

THE DESERT CAMPAIGNS

BY

W. T. MASSEY

OFFICIAL CORRESPONDENT OF LONDON NEWSPAPERS WITH THE
EGYPTIAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS FROM DRAWINGS BY

JAMES McBEY

OFFICIAL ARTIST WITH THE EGYPTIAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

This is the story of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, an army whose work has been thrilling, exacting, and of the utmost importance.

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THE SERGEANT.

For him the desert holds no secrets—even that which is beyond Bedouins is not hid from him, Jim Liddy, silver miner from Broken Hill, New South Wales.

[*Frontispiece.*

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To

MY MANY STERLING FRIENDS
IN THE
EGYPTIAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

FOREWORD

I WAS prompted to write this book by a sentence in a letter received from a colleague on the Western Front, a thinking man, who some months ago expressed the hope that the war in Egypt would soon be over, for then "the good boys out your way will be able to come to France to see what war is." That betrayed a lack of knowledge of the Army's work in Egypt, and from what I have heard from many sources, not the least important being letters received by soldiers from friends at home and on the Western Front, I am afraid it echoes the opinion generally held in Britain. All the great London newspapers, who did me the honour of selecting me to act as their correspondent with the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, have been generous in the amount of space allotted to the labours of this Force, but a good deal the newspapers have recorded has been forgotten in the ever-changing picture of all the battle fronts.

The epic fights for German strongholds on the Western Front, the struggles for dominating positions, the tense expectation of strategic victory and not merely tactical gains, have made the public look with only half-closed eyes to the lesser field in

Egypt, and to concentrate their intelligence upon the ebb and flow of fighting in the wider area where the ultimate decision is to be reached. It would be surprising if the people at home did not focus their attention upon the Western lines, for there their hopes are highest and the prospects most justify the belief that triumph will be ours. Yet they should be brought to realise the deep importance of the campaigns in Egypt and the far-reaching effect of what has been accomplished there, where battles won and the preparations made for further enemy defeats have prevented possible defections of peoples and tribes, and have held in check some dangerous elements in the East.

Perhaps this little hurried effort of mine will do something to give our people a better understanding of the really great effort the Army in Egypt has made to serve Imperial interests by keeping open the Gateway between East and West. With this object I shall carry the story down to the battle of Rafa, which ejected the Turk from the Sinai Peninsula and gave back to Egypt every foot of its territory.

IN PALESTINE,
September, 1917.

NOTE ON JAMES McBEY

MR. JAMES McBEY was born in 1883, at Newburgh, Aberdeenshire.

While employed in a bank at Aberdeen, he was already acquiring the skill in etching which ensured his rapid success when he decided in 1910 to abandon a commercial career for that of an artist. He profited by his new-found liberty to travel in Holland, Spain, and Morocco. His etchings are much prized by collectors, and he has added to his reputation by successful exhibitions of water-colour drawings.

He was on active service in France prior to April, 1917, when he became one of the official artists appointed to make war drawings of contemporary and historical interest. He started for Palestine in May, and is attached to the Egyptian Expeditionary Force.

The illustrations in this book appear by permission of H. M. Government.

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Along the front of the Romani sand-hills right to the sea are still what remains of the chain of posts or redoubts which resisted the attack of the Turks in the fierce fighting in August of 1916, though now they are but tumbled mounds of sand from which protrude sandbags and rivetting wire.

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From a hut comes the clack of looms as the old men weave cotton for the Red Cross. In another hut the dyers stir the blue in vats.

Further on the women make rugs and fly-nets, and throughout the whole camp is the hushed stir of quiet industry.

MAP	<i>At end</i>
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The Desert Campaigns

THE CANAL CAMPAIGN

CHAPTER I

THE DEFENCE OF EGYPT

THE outbreak of war brought to those charged with watching over the interests of Egypt no little anxiety. They were left without the strong guiding hand of Lord Kitchener, called to higher duties in the State. With a class of Egyptians that feared him, Lord Kitchener's presence would have had an important influence, and though many tried men well versed in the Egyptian character remained behind, there was always a risk of trouble. In the winter before the war an extraordinarily large number of Germans visited Egypt, not all of them merely to enjoy the benefits of the balmy winter climate, and certainly all of them did not come to develop commercial interests. There is more than a suspicion that some Teutonic trippers sowed seeds of rebellion which

were to germinate when the Kaiser drew the sword in Europe, and if the crop failed it was due more to the alertness of British officers and officials in the Government and at the British Residency, than from a want of fertility of the soil in which the seed was scattered. The Nationalist party was practically moribund, notwithstanding the sympathies for it of the Khedive Abbas, but its adherents suddenly emerged from their holes and corners in August, 1914, and they talked sedition with a boldness never before attempted. The cafés where Egyptians of the *effendi* class congregated were filled at night, and some natives higher in the social scale visited the bars of the two leading hotels, and openly expressed the opinion that the British Empire had passed its zenith and that the great German people would speedily bring about its downfall.

Some natives showed their anti-British feeling on the sidewalks and in trains, and it was only tact and unceasing watchfulness which prevented public incidents of an unfortunate character. Abbas was away at Constantinople, which was a happy circumstance, and the rebellious spirits lacked a leader and feared the consequences of a rising. The *effendi's* growl is sharper than his bite. There were many enemy subjects in Egypt at this time. They helped to fan the Nationalist flame, and the early successes of the German armies were always known and spread in the bazaars long before our official reports, and our

retreat from Mons was magnified into an overwhelming defeat and the beginning of the end of the British Empire.

The arrival of the East Lancashire Territorial Division in Cairo at the end of September was very welcome to the Residency and to General Sir John Maxwell, but it did not stop the native chatter. In place of battalions of Guards and Highlanders which Egyptians had been accustomed to regard as average samples of Imperial troops, they saw a division of half-trained and not too well-equipped men straight from their professions and trades in town, mill-workers and miners, many of them, whose daily labour had made them pale of cheek. The native could not realise how these good fellows were fired by patriotism; they judged by outward appearance only, and declared "These are not soldiers, they are shopkeepers dressed in uniforms." There were British critics, too, and to a remark, "They run small, don't they?" an Indian Army general, on his way through Egypt to France, answered: "Yes, that is true, but I wish I had the good fortune to train them. The spirit is there, and mark my words, in two months their improvement will be so great you will not know them for the same men." That professional opinion was amply borne out, and the 42d Division on proceeding to the Dardanelles left behind it a record of soldierly qualities, good behaviour, and discipline worthy of the County Palatine and of Britain.

The entry of Turkey into the war was another awkward time, but the worst fears were gone when we began to round up and intern enemy civilians, and with them a few Egyptian mischief makers, while the constant arrival of troops from India, the victory on the Marne, and the failure of the German hordes to take Paris, which the natives had been assured was almost an accomplished fact, made the people realise the sealing of the fate of the British Empire was not yet.

I arrived in Egypt when the concern of officials had been greatly lessened by the improvement in the outlook. I saw the first 30,000 Australian and New Zealand troops to take part in the war set foot in Egypt, and their physique and "stand-no-nonsense" attitude greatly impressed the people with the fact that we were determined to go through with the war, and that the Mother Country had a mighty reserve in Britons overseas. Though there were undercurrents, more or less strong, when the Turks got to the Canal early in the following year, and when the Grand Sheikh of the Senussi became an open enemy, the Egyptian people from an uncertain quantity became well in hand. For this the Empire has to thank the officials of the Residency, and, perhaps more particularly, General Maxwell, commanding the forces in Egypt, whose policy, firm and just, was based on a deep knowledge of the Egyptian character, and was framed to serve our highest interests at a point which, at the time, was not

an over-strong link in the Imperial chain. Sir John Maxwell's initial success had an important bearing on future events, and his work, sterling as it was held to be at the time, will be even more highly appraised as the years roll on. We have not always been so fortunate in the choice of our administrators in Egypt.

On the Young Turk party arriving at a decision which spelt ruin for Turkey, it became vitally necessary to prepare for the defence of the Suez Canal. At all costs that highway connecting the seas and countries of East and West must be kept open, and it was just as much the concern of neutrals as of the Allies that no enemy hand should grasp it. Any one who has been pinned to the banks of the Canal as I have must realise the advantage our hold on the waterway has been to neutral countries. Ships flying neutral flags, especially Dutch steamers, have passed through deeply laden with commerce, and the wealth of these nations has been increased by the accumulation of heavy rates for freight charged by owners, and the profits of dealers in the commodities the ships carried. We took the Canal defences in hand in November, although a strong military element believed no serious attempt to get to the Canal would ever be made. I confess their arguments at the time convinced me of the impossibility of an advance to the Canal by any substantial body, but subsequent events proved that given resources and men, the desert of Sinai can be

crossed by armies just as it was by Napoleon, by Mohammed Ali, and by the warriors of the ancient kings. General Maxwell accepted a scheme prepared by Sir Murdoch Macdonald, Under-Secretary for Public Works in Egypt, an engineer who has planned nearly all the improvements effected in the country since the Assouan dam was opened, in the building of which he had taken a very responsible part. East of the northern end of the Canal to beyond Pelusium the desert is below the level of the sea. It was decided to flood this area, but instead of opening a channel through the low sand dunes on the shore, Sir Murdoch proposed that the Canal bank should be cut in a few places to flood many miles of the desert so as to make a water defence to the Canal for some eighteen or twenty miles of its length. This was a comparatively simple matter in expert hands, and at the cost of a few thousand sandbags, and some cheap labour many troops were spared for other sections which could not be so readily defended. This reduced the length of front to between sixty and seventy miles, and of this length the Bitter Lakes should be omitted because naval patrol launches took over the duty of guarding them. A few defence posts were built and entrenched on the east bank to cover certain ferries, but the main defences in the early days were on the west bank and consisted of trenches from which attempts to cross the water could be repelled. The railway and the sweet water canal,

which brought Nile waters to the labourers who excavated the Suez Canal and was now utilised to supply the drinking water for our troops, were protected, and armoured and other trains were kept at strategic points for the movement of troops.

