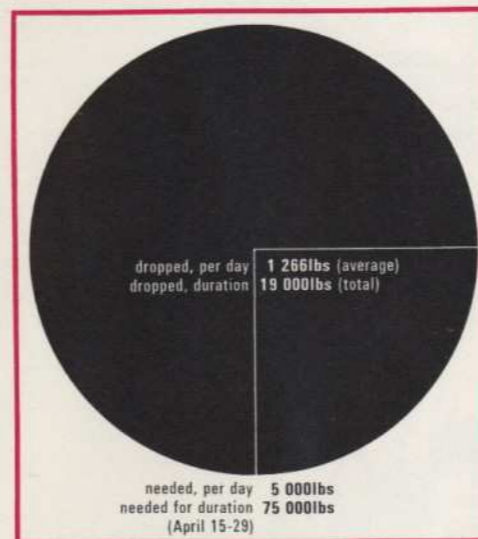
Finally, from April 12 onwards, work was put in hand to modify the few aircraft of the Tigris Corps so that supplies might be dropped to the garrison. This was the first time that supply by air had been attempted. Apparently the idea was a sudden thought of the air commander in Mesopotamia. As late as December 1915 an IEF 'D' memorandum on the subject of employment of aircraft quoted reconnaissance, bombing, intercommunication and artillery observation as possible tasks but made no mention of air supply. Townshend, when asked, stated that an air drop of some 5,000 pounds a day would allow the garrison to exist indefinitely. A few days were spent modifying the aircraft and the attempt began. It was bedevilled by bad weather, few aircraft (none of which were in the best of condition), the threat of the superior German aircraft attacking them, and the inexperience of the pilots. As a result Gorringe told Townshend that the maximum daily drop would be 3,350 pounds only. Rations inside Kūt were promptly reduced by a further ounce. In the event some 16,800 pounds of food were air-dropped into Kūt between April 15 and 27, unfortunately not enough. Townshend dismisses the attempt; in his memoirs he notes 'My anxiety now regarding food was intense, for it was patent to all of us that the air food supply service was a hopeless failure.' Had the idea to feed Kūt by air occurred earlier it might well have saved the day. Lawrence's opinion mentioned in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* was that with eight aeroplanes resistance could have been prolonged indefinitely.

Townshend continued to exhort all to yet another effort and explained to the Indian troops that they now had to eat the horsemeat that had been so long available to them. More than half did so and the majority of the remainder followed suit after Townshend's ultimatum to them on April 12. Colonel Hehir, however, noted on the same day that the Indians were now in a state of semi-starvation, emaciated and too weak to carry out the tasks of a defence force. It was clear that the chances of relief were slight indeed. On April 16 Townshend signalled Lake saying that the Turks would probably demand an unconditional surrender should Gorringe fail again unless they could be paid to let the garrison go. Should there be doubt of the chances of relief he considered it wise to commence negotiations at once while he still had some food available. Even the Arabs were at this stage deserting Kūt although the majority escaping were killed by the Turks. On April 19 Lake told Townshend that he hoped the garrison would not need to wait more than a few days for relief. It was a forlorn hope. By April 21 all ordinary rations had gone. Two days' emergency rations were made to last four days and for the remainder of the siege the garrison consumed the little food that had been got in by air. The desperate naval attempt to replenish the garrison with 270 tons of food in the *Julnar* failed and the badly needed stores fell into Turkish hands.

Townshend asked Lake whether or not negotiations should be opened on the 23rd and suggested that a parole be obtained, using money if necessary. His force was now so weak, and the Turkish besiegers themselves so short of supplies, that he hoped food would be allowed into the garrison while negotiations progressed. Two



Above left: The standard daily ration in 1915 for British troops overseas: Bread, cabbage, beef, bacon, pickles, jam, cheese, tea, sugar and condensed milk. Above right: The daily ration at the end of the siege of Kūt: 12 oz of bread, 1 1/4 lbs of horse meat, 1 oz of jam. Right: The siege of Kūt as the end drew near. Below: The chart shows the huge difference between Townshend's real needs in rations and the amount flown in. This was probably the first 'ration-drop' in military history. Food packages were dropped free from low-flying planes in specially prepared containers



days later he asked Lake to ensure that ten days' food was prepared for despatch to the garrison by April 29. Disease inside Kūt was now causing 15 deaths a day from dysentery and many more from scurvy. Townshend asked that the Army Commander should carry out the negotiations, but the latter replied on April 25 saying that Townshend was more likely to achieve better terms once permission by the government had been given. The negotiations were not Townshend's preference since without food he felt he would be arguing from weakness whereas the Army Commander could have argued from strength by threatening a resumption of hostilities. Hardly a convincing argument



1330c. (Established May, 1909) (Revised January, 1917) NAVAL SIGNAL.

