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THE BUSHIRE-SHIRAZ ROAD, 1918-19

By Major-General J. A. Douglas, C.M.G., C.I.E.

A meeting of the Central Asian Society was held at the Royal United Service Institution, Whitehall, S.W., on Thursday, February 8, 1923. An address was given by Major-General J. A. Douglas, C.M.G., C.I.E., on "The Operations on the Bushire-Shiraz Road, 1918-19." General Sir Edmund Barrow presided.

The Chairman: Ladies and Gentlemen,—The lecture this evening is on "The Operations on the Bushire-Shiraz Road," the well-known road that leads up into the heart of Persia; and the lecturer I need hardly introduce to most of you, as I expect all those who have served in the East are well acquainted with the name, at all events, of General Douglas, who commanded on that line during the operations. I will now ask you to give your attention to a lecture which, I am sure, will be both interesting and instructive. (Applause.)

THE LECTURE

Persia during the War was the scene of military operations in four different parts of the country. General Dunsterville has already described before this Society the achievements of the force which he commanded in the North-West; Sir Wilfrid Malleson has told us of the good work done under great difficulties by his Mission on and beyond the North-East frontier, and Major Blacker has added many details of hazardous enterprizes and interesting episodes while he was with the Mission. Further south Sir P. Sykes has narrated the vicissitudes and adventures of the forces under him; and I propose now to give a short account of the comparatively humble part taken by the troops in Bushire, and so to complete the tale of the operations of British, or British-led, forces in Persia during those eventful years.

The operations, which form the subject of my remarks, were at a late stage of the War, when all eyes were turned to the momentous events then taking place on the Western front, and I do not think that any reference was ever made to them in the English Press; consequently few people know that they ever took place. They involved no serious fighting, and I cannot claim that they were of any great importance—the interest of these small side-shows in remote countries lies, perhaps, mainly in the fact that they help us to realize how immense was the front occupied, wholly or in part, by the fighting forces of the British Empire, extending as it did from the western

frontiers of India across Persia to Mesopotamia, Palestine, and Egypt, thence carried on by the Navy to Salonika, and so through the north of Italy to France and the shores of Great Britain.

Before I touch on the actual operations, I must give a short account of the events which led up to them. Bushire has, for many years, been the headquarters of our activities in the Persian Gulf. Before the War we had there a Political Resident who was also the Consul-General for Fars, and was provided with a small guard of Indian soldiers; a post which, at the outbreak of war, had been held for more than ten years by Sir Percy Cox. There were also a Russian and a German Consulate-General, and France was represented by a Consul. It will perhaps be remembered that in 1914, before the Turks had definitely declared themselves on the side of our enemies, a brigade was sent from India and landed at Bushire, so as to be ready in case of emergency. When, a few days later, war with Turkey was declared, this force moved on at once towards Basra, leaving behind only a small garrison of one battalion. It was known at this time that the German Consul-General and his staff were actively intriguing against us, and doing all in their power to stir up the tribes in the neighbourhood to attack Bushire, with the object, presumably, of embarrassing us and drawing off troops from the more important theatres. The situation was somewhat delicate, Bushire being neutral territory, but it was finally decided to arrest the German Consul-General and his staff and deport them to India. I need only add that documentary evidence afterwards obtained fully justified this action.

Among the staff was a certain Herr Wassmuss, a dragoman of the Consulate, who, unfortunately, escaped arrest and fled to the mainland, where he took up his residence among the tribesmen near the coast. At first, well provided with funds, wearing Persian dress, and passing himself off as a Mohammedan, he succeeded, by means of liberal payments and still more lavish promises in the name of the German Emperor, in organizing a series of night raids in the peninsula, chiefly in the neighbourhood of Rishahr, a place about five miles south of the town itself, the site of the cable station and the Indo-European Telegraph Department's quarters and offices. Most of the Europeans lived in this neighbourhood, and the headquarters of the garrison were here. Though no serious damage was done, these raids produced a general feeling of insecurity, and necessitated the increase of the garrison to two battalions. To understand the situation, I must explain that the peninsula of Bushire is separated from the mainland by a strip of mud flat, known as the *Mashileh*. This is about ten miles across from east to west, and in its narrowest part about seven miles from sea to sea. The soil is mostly clayey; there is no regular road across it, and though light wheeled traffic can cross it in dry weather, the going is always very heavy in parts. After heavy rain, it is passable

for pack animals only with difficulty, and at certain states of the tide and very high winds it is liable to be completely inundated by the sea. Where the east side of the Bushire peninsula abuts on this neck are low cliffs, precipitous in places and intersected by rocky ravines. The method adopted by the tribesmen was for small parties to cross the *Mashileh* early in the night, and, making their way through our outposts, to attack some European house or military establishment—transport was a favourite target—and after the nearest troops had turned out and much promiscuous firing had taken place, the raiders withdrew. A more ambitious attempt took place in September, 1915, when a force of some 600 tribesmen crossed over at night and concealed themselves in the ravines on the edge of the high ground preparatory to attacking our outpost line. Here they were discovered the following morning by our patrols, and after some fighting, were driven out on to the plain, where they were charged by a handful of cavalry and fled in disorder. After this, though the night raids still continued, the enemy were considerably disheartened by the losses they had suffered, and though Wassmuss still continued his efforts to organize an attack in force, they met with little response from the tribesmen.

