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Paul K. Davis. *Ends and Means: The British Mesopotamian Campaign and Commission.* Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994. 279 pp. $41.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8386-3530-8.

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In 1914 the British, largely with Indian troops, landed at Basra at the head of the Persian Gulf and began a march to Baghdad. They were surrounded by the Turks at Kut and there suffered a defeat that was compared to that of Yorktown. The casualties were among the highest of the entire war. During the recent Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, it was amazing to see that so little attention was paid to this invasion of what then were the Turkish provinces of Mesopotamia. The region was of course to become Iraq.

The ignorance displayed in current accounts of Saddam Hussain's maraudings of just how Iraq was created after a series of British military blunders is singular, because there have been many volumes on the subject. In fact, a few years ago a publisher (Allborough Press) in England reprinted under my editorship a number of books that had appeared in the aftermath of the invasion – Eleanor Egan's *The War in the Cradle of the World*, Thomas Lyell's *The Ins and Outs of Mesopotamia*, C.M. Cursetjee's *The Land of the Date*, Rupert Hay's *Two Years in Kurdistan*, Gertrude Bell's *The Arab of Mesopotamia* .

None of these in either their original editions or subsequent reprints appear in the bibliography of Dr. Davis' study, which is fair enough, but nor do many other books, both the contemporary and the more recent, which might have been useful for background information. Some that come to mind are E.S. Stevens' *By Tigris and Euphrates*, Henry A. Foster's *The Making of Modern Iraq*, Yitzhak Nakash's *The Shi'is of Iraq*, Lord Birdwood's *Khaki and Gown*, Geoff Simon's *Iraq: From Sumer to Saddam*, S. Guyer's *My Journey Down the Tigris*, Gerald De Gaury's *Three Kings in Baghdad*, Edith and E.F. Penrose's *Iraq*, A.H. Burne's *Mesopotamia: The Last Phase.* Perhaps the most remarkable omission is of David Fromkin's justly acclaimed *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East.*

In fact, with the exception of one book published in 1982, there is not a citation offered of any book or journal article after 1979. Apparently this is a doctoral dissertation done in the late 1970s and published without updating and revision, which is a pity. Moreover, Dr. Davis' opportunity for making a contribution to the subject surely rested in what he might have unearthed about the work of the Mesopotamian Commission after the war, a highly controversial fact-finding tribunal investigating the British military blunders during the campaign. Charges that it whitewashed the conduct of high British officers have never been resolved.

The story of the campaign itself, including the British defeat at Kut, has been told so many times that the chances for such a slim volume saying anything new would be limited. A.J. Barker in *The Neglected War: Mesopotamia 1914-18*, and Briton Cooper Busch in *Britain and the Persian Gulf* and *Britain, India, and the Arabs*, for example, have done such notable work on the period and region that it would be indeed courageous to retill the soil. But there are certainly many issues related to the campaign that are still awaiting their monographs.

The reader may be put on guard by the inadequate list of secondary sources that *Ends and Means* mentions; he or she might not, however, be equally critical of the extent of documents and papers listed. Few will be in a position to judge Dr. Davis' work in the archives. However, the fact is that the Mesopotamian Commission has always been something of a bibliographical and archival puzzle. After promising to deal with the Commission, Dr. Davis does little to unravel its mysteries. The working papers of individual members and the publishing status of the reports rendered have been an archivist's problem. Unfortunately Dr. Davis provides no bibliographical essay and no comment on the Commission's publications. The fact is that he spends so much time explaining the British military campaign that he has little left for the Commission. Had he devoted far less space to the war and far more space to the Commission, he would have

earned considerable gratitude from Middle East enthusiasts. It is the work of the Commission in investigating the military debacle that is an untold tale.

Since he feels that he has to recount once again the entire military episode as well as deal with the Commission, his analysis is thin. He must land the troops at Basra, drum them up the river, and get them surrounded and captured by the Turks. That gives him little opportunity to consider the war as a whole. For example, he skirts the 'Indianness' of the whole affair. The British decision to land at Basra and occupy what became Iraq had much to do with the desire of those in charge of the Indian Empire to extend Imperial rule into the Middle East. The Gulf shaikhdoms were already part of that Empire and taking the head of the Gulf and then going on to Baghdad was a logical extension of the situation. Indian troops were prominent during the whole operation.

Out of necessity because of all the ground he feels he must cover, Dr. Davis gives far too little attention to figures such as Sir Percy Cox and Sir Arnold Wilson, Indian Political Service officers who were of tremendous significance in pushing the invasion. If he wanted to deal with the war, his book is far too short. But he really should have concentrated on the Commission and not become involved in a rehash of the campaign.

For his account of the war, Dr. Davis used files in the Public Records Office and India Office Library and his citations of those files will be useful to specialists. The maps are outstanding, and make the siege of Kut and other operations intelligible. There is an excellent index. Unfortunately, in choosing to once again belabor a story that others have told at much greater length and (it must be said) with more subtlety, and in falling so far short in dealing with the Commission, he has missed a considerable opportunity. We did not need another short book about World War I, the invasion of Iraq, and the fall of Kut. We did need, and still need, a book about the Commission and the sincerity of its efforts to get to the bottom of the British catastrophes at the hands of the Turks. Dr. Davis should use his considerable knowledge about this interesting period to provide that book, and regard this one as an installment.

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