

Wheeler Bingham

Confidential

Mesopotamia Commission

Tuesday 22nd August 1916

Second Day

Members Present

- The Right Hon. Lord George Francis Hamilton G.C.S.I. (in the Chair)
- The Right Hon. the Earl of Donoughmore K.P.
- General the Right Hon. Sir Neville Gerald Lytton G.C.B., G.C.V.O.
- Admiral Sir Apprian Arthur George Bridge G.C.B.
- Lord Hugh Cecil M.P.
- Sir Archibald Williamson Bart., M.P.
- John Lodge Esq M.P.
- Commander Josiah C. Wedgwood M.P.
- Mr R.G. Duff, Secretary.

General Sir Edmund George Barrow G.C.B recalled and further examined.

Chairman: Now General, we left the Expedition in this position that Kut had been captured on the 29th September and Townshend's cavalry were half way to Aziziyah on the 3rd October; ^{Yes} it is No 9 of the Statement

a and page 31 of the Précis

584 Q And in the Yellow Book it is 937

a Yes, and then there is also the Addendum to the Yellow Book

585 Q Then on the 3rd October General Nixon telegraphed on page 31 of the Red Book: "I consider I am strong enough to open road to Baghdad, and with this intention I propose to concentrate at Aziziyah."

But this concentration must be partly by land. Families of Germans and Turkish officials are said to be leaving Baghdad for Aleppo. From military point of view it is highly desirable to capture enemy steamers, which at this season cannot get far up stream of Baghdad." Then in consequence, I assume, of that telegram or in anticipation rather, I suppose, of the request to move on, ~~then~~ you on the 4th October submitted the Minute which is on pages 31 and 32 of the Red Book to the Secretary of State.

a Yes

586 X It is as follows: "The victory at Kut el Amara is of so complete a nature that the idea of pushing on to Baghdad will certainly be revived. Pressure will be brought on us either directly by Sir John Nixon and Sir Percy Cox, who, *prima facie*, are in the best position to judge of its feasibility, or indirectly by an agitation in the Press or in commercial circles. It may even be urged, and there is much force in the argument, that it is advisable on political grounds on account of the world-wide prestige which the occupation of Baghdad would confer. Certainly strong arguments can be advanced for its occupation, and the ease with which the operation can be carried out will be impressed on us with such cogency and insistence that the proposal will be difficult to resist. Of course the glamour attaching to so historic a city is in itself a temptation, and it is with extreme reluctance that I advocate a policy of caution which will certainly be unpopular, and perhaps difficult to justify in the minds of those who are not intimate with the intricacies of the problem. The force under General Nixon comprises two Divisions of Infantry and

and a Brigade of Cavalry. This force occupies a considerable area in the midst of a doubtful and possibly hostile population. It also has to protect important British interests in the Anglo-Persian Oil fields as well as at Bushire and Basra. The consequence is ~~that~~ it cannot be concentrated. Such a force may be sufficient to expel the Turks from Baghdad. That is a question which can only be answered by General Nixon on local information, but the problem does not end at the capture of Baghdad. The city will absorb a garrison of at least a Brigade. This leaves us only two weak brigades to cope with any eventualities that may arise. The debris of the Mesopotamian Army Corps will probably retire towards Mosul and if they were hereafter - say three months hence - reinforced by a Turkish Division either from the Caucasus or Syria our reduced division of 5000 men would have a formidable task to resist the enemy's advance.

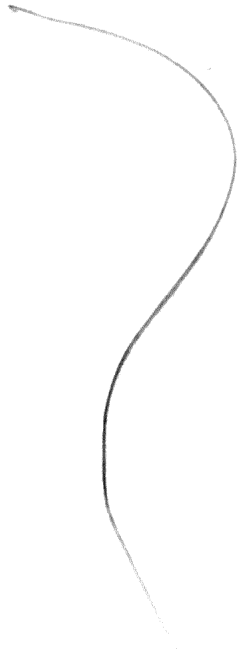
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If it were supported by disaffected Arabs as a religious rising we might have to evacuate Baghdad and retire to our present strong strategical position at the junction of the Tigris and Shatt-el-Hai. Such a sequel to the occupation of Baghdad would reverberate through the East from Constantinople to Delhi and might have a disastrous political effect far outweighing the credit we would now acquire by its capture. The Arabs along our line of retreat would certainly rise against us and our communications would probably be threatened all along the Tigris as far as Kurna. Whereas if we set tight at Kut-el-Amara we can consolidate our control of the Basra vilayat and fortify a strong position at the apex of the triangle formed by the Tigris and Shatt-el-Hai which with our naval command of the river would be unassailable by any but a very superior force accompanied by heavy artillery, while it would at the same time completely cover the main approaches to the territory now occupied by us. ~~But~~^{By} such a military policy we can insure our present hold of the country with the troops now at our disposal, whereas under the more ambitious and alluring Baghdad policy we should be weak everywhere and unable to maintain our position without a considerable addition to our present strength. In my judgment it will not be wise to go to Baghdad unless we can increase the force by a whole Division of Infantry and one or two Cavalry Regiments,

and this we know is impracticable unless the Indian troops are withdrawn from France. The conclusion of the whole matter therefore is that we cannot under present circumstances go to Baghdad without incurring unjustifiable risks. It must be remembered that during the winter the Russians are not likely to be able to make any advance into Armenia, and consequently the Turks can very well spare a division or two from the Armenian Army at this season to reinforce the Mesopotamian troops. We do not know what may now be the strength of the Mesopotamian force but we have been told of a Brigade which was recently at Kifri and is now retiring to Baghdad, and presumably there is a Baghdad garrison apart from the force beaten at Kut-el-Amara, so probably not counting Arabs the Turks can still muster some 10,000 men at or near Baghdad. If we go to Baghdad and the enemy retires to Samarra they may very possibly be reinforced there by another 10,000 men or more from Armenia and yet another reinforcement from Aleppo, so I greatly doubt whether we can hold Baghdad for any length of time with our present force. We have practically no reserves to depend on and we must play a safe game and husband our sorely drained military resources. I have felt it my duty to place these considerations before the Secretary of State because every

Everything points to our hands being forced unless we can arrest the present trend of events by a prompt and imperative decision. Kut - al - Amara is only about 120 miles by road from Baghdad although by river it is 220 miles, and General Nixon's Advance Guard in boats, has already covered some 20 miles of that distance. I see no indication of a halt in the pursuit, though in the present state of the river I also see no probability of being able to overtake the enemy. If we do not stop them General Nixon will soon be in Baghdad regardless of orders and we shall then be faced by the grave alternative of either having to withdraw again or of making our occupation effective. Either course involves serious considerations more especially in view of the gloomy situation in the "near East".



I should like to dwell on one or two statements in this minute. You commence by saying: "The Vicloignat Kut el Amara is of ~~so~~ complete a nature that the idea of ~~the~~ pushing on to Baghdad will certainly be revived. Pressure will be brought on us either directly by Sir John Nixon and Sir Percy Cox who prima facie are in the best position to judge of its feasibility, or indirectly by an agitation in the Press or in commercial circles"; and then you go on to say that it ^{would} be unpopular to stop this, and so on, but you give your reasons for it. Then you point out that there is only a force of two Divisions of infantry and a Brigade of ~~Cavalry~~ Cavalry; you say: "Such a force may be sufficient to expel the Turks from Baghdad. That is a question which can only be answered by General Nixon on local information, but the problem does not end at Baghdad. The city will absorb a garrison of at least a Brigade. This leaves us only two weak Brigades to cope with any eventuality that may arise." Then you go on over the page, on page 32, - This is the crux really: "In my judgment it will not be wise to go to Baghdad unless we can increase the force by a whole Division of infantry and one or ^{more} ~~two~~ Cavalry regiments, and this we know is impracticable unless the Indian troops are withdrawn from France. The conclusion of the whole matter

therefore

Johnson

therefore is that we cannot under present circumstances go to Baghdad without incurring unjustifiable risks." I assume that this memorandum was sent on to the Secretary of State.