The Turks knew as much about the Sinai Desert as we did. They were aware of the existence of the Roman or Babylonian cisterns cut in places where the flow of winter rains was certain to fill them. The Bedouins probably told them that the underground reservoirs were full, owing to a good rainfall in districts where in some winters there is hardly a drop of rain. This year, however, there had been some cloudbursts, and torrents rushed down the hills to fill, not only the cisterns, but big pools which are formed only in exceptionally favourable years. From one pool in the early summer of 1916 we drained off five million gallons of water, sufficient to support a substantial Turkish force for a long period. The Turks took an early opportunity of showing they were a live military nation and were ready to act at the bidding of their German masters. Early in January, 1915, intelligence reports told of a certain activity in Syria, and by the middle of January we knew that the enemy had formed advanced posts and depots at Auja and Kosseima on the Egyptian frontier, at El Arish inside it, and at Khan Yunus, places which are now as familiar to our troops as our own important cities. We heard of Germans, robed and turbaned as Bedouins, accompanying

Arabs on reconnaissances, and soon after the middle of the month there was no doubt that a substantial enemy force was in Sinai and moving west.

General Maxwell had to find new troops for the Canal zone. There were plenty available. On the Canal were battalions of India regulars and regiments of Imperial Service troops. They were very good, and it went hard with any one who met a patrol and did not know the password. Here is an instance of the way Indian troops took no chances. An old friend of mine, Captain Wallingford, of the Auckland infantry battalion, went to the Canal and offered to try to snipe a German officer who had been noticed in the desert about eight or ten miles from Serapeum. Wallingford was the man for the job. I had seen him in three consecutive shoots for the Army Rifle Championship at Bisley put on totals of 101, 103, and 105 (highest possible), a world's record which has never been approached, and he afterwards did such fine work on Gallipoli that the Germans with the Turks used to call out, "Bring out your Wallingford; let us see him." Wallingford with another New Zealand officer dug themselves in on a sand dune and waited for the German officer. He came not, but a patrol of Indian camelry rode up and asked who the officers were. Wallingford told the jemadar, but the latter was unconvinced, saying some Germans could speak English and could get hold of British uniforms.

The officers would have to give up their arms and go in under arrest. The New Zealand officer with Wallingford wanted to resist, but the latter, who had been in India and knew the jemadar would carry out his orders to the letter, saw it was useless expostulating, and the day's sniping expedition ended with the return of the officers' rifles at the next post.

CHAPTER II

THE TURKS REACH THE CANAL

WITHOUT any hurry, and certainly without any elaborate display, reinforcements were sent to the Canal. New Zealand and Australian battalions went to the Canal zone, greatly to their satisfaction, and one always felt it was a pity these grand fellows did not get the opportunity of showing their fighting value in the desert. Without wishing to be boastful, I may say I always saw it in them, and the high opinion I formed after close association with them during training has been confirmed over and over again in Gallipoli, France, and in Sinai. The *Swiftsure*, *Ocean*, *Minerva*, and *Clio* took up stations in the Canal, and two French warships also had a part in the defence, the *Requin*, which two years later joined in the attack on Gaza, having the best opportunities for gunnery by her station in Lake Timsah. Djemal Pasha was in command of the Turks, and with him was the German Major von der Hagen. During the last days of January the enemy, feeling his way, got within a few miles of the Canal

in several places. In the northern section a body sat down across the old caravan route to El Arish about five miles east of Kantara, dug themselves in, and made a slight attack one morning on a Canal post. There was also a little skirmish at Kubri, south of the Little Bitter Lake, while other parties appeared near the ferry at the point where the Canal enters Lake Timsah from the north, at El Ferdan, and at Serapeum, opposite which places the enemy showed a desire to dig in the sand and await attack. However, that was not his intention. On the morning of February 3d, he made feints of attacking Kantara, Ismailia Ferry Post, and El Ferdan, while his main attack was launched between Toussoum and Serapeum, south of Lake Timsah and directly east of the beautiful line of trees which refresh the traveller's eye as his ship proceeds south towards the Great Bitter Lake.

A few hundred yards away from the Canal station at Toussoum, the Turks made three very determined attempts to get across. It was a well-chosen point, for, if successful, the railway from Ismailia to Suez and the line between Port Said and Cairo were within easy distance, and the sweet water canal was likewise open to damage. At half-past three, fully two hours before dawn, some Turks carried a few light steel pontoons down a ravine and launched them in the Canal. There were some pontoons also put in the water north and south of this point. The defence hereabouts

was in the hands of Colonel Geoghegan, commanding the Indian infantry, and to the colonel and his brigade major, Major T. N. S. M. Howard full credit is due for breaking down what was unquestionably a very cleverly planned effort to get astride the Canal and stop our seaborne traffic. Headquarters apparently thought the real attack was coming somewhere else, for there were some promising situations to the north, and though Serapeum is well within an hour's journey from Ismailia, where we had considerable reserves, it was thirteen hours before reinforcements arrived at Serapeum. It was the Native infantry brigade which wrecked the Turks' hopes, and Colonel Geoghegan and Major Howard were responsible for the dispositions which made our success possible.

The pontoons carried by the Turks were light handy craft, with about a dozen metal handles on the inside of the gunwales to enable them to be lifted easily. Several of them were put into the water and manned, while Turkish infantry deployed left and right of the gully and poured a heavy rifle and machine-gun fire to cover the crossing. On the west bank were detachments of the Punjabis under Major Skeen in one place and Captain Morgan in another, and from their entrenchments the Punjabis fired at the pontoons and ignored the covering fire. Four or five, perhaps more, of the pontoons were so riddled with bullets that they filled and sank, but two got to the west



LAKE TIMSAH.

In the distance on the extreme right lies Ismailia. Near, where the Canal joins the lake, was formerly an R.E. Park.

[To face p. 12.

bank, and twenty of their crews who were not killed took shelter till the morning behind the embankment, when they surrendered. One pontoon was charged by Major Skeen and his men, and all the occupants were killed or wounded. An attack was made on our post at Toussoum east. We counter-attacked from Serapeum with Rajputs and Gurkas and drove the bulk of the enemy from the east bank, killing many and capturing three hundred, but the party which had covered the crossing was well dug in on broken ground and could not be dislodged. About two brigades of enemy infantry and six guns left their camp during the morning and took up a position two miles north-east of Serapeum, whilst we occupied a low ridge facing them, about half a mile from Serapeum post. There was some shelling, but the Turks did not press their attack nearer than 1200 yards of our line, and they withdrew to the hills early in the afternoon. Torpedo boat 043 came into this section of the Canal, and Lieutenant-Commander G. B. Palmes, R.N., was asked by Colonel Geoghegan to break up by shell fire all pontoons lying on the east bank. When this had been done, a party went ashore to ascertain if any pontoons remained beyond the bank, but Commander Palmes on looking over the crest found himself face to face with a trench full of the enemy and hurriedly retired, both he and Sub-Lieutenant C. V. Cardinall, R.N.V.R., being wounded in getting back to their ship. There

was a good deal of sniping during the night which could not have come from the main enemy force, and Major Maclachlan, Punjabis, next day went out to sweep the east bank. He completely surrounded a considerable party and charged them, whereupon the whole surrendered. Among the dead was Major von der Hagen, who was carrying a white flag rolled in a khaki canvas case and fastened to his scabbard. It is characteristic of the chivalry of our officers that they thought the flag was to be used in night marching. Many of us believe it was to be put to a sinister use. Anyhow, von der Hagen was given a military funeral, and a cross enclosed in a barbed-wire entanglement now marks his grave on the top of the east bank.

Apart from a number of small encounters with the Turks in Sinai, which rarely were larger than affairs of patrols, there was little doing in the Canal zone for a long time after February. I cannot speak of the work in Egypt during the nine months from April, 1915, because Italy entered the war and became our ally, and I went to the Italian front to learn at first hand how the cheerful soldiery of that country laughed at and conquered mountains and precipices and, fired by an intense patriotism, strove to liberate their blood brothers in the Trentino from the Austrian yoke. I went away with the conviction that the Turks, having crossed the Sinai Desert with 15,000 men and fought the battle of Serapeum, would come back again, stronger in numbers, probably,

and fortified with the experience gained in their first attempt to seize the Canal. The summer passed fairly quietly, but when I was in England in December, 1915, there was very real concern in responsible quarters as to what was about to happen in Egypt. Early in February, 1916, I had the honour to be selected by all the London papers to represent them as war correspondent with the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force, and I returned to Egypt to find a new and, if as a civilian I may make the criticism, a sounder scheme for defending the Canal and Egypt about to be put into operation.

CHAPTER III

CEASELESS VIGILANCE

SOME engagements in the preceding summer I write up from the official despatches of Major-General Alex. Wilson, the commander of the Canal defences, whose duties were not rendered easier by the almost weekly change in the composition of his forces. The urgent necessity for more troops for the Dardanelles called for some of the best brigades and batteries serving on the Canal. Some battalions went to Mesopotamia, others in the heat of the summer responded to an immediate call from Aden, where the Turks had had a success which nearly brought them to the port, while smaller expeditions were sent down the Gulf of Suez to Abu Zenima and to Tor, where the presence of the enemy caused us to be vigilant. The troops despatched to take the place of those sent off on other errands were quite good, but they had to learn a new job in the desert, and the staff during the trying hot months of the summer had a great deal more to think about than the mere arrangement of patrols to watch the Turks. This

work came very little under the public eye, but every word of praise which General Maxwell bestows upon it is justified to the full. There is no doubt that the heavy losses inflicted on the Turks at Serapeum, and the losses they suffered in the arduous march across the barren desert back to Palestine, prevented a second serious attack on the Canal in 1915. Another factor was the campaign in Gallipoli, where large Turkish armies were engaged, and though the Dardanelles expedition failed in its immediate object, it undoubtedly did stop an army moving against Egypt when we were not prepared to meet it, and could not be adequately prepared to meet it because of the calls made on the forces from other theatres.

