



The Spire Sentinel



**The Newsletter
of The
Branch of The
Front**



**& Magazine
Chesterfield
Western
Association**

ISSUE 126 - August 2026

Our aims are 'Remembrance and Sharing the History of the Great War'.



Western Front Association Chesterfield Branch – Meetings 2026

Meetings start at 7.30pm and take place at the Labour Club, Unity House, Saltergate, Chesterfield S40 1NF

January	6th	. AGM + Tim Lynch - “Huns on the Run” Tim explores the often overlooked experiences of German POWs held in Britain during and immediately after the First World War
February	3rd	Ross Beadle - Sarajevo 1914 This talk examines the sequence of chance events of the preceding 36 years and, even, on the day of the killing.
March	3rd	Andy Rawson - Malta...Nurse of the Mediterranean against the Germans and Italians during WWII. However, over 125,000 casualties from the 1915 Gallipoli and 1916 Salonika campaigns were cared for on the island during WWI.
April	7th	Mick Byrne - Shot at Dawn Between 1914 and 1920, more than 3,000 British soldiers were sentenced to death by courts martial arms, However, only 346 were executed with 37 of these having committed capital crimes such as murder. The remainder become the centrepiece of our talk.
May	5th	Christina Holstein - Verdun. What was the plan behind the German offensive of February 1916? A thundering opening bombardment brought early success but the German advance soon slowed and the French refused to give up.
June	2nd	Scott Lindgren The Admiralty dispatched two dreadnought battlecruisers to the South Atlantic to eliminate the threat of the German East Asia cruiser squadron. This talk explains the events and consequences of the Falklands battle, along with some of the strategic and tactical lessons.
July	7th	John Wilson The action at Sheikh Sa'id November 1914. The opposed landing that nobody has ever heard about! .
August	4th	Ian Castle - Gotha Raids. The talk traces the sequence of raids made by the deadly Gotha and massive 'Giant' bombers, and the development of the world's first in depth, integrated aerial defence system. Based on his book London 1917-18: The Bomber Blitz
September	1st	Roy Larkin - Where the Money Went. Following the success of the original ‘Where the Money Went’, the Sequel explores the financial costs of the Great War. Fully illustrated
October	6th	Peter Hart Welsh Warrior at Ypres, 1914: The thrilling memories of Captain Hubert Rees who ended up in command of the 2nd Welsh Regiment during the fighting at Gheluvelt.
November	3rd	John Horner ‘In the care of St Dunstons : Private Richard Horner's story’
December	1st	Neil Taylor....”Winston`s Little Army...Aspects of the Royal Naval Division”

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Chairman`s Ramblings



I hope this finds everyone well and coping with the heat we all have been experiencing. Work aside, it's been a quiet month for me, and I hope everyone has been busy with all things WW1, whatever you have been up to whether it's been research or any battlefield tours. It would be great if we could hear about it so any bits you could put in a small article would be great if so forward them to Grant to put in the newsletter.

At this point I would like to say a great big thank you to Grant for all the hard work he puts doing the speaker's list and to putting the newsletter together and getting it out to everyone, also what a great job you have been doing getting out and about giving presentations in various destinations and groups so well done and many thanks .

Last month's talk was very interesting, certainly a different aspect of the war indeed the last two subjects have definitely shown why it was a global conflict war. I am sure Tuesday's talk by Ian Castle will be just as interesting and informative.

Looking forward to seeing everyone next week

Jon-Paul Harding

August Presentation - Ian Castle



The Gotha Raids



Biography

IAN CASTLE began writing military history over thirty years ago, but for the last seventeen years has focused on Germany's First World War air raids on Britain. Initially exploring the London raids, his later research extended to include attacks across the whole country. He has recently completed his 'Forgotten Blitz' trilogy.

In addition to writing books, Ian regularly contributes articles to magazines and journals and has been involved in several television documentaries exploring aspects of this early air campaign. Besides giving regular talks on the subject, Ian has also built an extensive website (www.iancastlezeppelin.co.uk) highlighting these air raids. In December 2023 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society.

