NARRATIVE OF A MARCH INTO KURDISTAN DURING THE REBELLION OF 1919.

BY CAPTAIN J. C. BURNS.
Royal Army Medical Corps.

The hot weather was once more upon us and from 10 a.m. till 4 p.m. the air was red-hot and sore to breathe. Overhead a pitiless sun in a brazen sky shone down on a parched and thirsty land. Along the Tigris four miles above Baghdad stretches a grove of palm trees and in June, 1919, these palm trees afforded some shade to the two miles of tents that sheltered the British and Indian troops who hoped to spend the next four dreary months in peace if not in comfort in this camp of Chaldari. But for some of us this was not to be. War clouds had already settled over the mountains of Kurdistan and their shadow extended as far as Baghdad. Since the armistice and the withdrawal of large bodies of troops down river from the outlying districts, discontent had shown itself among the Kurdish tribes. Sheik Mahmud, the paramount ruler of Southern Kurdistan, rose in rebellion in May. The British officials in Suleimanyah, the capital of this province, were besieged and their massacre was daily feared. The tribes, it appears, had been able to obtain supplies of arms and ammunition from the Turks retiring in disorder before the British advance from Kifri to Altun Kupri in 1918. A flying column in Ford cars was hurriedly got together at Kirkuk and accompanied by some L.A.M.B. cars set out to the relief of Suleimanyah. They succeeded in getting two-thirds of the way, but while bivouacked in the Tachluda Pass were attacked in force by the Kurds and forced to retire to Chemchemal. Two armoured cars, unable to elevate their machine-guns sufficiently to bear on the tribesmen hidden behind rocks on the hillsides, attempted to rush the lower slopes and give the convoy time to get clear of the pass. Owing to the broken nature of the ground and the low clearance of the cars both were put out of action. The British crews were captured, but thanks to the presence of Sheik Mahmud himself, their lives were spared and the men were taken back under safe conduct to Chemchemal. This engagement greatly encouraged the spread of the insurrection, and Halebja, lying to the east towards the Avromán mountains, was entered by hostile elements. The Political Officer only just succeeded in escaping with his life. Such was the situation in the month of May. Urgent action was now necessary to suppress this rebellion before the sporadic outbreak became an epidemic. Troops of the 18th Division were concentrated therefore at Kirkuk, the objective, Suleimanyah, being reached via Chemchemal and the Bazyan Pass—the latter a deep, narrow cleft in a chain of mountains running at right angles to the only practicable route into Southern Kurdistan. It afforded a position of great natural strength and was likely to be held in force by the Kurds. While the main operations were to take place from the west by the 18th Division, a column from the
17th Division was to proceed by the Persian border and enter Southern Kurdistan from the east by the Avromân mountains. This column was composed of troops encamped at Chaldari. The column was to be commanded by Colonel B. of the "Buffs"; Major W. of the Royal Engineers was Brigade Major; Captain M. P. was Staff Captain; Captain C. the Supply Officer. The troops consisted of one battalion of Gurkhas, two companies of Baluchis, a pack wireless section, a company of sappers and miners, and a "medical unit." I was detailed to take over the medical unit. Later, while on our way to the Persian frontier, we were joined by a section of mountain battery, a pack ambulance and a small survey party.

Little was known regarding the route we were to follow, the maps available were by no means complete. The route was said to be practicable for pack animals and it was said that during the war small parties of Turkish troops had crossed to Kermanshah by these mountain paths. I think it is safe to say we were the first body of British troops to penetrate this strip of border country. Just prior to the outbreak of war the Turco-Persian Boundary Commission passed over part of this country and did some valuable survey work.

It was considered probable that the column would be out of touch with any lines of communication for a period from three weeks to a month, so that the column would have to be self-contained. The Assistant Director of Medical Services of the Division informed me that all sick and wounded, once we had left the railway, would have to be carried with the column. No wheeled transport could be taken. The question of the transport of casualties over these mountain tracks was likely to prove a difficult one and one felt that even under the best conditions the lot of the sick man was likely to prove a rough one.