It was Wassmuss who had organized the mutiny of the old Swedish Gendarmerie at Shiraz in November, 1915, which resulted in the arrest of our Consul, Colonel O'Connor, and the other British residents. These were kept in captivity at Ahram, a small fort in Tangistan, and the residence of Zair Khidar, the chief of the tribe. It was generally Wassmuss's headquarters. It was only about thirty miles from Bushire, and when I took over command at the latter place in February, 1916, I was anxious to send out a small force, and, by a sudden raid, to effect their release, and possibly the arrest of Wassmuss. It appeared to me quite a feasible project, but I was then under the orders of Sir Stanley Maude, to whom the project did not commend itself. With our hands full as they were in Mesopotamia, he was, perhaps not unnaturally, anxious to avoid the possibility of further complications in South Persia. The prisoners were finally released as the result of negotiations between the political officer and the local chiefs, who were by this time becoming somewhat distrustful of their German adviser, more especially as he was then very short of funds. He stayed on in the country, however, until after the Armistice, when he moved northwards. and was captured between Ispahan and Tehran. He was, I believe, deported from Persia.

After the release of the prisoners matters quieted down considerably, but the tribes remained passively hostile; the part of the Indo-European telegraph line, which ran from Bushire to Shiraz, had been entirely destroyed, and we were unable to repair it; the road was nominally open to caravan traffic, but the exactions of the Chiefs on the route were so preposterous as to make the cost of transport almost

prohibitive. I calculated at that time that it amounted to more than £50 a ton—and trade was at a standstill. Thus, though the distance from Bushire to Shiraz direct was only 180 miles by one of the main caravan routes of South Persia, we had no communication with the troops there except *via* Bandar Abbas, and thence by a circuitous route of over 300 miles.

Early in 1917 the troops at Bushire were taken out of the Mesopotamian Command and put directly under India. At the same time the area of the Command. was extended to include all garrisons in the Persian Gulf, and the Gulf of Oman, as far east as Muscat.

Sir P. Sykes has described the events in Shiraz, in June and July, 1918, when the Indian troops there were attacked by a large force of tribesmen, consisting principally of the Qashgais and their allies, and their position was rendered somewhat precarious by the wholesale defection of the South Persian Rifles he had raised. In June, when it appeared as if the attack might develop into a more widespread movement, a move from Bushire was contemplated, but at this, the hottest season of the year, no operations could have been carried out in the low country without entailing very heavy casualties from the climate. The garrison of Bushire was, however, reinforced by two battalions, and as it seemed probable that, unless some strong action was taken, another similar, and perhaps more serious, situation might develop in the autumn when the tribes were moving southwards to their winter quarters, it was decided to make preparations for an advance to open up the road when the weather became cooler. While fully recognizing that the energetic action taken by the troops at Shiraz was the main factor in preventing the movement from spreading, and in bringing about the downfall of the Qashgai Chief and his following, I have no doubt that the arrival of these reinforcements, and the rumours circulated of an intended move from Bushire, had a considerable influence on the result.

The difficulties to be encountered were chiefly physical, and due to the nature of the country to be traversed. No serious opposition was anticipated from the local tribesmen, nor indeed were they capable of opposing an organized advance, but there was some uncertainty as to what the attitude of the Qashgais might be when their country was reached in the neighbourhood of Kazerun, and it was considered advisable to have a brigade available to meet contingencies in that direction.

The first serious obstacle was the *Mashileh*, which, as I have already said, was at all times difficult for wheeled traffic, and rendered quite or almost impassable for days together after heavy rain. Once across that, our route lay over fairly easy and flat country as far as Borazjan, thirty-nine miles from Bushire, and thence over gently undulating ground to Daliki, fifteen miles further on, beyond which the hills were entered.

Daliki is the first place along the road where there is a good supply of sweet water. In the country between it and the coast water is almost everywhere scarce and brackish, and it was difficult to supply at all a large force. The Rud Hilleh river is salt, though animals will drink the water. Daliki stands about 400 feet above sea-level, and from there to the Kazerun valley, 3,000 feet high, the road lies mostly through rocky defiles, with two very steep and rocky ascents, never to be forgotten by those who have travelled over them. These are the Kutal-i-Malu, where the ascent is about 1,200 feet, and the Kutal-i-Kamarij, not quite so high. Beyond Kazerun again another very difficult ascent, the Kutal-i-Dukhtar, led to the Dasht-i-Barm, and a few miles further on there was a final long climb up to the Kutal-i-Pir-i-Zan, the top of which is about 9,000 feet high. Thence the descent to the Shiraz plain, some 5,000 feet above sea-level, is comparatively easy and gradual.

At this stage of the war, the number of mules available in India was small, and quite insufficient for our requirements, and though camels could be used as far as Daliki, only mule transport could negotiate the road beyond that point until it had been greatly improved. To get over the transport difficulty, it was therefore decided to build a light railway as far as Borazjan; originally it was intended to continue it to Daliki, but detailed surveys of the ground showed that the difficulties were greater than we had anticipated, and to avoid the delay which the extension would have entailed, a cart-road was made, and supplies from railhead to the foot of the hills were carried on light Ford lorries. This left all the pack transport free for use beyond Daliki when the railway and road were completed.