Ian's talk traces the sequence of raids made by the deadly Gotha and massive 'Giant' bombers, and the development of the world's first in depth, integrated aerial defence system. Based on his book London 1917-18: The Bomber Blitz



Secretary`s Scribbles

Dear Members and Friends,

Welcome to the August 2026 edition of the Branch Newsletter and magazine - number 126. I trust you are all making the most of the summer weather, it won't be long before normal service - rain - is

resumed. Ten days ago I made my Quintinshill presentation at WFA Spalding Branch. They meet in the Spalding Baptist Church Centre. Last visited two years ago and then the meeting was held in one of the annex rooms - this time it was in the Church itself, so here's me up on the stage delivering from the preacher's lectern with my slides on a massive screen behind me. Thanks for the invite. I've no more presentations now until October.

Mark Macartney, who does so much to help me with arranging speakers and getting all our info on the main WFA website, and his wife Jean, have been off on their annual Scottish "safari" this past month and amongst other places have laid commemorations at Quintinshill, Larbert (where the ill-fated troop train set off on 22nd May 1915), and Rosebank Cemetery in Edinburgh where most of the soldiers of the Royal Scots Battalion who perished in the crash are buried. Mark promises me a report on his trip to these sites in the next issue of the Newsletter.

Our meeting on August 4th sees the return of Ian Castle for our annual WW1 aviation presentation. Last year Ian spoke about the Zeppelin raids, this year he will talk about the German fixed wing bomber raids - The Gotha's!

Thanks to member Kevin Dallyn who has donated his WW1 book collection to the Branch to raise funds via our monthly raffle - look for a lot of new items on the table tonight. Kevin has been doing some research - see elsewhere in this Newsletter - hopefully some of our knowledgeable members can help answer his questions.

Next month we have Roy Larkin back with us to discuss the business and financial side of the war with his presentation,

Where the Money Went. A follow up to his original 'Where the Money Went', this sequel explores the financial costs of the Great War and as always with Roy is well illustrated. I'm well under way with preparation of the 2027 Speakers' programme and will

be a mixture of “regulars” and “newbies” with a variety of presentations which should, I hope , have something of interest for everyone. Looking forward to seeing as many of you as possible on Tuesday. For those not been before to a meeting , we have free, off street parking, access to the Chesterfield Labour Club bar, before and after the meeting. There is a stair lift up to our first floor meeting room for anyone with mobility issues. We ask for a donation (suggested £3) from everyone who attends to cover the cost of the room hire and any fees or expenses requested by our speakers - some come a long way to entertain and educate us.

One of our members changed his car recently and asked if we had any WFA car stickers - we hadn`t. Again, thanks to Mark Macartney we now have a few available to members. Mark got in touch with Maya Shapland at WFA HQ and she sent up a packet - feel free to collect one on Tuesday...no charge - maybe just buy an extra raffle ticket, it all goes to support the Branch.

Finally, thanks to John Wilson who has supplied his complete presentation at the July meeting for inclusion in this Newsletter.

Best wishes, Grant grantcullen@hotmail.com / 07824628638

Help Wanted....

Branch Member Kevin Dallyn is seeking some help / advice....

His grandfather L/Cpl Percival Dallyn 21972 1st Battalion Sherwood Foresters was killed 4th July 1916 near La Boisselle. He was originally buried along with four comrades in a shell hole or dug-out but disinterred in 1919 and reburied in Gordon Dump Military Cemetery (57D x 14D) alongside his fallen comrades. What Kev would like to find out is where that battalion of the Sherwood Foresters went into action and if possible pinpoint on a map of the area (trench map?) so that maybe he could visit. Kevin says information about this action is very sparse and would appreciate if any members could assist him in his quest.

Anyone who could assist, please get in touch with Grant (details as above) who will liaise with Kevin. Thanks.