For cases able to ride we could utilize the pack mules of the supply column as their loads were used up as rations. Naturally the supply of such spare mules would increase from day to day. As regards lying cases or others who could not ride or be supported on a mule, they would have to be carried on stretchers by the dhoolly bearers. A patient who had to lie on a stretcher and be carried for hours on end in the fierce heat of a Mesopotamian midsummer, would require some arrangement to provide him with shade from the sun's rays. On the suggestion of "medical division," the sapper company forming part of the column constructed a number of three-sided supports out of thin iron bars (see photo No. 1). Two of these iron supports were needed for each stretcher; the ends of the uprights fitting into small slots at the base of the stretcher handles. Connecting the cross pieces at each end of the stretcher were two palm fronds—they were very light and yet sufficiently rigid to support the blankets which were to be thrown over this framework. Two blankets were needed for each frame and were arranged in such a way that the portion forming the roof was double. One side of this contrivance could always be kept open and allow of a free circulation of air. On the march, when not required, the iron frames were collected together and carried on a pack mule. The palm
fronds were folded up in the canvas of the closed stretchers. Later, while in bivouac at Suleimanyah, these stretchers with their frames were most useful for rigging up mosquito nets to protect the sick from the myriads of flies, mosquitoes and sand-flies that made this particular camp a torment.

As regards the medical and surgical equipment carried, it was the operation scale of a section of a combined field ambulance. Extra medical comforts were taken and four 160-lb. tents for sick. The personnel of the unit like the rest of the column was on summer operation scale and no tents.

As the country was rocky the mules had to be shod all round and more than usual attention had to be paid to the condition of the men's boots. New pakhals were obtained from Ordnance, etc. On the evening of June 2 the column entrained at Chaldari and we set off on the first part of our journey towards the Persian railhead. In the morning, while it was yet cool, we detrained at a "station" called Musa Atmah and here we went into camp. It was a delightful contrast to the sun-baked plains of the Tigris and on all sides the country stretched away in a series of grassy billows, mounting higher and higher and changing colour till they melted into the distant blue haze of the Persian mountains. We camped here for some days practising the rapid formation of perimeter camps and getting men and animals fit for the march. Orders were received to move up the railway another twenty-eight miles, where we were to await the arrival of the Political Officer from Halebjia who was to act as guide. The section of mountain battery had joined us at Musa Atmah and now the pack ambulance under Capt. M. of the I.M.S. joined the column. This unit was got together specially by General Headquarters and this was the first occasion for it to be used in the Force. The chief feature was the provision of "cacolets"—on either side of a pack saddle was a variety of skeleton chair into which a sick or wounded man could be
buckled. Some of the mules provided for this unit were not up to the weight of two men and equipment. The small Gurkha rifleman could be tucked into the cacolet more or less successfully, but a stalwart Baluchi sepoy was quite a different matter and a considerable amount of trouble had to be taken to ensure even distribution of the weight. As far as I can recollect there were twenty of these cacolet mules, so that the actual transport of suitable cases was made more efficient. I now thought that I would feel easier in my mind if I set about making some conveyance for a seriously ill case and decided upon making a mule "litter." For the construction of this I enlisted the help of the two sapper officers and the result was that if I provided the materials they would see that it was compactly put together. There were some E.P. tent poles lying in a dump waiting to be sent to Baghdad and the Staff Captain kept a jealous eye upon all articles in the dump. On waylaying the Staff Captain I told him my desires, but he did not seem to be at all keen on handing over the four tent poles I wanted. I therefore carefully explained what an excellent chance there would be of carrying a case of beer on the litter until a suitable patient turned up. In a few minutes the tent poles were in the sapper camp. Two of these stout bamboo poles were needed for each side. Cross pieces were lashed between the poles and to the cross pieces an opened stretcher was attached. Slings were firmly lashed to each of the four ends of the long poles to be attached to the hooks on the mule saddles. The Transport Officer looked out two of his most docile and intelligent mules and two good drivers. It took the mules quite a few minutes to get used to this weird piece of apparatus. As events proved later this litter was quite useless on those parts of the march where the track was steep and tortuous. The rigidity of the frame prevented the mules from "cornering" and many times I was tempted to throw the whole thing down one of the numerous ravines we crossed. On
open country it was excellent, and as it happened my British nursing orderly developed acute appendicitis on the march and was conveyed across country a distance of thirty-five miles to the field ambulance at Suleimanyah in comparative comfort.

The column was now ready to march, the Political Officer arrived, and then the Commander-in-Chief arrived, inspected the column, and wished us "bon voyage."