A Yes, and it was on that very day. We got that telegram I think on the 4th of October, and on that very day I wrote that memorandum and gave it to Mr Chamberlain; and in the evening the Secretary of State sent for me and we drafted the telegram that follows.

587 Lord Hugh Cecil: Which telegram is that?

A "I should be glad to know what Niscon's present intentions are."

588 I No 178 in the yellow book.

A Yes

589 The Chairman: Do you know whether that memorandum of yours was circulated to the Cabinet.

A Not circulated in the ordinary sense; it was not a document that went round before hand to members of the Cabinet. Mr Chamberlain may have taken it to the Cabinet, and I expect he did. He took it over with him. There were several Cabinets held at that time, both in the morning and in the evening, and I fancy he took it over, and he probably read extracts or made his remarks regarding extracts, and on that the Cabinet came to a decision which resulted in the telegram that begins: "I should be glad to know what Niscon's present intentions are."

FROM
W. B. GURNEY & SONS.

TELEPHONE 2703 GERRARD

26, ABINGDON STREET,
WESTMINSTER, S.W.

505
22nd Aug 1916

MEMO- to Messrs Harrison & Sons
Mesopotamia

On page 9 of transcript the words to be inserted are
"The orders conveyed in my telegrams of 24th April
and 6th August still hold good".

We shall be unable to send any more copy tonight
as we have only just got the material for filling
in extracts. The remainder will be ready in the morning
as arranged. Estimated folios 360

was that a Cabinet telegram or the Secretary of State's.

No, we drafted it; I remember drafting it, because I remember putting in "The orders conveyed in May 1912

6th August still hold good."

591 Q Then two days afterwards the general staff of the War Office also drafted a memorandum.

A Yes.

592 Q Which is enclosed.

A Yes

593 Q And that we must have on the minutes; it is in the Red Book, page 32. It is as follows: "It is probably quite feasible for Sir J. Nixon's force to advance to and seize Baghdad. The question is whether he would be able to remain there. For reasons stated in paragraph 4 below, it appears quite possible for the Turks to assemble a very superior force whose arrival would lead to active operations by the Arabs against our long and difficult line of communications. It seems to us that to attempt to hold Baghdad except with a force very much larger than Sir J. Nixon's and with proportionately increased river transport would be to court disaster. Even supposing that we were able to hold it in the face of any force the Turks could bring against us, it is doubtful if we should be able to maintain our supply service during the months when the

Tigris is low. We have not been able to discover from maps or reports any position in the neighbourhood of Baghdad which would enable us to hold the town or district against a superior enemy. Whatever line we took up would leave it open to the enemy to operate against our flank and line of communications. We see no reason why the Turks should not be able to concentrate a large force against us if we are holding a position at Baghdad. In fact it seems easier for them to concentrate against us there than it would be at Kut-el-Amara. There are no doubt difficulties in the way of transport and supply, but we think these could be overcome. The Turks, knowing that our hands are full and that we are withdrawing troops from Gallipoli to the Balkans, can reduce their forces in Syria-Palestine, Hedjaz, and Asyr - Ijail ^{could} probably move 20,000 troops in this way from Syria to Mesopotamia, and 20,000 could easily be spared from Gallipoli. The Russian inactivity in the Caucasus makes it quite feasible for the Turks to spare 15,000 or 20,000 from that front, especially in the winter time. It therefore will become possible for the Turks to be assembled from the three districts mentioned above and to be conveyed in the very same weeks to Baghdad. The occupation of Baghdad by British troops would impress

impress the Oriental mind not only in Turkey, but also in Persia and India, and reestablish some of the prestige which we have lost by our failure to force the Dardanelles. If, however, we are unable to hold Baghdad when 60,000 fresh troops assemble to cooperate with Turkish troops at present in Mesopotamia, our withdrawal from Baghdad might have as great and unfortunate an effect on the Mohammedan world as our withdrawal from the Gallipoli Peninsula."

The pith of that Memorandum is that it would be possible for ^{60,000} ~~the~~ Turks to be assembled from the three districts mentioned above and to be conveyed in the very same weeks to Baghdad. The occupation of Baghdad by British troops would impress the Oriental mind not only in Turkey but also in Persia and India, and reestablish some of the prestige which we ~~had~~ ^{have} lost by our failure to force the Dardanelles. If however, we are unable to hold Baghdad when 60,000 fresh troops assemble to cooperate with Turkish troops at present in Mesopotamia, our withdrawal from Baghdad might have as great and unfortunate an effect on the Mohammedan world as our withdrawal from the Gallipoli Peninsula"; and the conclusion they arrive at in Paragraph 3 is "that the attempt to hold Baghdad except with a force very much larger than Sir J. Nixon's and with proportionately increased river transport would be to court disaster". That opinion practically tallied with your own.

a Yes

594 2

Then we must go on with the reports of the General Staff. On page 35, on the 14th October the War Office submitted a Paper drawn up by the General Staff on the question of occupying Baghdad. It is as follows: - "The position at present is that Sir J. Nixon after a succession of victories over ~~the~~ Enemy forces has pushed a considerable force to Aziziya^{eh} (within 53 miles of that city) He has been ordered not to advance to it at present and it is under consideration that no such advance shall take place [unless a force of one complete

Division and a Cavalry regiment be insured to
 him as a reinforcement to reach ^{the} Shatt. el. Arab
 within one month of his undertaking ^{the} final
 advance. The first question to consider is
 therefore that of the time which it will take
 to convey a Division of the Indian establishment
 from the theatre of war in France to Basra
 A suggestion with regard to the period of
 one month has been discussed by an Inter-
 Departmental Conference which has been sitting
 at the India Office. It is understood that this
 period has been ^{proposed} produced after a review of the Turkish
 position in the theatre of operations at the present
 time but as Baghdad is now clearly threatened
 it is possible that the Turks will hurry reinforcements
 to the spot and that within the next few weeks the
 situation will have changed. It therefore seems
 very desirable that a decision should be arrived
 at as soon as possible because otherwise the
 Division which it is proposed to send may not
 prove sufficient for the purpose. To meet the possibility
 of Turks assembling greater forces at Baghdad
 than is at present anticipated, and to insure that
 sufficient force will be available to overcome the
 maximum resistance which it is estimated that
 the enemy can offer at Baghdad the General
 Staff is of opinion that two Indian Divisions should
 be added to Sir J. Nixon's army, if he is to take
 and occupy Baghdad Unless India is
 prepared to supply the additional Division
 which is required to justify ~~the~~ advance of
 Sir J. Nixon on to Baghdad, the General Staff
 are of opinion that such an advance should
 not be sanctioned until one or more Divisions

from France can leave Egypt for

Mesopotamia. with the forces now

at the disposal of the General

Officers Commanding, a move to

Baghdad would in their opinion

be a dangerous operation.

Shawler

[Now

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Now in this Minute I see there is a slight
diminution of the estimated dangers of advancing
on Baghdad

Q A slight diminution?

595 A Yes; this is more favourable to the advance
than the two previous Minutes

Q You mean ~~that~~ ~~in~~ than my Minute and the
previous one?