NOT THE WESTERN FRONT CONFERENCE

Saturday 31st October 2026
Cluntergate Centre, Horbury, WF4 5DA



Peter Hart - "The French at Gallipoli"



Tom Isitt - "The Vertical War"



Alan Wakefield - "Salonika"



Nigel Atter - "Tigers on the Tigris"

£29 including lunch (earlybird until 31st May £25)

<https://www.trybooking.com/uk/FPHV>

July Meeting

The Forgotten Gateway: The 1914 Pre-emptive Strike at Sheikh Sa'id

In the autumn of 1914, the British Empire operated not as a singular, monolithic entity governed purely from London, but as a complex network of semi-autonomous regional powers. While the Foreign Office and the Admiralty managed global diplomacy, the Government of India—the British Raj—exercised independent control over a massive, critical sphere of influence. From its administrative hub in Bombay, the Indian Government was directly responsible for Burma, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the Trucial States, British Somaliland, and, critically, the strategic port of Aden (administered under the Bombay Presidency).

For the Raj, the Red Sea was not a distant maritime highway; it was the "front door" to the subcontinent. The vital trade and troop routes connecting India and Australia to Great Britain ran directly past Aden and through the narrow Bab-el-Mandeb strait to the Suez Canal. With the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914, Aden instantly transformed into the primary staging post for the Indian Expeditionary Forces (IEF). Any threat to this maritime choke point jeopardized the safe transit of what would eventually become 1.4 million Indian soldiers and non-combatants bound for the Western Front and Mesopotamia.

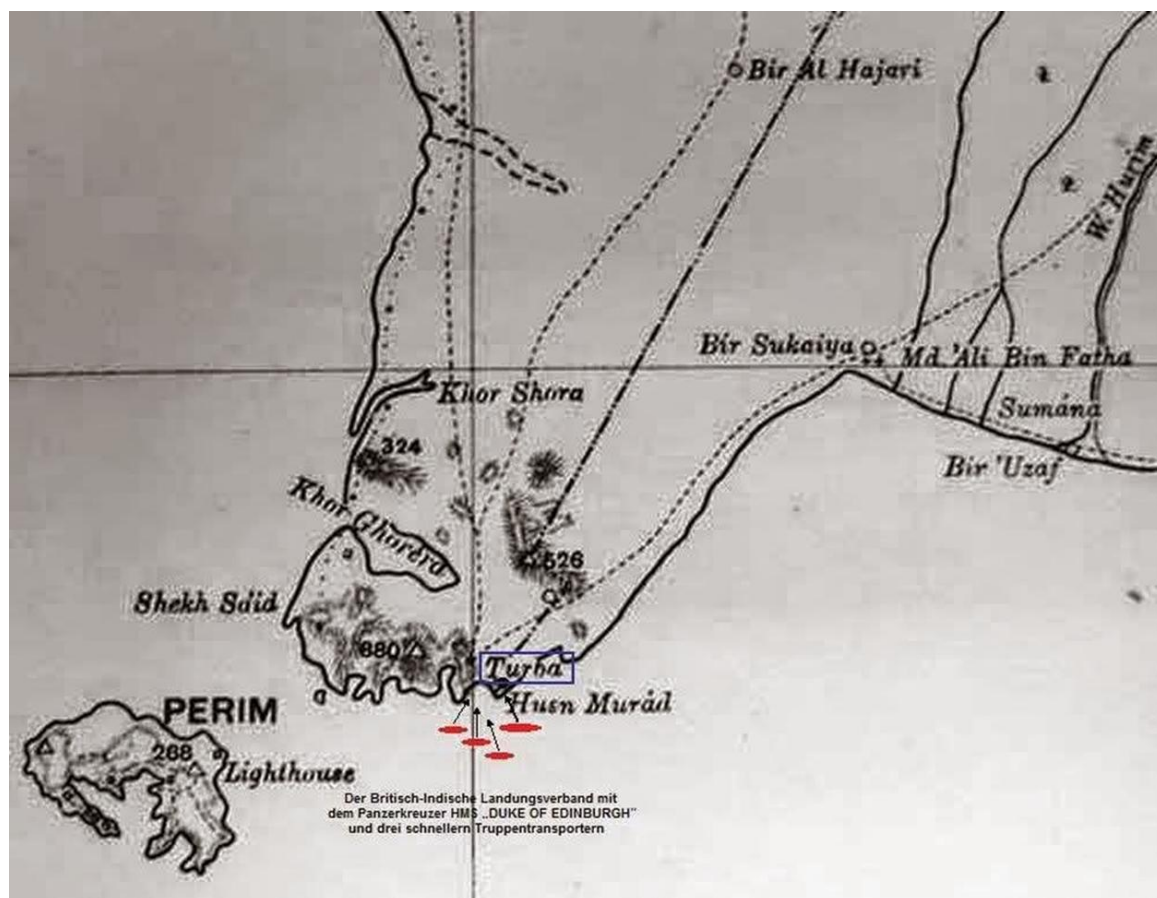
While London spent the early months of the conflict attempting to maintain Ottoman neutrality, the geopolitical landscape fractured on October 29, 1914. The Ottoman fleet, secretly aligned with Germany via the Turco-German Alliance signed on August 2, executed a surprise raid under the command of German Admiral Wilhelm Souchon. Utilizing the German battlecruiser *SMS Goeben* and light cruiser *SMS Breslau* (which had been absorbed into the Ottoman Navy), they launched the Black Sea Raid, attacking the Russian ports of Odessa, Sevastopol, and Theodosia.

