

THE ATTEMPT TO RECAPTURE BASRAH.

BY LIEUT.-COLONEL C. C. R. MURPHY, I.A.

THE Turks' attempt to recapture Basrah in mid-April, 1915, resulted in three days' fighting which will go down to history under the name of the Battle of Barjisiyah. The story of this battle from the British point of view was briefly told in an article entitled "The Operations in Mesopotamia," which appeared in the *Journal of the United Service Institution of India* for October, 1915. It is now proposed to give an account of it entirely from the Turkish side.

During the winter of 1918-19 the writer found himself in Constantinople where, through the courtesy of the Turkish General Staff, he made the acquaintance of two experienced Turkish officers who were present at Barjisiyah. One of these, Lieut.-Colonel Ali Bey, of the Fire Extinguishing Regiment,¹ was of great importance to our subject, because, as we shall see, he was virtually in command throughout that battle. Moreover, he had kept a diary from the day he left Constantinople. This diary, which he was good enough to hand over to the writer, was not intended for publication, or still less for perusal by a British officer, and is therefore of special value and interest. The other officer was Major Adil Bey,² General Staff, who was in Mesopotamia from the outbreak of hostilities till after Barjisiyah. The following account is compiled from the diary of Lieut.-Colonel Ali Bey; from cross-examinations to which both he and Major Adil Bey submitted with great patience; and from records in the Turkish War Office in Constantinople.

The news of the defeat of Subhi Bey at Zain³ on November 17th, 1914, and of the sudden collapse of the 38th Division, caused no little dismay at the Ministry of War in Stamboul, for they knew that the occupation of Basrah by the small British force under Sir Arthur Barrett would follow in a few days. Enver Pasha at once resolved that the British should be driven out of Mesopotamia at all costs. On November 22nd, that is to say, the day before Sir Arthur Barrett entered Basrah, Enver Pasha sent for Ali Bey and ordered him to form an independent Fire Extinguishing Regiment from the existing battalions and to mobilize it for service in Mesopotamia. This was done, and two splendid battalions, each consisting of 21 officers and 1,030 men, and with two machine-guns borrowed from the 5th Regiment, left Constantinople on December 3rd and 4th respectively.

¹ See Note 1 at the end of this article.

² This officer was in command of the Turks at Saihan, on November 15th, 1914, when they were defeated by Major-General Delamain.

³ This is the correct name of the battle which delivered Basrah into British hands. Written in full it is Kut-az-Zain.

Thus, within ten days of the fall of Basrah, the first batch of reinforcements for that front left the capital. Others were to follow. Ali Bey says:—"The 2nd Battalion paraded on the square in front of the Ministry of War at 5 p.m. to-day (December 3rd). Enver Pasha came out and said good-bye to the troops. Headed by the band we then marched down to Sirkidje, where we took boats and crossed over to Haidar Pasha. This battalion, which I accompanied, left Haidar Pasha at 11 p.m. for Bezanti."

Then follows a description of their journey. From Bezanti they marched to Tarsus, whence they went by rail to Alexandretta. From there they marched to Katma, where they again entrained. On December 20th they reached Jerablus, on the Euphrates, and four days later they set out on their long journey down the river. Their fleet consisted of no less than eighty *shakhturs*, each capable of carrying thirty-two men. The officers' and machine-gun section's horses were loaded in the *shakhturs*, the remainder being sent by road to Feluja. They reached Nasiriyah on January 27th, 1915, so that their journey from Constantinople had taken them fifty-four days. The following is an appreciation of the situation, and a summary of events from January 28th, according to Ali Bey.

On arrival at Nasiriyah Ali Bey received long instructions from Lieut.-Colonel Sulaiman Askeri, General Staff. Ali Bey was appointed to the command of the Right Wing¹ and informed that henceforth he would be responsible for the organization and preparation of the troops and tribesmen as far as operations were concerned, and also for the lines of communication. Up to January 28th, the Right Wing command had consisted of the following remnants of the 38th Division:—

- 2 Arab battalions of about 400 men each.
- 1 squadron of cavalry.
- 1 field battery of 6 guns (not Q.F.).
- 2 mountain guns (not Q.F.).
- 1 field hospital section.

There were also the Arab tribesmen under "Saaduni Ajaimi Bey" and Abdullah Falih Bey. Also some of the Nejef tribes.

The Arab tribes of Mesopotamia are valueless. They were armed with the old pattern Mauser, with black powder ammunition. These arms and ammunition had been captured from the Turkish troops which had been sent from time to time to try and restore order amongst the Arabs. Most of the officers in the Irak divisions² were Arabs having no authority with their men. The civil administration in these parts was very weak, so the Turks had to depend entirely upon Turkish troops.

¹ The Turkish forces in Mesopotamia in February, 1915, were divided into three parts, namely, the Right Wing command, at Nasiriyah; the Left Wing command, in the Ahwaz area; and the Kurna (or Central) command operating on the Lower Tigris.