Our first march was a short one, the second a good deal longer. We camped that evening in a piece of ground thickly covered with thorn scrub, so that the men had a busy time clearing the camp site. The thorn, however, provided us with ample fuel, and soon the dusk was illuminated with the cheery glow of the cooking fires. Mosquitoes from the scrub, however, soon began their devilish biting, and one was glad, indeed, to get under a mosquito net. "Surveys" and I messed together, and

![Photograph No. 3.—The valley of the Sirwan River taken from the line of march 1,000 feet above the river.](http://militaryhealth.bmj.com/)

although the unit cook was somewhat deficient in the knowledge of what the "Sahib log" liked to eat, my orderly, Jhan Mohd, made good the deficiencies.

Each evening the Column Commander met the officers of the column, and he or his Brigade Major explained the route to be pursued the following day, and issued his routine orders regarding time and order of march, picquets, etc. Our time of marching was just before dawn, and it could be quite cold at this early hour. After a few marches the column developed the faculty of getting under way with the maximum speed and minimum of discomfort. Our route for the first four days was across wide rolling plains, and marching was fairly easy. Mountain ranges soon began to hem us in, and the nature of the ground became more difficult. A ridge of hills had to be crossed, and here we made the unwelcome acquaintance of marching over rocks. Our way was up a steep gorge, the narrow path
twisting in and out among huge boulders, while the surface underfoot was rough in the extreme, which cut up the boots very quickly. The sun striking on these naked rocks rendered the still air unbearably hot, but at last we reached the top. Our troubles now began, for the path ended in a precipitous slope which descended sheer into the valley far below us. The sappers, however, got to work with blasting charges, and cleared the path of the worst obstacles. The mules were allowed to come down as they liked, and one could not help but admire their agility and sure-footedness. One or two came to grief as a result of the loads slipping, but the damage was very slight. It took us ten hours to do eight miles that day, but our appetites were wonderful, and stewed "bully," chupatties, tea and tinned fruit was just the thing for dinner. As a result of the difficult country, there were many cases of foot trouble, and these were carried on the mules whose loads had been eaten. Next day's march was to prove the most trying of the whole operations. Up to now we had been able to find water without much trouble, but our guide warned us that the question of finding water in the next valley was very uncertain. Orders were given, therefore, that there was to be great economy in water on the line of march, as there was a likelihood of having to camp for one night away from a water supply. We started as usual about 3.30 a.m., and marched over stony ground through a desolate plain. This narrowed down to a valley between two ranges of barren mountains, and the air was oppressively hot. By mid-day we had had about enough, and were profoundly thankful for the order to halt for an hour and a half. There was no shade, however, and the rocks were almost too hot to sit on, and despite glare glasses and spine pads the heat seemed to penetrate to one's very marrow. Footsore and thirsty we resumed our march through the valley, and the track narrowed down to a path running through a wide
A March into Kurdistan during the Rebellion

belt of thorn. To make marching still more uncomfortable, the path was deep in soft black dust which hung like a cloud over the sweating column in the shimmering, baking air. The men were now beginning to show signs of fatigue, and soon we were busy collecting the men who had fallen in their tracks from heat exhaustion. The mules were as bad as the men, white with lather, and with heaving flanks. The column had to push on, however, until a suitable camp site could be found. About 4 p.m. word was passed back that a stream was close at hand, and in about five minutes we came upon it. It was not much more than six feet broad edged with rushes, but there was water in it. As soon as the water was sighted the animals became frantic. Despite the imprecations and all efforts of their drivers to hold them the mules reared and plunged, dragging their yelling drivers through the scrub, in their headlong rush to the water, carrying all before them. In this struggling, kicking, plunging mob of maddened mules were about thirty Gurkhas—heat exhaustion cases—strapped into cacolets. Down into the stream the animals plunged up to their bellies, careless alike of their loads animate or inanimate. The stream became a mud bath in which these wretched animals were wallowing with every mark of delight. The unfortunate patients were unshipped as fast as possible, and to my relief and astonishment no one was killed or drowned in the mud. Some had bruises to show, but the poor little fellows were already so done up they did not seem to mind what happened.

While this pandemonium had been going on the troops had continued their march to where the Brigade Major had found a suitable camp, about two miles farther on. It was not till some hours later that all the loads were collected and brought into camp. Fortunately, the most of our patients suffering from heat exhaustion were able to return to their units except a dozen or so who required treatment. As it had been such a long and trying march, the Column Commander decided to rest here a day and
give the men a much needed opportunity of washing their clothes. Boots were beginning to give way rapidly, and many of the animals needed re-shoeing. It was pleasant, indeed, to be able at last to strip off one’s nether garments and let the running waters of this cool Kurdistan rivulet restore one to cleanliness. As a result of this delicious bath one’s skin really seemed to fit. Both animals and men were much refreshed with the rest, and we resumed the routine of the march.