By early November, formal declarations of war rippled across Europe, with Russia declaring war on November 1, and France and Britain following suit on November 5. However, the most alarming development for British India occurred on November 14, 1914, when Ottoman Sultan Mehmed V formally declared a *jihad* against the Allied Powers, calling upon Muslims worldwide to support the empire.

The proclamation of holy war sent shockwaves through the halls of power in Bombay. The Government of India was haunted by the memory of the 1857 Indian Mutiny and grew deeply terrified that Indian *sepoys* might refuse to fight the Ottoman Sultan-Caliph. This anxiety drove a policy of aggressive regional defence:

destroy any Ottoman presence that could threaten the Red Sea while managing the internal political fallout of the Jihad within India's borders.

Long before the formal outbreak of war with Turkey, Viceroy Charles Hardinge had identified the primary threat: the Ottoman garrison at Sheikh Sa'id, a peninsula projecting into the Bab-el-Mandeb strait directly opposite British-held Perim Island. Perim was a critical lifeline housing vital undersea telegraph cable installations, a coaling depot, and a lighthouse. If the Ottomans destroyed these cables, India would be completely cut off from communication with London.



As early as September 4, 1914, Viceroy Hardinge had telegraphed London suggesting an immediate occupation of Sheikh Sa'id. At the time, London's "mood music" was entirely different, urging restraint so as not to jeopardize relations with Constantinople. But when the Ottoman raid on Odessa confirmed the worst, the Viceroy chose not to wait for the slow gears of the Admiralty or the arrival of the Mediterranean Fleet. Taking a massive political risk, the Indian Government acted on its own initiative, presenting London with a *fait accompli*.

In a message to London, the Viceroy stated:

"The security of the Red Sea route is of such paramount importance for the passage of our transports that we consider it essential to neutralize the Turkish position at Sheikh Said without delay. We have therefore taken the responsibility of issuing

orders to the Senior Naval Officer and the General Officer Commanding the 29th Indian Infantry Brigade, now at sea..."

Whitehall was forced to accept the manoeuvre, with officials noting that the Raj had moved with "characteristic promptitude—perhaps a little too much so for the Admiralty". To countermand the order now would look like hesitation in the face of the Jihad.

Intelligence regarding the enemy's strength at Sheikh Sa'id was sparse, fragmented, and gathered via clandestine observation from the sea. On October 13, the General Officer Commanding (GOC) Aden reported that Ottoman forces had occupied the telegraph house opposite Perim. Two days later, an Ottoman officer boldly visited the Perim Hospital under ambiguous circumstances.

Local intelligence, though treated with doubt, suggested a growing menace:

"Last gun that was brought to Manhali throws a fifteen by six inch shell and that four larger guns are being brought by a gunboat expected soon. The officers get drinking water from Dobat, distant 20 miles and the soldiers drink from Shaikh Sa'id wells which are brackish."

A series of reconnaissance photographs of the Turba and Manhali defences, taken from a distance of one mile at sea, confirmed that German ships at that place had only been dismantled on October 4.



Recognizing that the heavy guns at the fortifications of Turba and Manhali could bombard Perim Island and close the strait, the Raj finalized its tactical plans. Rather than seeking explicit permission, the Viceroy simply informed the home government of their actions. On November 3, 1914—two days before Great Britain officially declared war on the Ottoman Empire—Brigadier-General Cox, commanding the 29th

Indian Infantry Brigade then en route to Egypt, received secret orders to divert his force and strike Sheikh Sa'id.