Another difficulty was the water supply in Bushire itself, which is not only deficient in quantity, but is so brackish that it has a most trying effect on those who are obliged to drink it. I except the inhabitants of Bushire, who have presumably become inured to it. Before the war, Europeans had always obtained their drinking water from the weekly mail steamers. In 1916 a condenser was erected, but though the output from this was enough for the normal garrison, the water question made any considerable concentration of troops impossible. We had, therefore, to arrange that the additional units from India should not arrive till those in Bushire had moved forward, and Daliki was the first place where they could be concentrated in any force.

By the 24th of September, the preparations at the base had been completed, and the railway constructed to just outside our outpost line. Meanwhile, the Persian Government had agreed to the movement and had sent orders to their officials to co-operate. Needless to say, these orders produced no effect whatever on the tribes, who had for long been independent of all Government control. The three local

chiefs of Tangistan, Chahkutah, and Borazjan, through whose country our route lay, and who in normal times derived their revenue almost entirely from "rahdari," an illegal impost on all caravans passing up the road, had sent an ultimatum saying that they would allow us to repair the telegraph, but that they would oppose the construction of a railway to the last drop of their blood. With some 600 followers, they had entrenched themselves at Chaghadak on the far side of the *Mashileh*, and occupied the date groves in its vicinity. It was necessary to dislodge them before the work of carrying on the railway could be proceeded with. This was done on September 28 by a small column of one battalion of infantry, a squadron of cavalry, and two guns, who crossed over very early in the morning. The enemy bolted as soon as their flank was turned and before the guns could get into action, leaving their tents and all they had with them, including 20,000 rounds of ammunition, and after a little skirmishing in the date groves, our columns occupied the wells at Chaghadak and Ali Changi. Our losses in the fight were three killed and two wounded. This action completely quelled all organized opposition, and though afterwards our patrols were sometimes fired on, our camps sniped at night, and though skirmishes between small parties occurred, little damage was done on either side, and they in no way interfered with our progress. Before I go any further, and in case anyone should be disposed to criticize the operations from a purely military aspect, I would again lay emphasis on the fact that this was in no way intended to be a punitive expedition. My instructions were very clear that the object was to open up the trade route to Shiraz and to restore the telegraph line, and that no military operations were to be indulged in except such as were necessary to carry out these objects.

Owing to the treacherous nature of the ground in parts, the construction of a railway across the *Mashileh* was not an easy task, and it was not till the 22nd of October that it reached Ahmadi, twenty-one miles from Bushire. Its construction and all operations were also hampered by a serious outbreak of influenza among the troops early in October. Our hospitals were full to overflowing, and several battalions were practically out of action. Fortunately with us the epidemic was not of a severe type, and the percentage of deaths among the troops was comparatively small, but it was thought advisable to delay the arrival of other units from India until the epidemic declined. It was far more severe among the Persians, especially at Shiraz, and among the Qashgais and other nomad tribes, and also among our troops at Shiraz.

On the arrival of railhead at Ahmadi, the leading troops moved on to Borazjan. There was no opposition; the chief of Borazjan, who was amongst those who fought against us at Chaghadak, after hesitating for some time, finally decided to take to the hills, and a successor

was appointed by the Persian Governor of Bushire. Daliki was occupied a fortnight later, and the troops at once got to work on improving the road beyond Borazjan. The remaining troops from India were now arriving, and were pushed on up the line as they came, and by the middle of November the concentration was completed, and the force was organized as follows:

(1) A striking force of four battalions of infantry, a mountain battery, a machine gun company, and a field company of Sappers and Miners. This force was commanded by Brigadier-General Elsmie.

(2) Two battalions of infantry, including the Pioneer battalion laying the railway, two squadrons of cavalry, and a field company of Sappers and Miners for work on, and defence of, the line of communication. They also had a labour battalion attached.

(3) One battalion of infantry, a squadron of cavalry, and an improvised battery of artillery, who formed the garrison of Bushire.

The total strength of this force was about 11,000. The Indian troops with Sir P. Sykes at Shiraz had also been put under me in August.

As soon as the road was fit for wheeled traffic up to Daliki, the striking force got to work on the approaches to the Kutal-i-Malu. At this time we had some trouble with hostile tribesmen in the Filifili Pass, which is the defile where the road first enters the hills. These fired into our posts at night, and made several attempts to ambush the picquets protecting the working parties as they were on their way to their positions on the hill tops. This necessitated our sending out small columns to try and round them up, and though in this we were unsuccessful, the village in the hills where they had their headquarters and where they had collected supplies, was occupied and the supplies destroyed, and after this they ceased to trouble us. By the end of November railhead had reached Borazjan, though the line still required a considerable amount of work to consolidate it, and make it capable of carrying supplies for the whole of the striking force. The latter, working with great energy, had so improved the track through the Filifili Pass and the approaches to the Kutal-i-Malu as to make these easily passable for camels. They were then preparing to tackle the Pass itself. Hereafter the procedure was for the striking force to move slowly on ahead, making a practicable track for camels as they went; the Pioneers, with the other company of Sappers and Miners and the Labour corps, remained behind to consolidate the railway track, complete the bridges, and then to make a well graded and more permanent cart-road from railhead onwards.

