

CtesiphonBattle02

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Report of Major-General John Hawkwood

On August 22nd, 1915, 3 divisions of the Ottoman Sixth Army advanced from Baghdad on our hastily defended positions at Ctesiphon in order to dislodge the Tigris Force.

Fighting lasted 2 days with the Turkish attacks repulsed and they retreated with heavy casualties and light casualties in the Imperial forces.

Following the attack, we will press the retreating forces to limit their ability to re-group whilst pushing on to Baghdad to dislodge what we expect to be light defences.

Battle report

Before the start of the battle, forces were positioned around the main defences to slow the enemy advance.

The Dorsets were positioned near the bridges over the river xxxxx, close to the confluence with the Tigris where 4 gunboats were waiting. The White Company patrolled the north side of the xxxxx with the 7th Lancers screening the ford where we expected the Turks to cross.

The Ghurkas were positioned close to the ruins of Seulicia in anticipation that an attacking force would camp there overnight prior to attacking.

Action on the 22nd

Reconnaissance reports indicated that, as anticipated, there were 2 Turkish advances from Baghdad, one swinging wide on the eastern side of our position and the other pushing south. Loss of one of the scouting planes alerted us to the first encounter with Turkish aircraft. The remaining 9 planes (1 lost and 1 damaged previously) were sent north and chased 2 Turkish planes from the area.

The first action took place at a fording point 10 miles up the xxxxx river where the 51st Division attempted to ford the river. The White Company beat off the screening 2nd Tribal Cavalry Brigade whilst simultaneously the 6th Cavalry Brigade, led by the Bengal Lancers attempted to block the crossing. In fierce fighting, the 6th slowed the crossing sufficiently for the Dorsets to arrive and drive the 1st Regiment of the 51st back with casualties on both sides. Significantly however, the 4 gunboats under the command of Captain Nunn had destroyed the bridges, moved upriver and lay down fire on the 51st. Accurate fire from the ships took out 4 of the enemy gun batteries before they could be brought to bear and the whole 51st Division withdrew under the cover of darkness.

As a result of this action, the 51st were forced further east which delayed their arrival the next day and also depleted their artillery and cavalry.

That night the Gurkas, White Company and 6th Cavalry attacked the Turkish encampment at the ruins of Seulicia. With no casualties on our part, we estimated that there were approximately 2000 Turkish casualties from the 36th Division. The 36th was scattered and disordered.

Action on the 23rd

As a result of the previous day and previous night, the Ottoman forces were slow to organise the next morning and the planned attack was delayed until mid-day. The 45th advanced on our position with support from the remnants of the 36th and the left flank covered by the Arab cavalry.

At the same time the 51st hurried onto the battlefield to threaten our right flank. The 7th Cavalry with a mountain gun battery moved to support our flank.

Over the next 3 hours, the 45th attempted to close on our position whilst under fire from our artillery. One regiment closed on the Norfolks but were beaten off before over-running the defences.

Failing to disrupt the defences, the Ottoman forces withdrew towards the far fording point.

Plan for 24th

We assume that Nurreddin will appreciate the danger of leaving Baghdad undefended and retreat as soon as possible. He could risk the lower fording point but is as this would run the gauntlet of the gunboats more likely to go to the further ford. With many casualties, artillery and some supplies, he will have to split his force in order to get back to Baghdad sooner. I suspect that he will leave the 45th and 36th to cover the retreat of the 51st. Swinging wide to avoid our forces, this is about 20 miles and they should arrive on the evening on the 24th but worn and without artillery.

Our plan is, with fresh troops, artillery and river transport, that we push a brigade to Baghdad immediately. The city has been scraped for recruits into the army and a show of force should destroy the morale of any remaining defenders, especially as they will have no certainty of any survivors from the 3 divisions that left 2 days before. We also anticipate an arab uprising in the city.

With the city in our hands and no artillery support, the 51st will face tough choices, all promising for us. We also put ourselves between the Ottoman forces and the railhead at Fellujah both cutting supplies and also opening up the Ottoman empire for our next moves.

Baghdad Force consists of 24 boats, 4 battalions and various assets sent immediately upriver to terrorise the defenders. The first 2 battalions (66th Punjabis and Ghurkas) will leave late afternoon on the 23rd, they should get to Baghdad before dark and create a bridgehead for following forces. 33rd were en route to Ctesiphon so ready for quick transfer upriver. The White Company and Norfolks will follow on horse/foot (possibly being ferried the last part of the journey if the boats are available)

Once the boats arrive, there will be a full frontal assault by the naval force whilst the Punjabis move up the east bank and the Ghurkas the west bank. The White Company will skirt round the city and enter from the west of the city.

