

# THE BATTLE OF THE CANAL.

## FIRST-HAND ACCOUNT.

### FIGHTING ON LAND AND WATER.

We are able to publish this morning a full and accurate account, received yesterday from our Special Correspondent at Ismailia, of the Battle of the Suez Canal.

The hero outlines of the fighting, which reached its climax on February 2, have been recorded already. Our Correspondent is now in a position to describe it as a whole, and to add a number of dramatic details which marked the first, and most unsuccessful, attempt of the Turks to invade Egypt.

(FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.)

ISMAILIA, Feb. 10.

Though skirmishing had taken place between the enemy's reconnoitering parties and our outposts during the latter part of January, the main attack was not developed until February 2, when the enemy began to move towards the Ismailia Ferry. They met a reconnoitering party of Indian troops of all arms, and a desultory engagement ensued, to which a violent sandstorm put a sudden end about 3 o'clock in the afternoon. The main attacking force pushed forward towards its destination after midnight. From 25 to 30 pinnacled iron pinnacled boats, seven and a half metres in length, which had been dragged in carts across the desert, were hauled by hand towards the water, with one or two rafts made of kerosene tins in a wooden frame. All was ready for the attack.

The first warning of the enemy's approach was given by a party of a mountain battery, who heard to him, an unknown tongue across the water. The noise soon increased. It would seem that Madgha Ismailia ("Holy Warriors")—said to be mostly old Tripoli fighters—accompanied the pinnacled boats and Regulars of the 24th Regiment, for loud exclamations often



in Arabic of "Brothers die for the faith; we can die but once!" betrayed the enthusiastic irregular.

The Egyptians waited till the Turks were pushing their boats into the water; then the main attack was suddenly repulsed. The boats, with one or two rafts, were crowded under the steep bank opposite them.

#### A GALANT TORPEDO-BOLT.

Immediately a violent fire broke out on both sides of the Canal, the Egyptian artillery, rifles and machine gun fire and the batteries on our bank. Around 10 p.m. it was impossible to stand up, but the gunners stuck to the work, inflicting terrible punishment.

A British torpedo-boat with a crew of 12 patrolling the Canal dashed up and landed a party of four officers and men to the south of Tuumam, who climbed up the eastern bank and found themselves in a Turkish trench, and escaped by a miracle with the news. Promptly the tugboat dashed in between the first and second batteries on the eastern bank and a hail of bullets, unrelenting on the bank. It continued to harass the enemy, though two officers and two men were wounded.

As the dark, cloudy night lightened towards dawn fresh forces came into action. The Turks, who occupied the outer, or day line, of the Tuumam post advanced, covered by artillery, against the Indian troops holding the inner, or night position, while an Arab regiment advanced against the Indian troops at the Serapeum Post.

The warships on the Canal and lake joined in the fray. The enemy brought some six batteries of field guns into action from the slopes west of Katab-el-Kheil. Shells not only found made fine practice, all the visible targets, but failed to find the battery above mentioned, which, with some help from a detachment of infantry, boat down the fire of the riflemen on the opposite bank, and inflicted heavy losses on the hostile supports wounded four men of the battery, but it ran more risk from a party of about 20 of the enemy who had crossed the Canal in the dark and sniped the gunners from the rear till they were finally rounded up by the Indian cavalry and compelled to surrender.

#### CHARGE OF THE INDIANS.

Supported by land naval artillery the Indian troops took the offensive. The Serapeum position, which had stopped the enemy three-quarters of a mile from the position, closed its front, and the Tuumam garrison by a brilliant counter-attack drove the enemy back. Two battalions of Anatolians of the 25th Regiment were thrown vainly into the fight. Our artillery gave them no chance, and by 3.30 in the afternoon a third day's contact, with the exception of a force that lay hid in bushy patches on the east bank between the two posts, were in full retreat, having many dead, a large proportion of whom had been killed by shrapnel.

#### WARSHIPS IN ACTION.

Meanwhile the warships on the Lake had been in action. A salvo from a battleship woke up Ismailia early, and crowds of soldiers and guns continued to be fired every available shell till so late as what was doing till the Turkish

guns sent shells sufficiently near to convince them that it was safer to watch from cover. A husband and wife took a carriage and drove along the Lake front, much peppered by shells, till near the old French hospital, when they realized the danger and suddenly whirled round and drove back full gallop to Ismailia.

But the enemy's fire did more than startle. At about 11 in the morning two 6-in. shells hit the Hardings near the southern entrance of the Lake. The first damaged the funnel and the second burnt aboard. First Officer, a gallant old merchant seaman, refused to go below when the firing opened and lost a leg. Nine others were wounded. One or two merchantmen were hit, but no lives were lost. A British gunboat was struck.

#### A DRAMATIC DEED.

Then came a dramatic deed between the Turkish big gun or guns and a warship. The Turkish fired just over and then just short of 3,000 yards. The warship sent in a salvo of more 6-in. shells than had been fired that day.