596 A Yes

Q Perhaps it is so

597 Q: Now on the 23rd October, page 38 of the
Minute, - the Secretary of State telegraphed the
Viceroy, - and this was a Cabinet communication
as is clear from the preceding papers, - "Nixon
may march on Baghdad if he is satisfied
that force he has available is sufficient
for the operation. Reinforcements will take
time owing to ~~the~~ relief and transport
arrangements but two Divisions will be sent
as soon as possible. I will telegraph ^{probably}
date later". That is the telegram which
gives the assent to advance on Baghdad.

Q Yes

598 Q: It was a foregone conclusion that General
Nixon would say he had sufficient force
because he had always said so, was it not
A No, because we did not know what in-
formation he might have received in the meantime
That was rather in the nature of a permissive
order. We say, if he is satisfied that his force
is sufficient. He may have been satisfied
when he made the proposal, but the later
information ~~we~~ ^{he} got ~~or~~ regarding reinforcements
might have induced him to change his views

599 Q You mean Turkish reinforcements

Yes, Turkish reinforcements. And I think Mr Chamberlain thought the telegram should be couched in a permissive form so that if General Nixon wished to change his views he could say so.

600 Q Now what strikes me in looking at these papers is that on the 4th October the highest military authorities here combined were strongly opposed to an advance on Baghdad and I cannot see that the military situation had changed one iota between then and the 23rd, but on the 23rd the Cabinet gave ^{assent} consent to the march on Baghdad. If I am right in that that the military situation had not in the least improved, is it not ^{pretty} immediately clear that some pressure was brought to bear on the military authorities which induced them to alter their opinion.

You ask me?

601 Q Yes, and you may answer fully.

A I do not think that the military authorities had altered their opinion. They said, if our reinforcements can arrive within a certain period we think it is a feasible operation; because we did not believe at the time that the Turks were in any great force in the vicinity of Baghdad. But the thing we feared was that Turkish reinforcements were coming up.

602 Q But you see the military authorities say that this operation must not take place unless there are two extra divisions sent to augment General Nixon's force. Then after a great deal of haggling the Government here say that they may eventually be able to send two divisions from Egypt I think it was, or from France

603 Q They were sent from France to Egypt and then passed on. Then the Secretary of State in a telegram No 195 on page 40 of the yellow book, No 5 marked private, says

Johnson,
 "War Office contemplate transfer of two Indian infantry Divisions from France to Egypt with the intention of placing them at your disposal for Mesopotamia if report of General Staff is favourable to occupation of Baghdad. But owing to uncertainty of position in the near East and possible need of transport for other purposes they cannot guarantee date of departure. Under these circumstances they do not consider that it would be safe for Niscom to advance to Baghdad before these troops have actually started from Egypt unless you can undertake to supply him temporarily with a Division from India in the event of these reinforcements being unavoidably delayed. I request early reply as to possibility of your undertaking this liability." That was sent on the 15th of October.

605 Q Yes, eight days before the order was sent. Now the reply is on page 41, No. 198: "Your private telegram of 15th October. Advance on Baghdad. Am I to understand that even if two infantry Divisions are transferred to Egypt the uncertainty of position in the near East may not merely delay their departure but possibly even prevent their being available at all for Mesopotamia? After consultation with Commander in Chief we agree that in no case could I undertake to supply from India even temporarily, a further force of the strength of a Division".

Ayes.

606 Q They adhered to that decision, did they not. a who-

Q. A Who - India?

607 A Yes.

A Yes.

608 Q. You see there are certain safe-guards, or certain precautions suggested by the military authorities here as regards this advance on Baghdad, and it seems to me that they were all swept on one side. The two Divisions were only tentatively promised, and they did not arrive until two months, I think, after the expedition had gone up to Baghdad.

A. That was on the 15th.

609 Q. I am only talking of what were the conditions under which this advance was taken. The two Divisions did not arrive until the next year - that was in January.

A. No, they began to arrive in December; one Brigade had arrived early in December.

610 Q. It was not till two months after the expedition had begun that a Division, without which the Secretary of State said it would not be safe to advance, was sent from India, and I think the General Staff said that although it might be advisable with the two Divisions to attempt to attack Baghdad, it ought not to be occupied. Then the Indian Government, on the 23rd October, - No 203, page 43⁴² of the yellow book, sent this telegram: "Baghdad advance. Your description of the situation in the near East proves conclusively the necessity for action in the Middle East. We accept the calculation

of the combined Staffs of possible strength of Turks that may with time be brought against us, but with reinforcement of two Indian Divisions from France we believe that Sir J. Nixon has a ^{reasonable} considerable prospect of being able to hold his own against 60,000 or 70,000 Turks, provided that he occupied Baghdad as soon as he is ready. Although I realise that the occupation of Baghdad is a provocation that will probably determine the Turks to send large forces to attack us, ~~which~~, however, will not be easy for them to do, and although the bad effect of a possible withdrawal in the future cannot be ignored, I am confident that the right policy at the present time is to take the risk and to occupy Baghdad with the least possible delay, relying upon you to send the two Divisions from France as quickly as possible to Mesopotamia. On this understanding I propose, unless I hear from you before Monday, to the contrary, to order Nixon to march on Baghdad at once." And the reply to that is V. 204 on page 43: "Nixon may march on Baghdad if he is satisfied that force he has available is sufficient for the operation. Reinforcements will take time owing to relief and transport arrangements, but two Divisions will be sent as soon as possible." Therefore you see the Indian Government gave instructions to General Nixon to occupy Baghdad. I contend that somehow or other all

the precautions practically which the General Staff wrote down as essential to an advance on Baghdad disappeared.

Q May I point out the difference to you Sir?

611 Q If you please. I put my view of this matter; now will you put yours.

A You will see that the General Staff on the 14th of October in their last paragraph on page 35 of the précis say: "Unless India is prepared to supply the additional Division which is required to justify the advance of Sir Nixon on to Baghdad the General Staff are of opinion that such an advance should not be sanctioned until one or ^{more} ~~two~~ Divisions from France can leave Egypt for Mesopotamia"; and then it goes on: "With the forces now at the disposal of the General Officer commanding a move to Baghdad would in their opinion be a dangerous operation, ~~and~~ ^{if} the re-inforcements were not on their way. Sir Archibald Murray and I discussed this together, and we both held that if the reinforcements were on their way and ^{would be} ~~were~~ able to reinforce Nixon after he got into Baghdad, it would be possible. It was a risk, of course.

612 Q It looks to me, you know, that other than purely military considerations came in and influenced this advance. Let me just point out to you what, according to this paper, apparently occurred. On the 8th of October, that is, three days after there was the united opinion of the military authorities

authorities that advance on Baghdad would be very risky, the Secretary of State telegraphs to the Viceroy - page 34 of the Red book, No 3077: "Private and very urgent. Reference to my telegram of today to Viceroy repeated to you. Cabinet are so impressed with great political and military advantage of occupation of Baghdad that we shall make every effort to supply necessary force." I think that is the first indication of the Cabinet attaching great political importance to the capture of Baghdad, is it not.

A Yes, I think it is.

613 Lord Hugh Cecil: That is the 8th of October. The 5th of October is the first, if you look at No 180, page 37 of No 5; and there is a rather remarkable appendix to that in the Addendum.

A That is on the 5th of October.

614 Earl of Darnley: That is the first sign?

A That was after my minute of the 4th was submitted, in which I laid ~~of~~ stress, ^{you} remember, on the Persian situation.

