

The Mesopotamia Campaign

NOVEMBER 1915 - JANUARY 1916

Men from Marlow served across the globe during the First World War. Two brothers from the town died on the same day in January 1916 fighting in Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq).

The Mesopotamia Campaign

Britain relied heavily on oil to keep the Royal Navy at sea. When war broke out in summer 1914, it sent a force of British and Indian soldiers to occupy the oilfields and pipeline near Basra in Mesopotamia, which was then part of the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire. In November 1914, the Ottoman Empire joined Germany and Austria-Hungary in the War against Britain and its Allies.

In 1915, Britain decided to push further inland from Basra into Mesopotamia as part of its plan to knock the Ottoman Empire out of the War. The British got to within 30 miles of their goal of Baghdad, but in November were pushed back and besieged by the Turks in the city of Kut.

The British made various attempts to relieve the troops trapped in Kut. One of these attempts culminated in the Battle of Hanna on 21 January 1916.

The Battle of Hanna

After a short bombardment, the British charged the Ottoman lines. In an advance across 600 yards of flooded no-man's land, the British sustained 2,700 casualties. The well prepared Ottoman positions, notably the well-sited machine gun nests, forced the British to withdraw.

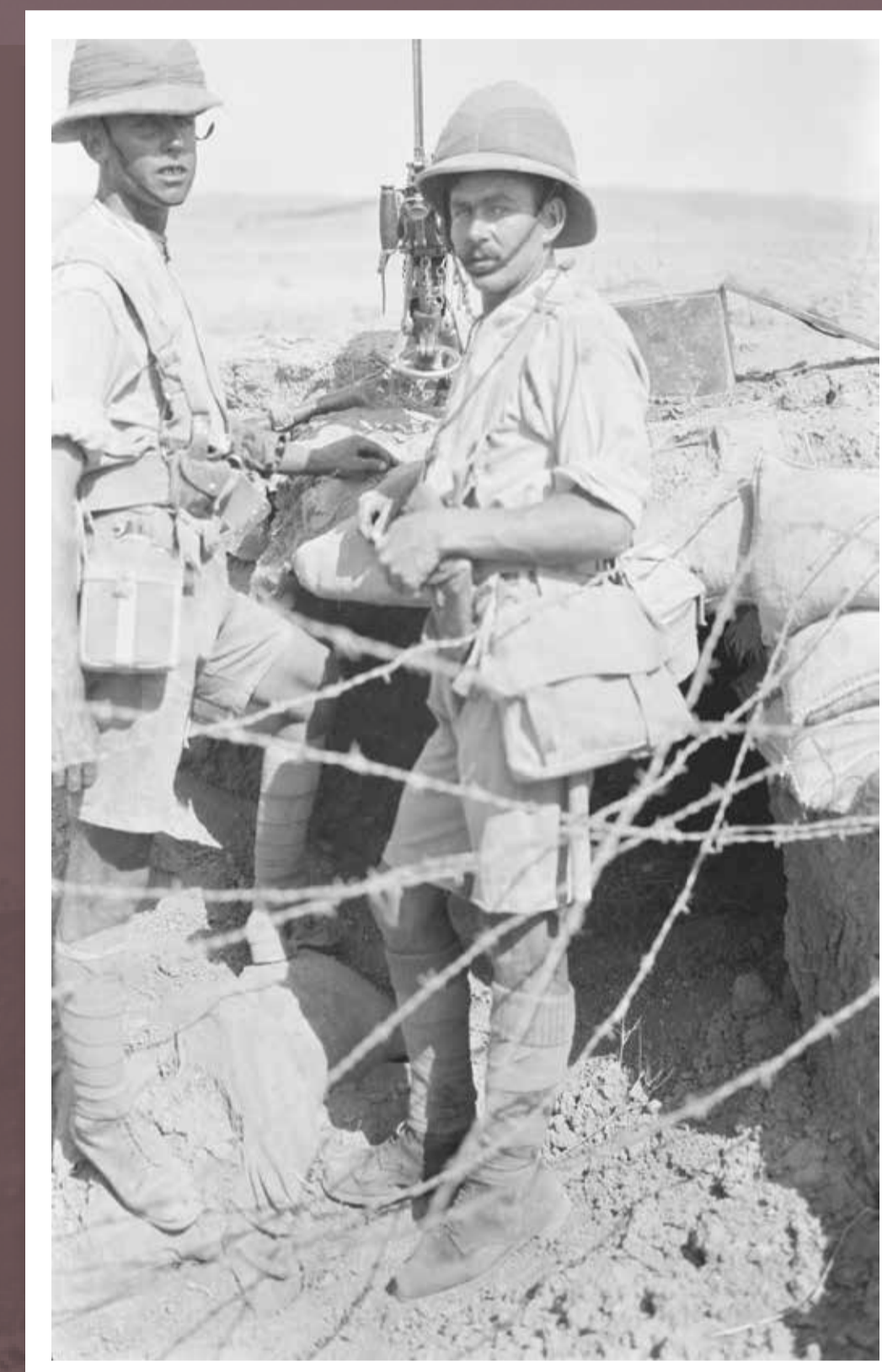
Among those killed were two brothers from Marlow, Harold and Sidney Clark, both of them Privates in the Hampshire Regiment.