During the morning the enemy moved towards Ismailia ferry. The infantry used the ground well, digging shelter pits as they advanced, and were covered by a well-served battery. An officer, apparently a German, exposed himself with the greatest daring, "pie dog," which also stopped, running about and kept the enemy from coming within 1,000 yards of the Indian outposts. In the afternoon the demonstration—for it was no more—ceased but for a few shells fired as a "night-cap." During the dark night that followed some of the enemy approached the outpost line of the ferry position with a dog, but nothing happened, and day found them gone.

#### THE ATTACK ON EL KANTARA.

At the same time as the fighting ceased at the ferry it died down at El Kantara. There the Turks, after a plucky night attack, came to grief on our wire entanglements. Another attempt to advance from the south-east was forced back by an advance of the Indian troops. The attack, during which it was necessary to push on a narrow front over ground often marred by recent inundations against our strong position, never had a chance. Indeed the enemy were only engaged with our outpost line.

Late in the afternoon of the 2nd there was sniping from the east bank between Tuumam and Serapeum and a man was killed in the top of a British battleship. Next morning the Turkish force was renewed, and the Indian troops moved out to search the ground found several hundred of the enemy in the hollow previously mentioned. During the fighting some of the enemy either by accident or design hid up their hands, while others fired on the Pinnacled boats who were advancing to take the surrender and killed a British officer. A sharp fight with the cold steel followed, and a British officer killed a Turkish officer with a sword thrust in single combat. The body of a German officer with a white flag was afterwards found here, but there is no proof that the white flag was used. Finally all the enemy were killed, captured, or put to flight.

#### RECONNOITRE OF THE PASSAGES.

With this the fighting ended, and the subsequent operations were confined to "rounding up" prisoners and to the capture of a considerable amount of military material left behind. The Turks who departed with their guns and baggage during the night of the 3rd still seemed to be moving eastward.

To reach the battle of the Suez Canal. Our losses have been amazingly small, totalling about 111 killed and wounded. Our opponents have probably lost nearly 3,000 men. The Indian troops were brave and gallant, and were well supported by the British and French warships and by the Egyptian troops. The Turks fought bravely and their artillery does well if unlikely, but the intention of the higher command are still a puzzle to British officers.

Did Djemal Pasha intend to try to break through our position under cover of demonstrations along a front over 90 miles in length with a total force, perhaps, of 20,000 men, or was he attempting a reconnaissance in force? If the former is the case, he must have had a lot of ideas of British leadership or an amazing belief in the readiness and ability of sympathizers in Egypt to support the Turk. Certainly he was misinformed as to our position, and on the 4th we buried on the eastern bank the bodies of two men, apparently Syrian or Egyptian, who were found with their hands tied and their eyes bandaged. Probably they were guides who had been summarily killed, having unwittingly led the enemy astray. If, on the other hand, Djemal Pasha was attempting a reconnaissance it was a costly business and gave General Wilson a very handsome victory.

#### THE TURKISH ADVANCE.

Till the last week of January there had been some doubt as to the road by which the Ottoman Commander-in-Chief in Syria intended to advance on the Canal. Before the end of the month it was quite clear that what was then believed to be the Turkish advanced guard, having marched with admirable regularity from Beersheba via 32 Ajaja, Djebel Libni, and Djidjida, was concentrating in the valley just east of Katab-el-Kheil, a group of hills lying about 10 miles east of the Canal, where it enters Lake Tuumam. A smaller column detached Ismailia Ferry. Smaller bodies had appeared in the neighbourhood of El Kantara and between Suez and the Bitter Lakes.

By the night of February 1 the enemy had prepared his plan of attack. To judge both from the movements during the next two days and the documents found on prisoners and slain, it was proposed to attack El Kantara while making a demonstration at El Fudian further north, and prevent reinforcement at the first-named post. The demonstration at Ismailia Ferry by the right wing of the Katab-el-Kheil force which had been partly refused till then in order to prevent a counter-attack from the Ferry, was designed to occupy the attention of the Ismailia garrison, while the main attack was delivered between the Tuumam post, eight miles south of Ismailia, and the Serapeum post, some three miles farther south. Edred Bey's highly irregular force in the meantime was to demonstrate on the Suez Canal.

The selection of the Tuumam and Serapeum both by the consideration that success here would bring the Turks a few miles from Ismailia, and by the information received from patrols that the west bank of the Canal between the posts, both of which may be described as bridge-heads, were unoccupied by our troops. The west bank between the posts is steep and marked by a long, narrow belt of trees. The east bank also falls steeply to the Canal, but is marked by a long, narrow belt of trees, full of brushwood, which give good cover. Here the enemy's advanced parties established themselves and retreated before the main attack was delivered.

#### LATE WAR NEWS.

##### WORK OF FRENCH WARSHIPS.

(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)

PARIS, Feb. 12.

In the course of the recent attack on the Suez Canal the French warships Requin and d'Entrecasteaux contributed with success to the defence of the Canal. The Requin silenced heavy Turkish guns and the d'Entrecasteaux dispersed large groupings of the enemy. There were no casualties on either ship.

\* \* \* The Requin is an old battleship, recommissioned in 1871, which has been used for gunnery school purposes. Her largest armament being two 16-in. guns. The d'Entrecasteaux is a protected cruiser, built in 1874, with two 9-in. and 12 1/2-in. guns.

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