FROM <i>Kut</i>	TO <i>Head Quarters R.E.F.</i>	P.O. or WIRE <i>W/T</i>
		REPORTED BY
		EXAMINED BY
		LOGGED BY
		DATE <i>29/4/16</i>
		TIME <i>1-35 pm</i>

*A Turkish regiment approaching  
fort to take their guards on Kut.  
I have hoisted the "White Flag"  
over town and Fort Troops  
commence going into camp  
near Shumran at 2 o'clock.  
Will shortly destroy the Wireless  
it is worth on as it is.*

*1-35 pm | General Townshend!*

*To All Ships & Stations from Kut.  
Good - Boys & Good Luck to All.*

1704/1900. Sta. 6/14. Sta. 596/16. [9415] 16306/E-450 1600. 7/18th G.A.S. 100 107

△ 1330 hours, April 29, 1916: Townshend's last signal from Kūt. The attempt to buy freedom with £1,000,000, and then £2,000,000 had failed and the whole force went into captivity. The Turks were not calculatedly cruel to their prisoners, but their characteristic indifference to suffering caused many needless deaths.

▽ General Townshend (seated in the middle) with his Turkish captors immediately after surrender



Aydun, Kut

in the circumstances!

On April 26 the surrender negotiations commenced and, as with other details of the siege of Kūt, controversy has raged around them ever since. Townshend was instructed to obtain the best terms he could and £1,000,000 were placed at his disposal. His first action was to write to the local Turkish commander saying that he was authorised to negotiate, that he wanted a six-day armistice, permission for food to be brought into the garrison and permission for Lawrence and Aubrey Herbert to join him at Kūt to assist with the negotiations. Also on April 26 Townshend sent a letter to Khalil repeating these details and adding that he hoped Khalil, who had already expressed admiration of the garrison's efforts, would grant honourable terms and allow them to return to India on parole. He added that Khalil would not then be burdened with having to feed, pay and transport the survivors as prisoners of war. Khalil's reply was equivocal, saying that Townshend and the garrison would receive an honourable reception in Turkey as did Osman Pasha in Russia after Plevna.

#### Surrender

The two commanders met on April 27 when all hostilities ceased. Khalil at first demanded an unconditional surrender followed by captivity. Further discussion and the mention of money elicited a hope from Khalil that better terms might be possible but Enver would need to be consulted first. Khalil was insistent, however, that while negotiations took place the 6th Division should move out of Kūt after which they would be supplied with tents and food from the *Julnar*. This initial conference was held by the two generals in secrecy.

Lake, pressed again by Townshend to take over negotiations, refused on grounds of the delay that would ensue. Townshend was told he could offer his guns, money and an exchange of prisoners in exchange for a parole. In addition Townshend was asked to obtain a guarantee for the civilian population of Kūt and to do what he could to block the Tigris. On April 28 Townshend wrote to Khalil offering these terms and asking him to reconsider the matter. The garrison was not prepared to evacuate Kūt in what amounted to unconditional sur-

render but would move to a tented camp on high ground near the fort to meet Khalil's wishes. Townshend pointed out that his doctors had said some 20-30 soldiers would die each day if taken into captivity in their enfeebled condition. Khalil, in his diary, remarks that it was necessary for Townshend to be taken prisoner to support Turkish morale, that he had no interest in the British manufactured weapons which his ammunition did not fit, and lastly that he considered the £1,000,000 offer a joke. Later on the 28th Khalil replied mentioning that Enver would parole only Townshend personally but his troops must stay captive. Townshend asked for further instructions from Lake and suggested 'upping the ante' to £2,000,000 with an exchange of an equal number of Turkish POW for the complete garrison at Kūt. Lawrence and Herbert conducted the negotiations without success. In a letter to his mother in May 1916 Lawrence said he had been pessimistic of his chances, knowing Khalil had all the cards in his hands, and in fact the attempt failed. Later Khalil did agree to allow the seriously sick in Kūt to go down to Basra in exchange for an equal number of Turkish POWs - Khalil specifying the regiments concerned and confirming to Lawrence his distrust of the Arab soldiery in the Turkish army who he stipulated should not be included in the exchange.