The operational directives issued to General Cox were explicit, uncompromising, and highly confidential. The striking force was composed of veteran Indian Army units: the 14th Sikhs, the 69th Punjabis, and the 89th Punjabis, accompanied by the 23rd Sikh Pioneers aboard the transports *City of Manchester*, *Edavana*, and *Nurani*.

The primary objective was not permanent occupation, but total destruction followed by immediate evacuation. Cox was ordered to capture Sheikh Sa'id, destroy the Turkish works, dismantle the guns, and render the wells unserviceable. To maintain total operational security, absolute secrecy was enforced:

"GOC Aden will detail his GSO 2 Major Bradshaw to join General Cox as the convoy passes Aden. Major Bradshaw will take with him maps and all local information... With the exception of Major Bradshaw no individual at Perim or Aden is to be informed of these orders."

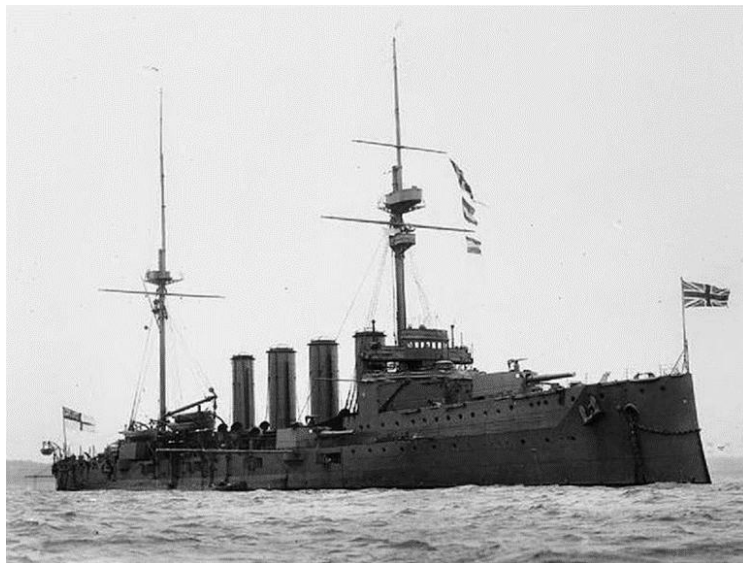
The convoy diverted to Aden first to collect a vital asset: a mechanical tugboat, Major Bradshaw with his intelligence maps, and a planned Political Officer. Intense correspondence had taken place regarding this political position because the Sheikh Sa'id peninsula occupied a delicate legal grey area; it was not explicitly owned by either the Ottomans or the British.

The initial appreciation noted that "It is our policy to alienate the ARABS from the TURKS and to give them moral support... it is necessary to consider the ARABS as far as is ordinarily possible." However, in a twist characteristic of hasty wartime logistics, the Political Officer never materialized, leaving the military to manage the regional complexities alone.

At 0615 hours on November 10, 1914, the armoured cruiser *HMS Duke of Edinburgh* opened fire on the Ottoman positions. To the soldiers watching anxiously from the crowded transports, the display of naval might was awe-inspiring. The heavy 6-inch and 9.2-inch guns appeared to reduce the shore defences to absolute rubble, creating a false sense of security among the men waiting to land. It was a dangerous illusion. The British were yet to realize, both at Sheikh Sa'id and later at Gallipoli, how little effect naval gunfire actually had on an enemy well-entrenched on shore.

The realities of amphibious warfare quickly asserted themselves. Lieutenant Gell, an officer participating in the landing, recalled the chaotic scene as the small tug went inshore to scout the landing zone:

"Duke was signalling with a green light. We then anchored and a tug which came with us from Aden, went inshore to see what the landing was like. When she had disappeared, firing suddenly began from the hills above the shore. Nowhere near us, though we were a long way out, they must have spotted the tug, after about an hour. The tug came back and reported a landing from this side was impossible to much surf and we couldn't of got boats in."