It is difficult to convey to anyone with no experience of the roads in Southern Persia what the old track up the Kutal-i-Malu was like. From the bridge over the river an easy track followed the right bank for about two miles, and then turned northwards into the hills and

commenced to ascend. For the first two miles the gradient was in most parts comparatively gentle, and the track, though rocky and narrow in many places, presented no great difficulty to loaded mules. It then turned up a deep depression from the top of the range with a very steep ascent of about a mile. A zigzagged and paved track had at some period been constructed, but the stones had worn smooth with the passage of many caravans and this combined with the steepness of the gradient made it almost impossible for mules and horses to keep their footing on it. It had, therefore, been discarded in favour of a very steep, narrow, and rocky track running up the opposite side of the ravine, often ascending by a series of steps cut or worn in the rock. Though the distance from Daliki to the top is only eleven miles, I find that in 1911, with two squadrons of the C.I. Horse and a convoy of about 600 mules, it took us seven hours—from 6 a.m. to 1 p.m.—before the bulk of the column was at the top, and even then the rear-guard was far behind, looking after animals which had fallen or cast their loads. We found it impossible to make anything of this track, and a complete re-alignment round the far side of the spur which ran on the east of the ravine was necessary. The men of the striking force, however, worked with the greatest keenness, and assisted by the Sappers and Miners, ably directed and inspired by General Elsmie, by the 19th of December they had not only completed a good camel road to the top, but had carried it on some nine miles further across the Khisht plain to Charum, which was at the foot of the Kamarij Pass. When one considers that this work was done entirely by troops with no previous experience of road-making, and that from Daliki to the top of the Pass it entailed much heavy rock-blasting, and that they had also to be constantly on their guard against attack, it will, I think, be admitted that it was a very creditable performance. With the aid of their working parties they had also got a small detachment of Ford lorries up the Pass and these were able to work between the top and Charum.

The next obstacle to be tackled was the Kamarij Pass, the ascent of which, though rather shorter than the Malu, was still steeper and more rocky. This would bring us to the Kamarij Plain, practically on a level with the Kazerun Valley and distant only twenty-two miles from Kazerun itself. The self-appointed ruler of Kazerun at that time was one Nasir Divan, a local chief who, with a following of about 600 men, had taken an active part in the fighting against our troops at Shiraz, and we knew that he was trying to collect men to hold the Pass against us. In the lower part of the Kazerun Plain we should also be in contact with Qashquli branch of the Qashgais, and there was some uncertainty as to what their attitude would be. Reconnaissance showed that the top of the Pass was occupied by riflemen, though not in very great strength, but a good position was found for our mountain guns,

and the day following our arrival at Charum, the Pass was taken with a loss of only one sepoy killed and one Indian officer wounded. This was due largely to the excellent arrangements for covering fire made by General Elsmie, as the troops had to attack up a very steep hill side, and though the enemy were few in numbers, probably not more than 150, many of then held on stubbornly, retiring only when our men reached the top.

Once established in the Kamarij Plain, we were in a position to occupy Kazerun at any time we wished should the political situation render it advisable, but local supplies were scarce and our communications were not yet sufficiently improved to enable me to feed anything but a very small force there. The troops were, therefore, employed as before in making the road passable for camels. The old track up the Kamarij Pass winds up the side of a steep, and in places precipitous, ravine where no decent alignment was possible, and a good deal of reconnaissance was required before a practical alternative route was found, following up the left bank of the Shapur River for four miles and so turning the Pass on the west. The making of this road and the improvement of the track onwards to Kazerun kept the troops busy for several weeks. Meanwhile the Qashquli chiefs had come in to see me, and expressed a desire for friendly relations, and so relieved us of any anxiety on their account. Not that much trust was to be placed in their protestations of friendship, but it was found that the tribe had suffered so severely from the influenza epidemic, losing several of their chiefs and a large proportion (probably not less than 20 per cent.) of their fighting men, that they were in a very humble mood, and incapable of offering any serious opposition to our column. Nasir Divan had fled from Kazerun, though with a small following he was still lurking in the neighbourhood, and a new Governor appointed by the Governor-General of Shiraz had been sent there.

By the 25th of January the advanced troops had completed their road up to Kamarij, and from thence onward to the foot of the Kazerun Plain. It was only a good camel track up the ascent, with no pretensions to being fit for wheeled traffic, but with some assistance from the working parties several light lorries had been brought up it, and could be used in the road beyond Kamarij. By this time the communications in rear had been sufficiently improved to enable us to keep up a constant stream of the necessary supplies, and, on the 27th of January, Kazerun was occupied by the headquarters of the striking force and two battalions without incident. The following day the force from Bushire joined hands with the troops from Shiraz who had advanced to Mian Kutal, a caravanserai situated on a spur some way below the top of the Pir-i-Zan Pass and twenty-one miles distant from Kazerun. We had now completed our task of opening up the road throughout, and it remained only to finish the restoration of the telegraph line.