² The 35th, 36th, 37th, and 38th Divisions.

After the fall of Basrah, Javid Pasha¹ made overtures to Ajaimi in order to get the benefit of his personal influence. Ajaimi accepted mainly with a view to revenging himself on Saiyyid Talib and also to try and make good the losses to his property in the Muntafik country.

In addition to Ajaimi there were some *saiyyids*, such as Saiyyid Muhammad Habubi and Saiyyid Hadi, both from Kerbela; and Shaikh Bakir, from Suq-ash-Shuyukh. These persons had thrown in their lot with the Turks on account of the proclamation of a *jihad*, but at the same time they were selling their rice to the British. This was the situation when Ali Bey took over the command of the Right Wing. One of the Arab battalions mentioned above, the field battery, the field hospital, as well as the Nejef tribes, were then at Nasiriyah. The other Arab battalion, the cavalry squadron, the two mountain guns, and Ajaimi's tribesmen, were at Alawi. At that time some of the Kurdish tribes from the Sulaimaniyah and Kerkuk districts had sent down mounted contingents under the members of parliament for those places. These personages had telegraphed to Constantinople exaggerating the number of men they had sent, and saying that they had paid all their expenses up to Nasiriyah. In reality, the men were being paid by Sulaiman Askeri at the rate of two piastres a day for each infantryman, and two and a half piastres a day for each mounted man, besides forage for his horse.

The Osmanjik battalion,² under Sulaiman Askeri, was being brought from the Kurna to the Right Wing command, together with the remainder of the 1st/26th Regiment, which had been sent to Basrah before the war, when Sulaiman Shefik Pasha was Vali of that city. The 1st/26th Regiment had taken part in all the fighting up to Basrah and had lost so heavily that the battalion was now reduced to about a hundred and seventy men. Two howitzers were being sent to the Right Wing command, and the remnants of the 35th Division. All these units arrived in Nasiriyah between January 28th and March 28th. Communication was established between the Tigris and the Euphrates along the Shatt-al-Gharaf, and food depots were organized at Khamisiyah, Ghabisiyah, and Nakhailah. The Arab battalion from Nasiriyah, with a field battery and some tribesmen, were sent down to Nakhailah to put that place into a state of defence and to get into touch with the British. Those portions of the 35th Division which arrived first were sent on to Khamisiyah to support the advance troops at Nakhailah. The 35th Division consisted of two regiments of two battalions each, namely, the 104th and 105th Regiments, each battalion being about 600 strong; an engineer company; a cavalry squadron; an artillery battalion of two batteries, each battery of six guns, not Q.F.; a divisional military band; and a field hospital. The 103rd Regiment, consisting of two battalions, each 600 strong, was sent to the Kurna command.

¹ Javid Pasha was Vali of Baghdad, and Inspector of the XIIth and XIIIth Army Corps when war broke out. He was recalled to Constantinople in January, 1915.

² See Note 2 at the end of this article.

The 35th Division was formed after the Balkan War, and belonged to the Mosul Army Corps. It was composed of men from the Mosul area and had no fighting value. At the outbreak of the Great War the division was sent to Aleppo, but for some reason unknown to Ali Bey it was recalled to Baghdad. When it arrived at Mosul a great many of the men deserted, and the result was that the ranks of the division were filled up with untrained and undisciplined Arabs from the Mosul area who were only soldiers in dress. The Osmanjik battalion, and what was left of the 1st/26th Regiment, arrived at Nasiriyah about the middle of March. The advance was then about to take place. The commander of the whole force, Sulaiman Askeri, arrived about the same time. He had been severely wounded and was being carried about on a stretcher.

Sulaiman Askeri Bey had passed through the Ecole Militaire, Constantinople, and was therefore a trained Staff officer. His early military life was spent in the Monastir district hunting down Bulgarian brigands. After the Constitution he went to Baghdad when Nazim Pasha was Vali there, and thus he became acquainted with Mesopotamia. In the Italian war in Tripoli in 1911 he went to Benghazi, where he remained, in the dress of an Arab, for a year under Enver. In the Balkan War he greatly distinguished himself by his bravery. During the advance of the Turkish Army from Bulair to Adrianople he crossed the frontier and entered Bulgaria. At the end of that war he resigned, but his resignation was not accepted. At the outbreak of the Great War it was considered desirable by the Committee of Union and Progress to send him as far away from Constantinople as possible, so with 450 selected men¹ he left that city for Baghdad.

Before the arrival of the Fire Brigade he had attacked the British at Kurna, where he was wounded. One bullet hit him in the left leg below the knee, breaking the bone, and another hit him in the hip. As his cure would take perhaps six months he became depressed and returned to Baghdad. The Ministry of War sent out Lieut.-Colonel Kiazim Bey to take his place, but on the arrival of that officer in Baghdad Sulaiman Askeri telegraphed to Constantinople that he would not hand over his command; so Kiazim Bey returned. Wounded and weak, Sulaiman Askeri travelled from Baghdad down to Shatrah by boat, and on to Nasiriyah in a stretcher. On his arrival there all the shaikhs and saiyids came troubling him "about money and nonsense." There was little talk of duty and preparation for fighting.