There was quite a brilliant little show at Tor on February 13th. The vast quarantine station set up for watching the health of Mecca pilgrims was garrisoned by 150 men of the Egyptian Army, and the Turks were threatening the place. On the 12th half a battalion of the Gurka Rifles under Lieutenant-Colonel Haldane embarked on H.M.S. *Minerva* at Suez, arrived at Tor in the dark hours, and, before the Turks knew of their presence, attacked at dawn, sixty of the enemy being killed and 102 taken prisoners. Our losses were only one killed and one wounded. The lesson was very thoroughly taught, for Tor, isolated though it is, has been left in perfect peace ever since. Towards the end of March an infantry patrol from Kubri came into contact with 400 Turks,

part of a body of 1000 men who were subsequently found to be entrenching about ten miles from the Canal. Lieutenant-Colonel Boisragon, V.C., took out a column on the 23d consisting of the Lancashire Battery, R.F.A., two squadrons of Lancers, a detachment of the Bikaner Camel Corps, the Sikhs, and half a battalion of the Gurkas. The enemy suffered about fifty casualties and left their trenches hurriedly, their camp equipment and much rifle ammunition falling into our hands. The enemy continued to threaten pin-pricks on our defences, and bodies of Turks sometimes numbering a hundred or two, sometimes over a thousand, were frequently observed within striking distance of the Canal. They were always attacked and dispersed eastwards, and not allowed time to make strong defences, or prepare positions, to maintain themselves in them.

If the summer proceeded without any fighting of importance, the trials of patrolling at night were constant, and the troops had a heavy time. Three or four events served to illustrate the necessity for unceasing vigilance during this period of apparent slackness. It was always suspected that the Turk, foiled in the attempt to seize and hold the Canal, would try to place mines in the waterway and, by sinking a ship, stop the traffic. The suspicions were well grounded. On April 8th a patrol, examining the broad band of smoothed sand which was nightly drawn down the whole length of the Canal, noticed some foot-prints



A LISTENING POST IN THE DESERT.

Tense and immovable, like stones sculptured in the desert, Indian Lancers—the ears of the Canal Post—lie out on the sand all night. While three watch, one sleeps.

[To face p. 18.

which should not be there. Following up the marks to the Canal bank the patrol gave a warning to the naval craft between El Kap and Kantara. These dragged the channel and brought up a large mine.

A small party of Turks, again, got to the Little Bitter Lake and swam out to a Canal Company pile driver, which they boarded, and carried off an Italian employee as prisoner. Eighteen Egyptians were asleep on the boat at the time.

On the last night of May one of our watchful patrols saw an enemy detachment approach the Canal about ten miles south of Kantara and engaged them. In the morning it was found they had brought with them a large mine which we carried away and destroyed, and when the Turks returned next night to recover it they had a warm reception. A more successful attempt on shipping was made at the end of June. Carrying a mine in sections on camels, some Turks got to the east bank at the southern end of the Little Bitter Lake, and, placing the mine on a raft of blown-up sheep-skins, waded out to the channel where they sank it. The British steamer *Teresias* struck the mine, but was cleverly put ashore and, after the flow of shipping had been interrupted for half a day, traffic was resumed. This was the only effort on the Canal that the Turk made which ever gave him cause for satisfaction.

CHAPTER IV

AN OFFENSIVE DEFENCE

AFTER Lord Kitchener had paid his memorable visit to Gallipoli he came to Egypt, which, from long associations, was bound to hold a firm place in his war anxieties. At that time it was believed the Germans were sending four or six divisions to Constantinople to form the backbone of a Turkish army to march across the Sinai Desert and try to cut the Suez Canal, that artery of traffic between East and West described by the Kaiser as the "jugular vein of the British Empire." Lord Kitchener went to the Canal, saw the defences, and is credited with the remark made to a distinguished general: "Are you defending the Canal, or is the Canal defending you?" That brief question so admirably sums up the situation as it was in Egypt at the time of the evacuation of Gallipoli, that it deserves to be true. I know there is one school of military thought which strongly supports the view that our best policy was to allow the Turk to encounter the difficulties of the desert and to meet him on the Canal, or within a few

miles of it. General Sir John Maxwell said to me at the end of 1914: "The desert is our great ally, and it will beat the Turk in the end." There is much force in that, I agree, but the attack of February, 1915, proved that the Turk could bring a substantial body of troops over the desert and hold up shipping in the Canal, and if, as the Turk claimed, that expedition was in the nature of a reconnaissance, when 6-inch guns were hauled into action and hit one of the ships of the Indian Marine in the waterway, the knowledge gained during the march was of great value for any future attack. And we ascertained a year and a half later at the battle of Romani (which is not much more than twenty-five miles from Port Said) that knowledge was brought into such practical use that 8-inch as well as 6-inch guns were transported over the desert a hundred miles from any Turkish railway.

It is claimed by the critics of the scheme which Sir Archibald Murray lost no time in putting into operation, that if the Turks' big guns got within range of the Canal they could not damage it, that no long-range fire would breach its banks, and that the stoppage of shipping for a week, a fortnight, or a month, till such time as want of water and supplies compelled the Turk to retire, was of no consequence. To this I reply that there is no certainty that if the Turks once stopped traffic in the Canal they would ever lack supplies, for if they scored such a success they would concentrate

all their energies on holding the advantage. Further, no military censorship would prevent the news reaching the people in Egypt, that home of exaggerations based on a substratum of fact. Egyptian opinion strongly leans on the winning side, and the regard in which we are held in Egypt is because of our strength, and not for the lasting good we have done the people. An undercurrent of disaffection would have been inconvenient; open rebellion would have compelled the retention of the whole of the troops in the country in the spring of 1916. The Australians and New Zealanders and some of the divisions of tried troops were urgently needed on the Western Front. And then what would have been the consequences in India, in Afghanistan, in Persia, if the fact was established that the Turks had got the British Empire by its Suez Canal throat? How could we supply our Army in Mesopotamia, which was then, as we afterwards had the pain of learning, in sore straits from lack of munitions, rations, transport, medical supplies, and comforts? The Indian Army machine had hopelessly broken down, and on Britain the Mesopotamian Army had almost entirely to rely for its supplies. I have seen, churning up the waters of the Canal, all sorts and conditions of craft bound for the river waters which fall into the Persian Gulf—London County Council “penny” steamers, specially built shallow draught vessels capable of carrying much material, and many other weird-looking ships which

had braved the perils of the wider seas to succour and sustain the gallant army fighting against the Turk and against nature in a torrid and unhealthy theatre of operations. Were we to risk a day's delay in sending forward help to this sorely-trying force?

General Murray, taking the wide view that his responsibilities were for the whole Empire and not for Egypt alone, tackled the strategic problem by "thinking Imperially," and, looking at the nature of subsequent operations, few will say he was wrong. To my mind the most eloquent proof that he was absolutely right is to be found in the events of July and August when the Turks, with an enterprise which all military men must admire, brought some 20,000 men and heavy guns up to Romani across an exceedingly difficult piece of desert, and strongly attacked our defences. And he kept up a fight for ten days, although harassed by some of the finest irregular cavalry in the world. The new strategic plan meant vast expenditure in money and labour, but it secured the safety of the Canal at least during the war and, perhaps, for all time. The vast work of preparation could not be more strikingly illustrated than by realising what was done in making railways and roads, laying down pipe lines for water supply, and the quantities of material used on the eastern defences of Egypt. The good work has gone on at an ever-accelerated pace; the railway, then some miles short of El Arish, has been thrust out to Rafa,

on the Turco-Egyptian frontier, to Khan Yunus, and to Deir el Belar just short of Gaza, another seventy miles. Pipes have gone forward, too, and the amount of sandbags and barbed wire needed and supplied has grown enormously. A glance at the map shows the extent of ground covered.

The engineering work which had to be undertaken shows how the Sinai Desert has been throbbing with life and industry.

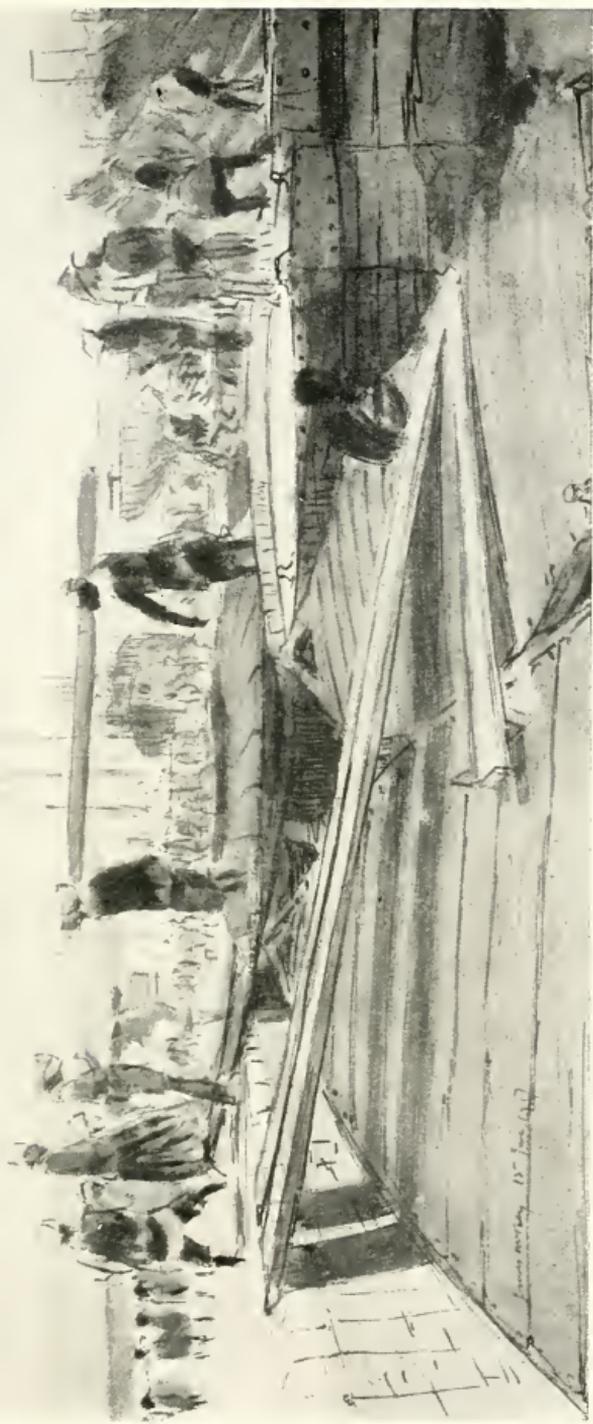
It is due to the troops engaged in Egypt that people at home should know the extent of the labour which fell upon them during a very trying period. It was not all honey for a man in the Egyptian Expeditionary Force. My correspondent in France above referred to, being a generous man, will acknowledge his error when he learns of the trials of the soldier in Egypt. One night in May, 1917, I sat next an Australian brigadier at a private show of the Ancre film in Cairo. Seeing men and horses ploughing through a sea of mud the brigadier remarked: "We are lucky to be out of that." If I mistake not, our brave boys in France looking at any true picture of troops in the desert would make precisely the same comment. Yet, you can have too much of the desert. There are Australians and New Zealanders who, excepting during the months they were fighting a desperately uphill battle on Gallipoli, have been in Egypt from November, 1914, till to-day.