Next day was eventful in so much as we had the pleasure of seeing a real tree—the first one since leaving the palms of Baghdad. It was perched on the top of a hill and afforded the survey officer a chance of giving this hill a name and not a number, on his map. We had seen no human beings up to the present, no villages and not even the tent of nomad shepherds. The whole country we had passed over was destitute of animal life. The route was now ascending steadily and with the rise a change in the

character of the vegetation could be noticed. Instead of smooth rounded hills with broad valleys covered with thorn and scanty grass we now entered an area of rugged mountains, deep ravines, down which coursed numerous streams of delicious ice-cold sparkling water. The slopes of the less precipitous ravines were clothed in long green grass studded with many flowers and here and there groups of small oak trees. The scenery was more varied and beautiful and as we crossed the numerous ridges we could look back over a view extending many miles to the Persian hills, round Kermanshah. The air was fresh and cool and marching became easier as there was more to occupy the mind. The track was still difficult, in many places where it traversed these ravines being at times scarcely a foot broad. On these occasions the mules were allowed to go free and the column moved over in single file. While crossing one particular nery ridge, a mule belonging to the sappers lost its footing and rolled down the 900 feet slope in a cloud of shale and dust. Funnily enough, this mule was carrying
the gun-cotton. A few minutes later, one of my mules was hustled off the path by an impetuous animal coming up from behind. Down it went rolling over and over, scattering its loads in its fall. Anyone who has been in a similar column will know what load this unfortunate animal was carrying, viz., my few mess stores. Of great importance was the sole remaining bottle of whisky in the column and that bottle was in one of the boxes now careering in a cloud of stones and dust down the side of the Khud. The mule was not killed, but of course the bottle of whisky was broken to pieces. Two bottles of lime juice and one of Eno’s were intact.

Clambering carefully down the slope we reached the unfortunate mule wedged in a crevice and while the men busied themselves with extricating the animal, I had an excellent opportunity of watching the whisky—that delightful elixir, the life-giving distillate of waving fields of Scottish barley ripened by the northern sun—drain slowly but surely into the thirsty earth. It was not a joyful moment.

About midday we entered a beautiful wooded glade—the sylvan glade one reads about in books. Here we halted for tiffin. It was delightful to lie at the foot of a tree sunk deep in luscious cool grass and partake of cold bully, raw onions, biscuits and tinned cheese, and later, replete, lie back and watch the blue smoke from one’s pipe curl up towards the leafy screen above. To lie with half-shut eyes in perfect rest with a delightful sense of lassitude in relaxed limbs, while the drone of insects, the soft crunching of the mules in the grass, and tinkle of their harness, gave an added sense of languor and drowsy peace.

At this point the detachment of the Baluchis was due to leave the column returning to railhead with the spare ration mules and some bad footbite cases. We had thus an opportunity of writing some letters and having them posted at the Persian railhead. Our “wireless” had also got into touch with the 18th Division, and we heard that the strong position...
of the Bazyan pass had been forced and Sheik Mahmud wounded and a prisoner. The Division was continuing the march to Suleimanyah. We learned later of the dash through of the 32nd Lancers to Suleimanyah to release the prisoners before the routed Kurds had time to get back to massacre them.

Next day we reached the highest point of our march and before us opened a magnificent vista of tree-clad slopes descending gently to the green plains in the distance, through which wound the blue water of the Serwan river, on its journey to join the Dealah. On our right a precipice descended sheer into a rocky canyon through which the snow-fed waters of the river hurled themselves from rapid to rapid and the thunder of their wrath rolled up to us perched 800 feet above. By the aid of field glasses a Kurdish encampment could be discerned on the plain and on the opposite (right) bank of the river. Our path was now downhill and we pushed on rapidly. Soon we began to pass patches of cultivation with here and there a rude hut of leafy branches. The banks of the streams we crossed were now becoming more thickly clothed in vegetation and here and there we traversed sheltered hollows bowered deep in close-growing clumps of rhododendron shaded by the fresh green leaves of walnut, oak and mulberry. Along the edges of the path grew in thick profusion blackberries and the wild rose. The scenery was delightful and the march almost a pleasure.

