

temporarily to Middle East Command from whence only immediate assistance could be provided. The Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, consequently assumed operational control of Northern Iraq from 5th May and Southern Iraq from 9th May, and was instructed by His Majesty's Government to despatch such immediate assistance as was possible. In view of this, arrangements were put in hand to assemble in Palestine a small mechanized force of all arms, which at that time was all that could be spared. This force consisted of an incomplete mechanised cavalry brigade, a field regiment less one troop, three squadrons Trans-Jordan Frontier Force and 1st Bn. The Essex Regiment; it arrived at Habbaniya on 18th May.

14. On 6th May, however, our forces at Habbaniya succeeded in clearing the plateau which overlooked the cantonment at short range and in doing so captured 26 Iraqi officers and 408 other ranks, together with a considerable amount of equipment. Our own losses were slight, but our aircraft inflicted very heavy casualties on the remainder of the Iraqi force as it withdrew in disorder towards Fallujah. It was evident that the morale of the Iraqi troops had been seriously affected by the attacks which had been made on them from the air. In this operation 1st Bn. King's Own Royal Regiment played a prominent part, and the Iraqi levies, who were normally stationed at Habbaniya and consisted mostly of Assyrians, gave our troops whole-hearted support.

15. In the Basra area no major operations took place. The principal difficulty was that, to start with, there were insufficient troops to take over Maqil, Ashar and Basra City concurrently. The airport, dock area and power station at Maqil were occupied, but although the Iraqi troops in Basra agreed to withdraw on 2nd May, they failed to do so. When, even after the time limit had been extended, they failed to comply, action by bombing and artillery fire was taken against them whereupon they immediately withdrew northwards, along the West bank of the River Tigris above Qurmat Ali and towards Qurna. The only other action of any importance in the Basra area occurred on 7th May, when our troops occupied Ashar, the business quarter of Basra, after encountering slight opposition from some Iraqi police and armed civilians.

16. In the meantime, following the engagement with the enemy at Habbaniya on 6th May, there was little land fighting until 19th May, when our troops, in company with the mechanised force from Palestine, occupied Fallujah after nearly a whole day's fighting. During this operation an air-borne detachment was landed in rear of the enemy position. Meanwhile, the Royal Air Force operating from Habbaniya, had been busily engaged attacking Iraqi aerodromes and other military objectives, with such success that by 8th May the Iraqi Air Forces had been practically eliminated. On 12th May, German aircraft were first reported in Iraq, and after that date encounters took place almost daily between our aircraft and German M.E.110's, casualties being sustained by both sides. On 29th May, Italian aircraft were also in action near Baghdad,

17. In the meanwhile, Rashid Ali and many of his principal supporters had fled the country and the Iraqis asked for an armistice. This was signed at Baghdad at 1500 hrs. on 31st May. It was followed by rioting and looting in Baghdad.

#### *Advance to Baghdad*

18. Shortly before this it had become apparent that it was essential to get troops forward from Basra to gain control of the situation at Baghdad and also to open up communications between Basra and Habbaniya. To effect this, 2nd Battalion 4th Ghurkha Rifles were moved from Basra to Habbaniya by air and a column was despatched from Shaiba towards Baghdad by the Euphrates route. This column, which consisted of 20th Indian Infantry Brigade Group, advanced from Shaiba on 27th May along the line of the railway, brushing aside slight opposition encountered near Ur. The advance from Fallujah was slow owing to extensive inundations, and the Brigade was unable to reach Samawa until 10th June and Baghdad on 12th June. The Iraqis had done considerable damage to the railway track, removing hundreds of sleepers and destroying essential installations at the stations. Reconstruction was carried out rapidly, and the line was re-opened to traffic on 9th June.

19. Although the progress of the 20th Indian Infantry Brigade Group was slow, preparations were well in hand for another force to advance by the Tigris. This force, under Brigadier Weld, Commander 21st Indian Infantry Brigade, was to proceed by river to Kut and thence by motor transport to Baghdad. All available barges and steamers were collected; many from up-river, and the barges decked so as to take motor transport, guns and armoured cars. These plans were made in conjunction with the Senior Naval Officer Persian Gulf (Commodore C. M. Graham, R.N.), and the convoy sailed on 12th June under command of a Naval Officer and with naval escort. The military force consisted of 21st Indian Infantry Brigade (less two battalions), two troops of 13th Lancers (armoured cars), one troop 157 Field Regt. and ancillary units. It reached Kut on 17th June and Baghdad on 19th June. This move up the Tigris had a most salutary effect on the tribes along the route, who, according to reports, were likely to be very troublesome and actively hostile.

#### *Occupation of Mosul*

20. No time had been lost in despatching troops to Mosul, where pro-Axis influence was much in evidence. A small mobile column, consisting of one Squadron Household Cavalry with two 3.7-in. howitzers and six Royal Air Force armoured cars, was formed and this left for Mosul by road, arriving on 3rd June. Two companies 2nd Battalion 4th Ghurkha Rifles, together with a Royal Air Force detachment, went by air from Habbaniya to Mosul on 3rd June; the remainder of the Battalion reached Mosul by air next day. In addition, 1st Battalion King's Own Royal Regiment from Habbaniya left Baghdad on 2nd June and arrived on 3rd June. The 20th Indian Infantry Brigade arrived in Baghdad via the River Euphrates route from Basra on 12th June and detachments were sent without delay to Kirkuk, Haditha, Rutbah, Fallujah and Mosul in order