A Territorial Division came from Gallipoli, too, and from early in 1916 were in Sinai and Palestine working as no other troops in the desert ever toiled, and not always getting their full share of fighting because for a long time the elusive Turk could only be brought to battle by horsemen. Some Yeomanry had almost as extensive an experience of life in the sandy wastes, and the Divisions had shorter, but still severe, trials.

Persons sitting at home at their ease during the abnormal winters of 1915 and 1916 might envy the men who saw the sun every day. To these I would say not a day passed in Egypt without some trial for the troops. It might be merely a long march through heavy sand entailing nothing more than fatigue. There was a time when six miles a day in marching order was considered the utmost limit for infantry in the eastern desert. One day, when travelling light, during the battle of Romani, I tramped twelve miles and could get nobody to believe me. At the end of it I chanced upon the East Lancashire troops at Canterbury Siding, and could not move for two hours. Yet I have been a walker and runner from my youth up. I was fresher after a London to Brighton walk, untrained, than at the finish of that desert twelve miles. And I was not carrying a sixth of the weight of the foot-sloggers. The fatigue of marching with the sun overhead was no light trial. Nor was the incessant digging. In the early days, before Egyptian labour was

brought in to supplement the work of the soldier, the sight of a spade must have sickened the hearts of our men. Each day brought the eternal round of sand shovelling.

For eighty miles on the eastern side of the Suez Canal there was a deep line of trenches and redoubts. They were not clean, sharp cuts in the face of the desert. To make a trench three feet wide you had to open some fifteen feet of ground, put in battens with canvas backs and anchor them, and then refill the spaces behind with the excavated soil. And when that was done a tiny rent in the canvas allowed sand to filter through at such a rate that a portion of the trench would be filled in in twenty-four hours. Sandbagging after the trench was cut, and building of redoubts, was another phase of hard work. When the khamseen blew, as it always does at intervals from March to May, a whole series of trenches would be found completely filled up in a night, and the game of shovelling had to begin afresh. Sometimes when the wind was carrying with it so much of the desert that the sun was hidden by the dust clouds, the temperature went up to 115 and 120 degrees, one's skin became hot, lips cracked, and the daily scanty allowance of water did not relieve parched throats for an hour. Still the daily work had to be done and night brought no relief, for as often as not someone had to be astir with a mallet to drive down tent pegs which were continually drawn out by the blast. Then followed the sum-



UNLOADING WOOD.

At an R.E. Park at a Base, the Egyptian Labour Corps are unloading wood brought from overseas.
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mer heat. For four days in June, 1916, the shade temperature officially recorded at General Headquarters varied between 114 and 117 degrees, and for fifty-six consecutive days the maximum shade temperature was never less than 100 degrees. G.H.Q. was nicely placed, overlooking Lake Tim-sah, and there were trees and gardens about the building. Think what the heat was out there behind the dancing heat haze in the desert where, in a bell tent without a lining, a man would get sunstroke unless he wore a helmet. In the hot hours, when no soldier save the sentry and the engine and transport drivers worked, the tents were unbearably hot, and rest only came to those who dug holes or fixed up a blanket as a sunshade. And the flies! They penetrated everywhere just as the sun did, and though to most of us the sand seemed to settle with most persistency on our food, yet the flies likewise tried to do so, and he was a lucky man who could say them nay.

Truly, in campaigning in Egypt there was much to try the temper. For a long time the soldier felt out of the war picture, and had almost persuaded himself he would never see a Turk. But he plodded on with the great good humour of his class, as keen as the conditions permitted, willing, well-behaved, strong, with "Duty" ever his watchword. He endured the trials of heat, of cold (for it was icy cold o' nights in winter), of thirst, of flies, of sand. He murmured frequently, but his murmur was a mild grouse which meant

he was happier than he would have you believe. His behaviour was worthy of the traditions of the British soldier. What higher praise than that?

What troops were they who earned this good report? In Egypt, where East meets West, Imperial interests were served by every limb except Canada. Perhaps even that exception should not be made, because a Newfoundland officer was on the Canal doing a specialist's work, and several Canadian officers proved splendid organisers of the desert railway. But no Canadian unit was in Egypt, which we regretted, though the pleasure of seeing the Canucks would not have compensated us for the fact that those sterling fellows would have had to be withdrawn from the front in France where they were always leaving their mark on the Hun. We had English, Scottish, Irish, and Welsh battalions, batteries—regiments of horse, engineers, ambulances, and other services. Each colony in the Australian Commonwealth had many regiments of horse and foot. So, too, had New Zealand, and after a few months the Maori population was represented by a battalion. A brigade of South Africans was in Egypt for a time. They became extremely popular with all the troops of the mother and daughter nations, for they did their job very cleanly and thoroughly. They had no wish to talk about it after it was done. From India there were men of many warlike races. Gurkas, Sikhs, Bikaners, Punjabis, and Imperial Service troops supplied by

loyal native princes fought and entrenched on the Canal when the war was only a few months old. The Tea Planters of Ceylon came to Egypt as a rifle corps. As a unit the battalion has long since been lost. Its members were of the class from which good officers come, and all were persuaded—some with much difficulty—to take up commissions. The last of the rank and file became General Birdwood's bodyguard on the Peninsula. From Singapore and Hong-Kong we had a mountain battery: ask the Anzacs what they think of them. The West Indies also sent a battalion, and if for a long period our dark brothers from the West were doing the almost thankless duty of military maids-of-all-work, they have the satisfaction of knowing they did it well. Thus from across the seven seas the Empire's manhood came to Egypt to stand sentinel over the narrow water line which brings us together more closely than nature did, and this union of races and creeds broadened the minds of all, and will yield a fruitful return when the Empire's needs are discussed in peace time in all quarters of the globe.

CHAPTER V

THE DESERT RAILWAY

IN competition with narrow-gauge railways in the somewhat hard western desert the motor car was unbeatable, but the self-propelled vehicle was hopelessly out of it with the main line of railway in the Sinai Peninsula. Against the narrow-gauge lines in the central and southern sections where roads had been made, the light car and motor lorry were easily first, but in the long journey to the frontier and into Palestine the railway was so supreme that no other means of land transport was dreamed of, except, of course, the supply trains of camels from railhead, wherever that might be for the moment. It is doubtful, however, whether the most sanguine engineer ever believed this single line could do the amount of work which was thrown upon it. The standard gauge railway running from Kantara to Palestine was the keystone of our strategic structure in Eastern Egypt. It was the backbone, the arteries, the very lifeblood of the Army. Running over it were London and South-Western engines and



THE RAILWAY.

A typical stretch of the Desert Railway. The building is used as an office.

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trucks with loads infinitely heavier than they ever hauled between Southampton Docks and Nine Elms. Without cessation night and day, week in week out, they moved on a journey out and home of three hundred miles to a time-table jealously guarded by R.T.O.'s and their staffs. To the conveyance of construction materials and supplies was added the constant movement of troops and equipment, yet the line which, by all the pre-war theories of railway management at home would be held to be grievously overworked, did its job with extraordinary smoothness and efficiency.

It was a triumph for the railway companies of the Royal Engineers, for the officials of the Egyptian State Railways who became part of the military staff, and for the construction gangs of Sikh Pioneers and Egyptian Labour Corps. These latter proved the finest navvies in the world. They had to build the line right under the enemy's nose. Protected by a thin line of outposts the Gypsy labourers worked under an hourly fear of aerial bombs. They got them often, and at El Arish one bomb killed and wounded thirty-nine of them. But under British and some Syrian officers, and with the splendid example of the Sikhs, they did marvellously well, and it is merely stating the obvious to say that if battalions of troops had taken their place, the line's rate of progress would not have been maintained. Heat affected the labourers but little. They received much more than the market rate of pay in the

Delta, their food was good and plentiful, they had uniforms and blankets provided for them and tents to sleep in. At the end of every three months ten days' leave on free passes was given, and the gangs going to their "Blighty" made one of the cheering sights of the line—trainloads of happy labourers with pocketsful of money, singing and clapping hands and waving anything they could make in the shape of a flag. The officers, by tactful control—there was not the slightest semblance of oppression—had got the most out of them, and the Gypsy had well earned his holiday.

In the early days of August, when a Turkish division ran into a hornet's nest at Romani, that place was railhead. During the battle construction was stopped, but immediately the Turks retraced their steps from Bir el Abd the work of track laying was resumed. Construction became slower near El Arish because the ground was softer and less suitable for a rail bed. There may not have been many engineering obstacles on the route, but sand dunes had to be avoided or cut, and embankments built up of sand required careful watching, whilst the line had to carry heavy traffic immediately rails were laid. At El Arish a viaduct had to be made over the Wadi Arish, the old river of Egypt, down which on some days in winter a spate half a mile wide rushes to the sea. The first line was carried over on sandbag foundations, because the military situation would brook



OFFICE OF THE INLAND WATER TRANSPORT.

The fleets of dhows, dahabias, lighters and tugs carrying stores on the Canal and the Delta are under the administration of the Inland Water Transport.

On the table is planned the Suez Canal, the exact position of each boat being indicated by various lead counters.

no delay, but the permanent viaduct is now in use. After the second battle for Gaza our wide front necessitated further developments, and the line is much bigger than originally planned.

Our forward movement required that Kantara, formerly merely a quarantine station with two houses and a mosque, should be built into a town. It was an important base. We now see great wharves at which ocean-going steamers discharge their freights without the slightest interference to traffic on the Canal. There are four bridges across the Canal. To make the approaches to this ferry the sweet water canal had to be diverted, although the operation was not allowed to stop the flow of water into reservoirs prior to being filtered for the troops. At Kantara the big filtration plant is all-important, as are the pump-house and siphons carrying the water along the bed of the Canal. Here, too, we have the Royal Engineer park defences, the R.E. stores (1400 natives are employed in these stores alone), the military railway dump, vast ordnance stores and workshops, a special ordnance siding, the base medical stores, veterinary stores, artillery camps, a rest camp, a stationary hospital with many beds, a native hospital, a camel hospital where thousands of sick camels are rendered fit again for service by quite a small efficient staff, a vast remount depot for many thousands of horses, and a huge compound for prisoners of war. I do not know how many square miles Kantara now covers, but it has grown like

a mushroom. Probably no town built during a gold rush grew so rapidly; certainly none was extended so methodically. I passed through the place on an average once a fortnight for many months, and I never saw it twice the same. Something had always been added, but no one ever saw congestion or confusion, even at the time when the railway was taking from it to the east several thousands of tons of rations, stores, and war material in every twenty-four hours. No grit got into the hub of the Kantara wheel of the military machine.