In the afternoon we passed a fairly large village and we camped a short distance away. Fresh vegetables were obtained, and some goats, and made a welcome addition to the rations. This village was the first of the characteristic Kurdish villages we had passed. It was built in two portions—a summer and winter. The summer quarters were higher up the slopes of the mountain and composed of thickly woven leafy branches. The more
permanent winter quarters were mud huts without windows or chimneys. The reason for building two parts to a village is really to enable the happy villagers to escape from the flea-infested winter huts and gain a respite in their flimsy but more sanitary arboreal summer residences. The number of fleas per inhabitant and habitation in these Kurdish mountain villages is probably unique among all the races of Asia. Though one must confess one never noticed anything in the way of the "clawin posts" that a philanthropic and practical Duke of Argyll is said to have set up in certain parts of the Highlands of Scotland. Having done dispensary and midwifery practise in the slums of Edinburgh and Manchester, I thought I knew something about fleas, but a five minutes' stay in one of these hovels while bargaining for eggs with an ancient crone convinced me that I had much to learn regarding the powers of penetration and irritation of this humble insect.

Photograph No. 9.—In camp near Suleimanyah. The column "hospital" built of brushwood.

Our next march brought us across a wide stretch of open land to the river edge opposite the Kurdish camp, as this pointed to being the most obvious place to find a ford. The afternoon was spent by the "Staff" in making a careful survey of the river and the best means of conveying the column across the 100 yards of swift waters. The current was too strong to allow mules encumbered with loads to cross, and the sappers as usual proceeded to get over all the difficulties in the shortest space of time. The Political Officer was able to obtain some useful information from the Sheik of the encampment as regards the safest route. Two stout posts were well dug into both banks of the river and connected by a stout cable of rope. The troops were turned on to cutting grass, brushwood, etc., to be taken to the sapper camp for the making of improvised rafts. Skins were not available, otherwise very serviceable rafts or kalicks as are used on the Tigris could have been quickly constructed. Pits were dug, lined with large tarpaulins, and grass and brushwood well stamped in till
the pit was filled. The excess tarpaulin was folded over and firmly lashed and the cubical bale removed from the earth. The dimensions of these bales would be about 9 feet long by 4½ feet deep and 4½ feet broad. Two or three such lashed together make a very effective raft. All the stores were collected on the bank and amid much hilarity from the grinning Gurkhas the work of transport proceeded apace. To prevent the rafts being swept down stream a travelling rope connected to the overhead cable was utilized and fatigue parties on the banks pulled the raft over by means of other ropes. When the stores had been safely put over, the mule saddles and the sick were ferried over and the bulk of the equipment of the soldiers, for it was no easy thing to keep one's feet when wading up to the waist in those cold snow waters that come past so swiftly. Life lines were stretched across and the strongest swimmers of the column were stationed on the banks in case of accidents.

However, although one or two went under, there were no serious results and a dose of brandy soon pulled round the few who were "shocked."

Our camp on the Halebja side of the Sirwan was near but not too near the Kurdish shepherds. There was nothing particular to note about the style of the camps, these being like all the other camps of the nomad shepherds one had seen along the Tigris from Basra to Mosul and from the Khabur river to the lower Euphrates. Long booths of black coarse material erected on rude poles, the interior divided into a series of compartments by mats made of reeds. The women lead a more independent life than their unhappy sisters on the Mesopotamian plains, but they still have all the hard work of the camp to do and are the hewers of wood and drawers of water. I was greatly intrigued by watching a group of Kurdish women who were churning butter. The apparatus was extremely primitive and had many "Heath Robinson" characteristics. The receptacle for the cream was a goat skin, and the rest of the apparatus consisted of some pieces of
A March into Kurdistan during the Rebellion

rope and a tripod. Another point of interest was a baby gravely surveying the busy scene. It was tightly rolled up in a piece of scarlet blanket and lay in a swinging cradle. A second “Heath Robinson” bit of mechanism connected up the cradle and the foot of one of the industrious women, so that as she worked at her churn she could at the same time rock the cradle. This idyllic scene was marred however by the condition of the infant’s eyes. Like so many other tiny tots one sees in every Arab village on the plains, the eyes were badly affected by purulent conjunctivitis and the sight of scores of flies clustering round those red oozing lids gave one a

feeling of intense nausea; strangely enough these children pay no heed to the flies and to all appearances suffer no discomfort from them. The mother was prevailed upon to bring the baby over to the camp, and there we cleaned up the horrid mess, although we knew that to-morrow the same state of filth would recur. As soon as the news got round that there was a “Hakim” all the chronics of the camp came along, including one old man completely blind who was evidently quite hopeful of an immediate cure. It is on such occasions the young medico wishes he had a magic wand of healing instead of some boric acid lotion and a dose of Epsom salts.