It must not be supposed that everything was quite plain sailing, and that there were no difficulties to contend with. The influenza epidemic kept many of the troops out of action for some weeks. An outbreak of cholera at Daliki in the earlier part of the operations caused some anxiety, but was fortunately prevented from spreading. The locomotives at first sent from India were not sufficiently powerful for the work required of them, and an extra strain was put on the railway by the necessity of sending a daily supply of drinking water to all detachments along the line between Bushire and Borazjan, as it was found that the brackish water along the route, though drinkable in case of necessity, had an injurious effect on the health of the troops when continued for long. At the end of December and beginning of January heavy rains and the irruption of the sea flooded the *Mashileh* and considerably damaged the railway track. The temporary bridge over the river at Ahmadi was swept away, and all this took some time to repair. Meanwhile there was considerable difficulty in keeping up the supplies for the advanced troops, and Colonel Tytler, who was in charge of the line of communications, had many anxious days.

The restoration of the telegraph line was a somewhat lengthy business. Not only had the offices been completely wrecked, all instruments destroyed, and all wire removed, but the large iron posts which carried the wire had almost everywhere been taken away. Being hollow, the villagers found them very convenient for use as water pipes and for other similar purposes. Beyond Daliki these heavy posts could only be carried on camels, and though a light telegraph line was run through immediately behind our foremost troops, with the many other calls on our transport their conveyance and the completion of the permanent line was slow work. So far as I remember, it reached Kazerun some time in February, and, from thence, parties working from both ends took it on to Shiraz a few weeks later.

By the time we reached Kazerun the troops had become so experienced in road-making, and both officers and men took so much interest in the work that, in order to keep them occupied, it was decided to employ them in improving the road onwards towards Shiraz. The very steep and rocky ascent of the Kutal-i-Dukhtar, the Pass of the Maiden, we could do nothing with, but a practicable line was found by which it could be turned to the south. Beyond the top about five miles of easy and gradual ascent leads to the fort of the last of the Kutals, the Kutal-i-Pir-i-Zan, or Pass of the Old Woman. This, though longer than any of the passes further south, was not quite so difficult in other ways. It was an ascent of something over 4,000 feet in about six miles by a zigzag, rough, and rocky track up a wooded hillside, steep in many parts, especially near the top, but still somewhat less formidable than the obstacles we had already surmounted. The nature of the ground, too, lent itself better to re-alignment. This

kept the troops busy until the beginning of April, by which time the track had been so far improved that General Elsmie, whose brigade had done the work, was able to take a Ford car to the top of the Pass, and thence on into Shiraz, the latter part of the road having been taken in hand by the troops of the Shiraz garrison. General Elsmie was always somewhat reticent as to the amount of assistance from the working parties required on the steeper parts of the ascent, but those who knew the road in its former state will admit that it was something of a feat to have taken a car under its own power from Bushire to Shiraz, even if it did require a little pushing at some of the worst places.

In the early part of the year a second Labour corps had been sent us, and while the troops were busy improving the upper part of the road, the Pioneers and the two Labour corps were engaged in making a good and, as I then hoped, a permanent, cart road from Borazjan onwards. This, of course, entailed a great deal of re-alignment and much heavy rock blasting on the hilly portions, as the camel track made by the troops had gradients as steep as one in ten, while the gradients on the cart road were, I think, nowhere steeper than one in fifteen. By the middle of April I was able to leave Bushire in the morning by train to Borazjan, and with two Ford cars and two light lorries to meet us at rail-head, we reached the top of the Malu Pass by 1 p.m., with no enforced stoppages except those required to fill up our radiators on the long ascent.

A small party from the Survey of India was attached to the force, and was able to make for the first time a detailed map of the whole of the road from Bushire to Shiraz and a good deal of the country on both sides of it, including areas which had never before been explored. When we left, I was able to arrange for them to remain in Shiraz for the summer, where, I have no doubt, they were able to extend their survey considerably. So far as I can ascertain, their work has not yet been published in any form accessible to the public.

After the declaration of the Armistice with Turkey, I had asked that a few aeroplanes might be sent me from Mesopotamia, and a flight arrived early in January, and were very useful in reducing to submission any of the remoter villages which were inclined to give trouble and so avoiding the necessity of small expeditions into the hills. In February I went by aeroplane from Kazerun to Shiraz. The visit was in the nature of an official entry, representatives of the Governor-General and other leading men among the Persians, as well as most of the British officers of the garrison, being assembled on the landing ground to meet me. As a dignified arrival it was hardly a success. My pilot, flying high over the hills north of Kazerun, arrived above Shiraz at an elevation of about 12,000 feet. He then cut off his engine and spiralled down, but, unfortunately, when flattening out near the

landing ground, the engine refused to pick up, with the result that we came down in a very heavily irrigated field some hundreds of yards short of our mark. The aeroplane, after going a few yards, stood on its head with the propeller buried in the mud, and after hovering for a few uncomfortable seconds in a perpendicular position, when we were uncertain whether it was not going to turn a complete somersault, finally subsided into a semi-recumbent attitude, from which we had ignominiously to climb down into the mud.

During the three days I spent in Shiraz, the Governor-General did his best to induce me to persuade our Government to leave a garrison there. Possibly his recommendations were not wholly disinterested, as, taking advantage of the security afforded by the presence of a British garrison, he had carried his exactions far beyond the recognized limits, and was somewhat doubtful what would happen when our protection was withdrawn. He solved the difficulty by returning to Tehran before the last of the troops left, and shortly afterwards, as is not unusual in such cases, he was put in prison, and doubtless made to disgorge a good deal of the riches he was credited with having amassed.