A PONTOON BRIDGE.

One of the pontoon bridges across the Suez Canal. The convalescent tractors on the left are in an R.F. Park. [To face p. 34.

CHAPTER VI

NILE WATER FOR TROOPS

MAKING due acknowledgment of the fact that without the railway the desert operations on the scale planned for them would have been impossible, it must be admitted there was even more important work to be done for the health and comfort of the troops than the iron road. Unless provided with an adequate water supply our Army would be confined to the neighbourhood of the Canal. The troops in this desert of Sinai had borne to them the waters of the White and Blue Niles, which, flowing out of the Great Lakes of Central Africa, or tumbling in cascades over Abyssinian mountains after equatorial cloudbursts, pour down the river courses heavily charged with the fertilising matter which makes the Nile Valley one of the most prolific agricultural districts in the world. The British soldiers drank many times daily of the purified water of the Nile. It was taken from the sweet water canal, which runs west of the Suez Canal, and after the fertilising mud had been deposited it passed through siphons

with filters attached, beneath the ship canal, into reservoirs on the eastern bank where it was again filtered, then chlorinated and pumped forward to distant stations. Very complete precautions were taken against a shortage. There were big reservoirs at several important troop centres.

On the desert route the troops were placed on an allowance of a gallon of water a day for all purposes—drinking, cooking, and washing—and wherever possible the animals drank the brackish water the country yielded. But as the Desert Column approached El Arish there was a belt of fifteen square miles without a drop of water, good or bad, and preparations had to be made for supplying tens of thousands of camels and horses as well as a large force of men in advance of railhead. To this end there were collected an immense number of tanks which were filled from the trains, and convoys of camels bearing fantasses containing water from these portable reservoirs supplied the positions held by troops. After the second battle for Gaza there was a section of our line in front of the Turkish positions which was in an absolutely waterless country, but the troops holding this section of trenches were never without an adequate supply of water. The old Nile was called in aid. Thus some of the troops in Palestine drank water which was lifted by the sun from the Atlantic, carried in clouds across Africa, condensed around mountain peaks, and dropped as rain in the centre of the Dark Continent, and

carried north by the Nile. And if the connoisseur declared chlorination spoiled the tea, he would at least admit that the draught was healthy. To stand on a Nile bridge and see the chocolate-coloured flood waters surge past you made you think the waters contained all the germs of diseases to which an army is prone. The medical service eliminated all these, and gave the Army a water freer from deleterious microbes than even the water consumed by Londoners. There was a touch of genius about the water-supply organisation, and the soldiers recognised it.

The railway made the advance into Palestine possible. But when these great works were being constructed we had to be ready for a Turkish descent on the Canal, and preparations of defence were going forward up and down the Canal while we were still searching the markets of the world for rails. The defensive positions created by willing hands of the Empire's manhood were of the most elaborate kind. Most of them were never used, and the possibility of attack in many places where our men toiled for months was very remote. But they had to be made; they were an insurance that the Canal would be kept open for the Empire's work, and the labour and money expended on this insurance scheme, vast as it was, was a comparatively small premium. I believe I saw every position of importance on the east side of the Canal, and I am able to speak of the magnificent efforts of the troops to do their job

thoroughly. There was never an idle day in the exceptionally hot summer of 1916, during which 30,000,000 sandbags were filled and placed in position in the entrenchments along the whole length of the Canal from Kantara to Ayun Musa, the oasis overlooking the Gulf of Suez which contains the wells at which Moses and his flock refreshed themselves. The Wells of Moses were put into a grand state of defence and they were not sullied by Turkish soldiery.

If you moved southwards about five or six miles from the east bank of the Canal, your eye always found entrenchments of a more or less elaborate description, some comparatively light in character, others veritable fortresses covering as much ground as small villages, and with underground works several miles in length. On the irregular entanglements framing these strong posts the troops expended many weeks of toil. I will select one post to give an idea of what the Army in Egypt did to preserve the Canal for the world's trade during the summer. It was known as the Ashton post because it was constructed by men of a Lancashire Division. They also made the Manchester, Oldham, and other excellent posts, but Ashton was the biggest and finest of the lot. It was sited to command a very wide field of fire. The position measured nearly half a mile across the centre, and the maze of fire and support trenches was connected by several miles of underground communications, made on

what engineers call the "cut and cover" system, that is, by first cutting an open trench and covering it to make it shell-proof. There was a plentiful storage of water, and the garrison enjoyed that most coveted luxury in the desert, a daily bath. Underground food stores contained a reserve of four days' rations, and the water tanks had a capacity for a longer period. Medical aid posts, also in bomb proofs, were admirably constructed and equipped, and though it was extremely improbable the post would have to stand the test, nothing had been left unprovided to enable the garrison to withstand a short siege. The wonderful orderliness and cleanliness of everything above and below ground was in keeping with all the other works on the Canal. The Lancashire Territorials who completed this post must have had a pride in it something akin to that which the shipwright experiences when he sees a huge ship he has had a hand in building returning from a successful trial.

Some other places in the system of defences were made with greater difficulty. There is Jebel Murr, the Gibraltar of the Desert, on which for weary months Indian troops blasted granite to cut trenches and make gun emplacements, and Ayun Musa, where the water level was so high that the defences had to be built up from, instead of being cut into, the surface. No praise could be too high for the workers here. The roads repaid the time and labour devoted to them. For

the most part they were metalled with a somewhat light friable limestone obtained locally, which wore fairly well if it was constantly watered, and at almost all hours of the day you could see motor lorries carrying big tanks of salt water out into the desert to preserve the surface of these highways. This road watering was so regularly done that it would have aroused the envy of many a corporation's sanitary department at home. Egypt is indebted to the Army for many things, but one of the most important works the troops completed for the country was a trunk road between Ismailia and Port Said on the western side of the Canal, which made it possible for the first time to proceed from Port Said to Cairo by motor car. Another excellent road was constructed between Suez and Kubri, and this will prove of real benefit to the native population in times of peace. The huts put up for men's messing and recreation were an absolute necessity, and these light wood and grass-matting structures were doubtless largely responsible for the fact that the sick rate was 200 per 1000 less than with troops in Egypt in peace time. When we advanced into Palestine most of the posts and works were abandoned. They were no longer required for the protection of the Canal, but they had served their purpose, and we, who had seen them grow, felt more than a tinge of regret when sandstorms blurred their beauty and left them derelict monuments of the Army's labours.

CHAPTER VII

EARLY PREPARATIONS

WHEN General Murray took over the command in Egypt a portion of his army was refitting after Gallipoli. The Anzacs, the East Lancashires, a Lowland Division, and others had a short period for recuperation after the toil and fighting on the Peninsula, but winter air in the desert soon restored their condition, and we saw them in February, 1916, working on the new system of Canal defences with an energy and enthusiasm which could not be surpassed. Before the position on the western Egyptian front was made easier by the very creditable victories over the Grand Sheikh of the Senussi, General Murray had to meet another call for aid. The rising of Sultan Ali Dinar in Darfur made it imperative for the Sirdar to conquer that open enemy if he was to succeed in keeping quiet the warlike tribes in the Soudan, and Sir Archibald Murray detached troops to keep watch and ward over the whole of the Nile area as far south as Wadi Halfa. The Egyptian Expeditionary Force was therefore ex-

tended over a vast stretch of country, but nowhere did it fail to put forth the full amount of work the situation demanded.

During the first four months of 1916 the eastern bank of the Canal was packed with troops, creating a barrier through which no Turkish army could break. Long strings of dhows and lighters were towed along the waterway with stone for roads, with water pipes and rails for the light lines which were to carry material and stores to the trenches cut in the sand at selected points to deny any ground to an enemy bent on attacking the Canal. The scenes of bustling activity in those early months will remain pleasant memories, and the hundreds of thousands of men who gave of their strength to prepare for the adequate defence of the Canal have the satisfaction of knowing they took part in laying a sure foundation for the Empire's security. The task was severe and exacting, but the result gained was worth the cost.

The trench-makers dug behind a screen of horsemen and camelry always on the look-out for Turk or Bedouin. These occasionally rounded up a few prisoners and kept prying eyes from gazing at our lines. Frequently detachments were sent out on long patrols, and when they came on an occupied area, they invariably drove back the Turk and gained information of value. In February, March, and April, there were some little expeditions in the air and in the desert which must have convinced the enemy that the whole of the



STRANGE SIGNALS.

On the palpitating horizon a tiny film, apparently smoke, rises and is gone. Instantly the bush-trained eyes—like birds—wait focussed. But it does not happen again. Bedouins, perhaps. Perhaps only mirage.

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Sinai Peninsula was dangerous ground for him. Our aircraft went out to the Wells of Hassana, nearly one hundred miles from the Canal, where the Turks were making an advanced base, building reservoirs for the accumulation of a large water reserve, an electric power station, and a camp of considerable proportions. The place was completely wrecked by bombs, the powerhouse being thoroughly demolished by a heavy projectile dropped with true aim. Photographs taken from the last machine over the place showed buildings in a condition of collapse and streams of water pouring from the sides of reservoirs burst by bombs. Months of labour were thus rendered valueless in a few minutes, and Hassana never again became an important base.

The trunk line to El Arish was begun, and preparations were started to carry out the new strategic plan of defending Egypt on the Palestine frontier and not on the Suez Canal. There was a slow beginning, and we had to use up the materials kept in reserve by the Egyptian State Railways, a reserve which had been considerably depleted by the doubling of the track between Zagazig and Ismailia, a vastly important work for the movement of troops, performed in a remarkably short period. General Murray was fortunate in having placed at his disposal the loyal services of a number of Egyptian State Railway officials, whose knowledge of track laying, the handling of traffic, and of the best means

of utilising the available supply of Egyptian labour was of inestimable value to the Army. But the standard gauge line could not be pushed out far from the Canal bank till the flank was secure. Concurrently with the advance of the railway line, troops were working to make it impossible for the enemy to cross the desert and attack the central or southern sections of the Canal defences, as he had threatened to do with parties of several hundred men in the previous summer.