Medical care for the wounded was practically nonexistent, and the night after the attack saw freezing temperatures. One British officer commented "I suppose this is as near to Hell as we are likely to see". The besieged garrison in Kut could hear the distant sound of the fighting, but realised they were not going to be saved.

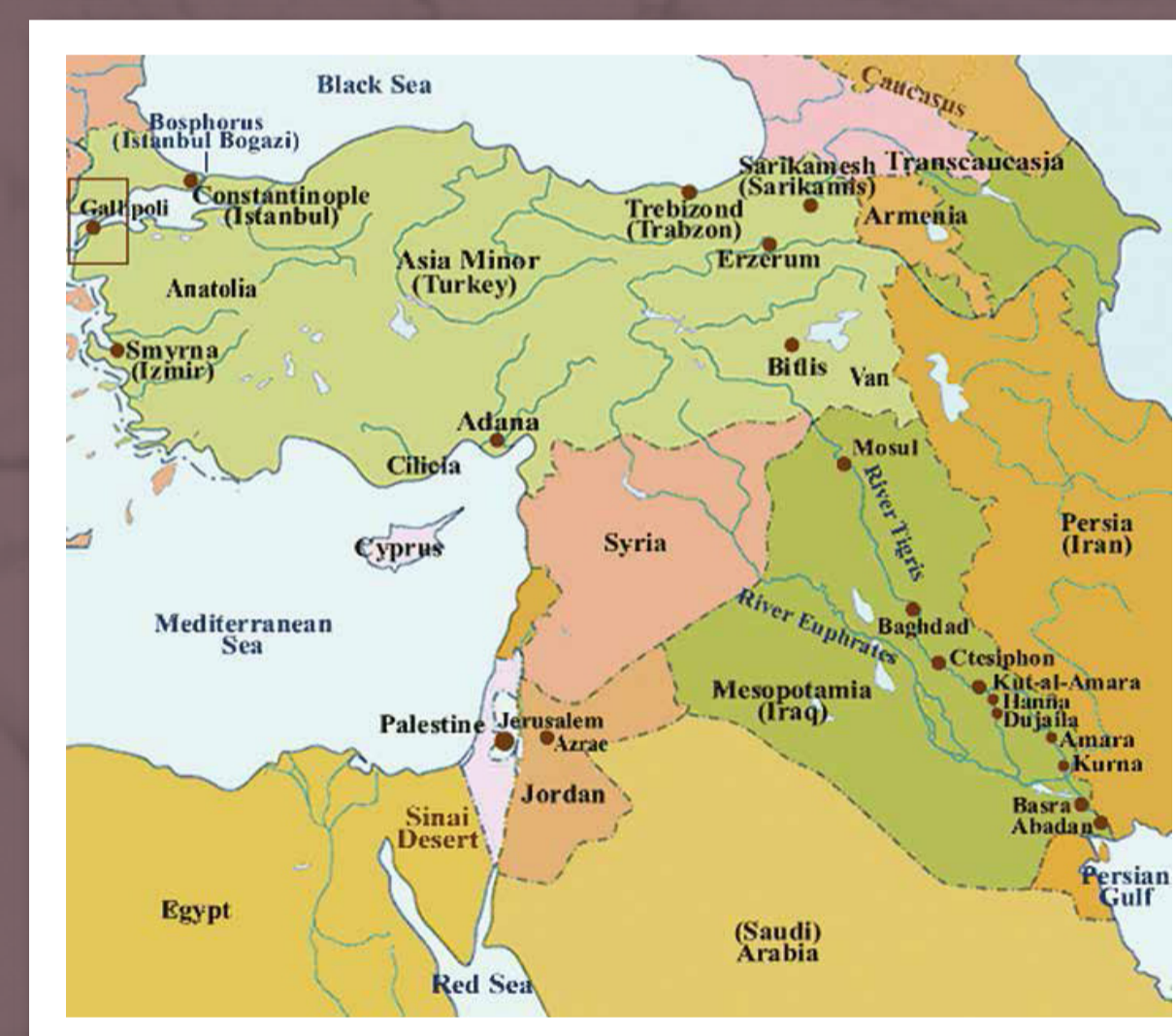
After the Battle

The garrison at Kut was finally forced to surrender to the Turks on 29 April 1916. Over 13,000 British and Indian soldiers became prisoners of war and many died in captivity. Kut was a humiliating defeat for the British, particularly coming so soon after the failed Gallipoli campaign. It was not until March 1917 that British and Indian troops finally captured Baghdad.

In total, the Mesopotamia campaign resulted in the loss of over 30,000 British and Indian lives, almost half through sickness, with another 50,000 wounded.



British troops in Mesopotamia
Image supplied by the Imperial War Museum



Map showing Mesopotamia and modern state boundaries



Indian troops entering Baghdad, March 1917