On April 29 Townshend destroyed his guns and ammunition and told Khalil he was ready to surrender. He hoped for generous treatment for his division. At 1300 hours the garrison wireless tapped out 'good-bye' and was destroyed.

The strength of the garrison when the surrender came was 13,309. The total casualties amounted to 3,776, of which 1,025 had been killed or died of wounds, 2,446 were wounded and 721 had died of disease. The hospital in Kūt contained 1,450 sick and wounded on April 29, most of whom were exchanged at once, followed by a further group three months later. Colonel Hehir in his report to the Mesopotamia Commission notes that there had been 3,000 cases of disease during the siege.

Later on April 29 the garrison moved into camp near Shumran. The food promised by Khalil did not appear until May 3

and then not from the *Julnar* and, although the Turks had not behaved in any overtly cruel fashion at this stage, their lack of interest in the fate of the captives was sufficient to cause 300 deaths within a week of the surrender. This treatment presaged one of the most unpleasant episodes of the war. Four thousand of the remaining 12,000 POWs are known to have died in captivity, including over 70% of the British rank and file. Of the Indian troops the ultimate fate of many is unknown. One thousand three hundred are known to have died, but escapees were still arriving in India as late as 1924.

The surrender was an inglorious end to a sad chapter of British military muddle. The blow to British pride was enormous and recriminatory action commenced almost at once, but for the dead and captive it was too late. The effects of the surrender at Kūt reverberated round the War Office and the Cabinet, and if nothing else was achieved by this failure it at least forced a complete reorganisation of the army in Mesopotamia.

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Arab refugees returning to their homes in war-ravaged Kūt



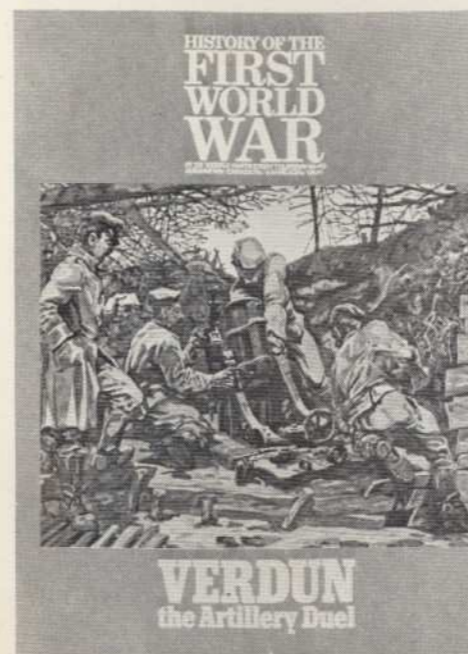
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# Volume 3 Contents