He then drew his water from a few pools and the cisterns cut into rock by races who peopled the desert many centuries ago. If the sources of water supply were denied the Turk it was obvious he could not march across the desert in any force large enough to cause damage, unless he brought a large camel transport column, which we knew was not available. Therefore, it was decided to draw off all water within a radius of some sixty miles from the Canal. There was a big pool at a spot known as Er Rigm where the winter waters of the Wadi Muksheib emptied themselves, and a party of engineers, protected by Australian Light Horse under Colonel Todd, D.S.O., cut trenches round the lake and drained 5,000,000 gallons from it in four days. Other detachments took out small portable pumping sets and lifted the water from innumerable cisterns, adopting this plan rather than that of destroying these underground reservoirs, which will continue their usefulness when the world enjoys peace again.

Not one of them was damaged. The Turk had been engaged on a rather elaborate well-boring operation at Jifjaffa, east of Er Rigm, for some months; an Austrian engineer superintending the work, with an excellent plant. Major Scott, D.S.O., took a squadron of his regiment, the 9th Australian Light Horse and some men of the Bikaner Camel Corps, to put an end to this attempt to secure a water supply, and by a well-conceived surprise attack captured the Austrian officer and most of the Turks, killing and wounding the remainder. The bore-holes and plant were destroyed. By June there was not a bucket of water available for the Turk in a wide belt of desert, and, though vigilance was never relaxed, patrols rarely had anything to report.

The enemy kept his eyes on places where water was procurable. His aeroplanes told him of the progress the railway was making from Kantara, and he set out to hinder us, not by making a big challenge as he did in the middle of the summer at Romani, but by attacking some of the guards protecting construction gangs and explorers for water. Three regiments of Yeomanry and half a company of engineers suffered substantial losses on April 23d, when, under cover of a dense fog, several thousand Turks in three columns attacked Oghratina, Katia, and Dueidar, but though the enemy overwhelmed the troops at the former places, he was completely repulsed by a small body of Scottish Territorial Infantry at Dueidar,

and the losses inflicted there were so considerable that while our losses in the three places in killed, wounded, and prisoners were heavy, the Turks suffered much more severely, and their killed alone equalled our total casualties.

There were some five thousand Turks in the neighbourhood of Bir el Abd, while we had the Worcester, Warwick, and Gloucester Yeomanry out on a rather wide front in the Katia district, with two squadrons of Worcester Yeomanry as escort for half a company of Lowland engineers engaged on improving the wells at Oghratina, between Katia and Abd. There were a few small posts established near Katia, but the nearest infantry were two days' march away at Dueidar, a pretty oasis on the old caravan route across the desert to Syria. For two days the presence of small enemy parties was known, and on Easter Eve the Royal Flying Corps reported some enemy at Mageibra wells, a dozen miles south of Katia. An attack on Mageibra was ordered, and yeomanry under General Wiggin destroyed an enemy camp, but on their return to Hamisah, south of Katia, the General heard that the posts of Oghratina and Dueidar had been assailed by considerable forces of the enemy and there was reason to fear the troops at the former place had been killed or captured. Then came the news that Katia was being violently attacked by more than one thousand Turkish regular infantry and cavalry. General Wiggin hurried to Katia's relief with two squadrons of

Warwicks and one squadron of Worcesters, Colonel the Hon. C. Coventry going ahead with the Worcesters and getting through to the post at eleven o'clock. General Wiggin and the Warwicks followed shortly after, but were hotly opposed by the Turks and could not break their line.

Colonel Yorke and the Gloucester Hussars were at Romani, affording protection to the workers on railway construction, and immediately he heard of the attack on Dueidar the Colonel set out to cut off the Turks should they be beaten back. On the march south he observed the Katia camp under heavy gunfire, and the Gloucesters turned east and came into action against the enemy just about the time Colonel Coventry reinforced the post. The Gloucesters did very well and forced the Turks back a considerable distance, but the enemy was superior in numbers and threatened the Gloucesters' flank, causing them to retire a quarter of a mile. Three times the Turks charged with the bayonet, and each time the yeomanry met them with a steady fire and repulsed them. Colonel Yorke made a further short retirement preparatory to attempting to reach Katia from another direction, but before he could advance it was seen that the Turks had got into the Katia camp, and he therefore retired on to Romani. General Wiggin retired on Dueidar. Some yeomanry, including Colonel Coventry, were taken prisoners. Among the killed were Viscount Quenington, Lord St. Aldwyn's heir, and Captain Leslie Cheape,

the international polo player, whilst Lord Elcho was among the missing. The troops at Oghratina had been overwhelmed by a large force in the morning fog, and the dead on both sides, found a few days later, showed how fierce was the struggle before the Turk got the upper hand.

Dueidar furnished a brighter story. The post was garrisoned by a company of the Royal Scots Fusiliers under Captain Roberts, who, before the war, was regimental sergeant-major of one of the regular battalions of the R.S.F. He had his men standing to arms an hour before dawn behind the defences which had just been begun. That precaution saved the situation. As it was getting light, with the fog so thick that it was impossible to see anything a dozen yards away, about nine hundred Turks tried to rush the camp. At once they were caught in a rapid fire and driven back to behind the protection of a slight ridge, two hundred yards away. The fog lifted a little about seven o'clock, and the Turks, who had been shelling the camp with two mountain guns, again attempted to get into our lines, but though some reached the wire they were driven off. A machine gun brought to within one hundred yards of one uncompleted redoubt caused much trouble and every Lowlander who tried to reinforce the redoubt was hit.

Before the sun pierced the fog there was a third attempt to break through, but this was likewise defeated, and thereafter the enemy endeavoured to wear down the garrison. Half a dozen men of

the Bikaner Camel Corps lay down in the open to lengthen the Scots' line and behaved with consummate coolness, and Captain Bruce and two or three of his Army Service Corps men also joined in the defence at a particularly dangerous spot, where Bruce, in a gallant effort to succour a wounded officer, was mortally hit. Captain Roberts at the first sign of danger sent a message to Hill 70, seven miles away, and help was immediately despatched to him, Major Thompson, a grand fighting Scot who died from many wounds received while leading his men at the second battle of Gaza, taking two companies of the Royal Scots Fusiliers and covering the seven miles of heavy sand in two hours. Major Thompson assumed command at Dueidar, and, when he had made his dispositions, ordered a counter attack which drove the Turks back in disorder. We buried seventy of the enemy near our lines and many more were killed by aeroplane bombs during the retreat. At Katia on the 26th, an Australian Light Horse patrol counted over two hundred Turkish dead, and these severe losses must have made the Turk doubt the wisdom of any sporadic attempt on our posts. Anyhow, he kept quiet for a long time, and the railway was carried into Romani, with a spur line to Mehamdiya to connect with a light railway running along the shore to Port Said. This was the position in the third week of July, 1916, when a new Turkish forward movement began, which was the last serious attempt made to get to the Suez Canal.

CHAPTER VIII

A DESERT BATTLE IN AUGUST

THE battle of Romani was the most important battle fought on Egyptian territory during the campaign. It proved beyond doubt the wisdom of General Murray's policy in going out to meet the enemy and denying him all the ground which was necessary for him if he were to attack the Canal with even temporary success. The presence of the enemy against our Romani positions showed it was possible for a well-led and well-organised Turkish army to make a long march across the desert in summer, unknown to us until it was almost within striking distance, bringing with it guns of large calibre and long range, and just that equipment which was required for holding up traffic on the Canal. The battle also showed that the constant call for troops, trained in Egypt, to serve on the Western front, must cease or sensibly diminish, or there would be a risk that the advance which General Murray had timed for the autumn would be postponed. The fighting, and the work preceding the fighting, corroborated the view held by every soldier of high rank that, in regard to

mounted men, we had in the Australian Light Horse, the New Zealand Mounted Rifles and English Yeomanry, troops of high courage and endurance, and possessed of resource and energy not only superior to the enemy but fully equal to any troops in the world. Upon the Australians and New Zealanders the brunt of the fighting fell, and during the whole of the battle, which, with its preliminaries lasted from July 19th till August 12th, they were in constant touch with the enemy, and one cannot set too high a value upon their fortitude during the blistering midsummer days when fatigue settles upon the strongest frames, and is naturally increased by sleepless nights on outposts. Another reason why I am setting out the full details of Romani is that our victory there settled once and for all the attempts of the Turks to get to the Canal, for once Romani was won nothing could prevent us from compelling an advancing enemy to meet us on ground of our choice, getting farther east every day with the best sites always entrenched. Romani will stand out as the big decisive battle fought on Egyptian soil in this war, and it put an end to the dream of the Kaiser of bleeding the British Empire to death by severing what he had well termed its most vital artery.

It was generally accepted at home that an enemy advance across the Sinai Peninsula during the summer was an impossibility and would not be attempted. I had an interview with the Com-

mander-in-Chief with the object of ascertaining whether there was any prospect of useful employment for me during the summer. Sir Archibald Murray, with a frankness he always displayed towards me, put his cards on the table, telling me in confidence that he was going to occupy Katia during the summer and El Arish in the winter, but, he added, he could not guarantee I should see fighting, though he thought Egypt, as the centre of the Arab world, would be interesting. The London newspaper proprietors appreciated the possibilities in Egypt and directed me to continue to remain with the Expeditionary Force. For over a year I was the only accredited correspondent with the Army in Egypt, and I had the satisfaction of moving forward with it to the frontier and into Palestine.

It was on July 19th when airmen made an evening reconnaissance over Bir el Abd that we learned there was a large force of the enemy within fifty miles of the Canal.

Turkish preparations it was clear later had been going on for months. They had had special equipment for the expedition made in Germany. Their camel pack-saddles were quite the best thing of their kind. The machine-gun and mountain-gun packs taught us a great deal, though we had been using camels in India for generations, and in Egypt for long enough to know what was the most suitable type of camel equipment. I do not say ours was not good, but



THE HILLS OF ROMANI.