615 Chairman: That is very much more qualified. Then the Viceroy in reply to the telegram of the 4th October, on page 38 of the yellow book, No 182, makes these remarks you will see in the middle of the third paragraph: "In view of German activities in Persia, increasing pressure on Afghanistan and the aspect in the Balkans and the Dardanelles, we hold that the capture of Baghdad ^{will} ~~would~~ have

have such an effect on the near East and offers such important political and strategical advantages as to justify movement, but to do this at least an additional Division would be required." So that now I think almost for the first time considerations outside the immediate sphere of operations in Mesopotamia are introduced. I do not think that has occurred before, has it.

10
A I think not.

616 Q Then an Inter-Departmental Committee was appointed by the Prime Minister, and he drew up certain questions. Was he present at that Committee.

A No.

617 Q He sent those questions to you.

A Yes, they came from the Prime Minister.

618 Q How was that Committee composed.

A Do you mean who were the members of the Committee?

619 Q Yes.

A There were three from the India Office, two from the Foreign Office, two from the War Office, and two from the Admiralty.

620 Q Of course all the political representatives from the first ^{had} been pressing to go on to Baghdad.

A I would not say pressing.

621 Q But they attached importance to it.

A They attached importance to Baghdad.

622 Q Can you tell us the names of the different members.

A For the India Office, Sir Thomas Holderness, who

who was Chairman, Sir Arthur Hirtzel, and myself; for the Foreign Office, Sir Louis ^{Mallet} ~~Mallet~~ and Mr. ~~Luxford~~ ^{Luxford} ~~Olephant~~; for the Admiralty, and for the War Office, Colonel ^{the} Honourable Milo Talbot, who was then acting for the Director of Military Operations, and Major Padham, the assistant in this particular section.

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To be supplied
in proof.

623 Q Now the exchange of communications between the Indian Government and the Cabinet (because the Secretary of State is now telegraphing on behalf of the Cabinet) seems to me to become more and more political. I think perhaps this one telegram will be sufficient for my purpose; it is No 201, on page 42 of the yellow book, - towards the close of the telegram: "At present moment it seems that German attempt to break through to Constantinople will succeed and our position and prospects in Gallipoli are most uncertain. Persia seems drifting into war on the German side, whilst Arabs are wavering, and unless we can offer them great inducements will probably join Turks. We are therefore in great need of striking success in the East both to check Persian movement and to win Arabs. Unless you consider that possibility of ~~the~~ eventual withdrawal is decisive against the advance, all other considerations seem to us to render it desirable and we

we are prepared to order it." That puts, I suppose, to a certain extent the case which was discussed at the Inter-Departmental Committee; it was an all-round discussion.

A I do not know that that was the only thing, because the Inter-Departmental Committee was appointed four or five days before that.

624 Q What I put is, ^{did} ~~that~~ the Inter-Departmental Committee discuss fully the military question, or were the political considerations discussed.

A Both were discussed.

625 Q: In that discussion was attention given to the necessarily increased difficulties of transport.

A No, I do not think it was. The Inter-Departmental Committee was hardly capable of dealing with that, I think.

626 Q Yet still you see it was on the report of the Inter-Departmental Committee, and practically not on the report of the military committees that the Cabinet ordered this expedition. Are there any minutes of this Inter-Departmental Committee; is there a report of it

A Yes, I think it has been put in.

627 Q There is no report of the discussion that took place.

A No, I do not think there is any report of the discussion that took place.

628 Q Who was in the Chair.

A Sir Thomas Holderness

Johnson

2. 28

Whelan Bingham

629 Q Then to go on, the force advanced and it did not encounter much serious opposition until it got to Ctesiphon and you gained what you properly describe as a Pyrrhic victory

A Yes

630 Q Then General Townshend found that unless he rapidly retired he would have been encircled and cut off

A Yes

631 Q There were two fresh Turkish divisions I understand that came up

A He believed so

632 Q That there were very large reinforcements was pretty clear from the way he was attacked

A Yes

633 Q And I suppose really that General Townshend, considering the condition in which the forces were, ~~had~~ handled them well to be able to bring so many of them to Kut-el-Amara

A I think they must have been extremely well handled and the troops must have behaved splendidly because it is a most difficult operation to retire in face of a superior enemy.

634 Lord Hugh Cecil Can you give the figures of the two armies approximately?

A No, I wish we could. We know that at Ctesiphon ^{itself} there were, as they said, only about 14000 British to 12000 Turks ^{actually}. I really do not know when the reinforcements ^{actually} arrived.

635 ^{the} Chairman You mean that the Turks were not in superior force

A No; it was the underlying idea that we should be able to smash the Turks at Ctesiphon and get into Baghdad and do a lot of damage such as seizing the ships, which would have rendered all their further movements impossible. We could have

des

destroyed the bit of railway there

is up at Samarra and we could

have got hold of all the rolling stock.

636 Q Those entrenchments were very well made.

A Yes, we carried them.

637 Q But they were very well made.

A Yes. You must remember that this same

division had repeatedly carried entrenchments.

At

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at the time of the advance the 6th Division were far better troops than their opponents because they had always beaten them. They were not aware of the arrival of the reinforcements

12
638

Q Sir Malcolm Williamson Did not the Indian reinforcements appear the following day after the battle; were they not discovered by aeroplanes the day after the battle
A The Turkish reinforcements I think began to show themselves immediately after the battle.

639

Q They were seen by aeroplanes the day after
A Yes

640

Chairman But General Nixon reports at page 45 of the yellow book, No 222 "General Townshend after night march 21-22nd November, attacked enemy's position at Chesiphon on 22nd of November. A severe fight lasted throughout the day resulting in the capture of the enemy's position. Owing to failing light it has not been possible to complete the fight - General Headquarters and Townshend's force bivouacked night of 22nd - 23rd of November in the captured position. Our casualties are heavy, no details yet received. Enemy's casualties believed heavy. We have captured eight guns and some 600 prisoners as far as reported at present."

641

Q Lord Hugh Cecil They had not really captured the guns

A Yes they had captured them but were obliged to leave them on the ground when they retired

642

Q They took off the prisoners but not the eight guns?

A No, they could not get them away

Chair

Wheeler-Bingham.

643 Chairman I believe there has been no criticism as to the handling of the Expedition

Q The handling of the troops in action?

644 A Yes

Q No, none?

645 A Or of the retirement which was quite necessary

Q No, it was quite good

646 A Now General Nixon was very confident throughout and he did not seem to attach much importance to the information conveyed to him that there would be this large augmentation of Turks.

Q He evidently did not

647 A Now who has the best sources of information say, on a movement of that kind. The Turks would be moving from west to east

Q Yes, north west to south east

648 A I suppose you would not get information from say Russian or European sources

Q Well, we were getting information both from Russian sources and from a European source

649 A So that your information was probably more accurate than the Indian information.

Q It proved so. When I say we, I mean the military authorities here

650 Earl of Donoughmore: London in the big sense

Q Yes. But on the other hand you would naturally expect the local authorities to get the best information because they had their aviators and their spies in Baghdad, and presumably they had sent spies elsewhere

651 Chairman: I am afraid we must admit that it was German methods which brought these divisions up quicker than they were expected

Q Yes, undoubtedly they came up much faster

than we expected them

13/ 652 Lord Hugh Cecil: There were German Officers in command I understand

a I do not think so. I do not think Von der Goltz had arrived. I think he arrived after the battle. I think the Germans were directing them at that time but the actual command was not taken over by Von der Goltz till some days afterwards

653 Chairman Do you think the transport arrangements were not directed by Germans

a Yes, largely I should think they were

654 Sir Archibald Williamson: And was it not the case that the native spies that we had were very unreliable.

a It is always the case

655 General Sir Neville Lyttelton: All Orientals are notoriously inaccurate about numbers

a Yes, but then the information obtained by London was generally from native sources in its origin

656 Sir Archibald Williamson But further than that, were not ^{the} natives really in the pay of our enemies and giving us false information on purpose

a But that always occurs. You have always to weigh the possibilities and probabilities that a spy may take money from both sides

657 General Sir Neville Lyttelton: I see at N^o 226 General Nixon reports that ^{opposed to} "the force at the disposal of our troops at Ctesiphon on 22^d November consisted of four divisions with 38 guns"

~~four divisions~~

The Turks were supposed

it
 A Yes, ~~it~~ was supposed at the start, to have two divisions when we attacked them at Ctesiphon although they had only 12,000 men or so who had been ~~which had been~~ ^{defeated} beaten at Kut-el-Amara plus another division, at least ^{so} he imagined

658 Q Do you think four divisions would be down to 12,000

A Two divisions would be down to 12,000

659 Q "Four divisions with 38 guns"

A He reported that after the ^{battle} ~~date~~. That was not what he imagined he had.