On March 27th the 35th Division was pushed forward to Khamisiyah, and the Nasiriyah force crossed over to the south bank of the Euphrates at Shamiyah. The troops of the Right Wing command, and the tribesmen, were to attack Sha'aibah on April 12th. This order was issued to the Right and Left Wings and also to the Kurna command.

The information available regarding the British force was as follows. The advanced Turkish troops at Nakhailah had come into

¹ The Osmanjik Battalion.

contact with the British. But Saifullah Bey, who was in command there, and Ajaimi, had been sending in fanciful reports of no military value, and so, when the 35th Division arrived in Khamisiyah, the officer commanding the division took over charge of the Nakhailah post. On March 3rd, 8th, and 16th he made reconnaissances and reported that the following units had been identified as being present with the British force at Sha'aibah :—

103rd Light Infantry.
 12th Infantry.
 2nd Battalion Norfolk Regiment.
 7th Rajputs.
 33rd Cavalry.
 76th Battery, R.F.A.
 30th Mountain Battery.
 48th Pioneers.
 17th Signal Company.

It was known that the Sha'aibah towers (*qasr*) were fortified, and also that it was possible to reinforce any part of the British line with troops from Basrah.

The order of battle of the Right Wing command, and the tribesmen, concentrated between Shamiyah and Nakhailah was, on March 27th, 1915, as follows :—

REGULARS.

Headquarters of the Right Wing Command.

15 officers.
 92 other ranks.

Headquarters of the 35th Division.

14 officers.
 101 other ranks.

104th Regiment.

44 officers.
 1,450 other ranks.

105th Regiment.

41 officers.
 1,395 other ranks.

Cavalry Squadron of the 35th Division.

2 officers.
 70 other ranks.

Artillery Battalion.

19 officers.
 335 other ranks.
 12 field guns.
 533 rounds common shell.
 2,135 rounds shrapnel shell.

Engineer Company.

2 officers.

80 other ranks.

Cavalry Squadron.

3 officers.

95 other ranks.

1st Muretteb Battalion.

(The Osmanjik Battalion and the 1/26th Regiment.)

17 officers.

729 other ranks.

The Fire Extinguishing Regiment.

43 officers (including Ali Bey).

2,046 other ranks.

Muretteb Irak Regiment.

(2 Arab battalions.)

39 officers.

850 other ranks.

Muretteb Field Battery.

4 officers.

216 other ranks.

5 field guns (not Q.F.).

412 rounds common shell.

600 rounds shrapnel shell.

Mountain Artillery Section.

1 officer.

50 other ranks.

3 mountain guns.¹

333 rounds common shell.

74 rounds shrapnel shell.

Howitzer Section.

1 officer.

58 other ranks.

2 howitzers (10.5 cm.).

500 rounds common shell.

200 rounds shrapnel shell.

Cavalry Squadron.

2 officers.

80 other ranks.

The above numbers *include* non-combatants.

Total: 244 officers and 7,353 other ranks, with 22 guns.

¹ Probably a mistake for two.

TRIBESMEN.

With Ajaimi Bey.

6,153 foot.
630 horse.

With Abdullah Falih Bey.

1,550 foot.
1,000 horse.

Mujahidin of Shamiyah and Hindiyah.

1,027 foot.
211 horse.

El Bedur, El Khafajah, Abu Sa'id, and El Husainat Tribes.

930 foot.
600 horse.

Kurdish Mujahidin.

175 foot.
1,134 horse.

Janun-el-Ubaiyid.

800 foot.
81 horse.

With Saiyyid Hadi.

4,032 foot.
36 horse.

Totals : 14,667 foot.
3,692 horse.

Tribesmen	18,359
Regulars	7,597

Grand total 25,956¹

The numbers of these tribesmen changed every day. It was to the advantage of the shaikhs to exaggerate the strength of their following because they were being paid so much per man. Their rifles were of many kinds, much worn, very dirty, and mostly without backsights. The tribesmen had no modern fighting value, and moreover, no love for the Turks. On March 30th most of the Jaf, Hamawend, and Nejef tribes deserted from Nakhailah and went back to Khamisiyah. Sulaiman Askeri said that in the Turkish Army there was no place for deserters, and sent them to their homes. This

¹ This was on March 27th. Many desertions took place between that date and April 12th, when Sulaiman Askeri's total force at Barjisiyah, including non-combatants, probably did not exceed 18,000 men.

shows the futility of trusting to these tribesmen. The Nakhailah Arabs said that the British position at Sha'aibah was an open one and could be stormed in an hour. At the same time they were writing to Sulaiman Askeri that if the attack were really going to take place they would not remain. They were telling the British that the Turks would not attack, and they were telling the Turks that the British had evacuated Sha'aibah. The result of all this was that the Turks knew that their attack on Sha'aibah would fail, but as Sulaiman had given his word to Enver Pasha the attack would have to take place.