ISSUE 1	902	<b>Gallipoli: The Second Stage</b> <i>Richard Wright</i>	9	1125	<b>Salonika</b> <i>Alan Palmer</i>
	912	<b>Gallipoli: The Generals</b> <i>Lieutenant-Colonel Shepperd</i>		1130	<b>Gallipoli: Evacuation and Withdrawal</b> <i>Alan Wykes</i>
	914	<b>Submarines in the Marmara</b> <i>Lieutenant-Commander Peter Kemp</i>		1138	<b>Gallipoli Judgement</b> <i>The late Sir Basil Liddell Hart</i>
	920	<b>Naval War in the Mediterranean</b> <i>Lieutenant-Commander Peter Kemp</i>		1142	<b>The Mesopotamia Situation</b> <i>Lieutenant-Colonel A. J. Barker</i>
	926	<b>Second Givenchy and Bellewaarde Farm</b> <i>Kenneth Macksey</i>		1146	<b>Townshend's Regatta</b> <i>Lieutenant-Colonel A. J. Barker</i>
2	929	<b>Gorlice: Turning Point on the Eastern Front</b> <i>Dr Kurt Peball</i>		1149	<b>The Capture of Kut</b> <i>Lieutenant-Colonel A. J. Barker</i>
	936	<b>Russia: Exhaustion and Decline</b> <i>Philip Longworth</i>	10	1153	<b>Persia: Stepping Stone to India</b> <i>Eugene Hinterhoff</i>
	945	<b>Commanders on the Eastern Front</b> <i>J. F. N. Bradley</i>		1158	<b>Strategy and Supply in the Desert</b> <i>Lieutenant-Colonel A. J. Barker</i>
	947	<b>Naval War in the Baltic</b> <i>David Woodward</i>		1164	<b>Ctesiphon: Townshend's Pyrrhic Victory</b> <i>Major-General H. H. Rich</i>
	952	<b>Austria-Hungary: Exhaustion and Decline</b> <i>Norman Stone</i>		1174	<b>Retreat to Kut</b> <i>Lieutenant-Colonel A. J. Barker</i>
3	957	<b>The Fall of Warsaw</b> <i>Leo Kahn</i>	11	1181	<b>The New Warfare</b> <i>Major-General H. Essame</i>
	970	<b>The Eastward Exodus</b> <i>Robert V. Allen</i>		1186	<b>The Ammunition Scandal</b> <i>Major Henry Harris</i>
	976	<b>Japan and the 21 Demands</b> <i>Ian Nish</i>		1191	<b>The Belligerents</b> <i>Major-General Sixsmith</i>
	980	<b>Rommel in the Argonne</b>		1200	<b>Neutral Attitudes</b> <i>D. R. Shermer</i>
4	985	<b>Zeppelins: The Growing Threat</b> <i>Douglas Robinson</i>	12	1209	<b>Plans for 1916</b> <i>Brigadier Anthony Farrar-Hockley</i>
	992	<b>Zeppelins: A Pilot's View</b>		1216	<b>The Fall of Sir John French</b> <i>Patrick Scrivenor</i>
	994	<b>Air War: The First Fighter Planes</b> <i>D. B. Tubbs</i>		1217	<b>Haig and Robertson</b> <i>John Keegan</i>
	1004	<b>America: The Benevolent Neutral</b> <i>Marion C. Siney</i>		1218	<b>The Tunnel War</b> <i>W. T. T. Prince</i>
	1010	<b>The First Flame Attack</b> <i>Michael Dewar</i>		1224	<b>Peace Moves</b> <i>Charles Neu</i>
5	1013	<b>Kitchener's First 100,000</b> <i>Peter Simkins</i>		1228	<b>Austria on the Defensive</b> <i>Friedrich Wiener</i>
	1020	<b>French Offensives in Artois and Champagne</b> <i>John Keegan</i>	13	1237	<b>Montenegro—The Smallest Ally</b> <i>Alan Palmer</i>
	1030	<b>Loos</b> <i>Alistair Horne</i>		1242	<b>Verdun—The Plans</b> <i>Christopher Duffy</i>
	1036	<b>The Chinese Situation</b> <i>Ronald Heiferman</i>		1248	<b>Verdun—The Storm Breaks</b> <i>Alistair Horne</i>
6	1041	<b>The ANZACs</b> <i>John Vader</i>		1260	<b>Crown Prince Wilhelm and Pétain</b> <i>John Keegan</i>
	1048	<b>Suvla Bay</b> <i>Don Schurman</i>		1262	<b>The Fall of Erzerum</b> <i>Robert C. Walton</i>
	1060	<b>Desert Rescue</b> <i>Major J. W. K. Bingham</i>	14	1265	<b>Fort Douaumont</b> <i>Kenneth Macksey</i>
	1064	<b>The Senussi War</b> <i>Gregory Blaxland</i>		1274	<b>Portugal at War</b> <i>Hernani A. Cidade</i>
7	1069	<b>Bulgaria Joins the War</b> <i>D. R. Shermer</i>		1276	<b>Conscription</b> <i>Arthur Marwick</i>
	1076	<b>Bulgaria's Forces</b> <i>Jan Beránek</i>		1286	<b>Lake Narotch</b> <i>Ward Rutherford</i>
	1084	<b>Gunboats on the Danube</b> <i>Peter Kemp</i>	15	1293	<b>The Easter Rising</b> <i>Constantine Fitzgibbon</i>
	1089	<b>The Secret War: Intelligence</b> <i>Donald McLachlan</i>		1306	<b>Trabzond: Russian Success in Turkey</b> <i>Robert C. Walton</i>
8	1097	<b>Mackensen's Balkan Victory</b> <i>Norman Stone</i>		1314	<b>The End in the Cameroons</b> <i>David Chandler</i>
	1113	<b>Serbia: The Long Retreat</b> <i>Dr Kurt Peball</i>	16	1321	<b>Genocide in Turkey</b> <i>A. O. Sarkissian</i>
	1121	<b>A British Nurse in Serbia</b> <i>Pamela Bright</i>		1328	<b>Relief of Kut—The First Attempt</b> <i>F. W. Woodhouse</i>
	1123	<b>Naval War in the Adriatic</b> <i>Peter Kemp</i>		1332	<b>Relief of Kut—The Last Chance</b> <i>Lieutenant-Colonel A. J. Barker</i>
				1340	<b>Townshend: Surrender, Capture and Disgrace</b> <i>Donald Clark</i>