Forced to find an alternative landing site under the gaze of the Ottoman defenders, the operation rapidly deteriorated into a slow, hazardous ordeal. Gell noted the primary objective of the expedition:

"Perrin is an island belonging to us, and the object of our little expedition was destroyed, the forts, which overlooked Perin and might bombard it. We were told B (Manhali) was the strongest fort of the two and that a Turba was the old one, and not so important. They took rather a long time to get the range. I thought the fire of 6 inch and 9.2 is really terrific, they riddled the fort in about half an hour... I must say I should hate to see 9 inch guns firing from the other end"

Yet despite the apparent destruction, surviving Ottoman artillery pieces remained operational, finding their range and opening fire on the approaching assault craft. Packed tightly into small cutters, the men found themselves entirely exposed:

"our boatload was about 60 men and major and myself (one of the cruisers cutters) and therefore a mark for the Turks guns, which they let us know. The first shell came over us when we were about halfway to shore, but so absurdly high that we argued, as whether it was meant for us or not. The tug taking us in couldn't get us, right, ashore, of course... The fellow in command of her an Indian Marine officer, seemed to be quite lost as to what to do with us, so did nothing. We just sat there crowded in the boat and an excellent mark within nice range of about 14 or 1500 yards of the enemy's guns"

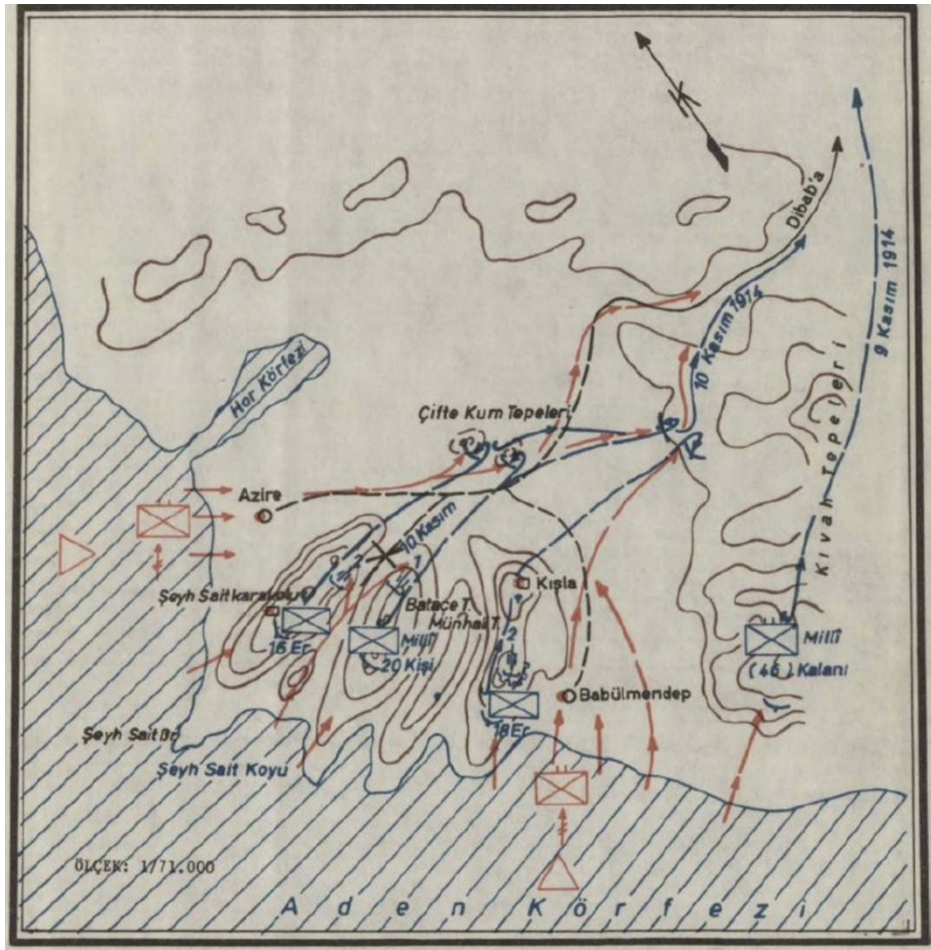
The slow approach grew lethal as the boats drew closer to the beach, resulting in immediate casualties before the troops could even touch dry land:

