

convoy. Troop-carrying aircraft used were 7 R.A.F. Valentias and 4 Atalantas supplemented by 4 D.C. 2's which had recently arrived in India.

6. The seaborne force arrived at Basra without incident on 18th April and by the evening of 19th April the disembarkation was completed. All evidence indicates that the rapidity with which British forces arrived in Iraq came as a surprise to Rashid Ali and his supporters and probably accounts for the fact that no organised resistance was encountered on arrival. The initial advantage thus gained undoubtedly had an important bearing on the subsequent operations.

7. The naval vessels covering the operation consisted of H.M.S. Emerald, H.M.S. Falmouth, H.M.S. Cockchafer, H.M.S. Seabelle, H.M.I.S. Lawrence and H.M.A.S. Yarra. The convoy, composed of 8 transports escorted by H.M.A.S. Yarra, was met at sea by H.M.S. Seabelle from Basra on the morning of 15th April. Later in the day the escort was reinforced by H.M.S. Falmouth who became S.O. (Escort). On 17th April the convoy was joined by H.M.I.S. Lawrence and proceeded towards the entrance of the Shat-el-Arab. The following day the convoy moved up the Shat-el-Arab and arrived at Basra at 0930 hrs. H.M.S. Emerald was already in Basra.

The movement in the Shat-el-Arab was made in two Sections, each Section being preceded by two warships:—

Section I—Cockchafer and Falmouth.

Section II—Yarra and Seabelle.

Lawrence remained to mask the Control Battery at Fao, while Emerald was at Basra throughout the operation.

8. On 21st April the Iraq Government formally agreed to the arrival of the British troops in Iraq under certain conditions: the principal stipulations being that no further troops should land before those who had already arrived had crossed the frontier out of Iraq, and that at no time should British troops in Iraq exceed one mixed Brigade. However, although the Iraq Government was adamant on this question and the situation remained very tense, further British ancillary troops disembarked at Basra without incident on 29th April.

9. On 7th May, Lieut.-General E. P. Quinan, C.B., D.S.O., O.B.E., arrived in Basra by air from India and took over command of all British land forces in Iraq from Major-General Fraser, who resumed command of the 10th Indian Infantry Division. On the same date a small Force Headquarters also disembarked, together with the Headquarters of the 10th Indian Infantry Division and the 21st Indian Infantry Brigade.

10. The directive which was issued to Lieut.-General Quinan on 2nd May instructed him to command all British Empire land forces in Iraq and stated that it was the intention of His Majesty's Government to:—

(a) develop and organise the port of Basra to any extent necessary to enable such forces, our own or Allied, as might be required to operate in the Middle East including Egypt, Turkey, Iraq and Iran, to be maintained.

(b) secure control of all means of communication, including all aerodromes and landing grounds in Iraq, and develop these

to the extent requisite to enable the Port of Basra to function to its fullest capacity.

Lt. General Quinan was further instructed to begin at once to plan a system of defences to protect the Basra Base against attack by armoured forces supported by strong air forces, and also to be ready to take special measures to protect:—

(i) Royal Air Force installations and personnel at Habbaniya and Shaiba.

(ii) The lives of British subjects in Baghdad and elsewhere in Iraq.

(iii) The Kirkuk oilfields and the pipe line to Haifa.

He was also to make plans to protect the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's installations and its British employees in South West Iran if necessary.

He was informed that it was the intention to increase his force up to three infantry divisions and possibly also an armoured division, as soon as these troops could be despatched from India.

#### *Operations—May, 1941.*

11. The first hostile move by the Iraq forces occurred on 30th April, when two infantry brigades of the Iraq Army, supported by Artillery and some armoured cars, began concentrating around Habbaniya and training their guns on the Camp, thereby constituting a direct threat to the British Cantonment there. A demand for the withdrawal of these troops was refused by the Iraqi Commander, who stated that no normal training was to be carried out from Habbaniya, and that fire would be opened on aircraft or troops leaving the Camp. Hostilities broke out on 2nd May and the Royal Air Force station was shelled intermittently until 5th May. The Camp was also bombed and machine-gunned by the Iraqi Air Force. The Royal Air Force bombed the Iraqi positions scoring many direct hits on their guns, armoured cars and machine gun posts. During this period also the Royal Air Force, despite the fact that the aerodrome was often under heavy fire, successfully evacuated by air to Basra a large number of women and children, who had been sent from Baghdad to Habbaniya when the situation at the former place became threatening. (The remainder of the British population of Baghdad were accommodated either in the British Embassy or the American Legation throughout the period of Operations.)

12. The situation at Habbaniya daily became more critical as, due to the persistent bombing of the landing grounds, we lost a number of aircraft and, although 1st Bn. King's Own Royal Regiment were brought up from Shaiba by air as reinforcements, the garrison was considerably outnumbered. In the meantime, Iraqi troops had occupied Rutbah, and by 3rd May all the refineries and oil installations were in their hands. There were at the time insufficient forces at our disposal to drive them out. On 6th May Colonel O. L. Roberts assumed command of Habbaniya.

13. A situation had now developed in Iraq which was not that which was visualised when operational control had been delegated to the Commander-in-Chief, India. The despatch of additional troops from India to restore the situation could not be effected in sufficient time, and His Majesty's Government therefore decided that operational control should pass