660 Lord Hugh Cecil: I want to be clear about the numbers. I understand that they actually engaged you think only about 14,000, - because more came up a day or two afterwards

A I think I said only about 12,000

661 Q But more came up a day or two afterwards

A I think the very next day because it was the next day they found they would have to retreat.

662 Q And how many troops do you gather came up

A It is very difficult to say, but certainly a couple of divisions had come up about that period. But the Turkish divisions you must remember are not the strong divisions that ours are

663 Q What are the Turkish divisions

A At the most about 7,000 men

664 ^{the} Chairman But still, would you put your estimate of what number you thought were present at this battle against the estimate of General Nixon. You say you think there were about 12,000. General Nixon doubles it

14
 a I think I have got an Appreciation of my view
 at the time

665 Sir Archibald Williamson: Was it not the case that
 on the following morning aeroplanes went up
 and discovered two Turkish divisions approaching
 that were not known of before

a I am afraid I do not recollect exactly the details,
 but they had aeroplanes at that time

666 General Sir Neville Lytton: That is reported in N^o. 234
 a Someone asked when the reinforcements began
 to arrive in Mesopotamia. I see in my
 Appreciation I said "Reinforcements began to
 arrive about the 6th at Basra" - that is the
 6th of December.

667 Earl of Donoughmore: Those are our reinforcements
 a Yes

668 Sir Archibald Williamson: That was after the battle
 a Yes

9
 669 ^{the} Chairman: Then General Nixon after the battle
 telegraphed to India on the 26th November 1915
 page 39 of the Red Book; ~~He~~^{he} states there:
 "General Townshend's force has suffered such severe
 losses and its units are so depleted of officers that it
 cannot be counted on for future operations as an effective division
 for some time but will be used on lines of communication and as a possible
 nucleus for increasing our striking force. Its effective strength in rifles and sabres
 probably does not exceed 7,500 and its total casualties are now reported 4,300"
 So that that would just make it about 12,000

a When he was retiring do you mean?

670 2. No, when he went up

a I think we have a statement shewing that it was
 14,000 when he went up, but I cannot
 lay my hands upon it. I think 14,000
 was the force with which General Townshend
 attacked

Wheeler

657
 2 Then General Nixon after going through details and assuming that the Turks might assemble 50,000 men and 84 guns arrived at this conclusion "Provided that my river transport is immediately augmented to the maximum extent possible and that all promised reinforcements plus drafts to make good present wastage reach me by middle of January I consider that I shall be in a position to capture and hold Baghdad by the middle of March 1916 without any additional troops. Should the Russians be able to cooperate with me my task will be proportionately simplified, and I ask for information as to their ~~ability to~~ ^{ability to} ~~propose such co-operation.~~ ^{propose such co-operation.} As I feel confident of capturing Baghdad I do not ~~propose to discuss the alternative of taking up a defensive line in case rear~~ ^{propose to discuss the alternative of taking up a defensive line in case rear} what were the promised reinforcements there."

1 Those were the two Divisions. The two Divisions were then on their way

672 2 And how many Divisions would that give him
 1 If he got the two Divisions it would have meant four Divisions actually in Mesopotamia

673 2 That would be between 40,000 and 50,000 men

1 Yes, about that

674 2 If you have any observations to make on my examination I am sure the ^{Commission} Committee would like to hear them

1 I would like to draw your attention to one matter. I think from questions that you asked or from ~~the~~ remarks ~~that~~ you ~~made~~ made you are under the impression that the Military authorities were influenced by the Dardanelles situation, - by the situation that was being brought about in consequence

675 2 What I meant to convey was that in the conditions under which they were ^{subject} ~~subject~~ the inter-Departmental Committee did not look at this question from the ^{purely} ~~purely~~ military point

point of view, ^{but} that certain political considerations outside the actual sphere of military operations came in and to some extent influenced them

With regard to that I think my remarks at the present time expressed what was our opinion at the time. In these I said at the bottom of page 9 the last paragraph of book No 3, "At the time Anarchy prevailed throughout Persia and German intrigues were rampant, so that had the Turks not been threatened north of Kut-el-Amara it is quite conceivable that, while containing us there, they would have pushed into Persia through ^{the} ~~the~~ Caspian Coast ~~to~~ ^{thereby} ~~have~~ ^{forced} all the Russians at Kermanshah and got into ^{easy} ~~easy~~ ^{touch} with Persian centres of disturbance. ~~Such~~ ^{It} ~~might~~ ^{might} have been even more disastrous than the surrender ~~of~~ ^{of} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~Commission~~ ^{Commission} would like to draw the attention of

the ~~Commission~~ ^{Commission} to the fact that that is precisely the situation which is now occurring. The Turks are ^{containing} ~~containing~~ us ^{at} ~~at~~ Kut with inferior forces; they are holding us at Kut and the result is that they have been able to push into Persia and have defeated the Russians and have driven back the Russians. The situation in Persia at the present time is most grave. It is exactly the situation we contemplated as possible in October last and which I think largely influenced the Members of the inter-Departmental Committee. That situation has now arisen from other causes but we are ^{contained at} ~~contained at~~ ~~at~~ Kut-el-Amara

General Sir Neville Lyttelton We are not there
Yes we are, - within a few miles of it. We are ^{contained} ~~contained~~ in the neighbourhood
Lord Hugh Cecil At Es-Sinn
We have taken the Es-Sinn ^{line} ~~line~~ on the right

of Kut or all Persia would have gone against us, Afghanistan would have followed suit and then the whole Indian frontier would have been in a blaze

right bank; we are quite close to Kut;
we could cross the Shatt el-Arab

at any moment if we chose
Chairman I quite see your point

What we feared was this movement into
Persia at the time and by rushing on to
Baghdad we drew down the Turks upon
Townshend's force instead of directing them
to Khanykin, and that the result might have
been that in October last we should have
been faced with the very situation with which
we are faced now, nearly a year afterwards

679 General Sir Neville Lytton: Khanykin and
Kerind are a good deal north of Baghdad
are they not

Khanykin is right up in that corner
(pointing to the map)

680 Chairman And there is also I understand
increased pressure exercised in Southern Armenia

Yes

681 I So that you would contend that we did
for the time being largely reduce the Turkish
pressure

On the Russians and on Persia

682 I And, pushing ^{that} out a little bit further, you
would in the same way contend that the
attack on the Dardanelles held there a
very large number of Turks

Undoubtedly it did

683 I Who have since been available

Yes

684 I Now we have got here a statement in
Book 10, No 6. The communication

I would like to call your attention to is that on page 3, a statement by General Townshend on the 3rd October 1915 I think the part of it is in this sentence about half way down.