Orders for the withdrawal of the bulk of the troops were received early in March, though, owing to the difficulty of providing the necessary ships to transport them, it was not till the end of April that the move actually commenced. One battalion and a mountain battery remained at Kazerun, and a battalion at Bushire with a detachment at Borazjan. The remainder of the line was taken over by the South Persian Rifles. After the mutiny of the greater portion of this force in 1918, the remainder had been disbanded and an entirely new force raised. These were recruited chiefly, with the assistance of the Persian officials, from the settled tribesmen in the vicinity of Shiraz and from other elements likely to develop into good fighting men; the Persian officers were carefully chosen, and under the able command of Major W. A. K. Fraser, now our military attaché at Kabul, they promised to develop into a very fairly efficient body of men. They were, at any rate, a great advance on any of their predecessors, and I confidently believe that they would in a short time have been able unaided to police the whole road between Shiraz and Bushire. For two years after this their fate hung in the balance, and I cannot but think that the decision finally arrived at, to discontinue the contribution towards their support made by the British and Indian Governments, and so to bring about their disbandment, was a mistaken policy. With some hope that the security of the line would be maintained, I believe that some enterprising firm would have come forward to take over the railway and the road we had with so much labour constructed, and possibly to continue the cart-road through to Shiraz. With the disbandment of the South Persian Rifles, and the consequent almost certain relapse of this part

of Southern Persia into its former state of chaos and anarchy, it is not to be wondered at that no one would risk their money in the country. Compared with the millions we have spent in Mesopotamia, the sum required was almost negligible. Eventually the railway was dismantled and removed, and the road, neglected and never repaired, is no doubt rapidly deteriorating, and will continue to do so until it is in a state little, if any, better than that in which we found it.

It is in the south of Persia, the country south of a line drawn roughly from Seistan on the east to the neighbourhood of Kermanshah, that our interests, both strategical and commercial, lie. It is a tract inhabited mainly by nomad tribes, where the orders of the Tehran Government carry little or no weight, and where it is only by playing off one tribe against another that the Persian officials, unsupported by any armed force, can maintain a semblance of authority. It is a country in which, so long as we hold India, we cannot afford to see any foreign Power predominant.

Lord Curzon, in his book on Persia, written more than thirty years ago, has remarked that "Since Sir John Malcolm first landed at Bushire, in 1800, down to the present day, Persia has alternately advanced and receded in the estimation of British statesmen, occupying now a position of extravagant prominence, anon one of unmerited security. At one time she has been the occasion or the recipient of a lavish and almost wanton prodigality; at another she has been treated with penurious meanness." And so it has been since this was written. So long as the Russian menace to India continued to haunt the minds of statesmen and soldiers, Persia occupied a prominent place in the politics of the Middle East; since the entente with Russia removed anxiety on that score, she has gradually sunk into the background. We have yet to see what the policy of Russia is to be when she emerges from the state of chaos into which she is now plunged; but if Bolshevist activities are any guide, we may expect that Persia may again be made use of to threaten our Indian possessions. We have heard lately of agreements between the Turks and the Soviet Government, and between Angora and Kabul, but an alliance with the Shiahs of Persia, "feeble as allies and impotent as foes," as Lord Curzon has described them, is hardly likely to be courted by her Sunni neighbours to the east and west, or the Christian Power to the north.

Her weakness, indeed, invites aggression, and the rich provinces to the north-west and north have before now excited the cupidity of the peoples coterminous with them. Every true friend of Persia must, therefore, view with regret the present attitude of her Government towards Great Britain, inspired as it doubtless is by pressure from outside; for it may well be that before long she may be in need of a powerful friend who, from motives of self-interest if for no other reason, might be ready to come to her help.

The CHAIRMAN: Ladies and Gentlemen,—After an interesting lecture of this kind, which also has been very instructive regarding the nature of the roads of Persia, I hope there are members of this Society who will now join in a discussion, and thus add to the interest of the evening.

Sir ARTHUR HARDING: Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,—I have listened to this lecture with peculiar interest, and for many reasons—one, that General Douglas and myself co-operated together in Persia for a considerable period before the war, and travelled and worked together in many parts of it. I, myself, have in a sense partaken of some of the General's experiences in the rugged and difficult country which he has just been describing to us, for it was my duty to ride from Tehran to Bushire in order to meet the Viceroy of India, then Lord Curzon, who was about to pay a State visit to the coasts of the Persian Gulf, and I remember very vividly those horrible passes—the Pass of the Old Woman, the Pass of the Daughter, and the one that is known as the Accursed Pass—of which it is difficult to say to which we are to assign the palm for discomfort and, sometimes, where a rider is not mounted on a very sure-footed horse, positive peril. I remember, when I was at Shiraz on my way down, calling on a man of great sanctity who lived there, and telling him what apprehensions I had, and the reverend gentleman presented me with a sacred ring which had for a long time belonged to him and had derived additional sanctity from being on his finger, and he assured me it would guarantee me against all possible dangers of the Kutals. I accepted it very gratefully, and I am bound to say that its magic effect was not only instantaneous, but instantaneous and constant; for at each Kutal I managed to get down, sometimes getting off and leading my horse, but without ever being pitched from his back. I fully share in the admiration with which those of you who have heard General Douglas's lecture must regard the excessively able and successful way in which the troops under his command negotiated this most difficult country. After the wonderfully interesting lecture which he has given—it is scarcely necessary for me to emphasize how difficult and how laborious a task it must have been, and, I think enormous credit attaches to the officers in charge of these complicated and difficult operations. It seems to me that they could hardly have had a more fitting chief than General Douglas, for he is thoroughly accustomed to these wild tribes and their disagreeable ways; and once, during my own stay in Persia, he was badly wounded during his travels in Luristan. The effects of the wound are no more visible than are the effects of the laborious campaign which he underwent in the hot neighbourhood of Borazjan and Bushire, and which has left him as young as, if not younger than he was when we laboured together at Tehran. (Applause.) Well, ladies and gentlemen, what