The organization of the lines of communication on March 27th was as follows:—Along the Euphrates line, provisions and stores came to Nasiriyah by river. From the Tigris line they came by the Shatt-al-Gharaf as far as Shatrah by steamer, from Shatrah to Decheh by small boat, and then on to Nasiriyah by land. From Nasiriyah to Khamisiyah, Suq-ash-Shuyukh, and Suwaichah, by *mahailah* and *bellem*. From Suq-ash-Shuyukh and Suwaichah to Ghabisiyah *via* Sinafur by river. The British motor boats at the last-named place did no harm at all. Two Turkish steamers and two motor boats assisted in the transport work. From Ghabisiyah the troops used their own transport for carrying their rations. In Nasiriyah there were large supply and munition dumps. When the British took to shelling the transport by means of guns put on to *mahailahs*, the Turks had to withdraw their depot on the water's edge at Ghabisiyah to a point inland, and they sent two guns and a company of infantry to guard it.

On the morning of March 28th, at five o'clock, the Fire Brigade, which was on the Shamiyah side of the river, the 1st Muretteb Battalion, a field battery under the command of a German reserve officer, the howitzer section, the Kurdish volunteers, and the headquarters of the Right Wing command, started for Abu Salibiq. The track had been put in order beforehand, and the march was an easy one. The following morning they again made an early start and got as far as Khamisiyah. Immediately on arrival there the 35th Division and the ammunition columns were sent on to Ghabisiyah, and on the afternoon of April 2nd the remainder of the troops in Khamisiyah went forward. The first halt was made at Hamadah, the second at Legait, and the third at Ghabisiyah. By April 4th all the troops had reached Ghabisiyah, whence some were sent on to Nakhailah. The Right Wing troops, after spending a night at Rumailah, reached Nakhailah on April 8th. Ten days' rations for the troops had been sent here on camels. The advanced troops already in Nakhailah now rejoined their units.

The Staff Officer, who had been sent on ahead to make reconnaissances and to study the ground over which the attack was to be made, now reported as follows:—"The enemy have made no fortifications at Barjisiyah, Zubair, or round about there. The ground is gently undulating. There are no British troops or fortifications on the Sha'aibah mounds lying north and south-east of the Barjisiyah-Kuwaibdah line. From these mounds Sha'aibah itself is distant about four kilometres. On this rising ground there are a few shallow trenches

knee-deep. The enemy have entrenched themselves strongly on the south-east of the line of the Sha'aibah towers. Behind this position, on the *khôr* side, many tents are to be seen. The British advanced line is about 500 kilometres in front of the Sha'aibah towers. About half an hour before sunset the Turkish reconnoitring troops went to the northern entrance to Zubair, and at sunset they approached to within a couple of kilometres of Sha'aibah. Both sides opened fire, the enemy being reinforced by an infantry company and two machine-guns. They also sent some cavalry and a battery towards their left flank. From this skirmish we got the impression that the British force and position were of considerable strength."

The question of water was one of great importance to the attack. There were only two watering places, Barjisiyah and Zubair, of which the former was much the better. The Turks were therefore obliged to make a dangerous flank march close to the enemy's position round the Sha'aibah towers. A squadron of regular cavalry and some mounted tribesmen now made a reconnaissance round about Barjisiyah, Zubair, and Kuwaibdah.

On the night of April 10th the force moved towards Barjisiyah in two columns, and on the 11th reached the wood before sunrise. After digging trenches the tired troops were given a rest. There were no signs that the enemy had discovered them. The men were forbidden to leave the wood or to light fires. At three p.m. Ali Bey, with the commanding officers, made a reconnaissance, moving at first towards Zubair and then towards Sha'aibah. The enemy opened fire on them with all three arms, but they gained a useful knowledge of the ground. When they got back to Barjisiyah Wood, Sulaiman Askeri Bey, who was lying on a stretcher, gave orders to attack, which were as follows:—

"OPERATION ORDERS, RIGHT WING COMMAND.

"Barjisiyah Wood, April 11th, 1915.

"1. To-day the enemy opened artillery and machine-gun fire on our cavalry patrols on a line south-west from Markab Sha'aibah towers.

"2. The troops of the Right Wing command will attack the enemy's position to-morrow morning before sunrise. The troops and *mujahidin* will creep up close under cover of the darkness. The objective of the attack is the Sha'aibah *qasr*.