"If ~~the~~ Government does not consider occupation of Baghdad as yet politically advisable owing to doubt of Dardanelles situation and consequent possibility of any small force we might put into Baghdad being driven out again by superior forces from Anatolia and so obliged to retreat along an extremely long line of communications infested with hostile or semi-hostile and on news of retreat actively hostile tribes, then we should on all military grounds occupy ourselves with consolidating our position at Kut. The plan of entering Baghdad on the heels of retreated and disordered force was ^{upset} ~~set up~~ by the sudden (?) fall of water rendering our progress in ships great difficulty, toil and extremely slow. On the other hand if Government desire to occupy Baghdad, then I am of opinion that ~~the~~ a methodical advance from Kut by road by two Divisions or one Army Corps or one Division closely supported by another entire, exclusive of line of communication troops garrisoning the important places of Amara
 Hawaz

Ahwas, Nasiriyah is absolutely necessary
unless great work is to be incurred.

It is absolutely impossible to send laden

ships up river now "



no steel for now

Craps

Walter Hodson
North and writer.

Lf

~~Had~~ ^{If} you had known of that communication ^{give} would it at all have affected your opinion as regards the advance to Bagdad.

16 A Certainly it would, if I had known that he really held those views on the 3rd October.

685 Q He of course was the officer to whom -
A To whom the movement was entrusted?

686 Q Yes, and he had so far, and I think throughout, shown himself to be a skilful and daring leader.

A Yes. He had only actually commanded at Kut-el-Amara, ~~and~~ ^{but} he had shown great capacity for command.

687 Q How do you interpret his demand for two divisions? Would you say that the force which he took up was equivalent to two divisions, and in any way complied with that demand.

A No. It consisted of four brigades of infantry and a brigade of cavalry. You may say that it was about two-thirds of a division.

688 Lord Hugh Cecil: Two-thirds.

A Over one and a half.

689 General Sir Neville Lyttelton: There ought to have been six brigades of infantry.

A There ought to have been six brigades of infantry but not necessarily a brigade of cavalry.

690 Admiral Sir Cyprian Bridge: Would not cavalry have been understood.

A In the case of an Indian Division what would have been understood would have been one regiment of cavalry with each division.

He had four regiments of cavalry and ~~a~~ ^a Horse Artillery ~~a~~ battery, which made more than the brigade, and he had a brigade of infantry in addition, so that he started with four brigades of infantry and one of cavalry.

691 Chairman: It was certainly less than two divisions. His own division was a good deal more knocked about than I think was known here.

A Yes; I think they suffered more. I am not sure whether they got any drafts in the meantime.

692 Q On page 5, he says: "~~a~~ ^{my} weak division ~~to~~ of which the British battalions were reduced to mere half battalions, ^{and} all casualties at the battle of Kut had been filled up with raw recruits."

A The drafts had arrived and all casualties had been filled up with raw recruits from India.

693 Q You being at Headquarters, so to say, at the India Office, and receiving opinions from officers in the Field, would you say that they must necessarily give ^{the information} ~~you~~ opinions ~~of~~ their subordinates on an expedition of this kind ^{ought}?

A You mean General Nixon ~~ought~~ to have informed us?

694 Q Yes.

A He was was not necessarily bound to give his opinion - certainly not. He had to form his own opinion, but I think that under the circumstances he ought to have warned us.

695 Q The officer in question was not merely a subordinate officer, but he was the officer who was

was entrusted.

A Yes. I think that under the circumstances General Nixon ought to have given more consideration to his views and ought perhaps to have communicated them to his superior, that is to say, to the Commander-in-Chief in India.

696 Q For instance: "I am quite confident I can ~~reach~~^{beat}"

A "I am quite confident I can ~~reach~~^{beat} Nur-ed-din" ^{she} and ^{occupy} capture Bagdad."

697 [Chairman: That was hardly justifiable when his subordinate held just the contrary view, was it?]

698 Lord Hugh Cecil: Is it not stating it a little too strongly? The difference between what he asked for and what he had was not a very great difference.

The Witness: No, it was not a very great difference.

General Sir Neville Lyttelton: If it is true that the casualties were filled up by raw troops I think there is a great difference.

Lord Hugh Cecil: That is said after the event.

General Sir Neville Lyttelton: This telegram was in the October.

The Witness: The other was the 7th April.

Sir Archibald Williamson: Is not there something in the word "methodical". He says "I am of opinion that a methodical advance from Kut and so on. That implies to my mind stores and reserves of ammunition and all sorts of things which perhaps he was very short of. The word "methodical" influences my mind a good deal. It seems to be a different kind of advance from the one made."

699 General Sir Neville Lyttelton: I do not agree with this statement of General Townshend where he says how difficult it is for a subordinate General to give opinions unmasked to the Commanding Officer. I think that he is bound to.

A Undoubtedly he is bound to give his opinion certainly

700 Lord Hugh Cecil: Where does that occur?

General Sir Neville Lyttelton: In the same telegram on page 5. He says that he did it but that he was doubtful about the propriety of it.

The Witness: He expressed a doubt as to the propriety of giving his opinion unmasked to ~~his Commanding Officer~~ ^{his} Army Commander.

701 Q Yes.

A He did not hesitate to give his opinion unmasked to others.

702 Q You agree that he ought to have given this opinion.

A Yes.

703 Lord Hugh Cecil: Take the next line on page 5: "I considered it my absolute duty to indicate to him the risk I ran in moving forward to attack the well-known strong position of Ctesiphon and occupy Baghdad with my present force." There is nothing on page 3 that justifies him in saying that, is there? It does not amount to a solemn warning such as ~~the~~ ^{is} suggested.

A I do not think so.

704 Admiral Sir Cyprian Bridge: When a Commander-in-Chief, either Naval or Military orders a certain

certain movement, and orders a certain officer to conduct that movement, whatever it may be, is it not assumed that he and his Staff between them - he with their assistance - have considered the whole of the points as to the sufficiency of the force, the difficulties to be met with, ~~of~~ the supplies and all the rest of it

18
A yes.

705

Q Is it not to be assumed that the Commander-in-Chief has done that.

A It certainly ought to be assumed that the Commander-in-Chief has taken all those considerations into mind.

706

Q Then in what way would a subordinate have any kind of right to question the wisdom of the Commander-in-Chief's proposals or orders.

A The subordinate was some 50 miles or so in advance of his Chief. I think that in one of these telegrams he ^{said he} had information from aviators, and I think that if he had any information he was bound to point out the risks if he thought that there were risks.

707

General Sir Neville Lyttelton: page 5: "~~I~~ ^{had} gained much more knowledge of Turkish reinforcements in Mesopotamia."

A That was after the event.

708

Q yes.

A Page 3 is the telegram.

General Sir Neville Lyttelton. The water difficulties had made themselves felt according to page 3. It was a very important consideration ^{but} to the Commander-in-Chief, General Nixon, would not know anything like as much about it as General Townshend

709

Lord Hugh Cecil: Where was General Nixon?

A. Hut-el-Amara. General Townshend would have been better acquainted with the river difficulties because he had already experienced them

710

Chairman: Would it be in accordance with custom or not very unusual, for an officer in command of a detached force ordered to carry out a certain service to be told to consider for himself what was the best method of doing it, and would not that give him a perfect right to make representations

Yes, undoubtedly

711

Q. Which right he would not ^{have} ~~lose~~ if the thing was so to speak, cut and dried and he was told to do it

A. If he got a definite order to carry out a certain operation it was his business to do the best that he could, but at the same time I think that he would not only be justified, but it would be his duty, to place all the considerations before his senior - before the General

712

Commander Wedgwood: But is it not clear that there is a warning in the telegram of the 3rd October if the Government does not consider the occupation of Baghdad is yet politically advisable owing to doubts about the Dardanelles

situation.

