

## Communiqué from Sir Charles Townshend to the Kut Garrison *26 January 1916*

Reproduced below is the first of Sir Charles Townshend's official communiqués to his garrison at Kut, dated 26 January 1916. Under siege from Turkish forces following the failure of the overly optimistic British advance upon Baghdad towards the close of 1915 — although Townshend himself had long held reservations about the plan — his communiqués were intended to sustain the inevitably flagging morale of his garrison troops. The garrison — chiefly comprised of native Indian troops — eventually surrendered to Turkish forces at the end of April 1916, and was widely regarded as a heavy humiliation to British influence in the region.

The relieving force under General Aylmer has been unsuccessful in its efforts to dislodge the Turks entrenched on the left bank of the river some fourteen miles below the position at Sinn, where we defeated them in September last.

Our relieving force suffered severe loss and had very bad weather to contend against; they are entrenched close to the Turkish position. More reinforcements are on their way up-river, and I confidently expect to be relieved some day during the first half of the month of February.

I desire all ranks to know why I decided to make a stand at Kut during our retirement from Ctesiphon. It was because, as long as we hold Kut, the Turks cannot get their ships, barges, stores and munitions past this place, and so cannot move down to attack Amara, and thus we are holding up the whole of the Turkish advance. It also gives time for our reinforcements to come up-river from Basra, and so restore success to our arms.

It gives time to our allies, the Russians, to move towards Baghdad, which a large force is now doing. I had a personal message from General Baratoff, in command of the Russian Expeditionary Force in Persia, telling me of his admiration of what you men of the 6th Division and troops attached have done in the past few months, and telling of his own progress on the road from Kermanshah towards Baghdad.

By standing at Kut I maintain the territory we have won in the past year at the expense of much blood, commencing with your glorious victory at Shaiba, and thus we maintain the campaign as a glorious one, instead of letting disaster pursue its course down to Amara, and perhaps beyond.

I have ample food for eighty-four days, and that is not counting the 3,000 animals which can be eaten. When I defended Chitral some twenty years ago we lived well on *atta* and horse-flesh; but, as I repeat, I expect confidently to be relieved in the first half of the month of February.

Our duty stands out clear and simple. It is our duty to our Empire, to our beloved King and country, to stand here and hold up the Turkish advance as we are doing now, and with the help of all, heart and soul together, we will make this defence to be remembered in history as a glorious one.

All in India and England are watching us now, and are proud of the splendid courage you have shown; and I tell you let all remember the glorious defence of Plevna, for that is what is in my mind.

I am absolutely calm and confident as to the result. The Turk, though good behind the trench, is of little value in the attack. They have tried it once, and their losses in one night in their attempt on the fort were 2,000 alone.

They have already had very heavy losses from General Aylmer's musketry and guns, and I have no doubt they have had enough.

I have done my duty. You know the result, and whether I was right or not, and your name will go down in history as the heroes of Ctesiphon, for heroes you proved yourselves in the battle.

I, perhaps, by right, should not have told you of the above; but I feel I owe it to you all to speak straight and openly and to take you into my confidence, for, God knows, I felt our heavy losses and the suffering of my poor brave wounded, and shall remember it as long as I live, and I may truly say that no general I know of has been more loyally obeyed and served than I have been in command of the Sixth Division.

These words are long, I am afraid, but I speak straight from the heart, and you will see that I have thrown all officialdom overboard. We will succeed - mark my words! but save your ammunition as if it were gold!

Source: Source Records of the Great War, Vol. IV, ed. Charles F. Horne, National Alumni 1923

Found online at: [http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/kut\\_townshend1.htm](http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/kut_townshend1.htm)