"3. Ajaimi Bey and his tribesmen will attack at right-angles to the line of the Markab Sha'aibah towers; the 1st Muretteb Battalion to the left of this line; the Fire Brigade to the right of this line, advancing from a north-westerly direction. The 104th Regiment, from the centre of the north-western exit of Barjisiyah Wood, facing north, will attack the south mounds of Sha'aibah. The Muretteb Irak Regiments, with two mountain guns and the *mujahidin* of Abdullah Falih Bey, under Major Vedad Bey, will attack in the same direction. The Hindiyyah and Shamiyyah *Mujahidin*, under Saiyyid Muhammad Habubi and Captain Shevket Bey, will attack the Sha'aibah mounds

between the *khôr* and the troops under Vedad Bey. The 105th Regiment, the cavalry squadron, and the Kurdish horsemen under Deputy Zia Bey, will be in reserve at the exit of Barjisiyah Wood which faces Sha'aibah. Ajaimi Bey will send some of his men in the direction of Gurmat Ali. The mounted men of Abdullah Falih Bey will attack the enemy's right flank. The Muretteb field battery will take up a position in rear of the centre of the Fire Brigade on a spot which has been pointed out to-day to the artillery commander. The artillery battalion of the 35th Division will take up a position, which will be pointed out, in rear of the 104th Regiment. The howitzers will take up a position in rear of the Fire Brigade Regiment.

"4. Artillery and infantry units will replenish their ammunition under their own arrangements.

"5. A field hospital will be established behind the Fire Brigade and the 1st Muretteb Battalion. A second field hospital will be established in rear of, and between, the 104th Regiment and the Muretteb Irak Regiment. Some field hospital sections will be located at the exit of Barjisiyah Wood.

"6. My position will be in rear of, and between, the Fire Brigade and the 104th Regiment.

"7. The Engineer Company will prepare the artillery emplacements and will destroy obstacles.

"(Signed) ALI BEY, Lieut.-Colonel,

"O.C. Right Wing."

The above operation orders were issued to Commanding Officers and to the Arab shaihs, and were explained personally to the latter. Afterwards the orders were explained to everyone in the neighbourhood. The troops, who had been told to get as much sleep as possible before the attack, were roused at ten p.m. and ordered to be ready to advance in two hours. By midnight the troops were formed up outside the wood ready to advance, and the tribesmen were concentrated at the eastern edge of the wood. The columns having been provided with experienced guides, the advance began. It was important, but at the same time not at all easy, for each unit to occupy the position allotted to it in the operation orders. Each regiment had its own scouts, and there were connecting files between the regulars and the tribesmen. The guns followed the infantry. The night was very dark. In this formation they marched on through the darkness without noise. In Sha'aibah some lights were seen,¹ which showed that the troops were on the right line of march. The sun was now rising, and the infantry began to deploy. They approached the enemy's wire entanglements and opened fire. The enemy withdrew his outposts into the fort. It was now daylight, and the troops took up their positions as ordered. The scouts got to within 300 metres of the enemy's wire. At first no movement of the enemy was observed in the fort. Then they opened artillery, machine-gun, and rifle fire, and their artillery fire increased. They were unable to locate the

¹ Contrary to the strict orders of the G.O.C. at Sha'aibah.

enemy's batteries, and so could not counter them. The enemy silenced one of the Turkish batteries, but the others remained in action, though apparently without much effect. The slow rate of fire and the erratic shooting of the howitzers¹ were due to faulty mechanism. The Turks realized that they were attacking an entrenched position which would be difficult to take. Their infantry, being held up, entrenched themselves and opened fire on the loopholes of Sha'aibah Fort, but without effect. Ajaimi Bey's troops, which had been ordered to support the right flank of the Turkish troops, were of no use at all, and towards noon went off to drink water. The Irak Regiment, the tribesmen, and the *saiyyids*, who were in Imam Ans, attempted to advance, but were not able to effect anything. The result was a lull in the fighting on the Turks' part. Their regular infantry and artillery were not able to produce any moral effect on the enemy or to induce the Arabs to stand the enemy's artillery fire. The engineer company were without sufficient means to cut wire and destroy obstacles. It was hoped, under cover of darkness, to destroy the enemy's wire and to storm his trenches, but if this were not successful the Turks intended to retire to Barjisiyah before it got light, entrench themselves there, and await the enemy's counter-attack, thus forcing him to come out into the open.

The situation remained unchanged, and so Ali Bey went off to inform Sulaiman Askeri, who was watching the fight through field-glasses from an observation post at the eastern end of Barjisiyah Wood. They decided to make a general night attack, so Ali Bey returned and gave orders accordingly.

At dusk rifle fire started. The enemy replied with machine-gun and rifle fire, and sought out the Turkish columns with a searchlight which, however, was soon put out of action. The troops advanced to the barbed wire and tried to cut it. Time was passing. They were making no headway, and to have continued this attack would have been madness. The troops had not slept the night before and had been under heavy fire all day. At midnight Sulaiman Askeri's aide-de-camp came to Ali Bey to inquire how things were going. It was now reported that the enemy had been reinforced. Sulaiman Askeri insisted on renewing the attack at dawn, so Ali Bey issued the necessary orders.