"The petty officer in our boat, regardless of rank, told the RIM fellow in the tug he must do something, so we went a little closer in & were then cast off by her & had to row in the rest of the way! It was a tub of a boat we had 4 seamen and they attempted to pull us 60 men ashore. Of course we hardly moved. Then an oar broke and finally shrapnel came within about a yard of our heads and hit the sea not more than 2 yards from the boat over it I thought it hadn't burst it didn't sound like it as it hit the sea with a plonk, but anyway, one man was killed in the boat, bullet through his neck, just as we were getting out in almost 3 feet of water."

Once ashore, the lack of landing craft left the initial waves isolated on the shoreline, unable to mount an immediate assault. The 14th Sikhs had only six boats to transport the entire battalion, towed by two naval pinnaces; their disembarkation began at 2:00 PM and was not completed until daybreak the following day. Lieutenant Gell recorded the desperate scramble for survival in the soft sand:

"We had about 1 double company when he arrived & so opened fire from our position on the beach to cover the 89th advance on our left. The sand was soft and so we managed to rake up quite a nice little trench each with our hands. Dill was baling himself out one with a megaphone! ... I am certain the blighters saw 3 officers together by our helmets, because we had several shells our way so I got a bit farther off. We had to wait about 4 hours before we got a chance to advance... The landing process was fearfully slow. I got ashore about 11 a.m. & was in same place at 3.30."

From the Ottoman perspective, the defence was fatally under-resourced. Due to faulty arrangements by the detachment commander, Major Ahsen, a grand total of only 164 scattered men (38 regular infantry under Captain Osman, 56 artillerymen, and 70 men of a local National Battalion) were tasked with defending the entire Mandeb Strait.



When the British landed, a mutual firefight commenced, but structural failure doomed the Ottoman defence. At a critical moment, the ammunition for the primary Ottoman field gun on Bataca Hill ran out. Taking advantage of the silence, British troops began encircling the position. The gun commander, Lieutenant Niyazi, was forced to withdraw after rendering the gun's breechblock, sight, and barrel unusable. The remaining mountain guns and infantry retreated four kilometres east to the Elkivah hills, while the National Battalion dissolved without showing any sign of movement.

The next morning, the 14th Sikhs covered the 23rd Sikh Pioneers as they completed their demolition work. The destruction of the enemy's arsenal was thorough. At Turba and Manhali, the Pioneers captured and destroyed:

- Two bronze 15-centimetre B.L. Krupp guns
- Two 12-pounder B.L. Krupp guns (dated 1870)
- One modern 10-centimetre B.L. Krupp field gun with ammunition
- Three smooth-bore muzzle-loading guns
- 100,100 rounds of small arms ammunition (SAA) and 630 artillery shells

By 3:00 PM on November 11, the entire force re-embarked onto the transports, with the Pioneers returning to Aden by 5:00 PM. The expedition cost the British force four Sepoys killed, ten wounded, and one officer (Second Lieutenant Campbell) wounded.

The action at Sheikh Sa'id remains historically significant for several reasons[cite: 4]. It was the first action of the war fought by an Indian Brigade without an attached British battalion. It vividly illustrated the fragmentation of the British imperial machine, with regional commands launching pre-emptive operations before a formal state of war had even been solidified by London. Most critically, the tactical friction experienced on the beaches of Sheikh Sa'id—the severe shortage of landing craft, the agonizingly slow disembarkation, and the complete failure of naval bombardment against entrenched shore positions—served as an unheeded warning. Just five months later, in April 1915, these exact operational flaws would be repeated on a catastrophic, tragic scale on the shores of Gallipoli.

XX



Record Bag



Shoulder Bag



Messenger Bag



Cap



Coffee Mug



Mousemat



Classic Tie



Fridge Tile Magnet



WFA Fridge Magnet



WFA Bookmark



Lapel Badge



Despatch Bag



When was the last time that you had a look at The WFA shop? There are some wonderful items to purchase and the profits help support the Association.

Go to the home page of the website and click on the 'About the WFA' menu and you will see the 'Branded Goods' option