From here, near Katia, the Turkish attack was launched over the dunes on Romani, lying in line with the bush in the foreground. The shallow trenches here shown were dug by the Worcester Yeomanry.

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that we had something to learn from our enemies. A manual printed in Arabic on the care and treatment of camels, which was given to the supply and transport trains, contains nothing but the soundest advice, and it has since been found useful in our service. With no railway nearer than Auja, a police spot on the frontier south-west of Beer-sheba, it was thought the Turks could not bring against us heavier guns than the Krupp mountain-gun which we have found makes excellent practice. But the enemy actually brought up and used 4-inch, 6-inch, and 8-inch howitzers, and the sand dunes did not stop them. They adopted an ingenious plan for securing a sufficiently stable track. Practically all the way from El Arish to beyond Katia they constructed an artillery road by cutting two trenches, each a foot deep and about eighteen inches wide, which they filled in with the brushwood and tough scrub found all over this part of the desert, and covered the whole with a layer of sand. When the sand was exceptionally soft, wide planks were used in place of brushwood, a battalion of labourers being employed in carrying the timber from the rear of the batteries to the front of them, till the soil became firmer and the scrub track could be resumed. The two complete field hospitals, which were captured by the Anzac Mounted Division, showed the Turkish wounded to lack nothing that German scientists could suggest for their treatment. Preparations of such a character take a long time. Fortunately

we had been taking no risks, and the Flying Corps report of July 19th found us in an advanced state of preparedness.

What did the Turks mean to do? It seemed almost too much to hope they would attack our entrenched positions from the sea at Mehamdiya through Romani, although that intention developed. For some time it appeared the enemy would sit down west of the Katia oasis, entrench and live on the wells in the palm groves, and await till such time as we could find it expedient to try to drive him away. That would have been a reasonable thing, and it might have cost us considerable losses, though with the high quality of our mounted troops there was always a chance of outflanking him and cutting him off from his line of communications. Or was the Turk anxious to make a demonstration which would revive his influence with the Arabs? The revolt in the Hedjaz and disaffection in Syria were giving the Turk food for reflection, and he had to do something to prevent lukewarm friends becoming hostile. He was anxious, too, about his communications with the Hedjaz. We soon became aware of the forces we had in front of us. The Anzac Mounted Division from July 20th onwards was continually harassing the Turkish outposts, and the prisoners, daily brought in, told us that the 31st, 32d, and 39th regiments, composing the 3d Turkish Division, were in front of our army with eight special machine-gun companies having German

officers and non-commissioned officers, and with Austrian gunners accompanying the heavy artillery, some late pattern anti-aircraft guns also manned by Austrians, and Arab camel corps. Behind this division were other troops on the march from El Arish, the strength being unknown, but to judge by the new troops thrown into action in the final phase of the battle at Bir el Abd they must have numbered at least four thousand. All the Germans and Austrians in the artillery, machine-gun corps, wireless telegraph sections, supply units, and field hospitals had undergone a special training in Germany for this expedition, and, if the thousands of prisoners we captured may be taken as representative of the whole force, it possessed a high standard of physique.

On the afternoon of July 20th, we sought to get an idea of the enemy's strength. Some guns went out from Romani towards Oghratina, when it was found the Turks were digging in on a line bending to the south-east, with their left flank strongly protected by a battalion on the high sand dunes at Mageibra. In this position von Kressenstein was content to remain for a few days, bringing up his troops from his advanced base at Abd, and going out in one or two places to secure strong points. He sent large reinforcements to Mageibra, where several redoubts were built, and the line to Oghratina and beyond it to the flat salt sand country on the north was connected up by a series of well-placed posts. Every day our cavalry

patrols met the enemy, whose dispositions became known to us with exactitude. At this moment it looked very much as if the Turks' commander had decided to remain here or rather at Katia, a few miles to the west, to which oasis he was certain to make a move, and to wait until we should attack him. There are a number of wells in this oasis whose water varies from brackish to drinkable, and the thousands of palm trees are a grateful relief, as Napoleon's army found, to the monotony of the country. If von Kressenstein had decided to accept battle here he might have given us some trouble to dislodge him, for General Murray was making arrangements to accept the challenge, and by August 13th, when a full moon would have lighted up the desert, we were going to attack. Our preparations could not be completed before then. Railhead was at Romani. Here there had to be collected ten thousand fantasses, flat tanks to hold water, camel transport for the mounted division, an infantry division, at least, and considerable accumulations of rations, ammunition, and supplies before the forward movement began. All the arrangements for these matters were taken well in hand by Major-General the Hon. H. H. Lawrence, in command of the northern section of the Canal defences, when on the night of July 27th, the enemy suddenly moved his front westwards, getting as far as Abu Darem on the south, though the Wellington Mounted Rifles, who were at the time brigaded with some regiments

of Australian Light Horse, so heavily checked the enemy right that its advance was small.

The situation became most interesting, for the new move indicated that the enemy had decided to attack us. His new front was reinforced in the same methodical way as at Oghratina, and by August 1st, preparations for attack were complete. The Royal Flying Corps opened the ball. All the machines that could be spared were brought to Romani. Neither heavy anti-aircraft fire, nor attacks by the better-equipped Germans daunted them, and though we had losses in the air, our men did everything asked of them and more. They freely sprinkled the enemy's positions with bombs. They were out observing from dawn till sundown, penetrating far into the desert to watch the flanks, going behind the enemy's lines to see whether his strength was being increased, and observing the fire for our monitors standing out in the Bay of Pelusium.

After a strong reconnaissance by the enemy on August 2d, when he felt the strength of the Anzac horsemen, von Kressenstein disclosed his intentions completely by making a general advance on the morning of the 3d. He took up a line running from a hill overlooking the salt bed of the dried-up lake east of Mehamdiya, on to the high ground west of Rabah, along the low dunes which hide the palm groves of Katia from the west and southwest, and on to the sandy ridges of Bir Hamisah. Our position fronting him was a strong one. On

the sea about a mile east of Mehamdiya we had a well-entrenched post, in the making of which a Roman villa was unearthed and a few beautiful specimens of the ancient potters' art were collected unbroken. Greek and Roman copper coins were also picked up in large numbers. A chain of sand-hills running south for three miles to the low-lying ground at Romani was well held, and on the ground rising again from the railway for a mile and a half to Katib Gannit, a lofty sand-hill with steep sides and a sharp-edged summit, there were placed a series of strong posts. This line was held by the Lowlanders, commanded by Major-General W. E. B. Smith. The division had been weakened by losses in Gallipoli, where its fighting qualities stood out as a magnificent example to all Territorials and New Army troops. "My own brave fellow countrymen from the Lowlands," as Sir Ian Hamilton described them. They were seasoned troops, fine fellows, typical Scots in their humour and in their ready acceptance of the conditions of the moment, however uncomfortable they might be. They had been digging, digging, digging for months, the full share of bully and biscuit had fallen to them, perhaps the allowance of water was not always so large as was desired, but the camps were always full of cheerful men, as big-hearted and generous as they were brave. The Anzacs and the "Scotties" had become close friends, and the comradeship grew as the cam-



MEHAMDIYA.

From the Roman ruins: the Hospital on the beach is seen three miles distant. [To face p. 58.

paign advanced. In the posts near Katib Gannit some Welsh infantry of another division were garrisoned, among them a Herefordshire battalion whose new men endured heavy shell fire during the battle with exemplary courage, though their casualties were severe. Down the line were other troops, the stout "East Lancs" in reserve, the New Zealand Mounted Rifles at Dueidar, and mounted troops (Worcester, Warwick, and Gloucester Yeomanry). Behind the southern chain of posts, when they were not out on patrol, were Major-General Sir H. G. Chauvel with Australian Light Horse, and the New Zealanders and Yeomanry. This was the force which General Lawrence had at his disposal.

CHAPTER IX

“ALLAH, FINISH AUSTRALIA”

GENERAL CHAUVEL made a very prudent use of his men of the Light Horse with him at the time on the night of the 3d-4th. His men and horses were tired with a fortnight's hard work in watching an enemy over a front of more than a dozen miles, to get to which from the Romani camp necessitated long marches. It was imperative that these mounted troops should be kept in as good condition as possible because, in the event of the forthcoming Turkish attack failing, upon them and the cavalry in rear would fall the duty of following up the retreating enemy. Notwithstanding the urgent necessity of keeping his horses and men at rest, General Chauvel felt compelled to detail a brigade, on the eve of the battle, to watch the front south and south-east of Katib Gannit, holding that the enemy would make an early effort to get through here to try to rush the railway, cut off Romani from Kantara, and hold off reinforcements and supplies. That view was fully supported by the events of the early hours

of the morning of the 4th, and it is not too much to say that the magnificent delaying action fought by one Light Horse brigade before dawn, reinforced at daylight by the other brigade, assured our victory.

Some Light Horse under Colonel (afterwards Brigadier-General) J. B. Meredith, in the temporary absence of Brigadier-General Cox, moved out on the night of the 3d to hold a three-mile line from the infantry post south of Katib Gannit, past Mount Meredith to Hod el Enna, sending out patrols a considerable distance in front. Just before midnight the outpost at Enna reported enemy patrols were feeling their way in that direction, and for an hour the patrols were continually pushed up. The enemy was reported from Mount Meredith at one o'clock, and an hour later the brigade was engaged along its whole front. At least two thousand enemy infantry were in action by three o'clock when very lively fighting occurred. Round about Enna the Turks fixed bayonets and prepared to charge, yelling out the cry made for them in Germany: “Allah, finish Australia.” To this the Light Horsemen rejoined: “Allah, you bastards, we will give you Allah,” and with that they met with a clash. The Australians drove home the bayonet with the thrust of big-shouldered men, cheering the while and taunting the enemy to “Try it again.” But though the Turks recoiled from the shock the weight of numbers was in their favour, and little by little

we had to concede ground, never failing to hold the enemy up when the ground was favourable and making him already anxious about the possibilities of the day. At three o'clock the Turks got on to the eastern spur of Mount Meredith, and by four the Light Horse were pressed northwards to the base of Wellington Ridge, a long dune connecting Meredith and Gannit, but their fire was so strong that the enemy could not force them back to the top of the ridge till nearly five o'clock, by which time the Light Horse had been reinforced; they then completely held up the enemy in this locality. The reinforcements were commanded by Brigadier-General Royston, a gallant South African, who, since the Zulu War, has served in all the Empire's campaigns.