The next attack started before sunrise. Still no progress was made. About noon Ali Bey gave the order to retire, but this order did not reach the 1st Battalion of the Fire Brigade, and they remained in their advanced position. At this juncture the enemy made a sortie with some infantry and cavalry towards Imam Ans and inflicted heavy losses on the Muretteb Irak Regiment. Again Ali Bey went to Sulaiman Askeri and explained the situation to him. Sulaiman Askeri sent a squadron of cavalry and a platoon to Zubair to cover the retirement. He recommended sending one or two infantry battalions to Zubair to try and envelope Sha'aibah from a distance. Ali Bey

¹ These howitzers were Bulgarian, while the ammunition was Serbian. The Turks might have saved themselves the trouble of bringing these cumbersome howitzers, with 700 shells, down to Barjisiyah for all the use they got out of them.

opposed the plan, saying that the Turkish losses had been very heavy, and that the troops, and above all the tribesmen, were completely demoralized. Moreover a counter-attack was to be expected. The occupation of Zubair would be of no use as the inhabitants of that place were only waiting to see which side won. All Ajaimi's troops had run away except about thirty who remained with him. Ali Bey knew that after the first Turkish attack had failed Ajaimi had gone into Zubair to see Shaikh Ibrahim and to make some arrangement with him.

Sulaiman agreed that it would be no use to occupy Zubair and ordered the troops to be withdrawn to Barjisiyah Wood during the night. The 104th Regiment, which had been in reserve, and a squadron of cavalry, were told off as rearguard. About 400 severely wounded were to be sent back to Nakhilah. The troops took up their positions on the eastern side of the wood ready for a possible attack in the morning. The night passed without any fighting. About eight a.m. reports were received that enemy columns were on the move.

The dispositions were as follows:—The 1st Muretteb Battalion was on the right flank, the Fire Brigade in the centre, and the 104th Regiment on the left. The remnants of the Irak Regiment were towards Kuwaibdah. The 105th Regiment, the Kurdish horsemen, and the Engineer company were in Barjisiyah Wood in reserve. The battle started, but up to noon the British infantry could make no progress. The enemy made an attack on the left flank with his cavalry, but it was easily driven off, so the battle was now going well. By two p.m. the Turkish troops in the firing line, and especially the Fire Brigade, began to run out of ammunition, and it was not possible to get any up to them. The non-combatants who were being used as ammunition carriers were mostly wounded. The weather was hot and water was scarce. Many of the wounded returning from the firing line had been hit in the right arm, hand, or foot.

The situation became critical. The Turks were sure the enemy would not remain where they were, but with the night would return to Sha'aibah. Soon their shells began to fall short, and it was known that they had gone back. At this moment some of the 1st Muretteb Battalion gave way, so some cavalry were sent to force them back into the firing line. A report was received from the Fire Brigade that their casualties had been very heavy, and that both their machine-guns had been put out of action. The open character of the ground made it difficult to manœuvre. The 104th Regiment, which had not been engaged at all, began to retire.

In the evening the Turks fell back again, so Ali Bey went to Sulaiman Askeri and begged him to get away and to give orders for a general retirement. Very reluctantly, and with great disappointment, he agreed. Ali Bey had not gone more than a couple of hundred yards from him when he heard a revolver shot. Sulaiman Askeri had shot himself on his stretcher.

In the three days' fighting he had seen that the Arab tribesmen of Ajaimi and the Kurds, on whom he had placed such reliance, were of no use at all, and that for the failure of this attack he would be blamed by Enver. So he committed suicide.

During the night orders were given for a retirement to Nakhailah as rapidly as possible, and it was carried out without molestation from the enemy. Thus the attempt to recapture Basrah had failed, with great loss of life to the Turks and with the greater loss of Sulaiman Askeri. During that night the Arabs fled in all directions, some across the *khôr* in *bellems*, others across the desert on horseback. Only Ajaimi and a few of his mounted men remained, like vultures to pick up what they could. At daylight the Turks sent two squadrons back towards Barjisiyah. They reported that there was no enemy to the west of the wood. Ajaimi insisted that the enemy would attack Nakhailah at once, but Ali Bey was not to be taken in by this ruse to induce him to abandon all his stores and ammunition.

On April 15th the Turks buried Sulaiman Askeri at Nakhailah, and then left again at two p.m. Some cavalry remained as rearguard. Ali Bey with his force reached Ghabisiyah in tolerable order considering everything, and then left again at once for Khamisiyah, where they halted for four days.

At Khamisiyah Enver Pasha, from the Ministry of War in Constantinople, summoned Ali Bey to the telegraph office and asked for a report. Ali Bey explained that, owing to the superiority of the enemy and the worthlessness of the tribesmen, the Turks had been driven back; that the enemy had lost so heavily that there was no chance of the Turks being pursued, or of Mesopotamia being further invaded for some time to come; and that Ali Bey was trying to reorganize his forces. After this Colonel Nureddin Bey was appointed to the chief command of the forces in Mesopotamia. At Khamisiyah Ali Bey formed a battalion from the remnants of the Irak Regiment, which he left there with two guns, and then went on to Nasiriyah with the rest of the force. On arrival there it was reported that the enemy were bombarding the Haqiqah Dam, and all the inhabitants were getting ready to leave the town. Ali Bey, however, stopped this and made arrangements for holding Nasiriyah with the remnants of the 35th Division.