Next week:



Massacre of Kazak Tribes

In 1916, while Russia was waging a life-and-death struggle on her western frontiers, her government was confronted with uprisings within her borders.

The agricultural crisis of the late 19th Century had given rise to the government's policy of the colonisation of Central Asia, under which thousands of Caucasian and Ukrainian families were moved east to occupy lands on which the Kazak and Kirghiz tribes depended for their livelihood. Unrest and dissatisfaction among these nomadic peoples culminated in organised rebellion when, in June 1916, the Tsar signed a decree calling for the drafting of 250,000 of them into a labour force. Moslem by faith, a law of 1886 had exempted them from military service, and the Tsar's decree was seen as yet another injustice that invited some form of protest. The armed uprising of the Kazak and Kirghiz tribes—a little-publicised aspect of the war—was answered by brutal repression during which more than 100,000 men lost their lives

Verdun: June 1916

The spring fighting in the hills around Verdun had cost thousands of lives on both sides. By the end of May, Pétain's policy of a massive turnover of troops had resulted in a slight advantage for the French. But Joffre was concerned that the concentration of fresh troops for the Verdun sector, at the expense of other parts of the line, was too dangerous a policy to pursue for long and replaced Pétain with the impetuous and ambitious Nivelle. The fact that Pétain's policy was shown to be working—however slowly—would seem to indicate that Joffre's move was mistimed—if not completely mistaken. For it was at this point that the Crown Prince declared himself resigned to relinquishing his visions of victory. Had Pétain been allowed to pursue his policy, the French might have been justified in heralding him as the 'saviour of Verdun'. But Verdun would drag on indefinitely now: Nivelle and Knobelsdorf, the new German commander, were men who believed in fighting to the bitterest end



Exhausted, dejected, French troops return from the Verdun front—the 'mincing machine' through which most of the French army was fed



## Return to Civilisation?

*Sir Ernest Shackleton sailed from England on August 1, 1914 in the Endurance, intending to cross the Antarctic Continent by way of the South Pole. The Endurance was caught in the ice and crushed in October, 1915; after drifting on a floe for some months, and then crossing in open boats to Elephant Island, the 28 men eventually managed to reach South Georgia. Shivering with cold, yet with hearts light and happy, we set off towards the whaling station, not now more than a mile and a half distant. We tried to straighten ourselves up a bit, for the thought that there might be women at the station made us painfully conscious of our uncivilised appearance. Our beards were long and our hair was matted. We were unwashed and the garments we had worn for nearly a year without a change were tattered and stained. We reached the outskirts of the station and passed through the 'digesting house', which was dark inside. Emerging at the other end, we met an old man who started as if he had seen the Devil himself and gave us no time to*

ask any question. He hurried away. This greeting was not friendly. Then we came to the wharf where the man in charge stuck to his station. I asked him if Mr. Sorlle, the manager, was in the house.

'Yes,' he said as he stared at us.

'We would like to see him,' said I.

'Who are you?' he asked.

'We have lost our ship and come over the island,' I replied.

'You have come over the island,' he said in a tone of entire disbelief.

Mr. Sorlle came to the door and said, 'Well?'

'Don't you know me?' I said.

'I know your voice,' he replied doubtfully.

'You're the mate of the *Daisy*.'

'My name is Shackleton,' I said.

Immediately he put out his hand and said, 'Come in, come in.'

'Tell me, when was the war over?' I asked.

'The war is not over,' he answered. 'Millions are being killed. Europe is mad. The world is mad.'

Sir Ernest Shackleton