We were enabled to lay in a stock of fresh meat for the column. Wireless communication was again established and we learned that a column of the 18th Division was marching to Halebja and would join our
column there. An aeroplane was also to fly over the route of the column and locate us. As many rebels had fled towards the mountains and Halebja, we thought there might be a chance of some fighting. We expected to reach the town that day and made an early start. We passed through a valley, and then our route lay past cornfields and orchards. The aeroplane as agreed swung round and round above us and then made off in the direction of Suleimanyah. We passed a certain number of Kurds, finely built men more robust than the lean Arab, covered in cartridge belts and armed with rifle, pistol and the inevitable curved dagger stuck in the folds of the wide Kurdish shawl that serves for a belt. We roped in five men that the Political Officer badly wanted and these we took along with us in handcuffs. Halebja was reached at about noon and the column bivouacked about 400 yards to the east of the town. There was no opposition and the inhabitants kept within doors. Thanks to the wonderful energy of the Staff Captain, and our supply representatives, a field oven was got going and white bread baked. The column of the 18th Division did not arrive till the afternoon about 4 p.m. Our column commander sent across a present of fresh meat and new baked bread to the new arrivals, and this no doubt gave them a hint of what a really wonderful column we were. The Political Officer borrowed the Union Jack from my unit (for which I obtained a receipt) and this was duly hoisted over the Political Serai as a sign to all that the town was in British occupation once more.

Halebja is the next most important town (or village) to Suleimanyah and boasts a telegraph and post office. It was in this lonely town disguised as a Persian trader from Sheraz that Major Soane, the Political Officer for Kurdistan, lived for three years before the war. His knowledge of the Kurds and the Kurdish dialects is probably unique. A very romantic figure lives in Halebja in the person of a middle-aged lady commonly known as “Princess Adela.” She was of Persian stock but allied to the ruling Sheiks of this district. She appears to be a woman of strong will and of exceptional talent. By her orders the bazaars of the town were roofed over and a vigorous and a successful anti-Turk campaign was carried out. Princess Adela lived in one of the largest houses of Halebja, but it was just as insanitary as the meaner houses of the poor. A stagnant pool of foul water occupied the centre of the front courtyard. The front of the house was provided with balconies, and here the occupants could sit in the shade and enjoy the evening breezes. Several Kurdish ponies were usually to be found tethered round the courtyard and here and there groups of armed retainers. The Political Officer’s house and offices were in a substantial building immediately adjacent to that of the “Princess,” and here on the afternoon of the day following our arrival some of us were summoned to attend the administration of justice to the prisoners we had taken. The original sentences passed by a Military Court Martial had been commuted to twenty-one lashes with the cat. The punishment was carried out in the public square as an example to any in the crowd who might
wish to emulate the deeds of the rebels. The well merited thrashing was carried through with expedition and thoroughness, a British serjeant using the cat with the touch of a master hand. The prisoners took it well and appeared none the worse, and as soon as their quota of lashes had been received put on their rough garments and disappeared in the crowds lining the market square.

The General Officer Commanding the 18th Division arrived that afternoon from Suleimanyah. A dinner was given that night to the Political Officer and the officers of the column, but as my professional attentions were required by the General, I was unable to partake of the Kurdish hospitality. It was decided by the higher command that the column of the 18th Division should remain in occupation of Halebja and our column was to march to Suleimanyah via Gulambar, destroying certain villages high up in the mountains. These villages had been a constant source of trouble to the district, being the resort of brigands who, descending from their rocky fastnesses, made raids on Gulambar and the villagers round Halebja. The route to Gulambar was across open country and save for occasional flooded areas from overflowing irrigation channels there were no difficulties to overcome. We camped beside a swift flowing stream, a few hundred yards above the small village of Gulambar—the village of the "amber rose," and indeed it was a most picturesque collection of Kurdish huts. There appeared to be a fairly large water mill built of stone and the mechanism for turning the grindstone appeared efficient although primitive. Just below the houses is a delightful grove of poplars and willows along the banks of the stream and behind an orchard of fruit trees with clumps of roses. From here the mountains rise sheer from the plain and there, with the aid of glasses, three villages could be made out perched high among the rocks, typical robbers' nests. The alarm had already reached the villages and men and women could be seen streaming from the huts carrying bundles. They appeared to be making for a "friendly" village away to our right.