The Patrol Group will infiltrate the city and support our agents there in breaking communications and encouraging arab uprising.

The Norfolks will reinforce the city as soon as they arrive.

A Company of the 66th Punjabis will divert to Fallujah to secure the railhead there (also giving us control of the Euphrates all the way down to Basra).

Forces assigned to Baghdad : 2nd Battalion, The Norfolk Regiment 1st Natal Volunteer Mtd Infantry (The White Company) 2nd Battalion, 7th Gurkha Rifles 66th Punjabis Long Range Patrol Group 30th Mountain Bty Machine Gun Battery (4 Coy)

Assets : 34th Division Signal Company, Royal Engineers 17th and 22nd Companies, Royal Engineers Bridging Train, 3rd Sappers and Miners, Royal Engineers Searchlight Section Company, Royal Engineers 3 Chaplains, Army Chaplains Dept. Survey Party, Field Post Office 4 Field Ambulances (3 & 106)

4 River gunboats 4 gunboats - *Gadfly, Grayfly, Mayfly and Sawfly*. All armed with : Gun 1 X 4", 1 x 12lb, 6lb, 2lb pom pom, 4 x HMG 2 Heavily armed paddle steamers - *HMS Lawrence* (4 x 4" QF Guns & 4 x 6lb Guns) and *Miner* (1 x 12lb, 1 x 23lb Gun & HMG) 5 Armed tugs and yachts - *Shaitan* (steam tug, 1 x 12lb Gun & HMG), *Sirdar-i-Naphte* (steam tug, 1 x 12lb Gun & HMG), *Mashona* (steam tug, 1 x 3lb Gun), *Lewis Pelly* (steam yacht, 2 x 3lb Hotchkiss & HMG) and *Comet* (steam yacht, 1 x 3lb & 3 x Nordenfeldt LMGs) 5 Patrol boats 2 MAS Boat (HMG) and 3 Motor Launches 8 River steamers *Mejidieh, Blossie Lynch, Malamir, Shihab, Sumana, Shurur, Salimi, Mosul (Ex Ottoman)* 3 Red Cross Hospital launches (<http://www.redcross.org.uk/standard.asp?id=69542>)

The Turkish 6th army present (with casualties were) :

| Division | Unit | Status | Men | Casualties | Captured |
|----------|---------------|---------------------------------|------|------------|----------|
| 36th | 1 Regt (2 bn) | destroyed | 1600 | 1400 | 0 |
| 36th | 2 Regt (2 bn) | mauled/spent | 1600 | 400 | 0 |
| 45th | 1 Regt (2 bn) | damaged/worn | 1200 | 400 | 0 |
| 45th | 2 Regt (2 bn) | damaged/worn | 1200 | 400 | 0 |
| 45th | 3 Regt (2 bn) | damaged/worn | 1200 | 400 | 0 |
| 45th | Arab Cv Bgde | dispersed (unlikely to re-form) | 1000 | 0 | 0 |
| 51st | 1 Regt (3 bn) | damaged | 2000 | 800 | 0 |
| 51st | 2 Regt (3 bn) | fresh | 2000 | 0 | 0 |
| 51st | 3 Regt (3 bn) | fresh | 2000 | 0 | 0 |

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|-------|----------------|-----------------------|-------|------|---|
| 51st | Artillery Regt | 4 batteries destroyed | 350 | 240 | 0 |
| 2nd | Tribal Cv Bgde | mauled | 1000 | 400 | 0 |
| Total | | | 15150 | 4440 | 0 |

The British units involved (with casualties were) :

| Division | Brigade | Casualties |
|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 6th Division | 16th Brigade | 400 |
| 6th Division | 17th Brigade | 0 |
| 6th Division | 18th Brigade | 0 |
| 6th Division | 1st Natal Brigade | 0 |
| 12th Division | 12th Brigade | 0 |
| 12th Division | 30th Brigade | 0 |
| Corps Asset | 6th Cavalry Bgde | 200 |
| Total | | 600 |

Commendation to the 6th Cavalry who persisted in their attack and delayed the crossing of the 51st Division long enough for reinforcements to arrive.