he has told us makes him, to a certain extent, an important pioneer, because, as he has told us, Persia was one of the few countries at the time the war broke out, claiming to be civilized, which possessed scarcely any railways—a little single line from Tehran to Shah Abdul-Azim being the only one on which trains could move by steam. All the time we were there, great railway projects were constantly being discussed, but I doubt whether any of the schemes actually embraced the difficult task of a railway junction between Tehran and Bushire through the Kutals. There was talk of lines down to Ahwaz, through a very similar country, or down to Bandar Abbas, or best, and most practicable of all, if the Turks would have allowed it, and they probably would—because of the profits of the corpse traffic—from Baghdad to Basra. All these schemes fell through, largely, I think, because of the jealousies of Great Britain and Russia; whatever was proposed by one would be vetoed by the other, and to this day there are no railways in Persia of any importance. In fact, I presume that Persia, during the last few years, has been in a state of retrogression rather than progress. When we were there, the situation was somewhat different. The struggle with Russia, which, to a certain extent, was terminated by her defeat in the Japanese war, was still at its height. Russia was, in those days, pursuing her path of conquest, by gold rather than by arms, by continual loans to the Persian Government, by acquiring that monopoly of furnishing supplies which has been the secret of the ascendancy of the House of Commons in this country, and, in fact, by reducing the Shah and his rather venal body of surrounding ministers and high functionaries into mere recipients of Russian gold. That state of things could only be met on our part by our financing the Persian Government in our turn. It was difficult to do so, because they had no means of raising an internal loan, and their treaty with Russia precluded them from making any foreign loan except with St. Petersburg. The only way we could get over that was to use the Imperial Bank of Persia, which was an English institution disguised as Persian, to advance certain funds supplied to it by the Government of India. That, to a certain extent, helped to break the power of Russia; and it was completed by the catastrophe in Japan. The Persian Government in those days affected a certain sympathy with Russia; but I remember being told by a Persian prince that, when the news arrived of the final defeat of the Russian fleet, the Heir-Apparent to the throne of Persia, who it was thought was by way of being a strong Russophile, called him back and said, "Is the news really true?" and he added, "It seems too good to be true." Then he hastened, with all his courtiers, to condole with great cheerfulness with the Russian representative. As a mere commentator—a respectful, admiring, and sympathetic commentator—on my old friend General Douglas's most inspiring paper, I had better resume my seat; but

I feel sure that all those who have heard his lecture will have derived much interesting information from it, as well as from the admirable illustrations by which he has rendered it more vivid. These enabled all of us to appreciate far more fully, and in a far more lively manner than we otherwise would have done, the most interesting address which he has given us. (Applause.)

Sir GEORGE KIRKPATRICK: Sir Edmund Barrow, Ladies and Gentlemen,—The operations which General Douglas has described in such an interesting manner were really the closing stage of a series which, when viewed in retrospect from the beginning of the war, have very outstanding characteristics. In the first place, it must be remembered that with operations in a country such as Persia, where whole districts will be affected by the success or the non-success of a small body of troops, then what in the big theatres of war would be regarded as not merely minor, but insignificant, operations become in themselves of great importance. Now when war broke out, to the authorities of India Persia presented a great problem. We soldiers wanted to save all our troops, all our forces, all our material, and all our transport for theatres of major importance, where decisive results would be obtained; and we looked with disfavour on any proposal for a diversion of force. But, unfortunately for us, owing to Herr Wassmuss, of whom you have heard, we had to deal with the problem of Southern Persia. We were troubled by a series of attacks, minor, but none the less harassing and anxious, on account of the feature which I have mentioned—that the reverse of a small body in those parts would have great political results throughout that region, and would be magnified beyond all measure in the reports that would be circulated. It became apparent that we should have to restore order. That restoration of order was done in Southern Persia in two divisions. After some local operations on the borders of Mekran, the South Persia Rifles, under Sir Percy Sykes, undertook the opening of the roads and restoration of order in the provinces of Kerman and Fars. Then during this period the troops at Bushire had a time of patient waiting. Their patience was sorely tried, not only by the provocation which was put upon them through the local tribesmen, inspired by German agency, but also by the natural desire to rescue their fellow-countrymen and fellow-countrywomen who had been captured at Shiraz, and were in captivity just outside their outposts. At the same time the higher military authorities directing operations could not run the risk of any failure in such an undertaking as that to release the prisoners, nor could they spare the forces to make a certainty of that operation. Therefore, as General Douglas mentioned, we had to wait. Well, after a period, in which these communications were restored, came another time early in May, June, and July, 1918, when, probably largely influenced by German successes in France, the situation in Persia—in Southern

