

WAZIRISTAN CAMPAIGN.

DESPATCHES PUBLISHED.
SUCCESS OF OPERATIONS.

*Reprinted from The Civil and Military Gazette of
May 5th, 1918.*

Lahore:

THE "CIVIL AND MILITARY GAZETTE" PRESS.

WAZIRISTAN CAMPAIGN.

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TRIBUTES TO OFFICERS AND MEN.

SIMLA, MAY 3, 1918—Despatches have been published today of the operations against the Mahsuds from March to August, 1917. The Commander-in-Chief brings to notice the admirable services rendered by General Sir Arthur Barratt, who had the direction of the operations, and Major-General Sir G. W. Beynon, who commanded the South Waziristan Field Force. His Excellency also acknowledges the great assistance afforded to the Government of India by the three regiments of the Nepalese Contingent who took part in these operations. General Sir Baber Shumshere Jang Bahadur Rana, in his capacity as representative of the Nepalese army and liaison officer, afforded Sir William Beynon all possible help, advice and support. Sir Arthur Barratt, in the course of his despatch, writes:—On 6th May the force in Derajat was constituted the Derajat Field Force and Major-General W. G. L. Beynon was appointed to command with Sir John Donald as his chief Political Officer. On 12th May the Bannu Brigade, under the command of Brigadier-General the Hon. C. G. Bruce, was placed under General Baynon's orders and the troops in the Derajat and Bannu Brigades were designated the Waziristan Field Force.

THE SARWAKAI ACTION.

Whilst these reinforcements were moving into Derajat an action was fought on the 10th May in the vicinity of Sarwakai. The Officer Commanding the post, Major L. P. Collins, 1-4th Gurkha Rifles, hearing that a body of the enemy was retiring from the vicinity of Tormandu, moved out during the night of the 9th-10th with a force of 450 rifles, comprising the 1-4th Gurkha Rifles, 11th Rajputs and South Waziristan Militia, with the object of intercepting the enemy's retreat. At Daja the

Mahsuds were successfully surprised, but large enemy reinforcements arriving, very fierce hand-to-hand fighting took place. As there was danger of being surrounded the officer commanding the detachment rightly decided to withdraw to Sarwakai. Although our losses in this engagement were severe those inflicted on the enemy were also heavy and included the leader of the *Lashkar*. Great praise is, I consider, due to the troops, who were largely composed of young soldiers, for the readiness and gallantry with which they fought.

A GALLANT PICQUET.

On 16th June the 45th Brigade joined the main body of the force at Haidari Kach. The three following days were occupied in carrying out punitive measures in the vicinity, in improving the road through the defile and in reconnoitring the route to Barwand. Reports were now received that the Mahsuds intended strongly to oppose the further advance of Major-General Beynon's force and on 11th June, when the force moved to Barwand, considerable opposition was met with. During the whole of the ensuing night several hundred of the enemy made a determined effort to capture a picquet of the 54th Sikhs (F. F.) under the command of an Indian officer. This picquet, although sustaining heavy losses, was successful in maintaining its position. Major-General Beynon describes the defence as a most gallant one which not only worthily upheld the fine traditions of the battalion of the Punjab Frontier Force, but, as was admitted by the Mahsuds at the final *Jirga*, contributed in no small measure to inspiring the tribe with respect for His Majesty's troops and a general desire for peace.

ENEMY'S MAIN RESISTANCE BROKEN.