He is talking there not of taking Baghdad at all but of holding it after it is taken

A. I think so.

712 Q. A small force being driven out again by superior force. Does it not seem if the Government does not consider the occupation of Baghdad politically necessary - supposing that the difficulty would be in the holding of it rather than in the taking of it.

A. I think it does.

Lord Hugh Cecil: That is also suggested by the idea of an Division clearly supported by another Commander Wadpoole. Yes, to help to hold the town after it is taken.

Witness: May I tell you my own impression?

713 Chairman: Yes

A. My own impression is that they were all fully convinced that they could beat the troops in front of them that they had a weak and inferior enemy in front of them and that they could beat them and then push on to Baghdad. I think that none of them had any real doubts on that point. The doubt that General Rowland expresses is owing to the fact that he knows that they cannot stay there.

715 Earl of Darnley: Nobody doubted that they could get to Baghdad?

A. From what I have heard nobody had any doubt about that.

716 Q. When I say that nobody doubted it, I mean to say it very widely - nobody in Mesopotamia doubted, nobody in India, and nobody in London doubted, that they could get to Baghdad. In the telegram of the 23rd October the Government say that Sir John Nixon may advance to Baghdad if he is satisfied that he can get there.

A. Yes

- 717 Q. The matter was not very thoroughly gone into anywhere, was it
 A. Well, I think that it was gone into as thoroughly as we could go into it with the information at our disposal. You see we are a long way from Mesopotamia
- 718 Admiral Sir Cyprian Bridge: General Townshend did, at all events make a representation
 A. Yes, he made a representation on the 3rd October to General Nixon
- 719 Q. That indicated his doubt of the sufficiency of the force to carry out the service which had been ordered, and, as far as he was concerned, I suppose that it had to end there
 A. Yes
- 720 Q. He could not protest any further - or I will say, could he protest any further?
 A. No. I think that after that there was the not much opportunity for protesting
- 721 Chairman: Let me take E now. You contended that if it was necessary to retreat Kut-el-Amara was the right place at which a stand should be made against the Turks
 A. Yes
- 722 Q. And you seem to think that if the troops had been properly handled and if there had not been an unlucky combination of tide and floods and bad weather they would have been relieved.
 A. Yes. They ought to have been relieved
- 723 Q. You mention here certain grievous tactical errors
 A. Yes
- 724 Q. Where did they occur
 A. At Dujailah Redoubt on the 8th March
- 725 Q. Was that the force under General Aylmer
 A. Yes.

726 Q. Will you just tell us shortly what the criticism is of those tactics.

A. May I suggest that you leave the officer who was with General Aylmer at the time and who is now in London - General Gorrings?

727 Q. Very well. He was Chief of the Staff

A. He can tell you more about it than I can, my Lord.

728 Q. But your general impression is that the relief might have been effected

A. I will try to state my general impression as shortly as I can. In the first place I think that the attempt to relieve Kut was premature. General Aylmer hurried to attack early in January because he believed from telegrams that he had got from General Townshend that General Townshend was sorely pressed and that he would soon be starved out. General Townshend's estimates were evidently inaccurate because he apparently told General Aylmer that he would have to surrender by the middle of January. I think that he calculated about the middle of January. We now know that he had food which lasted him until well into April, or the end of April, and therefore he had entirely miscalculated his food supply. Had General Aylmer known that there was an ample food supply to last for two or three months I doubt if he would have made the attack that he did in January - the premature attack. Having made premature attacks and having failed he had to wait for reinforcements and for further re-inforcements, and when those reinforcements arrived, then on the 8th March he made another attack on a different line. He went direct across. He did not attack the ^{Es-Sinn} ~~Es-Sinn~~ position on the left bank but

but he marched across the country to attacks which is called the Dujailah Redoubt on the right bank. Without the map it is difficult to put this before you.

729 Q. I think ~~with~~ ^{that} the telegrams speak of a serious reverse on that day.

A. On the Dujailah Redoubt day?

Commander Wedgwood: That is the earlier one, the Es Sinn

Witness: They were all serious reverses. The Dujailah Redoubt is not until March. All the battles in January to my mind were premature attacks and they were tactical errors also; but the serious thing ~~is~~ was that the Dujailah Redoubt we ought undoubtedly to have got through. General Aylmer appears to have misunderstood the whole situation. He made a night march with a view to a surprise and he effected that surprise. The night march was most skilfully conducted. His troops arrived on the ground allotted at the required moment and if he had attacked at once he would undoubtedly have turned the position because there was no one there. The place was absolutely empty. Instead of that he waited for his guns and for further troops to come up from the rear, and the delay resulted in the Turks bringing across troops from the other bank of the river and lining the entrenchments. But all that is a matter which General Goringe ^{can} tell you about far more fully than I can.

730 Chairman: Look at Book 7 Supplement "A" page 17 No 56 at the bottom of the page: "Further reports from Aylmer as follows: - First report 1.15 am 22nd"

A. That was the fight in January, or one of the fights in January

Commander

21/ The Commander Wedgwood : Yes, it is an earlier fight

131 Chairman : "Second report 10.30 a.m states that we have suffered severe reverse in spite of gallantry of troops and that our losses very heavy". On the next page, 18, No 59 there is a telegram from the Viceroy: "Aylmer's reverse is serious and unexpected, but not irreparable". Is that the reverse that we were speaking of

140. The reverse was March 8th.

The Secretary : It is beyond these papers

Witness : It is beyond the India Office papers. It is not in the period with which the India Office dealt.

The Secretary : It comes under the War Office

7 The Witness : Then perhaps I ought to make no use of that period

732 Lord Hugh Cecil. It is very interesting

Commander Wedgwood : We have telegrams dealing with it. There is a telegram from the Viceroy dealing with the question of General Aylmer's ^{removal} ~~removal~~ that is Supplement "A" Book 7, page 22 telegram

73 The No 70

Chairman : I was coming to that

7 The Witness : Yes, beg your pardon, it is there I see.
733 Q That telegram is a curious one. It practically admits that General Aylmer's failure had disheartened the troops

A Yes, that is so. All accounts seem to show that they had lost confidence

734 Q He is a very fine man, is he not
A Yes, he is a very fine soldier. I have known him for a long time, and when the appointment was made I thought that it was a very good one.

735 Commander Wedgwood : But it was criticised before that particular fight, before the 8th March

3/22
1962 The

Chairman: The situation ... 1. 11. 11. ...

545

The appointment of both Lake and Sylver was criticised

Yes, but after General Sylver was sent to Mesopotamia.

I do not think that the appointment was criticised at all until he had failed in the January fights, because I know that everybody had a very high opinion of him

736 Lord Hugh Cecil: He is personally very popular, is he not?

A. Well, I like him. I think that he was personally popular at the period that I am thinking of

737 Chairman: What sort of force have we got in Mesopotamia now?

A. Do you mean in numbers, my Lord?

738 Q. Yes

A. I suppose between 50,000 and 60,000 men

739 Q. How many Divisions would that be?

A. It ought to be only about five Divisions, but it is more

740 Lord Hugh Cecil: Six?

A. More

741 Admiral Sir Cyprus Bridge: The Viceroy says seven

A. I think that it is now seven but really I am not in a position to give you information about that.

Chairman: The operations are under the War Office. 346

A Yes.