Persia particularly—most distinctly depreciated. It resulted in the rising of Shiraz, against which Sir Percy Sykes made headway, and afterwards he did much to restore order. We had then to consider the question of the restoration of the communications, and it became evident that amongst the communications the most important was the road from Bushire to Shiraz. We had had accounts of its difficulties; we knew that in General Douglas on the spot we had a commander well acquainted with the road, and the tribesmen, and the difficulties to be met. We realized our good fortune in that, and we deliberately then began to make preparations for what we knew must be a very methodical and arduous operation such as General Douglas has described; and we managed to be able to supply him with some railway material and sufficient mules to enable him to advance slowly stage by stage. It is of great significance to note that in this campaign we put to use mechanical appliances in a country where really it was very doubtful whether it could be done. A point General Douglas has not mentioned—very modestly—is that unless the operations were completed as arranged the climatic conditions in a very few weeks would have increased the strain on the troops beyond all measure. He has told you how he carried through the operation, and in doing so he has not, perhaps, done himself full justice—although he has his troops. It was due very largely to his previous knowledge, to his careful foresight, and to his methodical preparation that he was enabled to carry out that work successfully. Remember that Bushire itself is an undeveloped harbour; in fact, it is no harbour. Ships of any size have to lie one or two miles out. There are no proper landing appliances and no proper roads into the port itself. There were no means of handling, when he first got it, the railway material with which to construct his initial railway, and no proper place to store his supplies; and he was faced always with that mud marsh of Mashileh before he could get to dry land. Remembering these things, I think you will agree with me that not only was his lecture exceedingly interesting, but it was a very modest account of his performance. (Applause.)

Mr. Donald Mellor: Mr. Chairman, we have listened with very great pleasure to General Douglas's lecture, and to all of us who take an interest in the development of a country like Persia, and the outposts of India, I think we must agree that the work which General Douglas directed will always stand as a monument to his ability and energy. I think with the last speaker that he has certainly underestimated the work that he did himself; for it is very well known that without a good leader the men would not work. In these things also the general public very often forget the energy of the officers and of the men, from the highest down to the lowest, that has to be put through in carrying out such an undertaking. I very much regretted, when reading the other day as regards the railway through Baluchistan

from Quetta, that there was a hint that part of that line, if not all of it, is to be taken up. That was mentioned by one of the papers with regret, which I re-echo myself. That line, although not exactly a gold mine, certainly has developed trade along the route to a remarkable extent; and to those gentlemen like General Douglas, who have done good work in the outposts of the Empire, it must be a galling thing that work which they have carried through so conscientiously, and which, if it had been backed up in England, would have led both to further development and towards the peace of the world, has not been seconded as it should have been.

The CHAIRMAN: If no one else will say anything more, it remains for me to make some comments. To me the most interesting feature of all in this discussion has been the clear conception that has been given to us, both by lantern illustrations on the wall and by the lecture and the discussion, of the immensely difficult road over which General Douglas succeeded in taking his troops. That road is, of course, a historic road. It has been used for hundreds, even thousands, of years, and, I suppose, originally it was fairly well aligned and probably fairly well kept. But you see the results of Asiatic rule during these long ages. When you looked at those pictures that were put before us you could appreciate what is meant in Central Asia by the term "road." A road is nothing like what we are accustomed to in this country, or anywhere in Europe; and some of the so-called roads that I have been over, and which are designated in our maps by beautiful thick lines, have shown me how deceptive our own maps often are when dealing with countries with which we are unacquainted. Once you have been over those roads you know that a map road is of little use to you until you have been over it yourself. Another point I would like to mention is that we were very fortunate during the war in having available for this particular job an officer like General Douglas, who knew the country thoroughly. He had been over that road, I suppose, half-a-dozen times before the war, and therefore was thoroughly acquainted with the difficulties he would have to cope with, and could make previous arrangements which would suffice to overcome them. That, I think, illustrates very clearly the fact that in Asiatic countries the difficulties of warfare must not be measured solely by the fighting. The main difficulties are moving and feeding troops. On that subject General Douglas, if time had permitted, could no doubt have told us a good deal more than he did, but it is evident that his troops largely overcame those difficulties by their own labours. They reconstructed this road; and the road, though bad from our point of view no doubt, was infinitely better than anything that had been seen in that part of Persia for a very long time. I am sure you will all join with me in giving a very cordial vote of thanks to General Douglas for his interesting lecture, and the trouble he has taken in putting

before us the difficulties of his little campaign. (Applause.) One word I would like to add; it is with reference to remarks made by the last speaker—I am sorry I did not catch his name. He expressed great regret that the labour of those generals and officers in distant lands should be thrown away, and all those roads disappear into the oblivion that their predecessors so justly merited. But I do not think that is the case altogether. I hope in these more civilized times something may happen which will enable Persia in the future to be more readily accessible to trade and commerce, either by railways or by good roads. We have two approaches which may help us in future. One is the approach from Mesopotamia, a good deal of which was improved enormously during the war, and the other is the approach from Quetta, viâ the Nushki line, to Duzd-ab. That railway still exists, and I hope it may continue to do so; because already the trade by it has enormously increased. Mention of that fact will give some satisfaction to the last speaker. Ladies and gentlemen, in your name I propose a very cordial vote of thanks to General Douglas. (Renewed applause.)