On the 20th for reasons of water-supply the force moved a short distance to Ispana Raghza. The enemy made a determined attempt to check the advance but the 43rd Brigade overcame the opposition, the work of the 1-25th London Regiment and the 1-4th Gurkha Rifle, being specially noticeable. On the 21st Major-General Beynon ordered the 45th Brigade to destroy the village of Nanu at the head of the Splitoi valley, whilst the 43rd Brigade dealt with the settlements in the vicinity of Ispana Raghza. The enemy had evidently determined to make a stand on this occasion and aeroplanes reported considerable bodies of the enemy on the ridge dividing the Splitoi and Shabur valleys through which ran the passto Nanu

The 45th Brigade attacked the pass with great spirit and dash, the 2-6th Sussex Regiment moving against the pass itself, whilst the 2-1st (King George's Own) Gurkha Rifles and the Mohendradal Regiment, Nepalese Contingent, seized the heights to the south and north of the pass respectively. The enemy was driven off, Nanu village destroyed and the retirement of the troops to camp effected with only slight molestation. Major-General Beynon brings to notice the most creditable manner in which the Mohendradal Regiment carried the heights forming its objective and also the valuable work performed by the aeroplanes of the 31st Squadron, Royal Flying Corps, both in reconnaissance and in bombing the enemy. The defeat of the enemy on this occasion appears to have brought home to the enemy the futility of attempts to oppose the British Raj and messages asking for terms of peace began from now to be sent in.

On 22nd June the 43rd Brigade destroyed the large village of Shah Salim Mela in the Waspas valley. The enemy had made careful preparations for opposing the advance but owing to the good dispositions made by Lieut.-Col. C. O. O. Tanner, Commanding the Brigade, the whole of the enemy's defence was turned and our casualties were slight.

Sufficient supplies having now been collected to enable the advance to be resumed, the striking force moved on the 23rd to Narai Raghza. A very difficult defile had to be negotiated in the face of opposition which was cleared away by the 45th Brigade. During the following night the camp was heavily sniped and several picquets were attacked, one of the 1/4th Gurkha Rifles coming in for a particular share of the enemy's attention. The possession of bombs assisted considerably in the defence of these picquets.

THE SHRAWANI PASS ACTION.

On the 24th Major-General Beynon directed the 43rd Brigade to capture the Shrawani pass to cover the passage through it of the 45th Brigade, which was to carry out punitive measures in the Khaisara. The heights leading to and commanding this pass were seized by the 1st Rifles, Nepalese Contingent, 54th Sikhs (F.F.) and the 1-4th Gurkha Rifles. The enemy was forestalled and the 45th Brigade was rapidly pushed through into the Khaisara valley, under cover of the right flank guard, which was continuously engaged with the enemy, the destruction of all the villages within reach was

proceeded with, the villages in the Nana Khelghazi Kot area and the Machi Khel settlements being thoroughly dealt with, practically all the towers of these villages being blown up. The retirement was then ordered. This movement was hotly followed up and a picquet of the 55th Coke's Rifles (F.F.), was charged but the enemy was driven back with loss. Major-General Beynon brings to notice the skilful manner in which the retirement of the 45th Brigade was carried out by Brigadier-General Luard. Major-General Beynon's intentions were to visit the Khaisara again on the following day but messengers had arrived from Kangiguram asking for terms of peace and the Chief Political Officer considered that the damage already effected was sufficient. Accordingly on the 25th after destroying a village in the vicinity of the Camp the force returned with slight molestation to Ispana Raghza.

AEROPLANES' GOOD WORK

Whilst these operations were taking place several raids were carried out by aeroplanes of the 31st Squadron, Royal Flying Corps. Shingai villages in the Takbi Zam and others in the Radda Toi were bombed and in a particularly successful raid on 26th June nine hits were scored on Makim and six on Marobi, the home of Mulla Fazl Din, the titular chief of the tribe. These raids involved considerable risks. Engines were very liable to failure in the high temperature prevailing, distances from the base at Tank were long and hills up to 8,000 feet had to be crossed. These risks were, however, cheerfully taken by the Flying Officers and were well repaid by the results obtained, which undoubtedly contributed largely to the desire for peace displayed by all sections of the tribe.