743 Q Do you feel any anxiety with regard to the position of our troops in Mesopotamia.

A None as regards defensive operations, but I do feel that we are being held up by an inferior force and ^{are} unable to do anything. It is very unsatisfactory.

744 Commander Wedgwood: Has the morale of the troops suffered.

A It has undoubtedly suffered.

745 Chairman: Were the troops mostly from Madras and Bombay.

A No. They were very good troops that General Aylmer had under him. There were two divisions from France; the 13th Division from Egypt, - a territorial division - not the new Army. There was also a division from India. They were all good troops and they behaved magnificently at some of the fights in January. Whole regiments were swept away. They went on charging line after line. I have had many letters about it.

746 Q That was in the relief operations?

A In the relief operations of January. Nothing could have been finer than the behaviour of the troops.

747 Admiral Sir Cyprian Bridge: You spoke some time ago about the political effect as regards Persia.

A Yes.

748 Q Are we not justified in assuming that the Kut-el-Amara force in holding out as

Folder from Mr Hill.

55

as long as it did, ~~held out~~ held up a very large body of Turkish troops which would otherwise have been employed elsewhere
A Yes: I think those troops might have been diverted at that period.

749

I might not that influence have extended even as far as Erzeroum and diminished the potential Turkish forces operating against the Russians.

A I do not think that it did. I think the troops came from other sources. I do not think that they weakened their forces in Armenia.

750

I I did not put it to you that they weakened their forces but that they were potential reinforcements for Armenia

A They might have been used for reinforcing in Armenia - yes, certainly.

751

I They were prevented from that potential employment by the holding out of the Kut-el-Amara garrison

A They were attracted towards Bagdad by the fact that we were going to attack Bagdad.

752

I I was going to say that in that way we really attracted a very considerable body of Turkish troops.

A Undoubtedly.

753

I Apparently good troops.

A Yes, Anatolian troops.

754

I As far as one can see from these papers the military opinion in London was not very much in favour of the advance on Bagdad.

A No; I think I may say that.

or by the military authorities in India

A. It was certainly not shared by the

3/4
3/3 23
761

A
110

518

755

Q That is your impression of the military opinion
A Yes.

756

Q But that opinion was not shared by the
Commander-in-Chief in Mesopotamia ~~and~~

I am doubtful if it was shared by the
responsible authorities in India

757

Q As you told us yesterday the operation
was, if I may use the expression, being
run, or being managed from India

A Yes, except in the matter of military
policy.

758

Q I mean the supervision of the arrangements.
A Yes.

759

Q ~~So that~~ whatever the military opinion in
London might have been, there was a very
strong opinion in Mesopotamia and in
India, on the part of people on the spot
in the theatre of war. I will assume
for the sake of the question that there
was one opinion in London and that there
were two opinions which agreed in Mesopotamia
and in India, a very strong combination,
and which were opposed to the London opinion
on purely military grounds. I do not know
whether I make myself quite clear.

A It is very difficult for us here I think
to form a judgment as to what the opinion
in India was. I do not think the telegrams
from the Viceroy ^{are} really very conclusive at
any stage.

760

Q That is exactly what I wanted to know.
What are we to read into them? The

A ^{The} telegrams from General Nixon are very
definite; the telegrams from India were not
definite.

3/4
24
761
Lord Hugh Cecil: Look at telegram no 200 in the yellow book at page #41. They say that they are in entire agreement with His Majesty's Government as to the political and strategical advantages. Then they review the different courses and conclude in favour of taking and occupying Bagdad.

A Yes, that was their general conclusion.

Chairman: The taking and holding are put together.

762 Lord Hugh Cecil: May it not be said to be true generally that there were great misgivings in London about the possibility of holding Bagdad, and that those misgivings were to some extent shared in India, but that no one had any misgivings about taking Bagdad.

A I do not think anyone had any misgivings on the subject of taking Bagdad. I think we all thought that it was possible to take Bagdad, but we had great doubts here in London as to whether Bagdad could be held for any time. My own personal opinion was that we should probably be able to hold it for two or three months, because I did not believe that troops could be got down in time.

763 General Sir Neville Lyttelton: Look at Book 6, page 12, the 2nd Addendum, 201a. That refers to a report of the combined staff. What ~~does~~ ^{combined staff does} that refer to ~~the~~ — the General Staff of the War Office and — ?

A The General Staff of the War Office, someone from

- 24
764 Q from the Admiralty, and I think myself.
A As a sort of Conference.
A It was informal.
- 765 Q It was not the two Staffs only, was it?
The Foreign Office were there too?
A No, they were not.
- 766 Q Was this purely military?
A Yes: military people discussed that.
- 767 Q "Only some 9,000 Turkish troops and some irregulars to deal with" - that is only an assumption. You could not be sure about it.
A That is what we believed.
- 768 Q "That Turkish forces may be somewhat increased by end of year and they might conceivably reach a total of 60,000." That means at Bagdad.
A Yes? if he had got his reinforcements.
769 Q ~~Yes~~ He would then only have been some 30,000 strong.
A Quite so, but he would have been on interior lines. The Euphrates and the Tigris come from ~~very~~ widely separated points. The two arms converge towards Bagdad and therefore an advance on Bagdad could be made separately, but troops coming down on either side, and moreover ^{the} troops using those rivers could only come down in detachments. They could not concentrate. ^{and therefore could be met separately.}
- 770 Q They would have to come by river.
A Yes: either by the Tigris or the Euphrates; they were the only ways possible of approaching Bagdad.
- 771 Q Is there a railway?
A No.

772 Q None at all.

A There is one between Bagdad and a point called Samarra 70 miles north of Bagdad, but none for the Turks to use

773 Q The assumption is that the 60,000 men could be dealt with in detail.

A Yes, on both lines. My view was that if the two divisions had arrived we should have been able to face 60,000 because they would all be in detachments. They could not concentrate 60,000 men in the space; whereas below Bagdad, once there, they could always concentrate. That was the first possible point of concentration for the enemy.

774 Commander Wedgwood: The Clapham Junction.

A Yes. Here were two divergent lines meeting at Bagdad.

775 General Sir Neville Lyttelton: On the face of it it does not look as if 3,000 men against 60,000 is otherwise than somewhat optimistic.

A No; but I have stated the view that we held.

776 Q That puts a different complexion on it of course.

A The surmise was that we were in Bagdad, with ^{that} our reinforcements had come up, and that we could meet the enemy in a prepared position

777 Sir Archibald Williamson: Was the India Office in a position to estimate the conditions out there with regard to transport, the medical supplies, and all the other matters

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appertaining to the expedition.

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A No.

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Q So that it may be fair to say that the India Office here was really partially if not totally ignorant of the conditions of transport and other things of that sort.

A I will not say that we were totally ignorant of the conditions of transport but we were not in a position to judge of the sufficiency of the transport.

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Q That was the duty of the General on the spot.

A Yes: to estimate what is required and to inform his employer, who, in this particular case, was the Government of India.

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Q The Government of India should have known the condition of things before coming to a conclusion as to advancing up the river.

A Yes, I think so.

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Q Why was the control of the operations transferred to the War Office.

A On the 16th February?

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Q Yes.

A Because the force in Mesopotamia was ~~was~~ ceasing to maintain its Indian character. There was a whole division of British troops actually arriving - the 13th Division. It consisted of nothing but British troops and we knew that in the future all reinforcements and the personnel like doctors and everything else would have to come from the War Office. India ~~could~~ could supply nothing more; India was down to the bone.