Ali Bey then handed over the town to the Muntifik Area Command and went to Kut-al-Amarah with what remained of the Fire Brigade and the 1st Muretteb Battalion. Colonel Nureddin Bey arrived in Baghdad from Constantinople in forty-two days, during which time nothing had happened. Ali Bey then went to Baghdad, handed over to Nureddin Bey, and left for the Caucasus front.

The casualties amongst the regular troops at Barjisiyah amounted to 54 officers and 2,381 other ranks. These figures do not include the very slightly wounded. The casualties amongst the Arab and Kurdish tribesmen are unknown, but probably did not exceed a few hundred. The bulk of the casualties occurred amongst the Turkish troops, namely, the Fire Brigade and the 1st Muretteb Battalion. The Fire Brigade lost half its total strength. Only five Arab officers were killed and wounded, which shows the part they had played in the fighting. The majority of the Arabs who were missing rejoined the retreating tribes. The diary concludes with the following remark :

"Although the Turks were so badly equipped and cared for, still we all felt proud because we had done our duty." Up to this point Turkish opinion only has been quoted. For the statements which follow there is merely the authority of the writer.

After exhaustive inquiry the writer puts down the number of regular combatant troops at Barjisiyah at 240 officers and 6,300 other ranks. Of these only the Fire Brigade and the 1st Muretteb Battalion were composed of real Turks. The total fighting strength of these two units on the night before the battle was 2,550 of all ranks. It will therefore be urged by the military student who examines the order of battle given above that if Enver Pasha had really meant to recapture Basrah he would have sent more regular troops to that front. It must, however, be remembered that when the Fire Brigade left Constantinople the mobilization of the Turkish Army had only just begun. Mighty events were happening everywhere almost daily, and for the time being the attention of the Ministry of War was absorbed in the forthcoming operations in the Caucasus. Furthermore, although Enver Pasha was himself anti-British, it was Russia, and not England, whom the Turkish nation regarded as its real enemy.

The Third Turkish Army crossed the Russian frontier on Christmas Eve, 1914. Two days later began a series of desperate encounters, known collectively as the Battle of Sari Kamish, which continued until January 5th. The frightful nature of this fighting, which is perhaps not generally realized, may be judged from the few following facts. At the time of crossing the frontier the IXth Army Corps comprised at least 18,000 combatants. At the end of December the whole corps could only muster a thousand men. The Xth Corps arrived in the Sari Kamish area on December 29th. Within two days its strength was reduced to a total of 2,300 men. The XIth Corps suffered so severely that on January 6th it was found impossible to form one division out of its former three.

It was, therefore, only natural that for some time after this the eyes of the Turkish Empire should remain turned towards the blizzard that was sweeping down from the Caucasus, and that the Mesopotamian force should be lost sight of. Then came the British bombardments of the Dardanelles, warning the Turks that an army would be required in the Gallipoli peninsula, and so it was reluctantly decided that no more troops could be spared for a front so far away from Constantinople as lower Mesopotamia. Still Enver Pasha never doubted that Sulaiman Askeri, with his 6,300 regulars and his hordes of Arabs and Kurds, would retake Basrah.

It is interesting to note the extent to which the Shatt-al-Gharaf was used by the Turks for the Nasiriyah concentration, the Osmanjik Battalion, the 1/26th Regiment, the 104th and 105th Regiments, and the field and mountain artillery, all coming by this route.

According to Major Adil Bey there were altogether twenty-eight guns with the Turkish forces at Nasiriyah, which agrees with Sir Arthur Barrett's estimate. Ali Bey, however, states definitely that not more than twenty-two guns were employed at Barjisiyah.¹

¹ Only twenty-one, unless there were three mountain guns, which the writer thinks unlikely.

It will be observed that when the orders for the attack had been issued to the Right and Left Wings and to the Kurna command, they were then "explained to everyone in the neighbourhood." This is, perhaps, the most significant sentence in Ali Bey's diary. The Turks knew well that if they could defeat the British the whole countryside would rise and drive the invading infidel into the sea. Indeed, they encouraged the idea by holding out prospects of loot and by pointing to the merit of joining in a *jihad* which had been proclaimed by the Sultan of Turkey. Arabs from far and wide; as well as the whole Muslim population of Basrah, were only waiting to see who was going to win, when they would swoop down on the vanquished. Swarms of Arabs, who were domiciled in Persian territory, actually crossed the Shatt-al-Arab, so as to be on the spot when the time came. When they heard the Turks were retreating they all disappeared.