Whilst these operations had been taking place the troops under Brigadier-General Bruce in the Bannu area were not called upon to undertake any offensive measure. The presence of strong forces at Bannu and Miranshah deterred the Mahsuds from raiding into the Bannu District and Tochi Valley and kept them in a state of uncertainty as to whether any advance from Miranshah might not be contemplated. On one occasion only was it necessary for Brigadier-General Bruce to act against a body of the enemy. This was on the 14th June, when a body of Mahsuds approached the Saidji defile in the Tochi Valley with the object of attacking the 1/1st Kent Regiment marching to Miranshah. The prompt concentration of troops both from Miranshah and Bannu, to effect which

mechanical transport was largely employed, successfully prevented the enemy from carrying out his design.

FINE SPIRIT OF THE TROOPS.

The physical and climatic conditions of this operation on the North-West Frontier are peculiarly trying and the period during which the recent offensive operations had to be undertaken was the hottest time of the year. Nothing however could have exceeded the cheerfulness and determination with which all difficulties and hardships were faced and overcome by the troops, not only by those actively engaged against the enemy, but by those on the lines of communication, who at first in the Gomal and later in the Shabur Valley were continuously employed on picqueting duties in difficult and dangerous country.

STRAIN ON COMMUNICATIONS.

At the time it was decided to take the offensive the most unfavourable season of the year, June, was commencing. It was necessary that operations should be undertaken with the least possible delay and with a force of adequate size to ensure rapid success. This entailed the immediate expansion of the force already available which threw a great strain on the communications leading into the area. The Kalabagh-Bannu Tank narrow gauge line was inadequately equipped for the movement of large bodies of troops and was liable to interruption in the event of heavy rain. The unbridged passages of the Indus at Kalabagh and Darya Khan added greatly to the difficulties to be overcome. Consequently the work of those responsible for the communications was very arduous and the manner in which these duties were carried out is worthy of great praise.

ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES.

The administrative services and departments had also to work under high pressure and adverse conditions and their untiring efforts contributed greatly to the success of the operations. The Supply and Transport and Ordnance services successfully met all the demands made upon them. The medical services under the direction of Colonel P. Hehir by the timely use of precautionary measures were able to prevent the outbreak of epidemics and the arrangements

made for the reception and evacuation of the large numbers of sick which it was anticipated would have to be dealt with as a result of the great heat and unhealthy theatre in which the operations took place were fully adequate to deal with the casualties which occurred. The provision and equipment of base hospitals and convalescent depots at Rawalpindi and in the Murree hills was quickly carried out under the orders of the General Officer Commanding 2nd (Rawalpindi) Division and amply sufficed to meet all requirements.

The Royal Engineers had to carry through much work, especially in connection with hospital accommodation which was expeditiously and satisfactorily executed. Whilst Major-General Beynon's striking force was in the Shabur Valley sections of No. 3. Wireless Signal Squadron had to be relied on almost entirely for maintaining communication with it and great credit is due to these sections for the way in which they coped with the heavy traffic.

THANKS TO N.-W. RAILWAY.

I wish to express my thanks to the North-Western Railway authorities for the manner in which the transport of troops and supplies was carried out, especially over the narrow gauge railway in the trans-Indus area. The congestion on this line was very great and it was only owing to the unceasing exertions of the *personnel* of this line that the heavy traffic was successfully dealt with in spite of inadequate rolling stock and frequent interruptions due to damage to the permanent-way caused by floods.

The operations threw a heavy amount of work on the Posts and Telegraph Department for the successful coping with which I desire to express my gratitude and thanks.

I also wish to thank the Red Cross Society and those who contributed to sending comforts to the troops for their gifts, which were most acceptable to the recipients.

I am greatly indebted to the advice and assistance I have received from the Hon. Lieutenant-Colonel Sir George Roos-Keppel, Chief Commissioner, North-West Frontier Province, and to the manner in which the Political Officers attached to the North and South Waziristan Field Forces carried out their duties; also for the assistance rendered by the North and South Waziristan Militia and Frontier Constabulary.

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED AT
THE CIVIL AND MILITARY GAZETTE PRESS, LAHORE,
BY EDWIN HAWARD, MANAGER.