



Kut 1916: Courage and Failure in Iraq

Colonel Patrick T Crowley

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The siege of Kut is a story of blunders, sacrifice, imprisonment and escape. The allied campaign in Mesopotamia began in 1914 as a relatively simple operation to secure the oilfields in the Shatt-al-Arab delta and Basra area. Initially it was a great success, but as the army pressed towards Baghdad its poor logistic support, training, equipment and command left it isolated and besieged by the Turks. By 1916 the army had not been relieved, and on 29 April 1916, the British Army suffered one of the worst defeats in its military history. Major-General Sir Charles Townshend surrendered his allied force to the Turks in the Mesopotamia (now Iraq) town of Kut-al-Amara. Over 13,000 troops, British and Indian, went into captivity; many would not survive their incarceration. In Kut 1916, Colonel Crowley recounts this dramatic tale and its terrible aftermath. 'There is plenty of horseflesh, which the Indians have been authorised by their religious leaders to eat, and I have to recall with sorrow, that by not having taken the advantage of this wise dispensation they have weakened my power of resistance by one month.' (Major General Townshend)

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