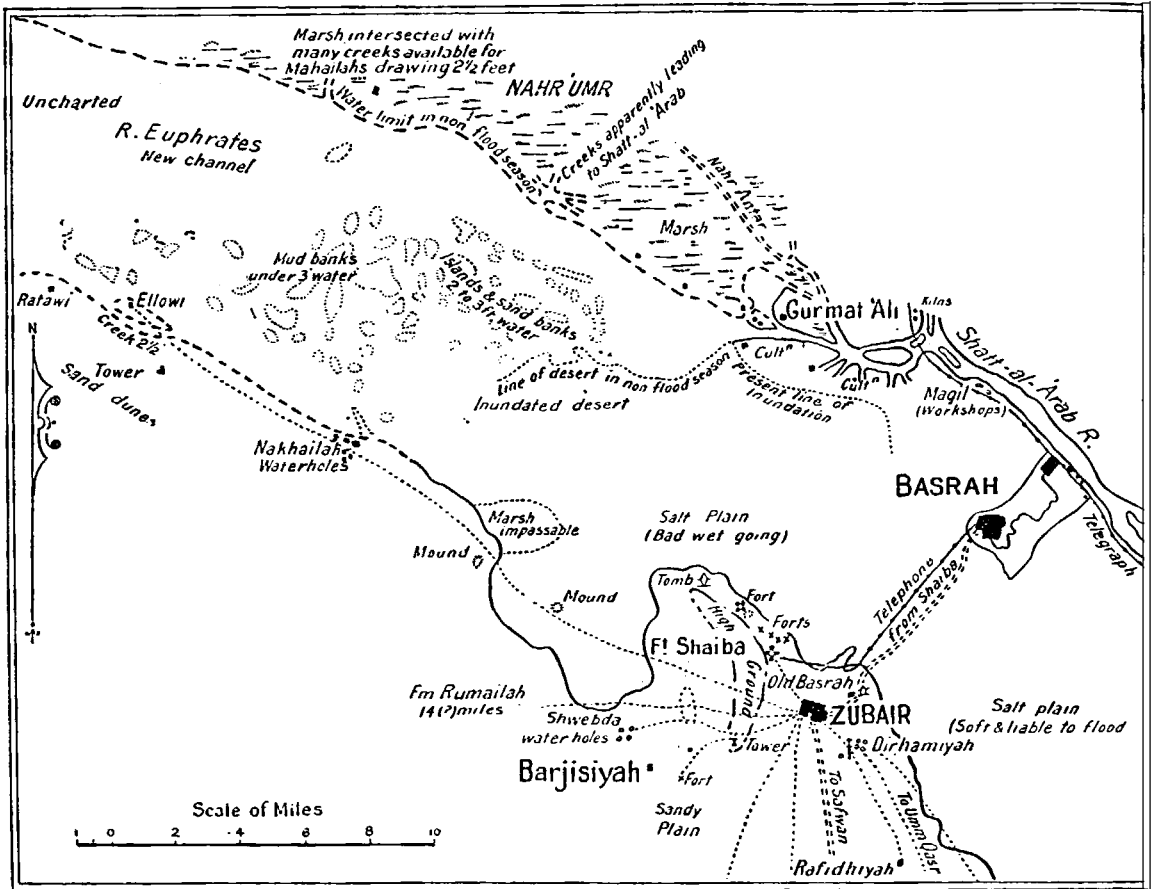
NOTES.

1.—*The Fire Extinguishing Regiment*.—A famous regiment forming part of the First Army. Their permanent station is Constantinople, and their main duties are those of an ordinary city fire brigade, but they also furnish guards at places like the Ministry of War, and attend ceremonial parades, such as the *Selamlık*, in which they take a picturesque part. They are popularly known as the Constantinople Fire Brigade, or *Sapeurs Pompiers*. The Turks call them the *İtfaiye Alai*.

Their pre-war establishment was four battalions, composed of men specially selected from line regiments. They had no machine-guns. During the war five additional battalions were raised, making nine in all. The 2nd and 4th Battalions were sent to Mesopotamia, and two fresh battalions, the 5th and 6th, and a company, were raised in Constantinople to take their places. Shortly afterwards this company was expanded into the 7th Battalion. The 1st, 3rd, 5th, and 6th Battalions were sent to Gallipoli to join the Fifth Army. An 8th Battalion, formed from a nucleus taken out of the 7th, was raised in 1917, and on July 13th, 1918, a 9th Battalion was added. When the writer left Constantinople in February, 1919, only three battalions existed, namely, the 7th, 8th, and 9th.

2.—*The Osmanjik Battalion*.—At the beginning of the war, Sulaiman Askeri collected some 450 Fidaïs and formed them into the Osmanjik Battalion. They were a wild lot, and were originally intended for special service on the Russian shores of the Black Sea, but when that scheme was abandoned they were sent to Mesopotamia. This obscure formation was there amalgamated with the 1st Battalion of the famous 26th Regiment, and became the 1st Muretteb Battalion. The Fidaïs did not constitute an official Turkish organization.

MAP 3.



MAP OF COUNTRY ROUND ZUBAIR AND SHAIBA