It was arranged that the three villages should be attacked simultaneously and the huts razed to the ground. The column assembled at the foot of the mountain and the three small columns deployed towards their respective objectives. Each column consisted of a company of Gurkhas, a section of the sapper company and some British signallers. The two mountain guns remained with column headquarters and the transport. As was to be expected, as soon as the troops began to scale the heights the tribesmen evacuated the villages and began to clamber up the precipitous rocks behind. Their withdrawal was hastened by very accurate shelling from the guns. After a hard and fatiguing climb the column surrounded the villages and proceeded to their work of destruction. The more substantial huts were blown up by the sappers and then set fire to. The three blazing villages made vivid points of colour against the grey rocks and served as an object lesson to the tribesmen for many miles around. This, however, did not put a stop to disorder, for some time later a detachment of the column
left in Halebja was attacked in the mountain defiles east of that town, and suffered many casualties. However, Halebja and its immediate district was well in hand and our worthy Political Officer left us to return to his lonely and responsible job of representing the British Government in Halebja.

Our march to Suleimanyah was rendered unnecessarily difficult by unreliable guides, and for two days our march led through swamps which appeared to be infested with more flies and stinging insects than one ever imagined was possible. We also lost our Staff Captain one night, but he turned up safely the following morning, having spent the night with some friendly Kurds.

On the third day we came in sight of Suleimanyah and camped at Kalasan Bridge, five miles beyond where a brigade of the 18th Division was in bivouac. Our marching was not yet over, for we were ordered out to search the valleys to the north-west, in which direction several large bands of rebels had fled after the battle of Bazyan. The country was difficult and our first day's march took us over a shoulder of a mountain to an altitude of 7,500 feet. On descending into the valley on the other side one entered an area of desolation—the ground devoid of every scrap of vegetation and covered with a profusion of large boulders. As the valley broadened out the rocks gave way to scanty grass and thistles, and streams, fed by springs in the mountain range on our right, meandered through the grass land. On the banks of every stream was a village hidden in its orchard of fig trees, mulberries and walnut. Those "oases" were a constant source of joy to the eye wearied by the drab colours of withered grass and naked rock. These orchards were usually fairly extensive, being about twenty to thirty acres in extent, and it was delicious to enter the cool green avenues that led through the trees and listen to the soft lappings and gurglings of some hidden stream. The figs were almost ripe and many a pound of this luscious fruit found its way into Jahn Mohd's haversack for the refreshment of his "Sahib." Mulberries both white and purple were in season and it was no unusual sight to see the men of a picquet squatting in the shade of a tree, crimson from face to feet with the juice of the berries. Other delicacies these areas of cultivation offered were spring onions and cucumbers.

Our farthest point was marked by a small river, probably one of the head waters of the Lesser Zab. The rapid flow of the clear water rushing tumultuously over mossy rocks between high banks covered deep with willows was very reminiscent of a Border stream, and on my part it required no great effort of imagination to believe I was standing once more on the banks of the Yarrow. This Kurdish stream was full of trout and a supply was obtained for the "pot" by bombing some of the quiet backwaters with small slabs of gun-cotton and Mills grenades. Later, when we returned to the Divisional camp near Suleimanyah, we carried on this practice as we found ourselves on two-thirds operation scale rations and short at that. However, this source of food supply was soon closed to us by a Brigade Order which read somewhat as follows: "In view of the fact that this
locality may be used as a Summer Hill Station for British troops. It is desirable to protect the fishing in this river with a view to providing recreation for the troops. All bombing of fish will cease forthwith. Fishing by rod and line, however, is permissible."

What the British troops thought of this locality as a Summer Hill Station is unprintable, but already a British military cemetery was showing an ever increasing crop of crosses as a result of malaria and dysentery. We resigned ourselves to the official ration and the trout swam merrily about undisturbed by further shocks of T.N.T. The end of nine days marching found us back again to the Kharasan Bridge camp and we all looked forward to the ten days' rest which was promised us. They were to prove days of extreme discomfort. To shield ourselves from the blazing rays of the July sun we constructed small huts of branches, and there we lay seeking some coolness from the furnace outside. The flies were overwhelming and made one's scanty meals a disgust. Sand-flies and mosquitoes kept one awake and prickly heat was added to one's torment. Men began to fall sick with malaria and sand-fly fever and in a week we had between 400 and 500 sick in our small column alone. All of us were attacked one time or another and the fever left its victims extremely weak. The Column Commander, the Brigade Major and the Staff Captain, all fell seriously ill and had to be sent off to Kirkuk. The only happy part was that we were beside a river in which a strong stream of clear cold water flowed all the hot weather. Driven from one's hut by the maddening bites of mosquitoes and sand-flies and with one's legs and feet bleeding from the scratching induced by prickly heat, it was delightfully refreshing to strip and lie in the cool clean water, usually with a small sweet melon held under water to keep it cool, to be eaten later when basking on the river bank.

Suleimanyah, the capital of this area of Southern Kurdistan, was disappointing. There were certain large well-built buildings in the centre of the town—one was used as Divisional Headquarters and the other was the Political Serai. The bazaars were roofed over and were therefore cool and dark. Part, however, of the bazaars had been looted when the tribesmen rose in revolt. One was able to buy excellent Japanese loaf sugar, sweet melons, mulberries, figs, limes and a few eggs. Blocks of snow could be purchased, a block of three pounds costing a rupee. The local wine was drinkable and was quite potent. The snow is got in the winter from the mountains behind the town pressed into blocks and stored in deep cellars or ice pits. The same process can be seen in Kermanshah and other towns in Persia. Another feature of the bazaar was the large number of Singer sewing machines. One great disappointment one never really got over was to find on our arrival at the 18th Division a complete absence of beer. To people in Britain this may seem a trivial thing, but in a land and at a season, when one is a living thirst, it is no small matter. Water was available, no doubt, and although this is excellent for use in an emergency, yet as a means of quenching a continuous thirst with satisfac-
tion water is inferior to nicely iced beer. Asahi and Katura beer did much to ensure the success of British arms in Mesopotamia.

The East Surreys by a great feat obtained a case of beer and with sublime generosity they treated each officer in our column to a bottle.

We were now due to return to the Division at Baghdad. The column was split into two. One company of Gurkhas, all the convalescents, about eighty in number, and my unit were to march to Kirkuk, thence across the desert to the Tigris and entrain at Baiji, the then railhead. The other and major portion of the column with certain elements of the 18th Division were to march south across the Kara Dagh to Kefri and thence to the Dyalah to the Baghdad-Persian railway. Although glad to receive orders to return to our units at Baghdad, the prospect of this 150 miles march to the railway under the late July sun was not inviting. The convalescents were put on empty A. T. carts as they were still unfit to march. Our march was via Tachludja, Bazyan and Chemchemal to Kirkuk. Prior to the insurrection, this road did not exist, being a mere caravan track, but now pioneers and sappers were working at high pressure converting it into an excellent motor road. This is the country of the famous Hamawand tribe whose raids were a constant worry to the Turks. The Turks maintained a large garrison at Kirkuk and a smaller garrison in Suleimanyah, yet despite the presence of these armed forces, every caravan had to pay toll. The Turks found it unsafe to traverse this part of the country with a force less than a battalion and even then these fierce hillmen would attack, cut off stragglers, and loot the baggage mules.

All along the road from Tachludja to Bazyan were grim relics of the fate of our motor convoys at the outbreak of the rebellion. Lying at the bottom of the nullahs could be seen the blackened twisted framework of the Ford cars with parts of the charred skeletons of the drivers. We arrived eventually at Kirkuk on August 1, but the last ten miles I was conveyed to Kirkuk by motor ambulance, having succumbed to the combined effects of fever, septic sores and dysentery.

The hospital at Kirkuk was packed with sick—malaria being very prevalent here. The officers’ ward was a big base room beautifully cool, or so it seemed—the temperature even in this ward running up to 95°. Shade temperature being approximately 120°. Thanks to the excellent treatment I was well enough at the end of ten days to be conveyed to railhead on the Tigris by ambulance car. There I rejoined our little band and we arrived back in our camp on the river at Baghdad on August 12.

One feature of this march which surprised me was the endurance of the dhooly bearers. Not a single man fell out or had to be carried and except for the attacks of fever at Kalasan Bridge their health was excellent. In the Arab rebellion of 1920, I went with another section of the Ambulance to Hillah and in the operations there from July, 1920, to February, 1921, the power of endurance of these one time "followers" was remarkable.

Fortunately, the higher command in the hot weather of 1920 raised the dhooly bearer to the status of a fighting man, so that at last he was clothed and fed in a manner befitting a soldier.