It had been a very hard night for the brigade and all had done well. The retirements were carried out with absolute calmness, and not once during the whole of the dark hours was touch lost. If when all were deserving of the warmest praise any special mention may be given, it should be awarded to the regiment who were on Hod el Enna and out towards Mount Meredith. They had the longest road to come in and they had to keep back the enemy's left. This they did most gallantly, though the pressure was constant upon them. More Australian Light Horse held the line from Meredith to the infantry post south of Katib Gannit, and, reinforced by two squadrons of another regiment, they like-

wise behaved with credit to themselves and the whole division.

Soon after daylight the enemy swung round his left flank and got on to Mount Royston, a high sand dune three miles west of Romani, and by this time the enemy could bring shell fire to bear on Wellington Ridge from three directions. We found it prudent to retire from this position; the enemy occupied it and, no doubt, began to plan an attack on the railway west of Romani. He had committed himself to a decisive attack. From the east he began to attack our chain of posts running south from the sea, supporting his attack by a long-continued fire from heavy howitzers and guns of lighter calibre, while seven of his aeroplanes in skilful hands dropped bombs on the positions. There was a particularly heavy bombardment by guns and from the air directed against railhead, where supplies and water had been collected, and here we suffered casualties in officers and men. Against the eastern face of our position the enemy could make no headway at all. The Lowland Division, supported by its guns, stood like a rock, and if von Kressenstein thought he could succeed in a frontal attack through the Scots on to Romani he was soon undeceived. He must have pinned his hopes upon the outflanking movement from the south, but he was held down tight here, and by eleven o'clock the attack from this direction had exhausted itself, though the Turks maintained themselves in the positions

they had gained. For this satisfactory state of things the Australian Light Horse were mainly responsible. They were supported by the Territorial Horse Artillery batteries from Inverness, Ayrshire, Somersetshire, and Leicestershire, and I am sure I am expressing the opinion of General Chauvel when I say the shooting of these batteries was most effective, and the gallantry and endurance of the gunners was equal to that of their Australian comrades. The infantry and machine gunners in our most southern posts also gave very effective support, and the Turks could not move on Wellington Ridge without exposing themselves to a strong enfilade fire.

This was the position at eleven o'clock, but it had been decided at least two hours earlier to counter attack the Turks who had moved from the south and south-east, which would not only remove the danger to the railway (that situation was relieved at eleven), but would put the enemy in a position of great difficulty, for we had other mounted troops ready to threaten his rear, and they were on the way from Dueidar. However, to counter attack we had to move up both cavalry and infantry, and there was some delay in carrying forward the infantry by rail. Meanwhile the Turks sought every opportunity for breaking down our defence. A squadron of Light Horse beat off repeated attacks in the region of Mount Royston for three hours with no protection to its right flank till a Yeomanry regiment, brought

from the south-west, gained touch with it. It is only fair to the enemy to say that the Turkish and Austrian gunnery was a marvel of accuracy. They concentrated a tremendous volume of fire on Katib Gannit, which from its situation and height was obviously the best of our observation posts. We had used the hill as an observation station for several days and to very good purpose, as I can testify, for I had seen from it Turks digging in Katia two days previously. But because it was so obviously useful to us it was deemed to be unsafe, and the observers and their instruments were withdrawn from it the previous evening, all except one volunteer who wished to remain, and did remain in a dug-out there. He must have had an uncomfortable time, as, during the half an hour I was watching Gannit in the morning, its crest was enveloped by a mass of bursting high explosive shell and a pall of black smoke hung over it. The next post to it was similarly treated and the Herefords had a bad time, but the survivors, some of them New Army men, held on staunchly. Unfortunately, no infantry were available to assist in a counter attack on Mount Royston during the morning, and General Lawrence had to bring up cavalry intended to attack the enemy from the rear in order to strengthen his troops on the north. The New Zealand Mounted Rifles arrived after noon and by one o'clock began to engage Mount Royston from the west. Two battalions of Manchester Territorials

moved between three and four o'clock from Pelusium station to assist.

I spoke to some of the men at the station and asked if they belonged to the Wigan battalion. They replied, "We come from Ardwick." I said, "That's Mr. Balfour's old constituency," to which they answered, "Aye, that's it." Their friends the East Lancashires were not within miles of the scene of action that day. The mounted troops marched up from Hill 70, and a splendid spectacle they presented as they rode along on a wide front, as well aligned as on ceremonial parade. About 5.30 the New Zealanders and some of the Yeomanry and the Manchesters launched an irresistible attack on Mount Royston which they carried triumphantly, killing many Turks and securing over three hundred prisoners, a complete battery of mountain guns, and some machine guns. At the same time a portion of the Lowland Division attacked Wellington Ridge which was strongly held, and owing to the late hour we were only able to get a portion of it. Our men bivouacked where they stood and were on the move again before dawn, the Lowland infantry with the Australian and New Zealand horsemen assaulting the remainder of Wellington Ridge, capturing it in a furious rush, and securing nearly two thousand prisoners. This completely finished the enemy's main attack, and we had every reason to be satisfied with the "bag," but it was important that no time should be given to the Turk to re-



ROMANI (KATIB GANNIT).

The highest of the hills of drift sand facing the Katia Plain. During the battle of Romani it changed its position several feet. It was used as an observation post until the Turkish artillery concentrated on it. On the left is Wellington Ridge, captured in the early morning of the 5th August by the Australian Light Horse and the men of the 52nd Division.

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cover, and a pursuit to the utmost limits of endurance was ordered. Right well did the mounted troops respond.

All the cavalry now came under General Chauvel's command. The enemy was in full retreat, but to cut him off it was necessary to get round his southern flank. The Australian Light Horse had reached Dueidar from the Canal on Friday evening, and was ordered to march on Hamisah where the Turks had made an elaborate system of field works some days previously, which they would doubtless hold so as to protect their most vulnerable flank. The Light Horse, the New Zealanders, and the Yeomanry moved on the Katia oasis. They had to go warily, for the Turks were able to step into the trenches they had prepared at the end of July. Indeed, all through their retreat they moved from one defensive position to another, and this must be taken into consideration in appraising the value of the cavalry work. The enemy always had guns and an amazing supply of ammunition. On that Saturday afternoon the mounted troops had to cross about three-quarters of a mile of open ground towards a low ridge covering the southwestern edge of the oasis. A dismounted advance would have resulted in many casualties, and it was therefore decided to get across this shell-swept zone at the gallop. General Chaytor's New Zealanders were on the right with the Light Horse next them. Then came more Light Horse, and

some Yeomanry were on the left. In line the cavalry rode over some broken ground on to the flat, and, putting spurs to their horses, galloped as hard as their tired mounts could carry them in the heavy sand. This manoeuvre took the enemy completely by surprise, and his salvos of shell burst behind our advancing ranks. But once the horsemen had gained the ridge the Turks held up the attack with heavy 6-inch howitzer and mountain-gun fire. At this period the Turks' main aim seemed to be to reduce the mobility of our troops, and they endeavoured to get at our horses quite as much as to kill our men. Their guns searched up and down the valley behind the ridge we held, but the Anzac is just as keen to preserve his horse as himself, and all horseholders brought their horses within a few yards of the firing line, and were much amused and gratified to see the number of "overs."

By dusk the progress at Hamisah had been slow, though three hundred prisoners and some material were taken, and, therefore, the whole of the Light Horse were withdrawn to their camps, horses and men being very tired. Some of the horses had not been watered for forty-eight hours, and many of the Australians drew their Friday's rations on Sunday. Some of them had had empty water bottles all that Saturday, which I remember as a desperately hot day in an exceptionally warm Egyptian summer. No one who has not undergone the trials of thirst and fatigue



DUIEDAR.

In the foreground is the well called Joseph's Well, on the ancient caravan road between Egypt and Palestine. On the 26th April the redoubt was attacked by 900 Turks, who were beaten off by the garrison of 150 Royal Scots Fusiliers.

in the desert can realise the sufferings of these troops. There was not a man who would not have buried his face in the turgid springs behind the Turkish lines if he could have got there, and the agonies of thirst were not made easier for the knowledge that the horses were suffering equally with the men. Sunday was a day of rest for the Light Horse. They had earned their repose, but when I was with them in the afternoon some officers, throwing fatigue to the winds and knowing they had to go out again that night, insisted on riding out with me to show me the spot near Wellington Ridge where Colonel Meredith, Major Chisholm, and Captain Hudson had had miraculous escapes from death on the morning of the 4th. “It was such a funny thing,” their lives had been spared, that they imagined I should think they were exaggerating unless I saw the spot myself. Colonel Meredith and his staff were standing at dawn behind a sand heap about six feet high, discussing whether they would withdraw a squadron holding a certain ridge at once or let it remain another fifteen minutes. An officer was holding the reins of the four horses whose heads were within six feet of any member of the staff. A high explosive shell fell on the horses, killing all instantly and wounding in the neck the officer holding them. The other officers were not only unscratched, but, they assured me, they felt not the slightest trace of shock. There were the four horses as I saw them, one on his knees, with not more room be-

tween them and the sand-hill than two men would require to pass abreast. Things like this are of such interest to the Light Horsemen that, though dog-tired, large parties had to go out to look at the spot, because, as one man said, "unless I could tell them at home that I had seen it the people would think I was 'bucking' a bit."

On the 6th the Lowland Division and some of the East Lancashires occupied Katia. The Scottish Territorials had made a big fight against the northern part of the oasis the previous afternoon, but they found, as did the mounted troops farther south, that the enemy was too firmly dug in about the palm trees to allow of a rapid advance and his flank was well protected. During the night the enemy retired and they were followed by the Yeomanry, New Zealanders, and Light Horse. There was now another rod in pickle for the Turk. For some days a column of the Imperial Camel Corps, raised from the Australians and Yeomanry, had been on the march from the central section of the Canal under Brigadier-General C. L. Smith, V.C., who, on Sunday, reached El Mageibra and the next day fought a successful little action at Aweidiya, driving the enemy from some strong positions and capturing fifty-three prisoners. This threat to his flank probably caused von Kressenstein to hurry his departure, and on the 8th, Oghratina was found to be abandoned and the enemy fell back to his advanced base at Bir el Abd. Next day the whole of our cavalry became

heavily engaged with the Turks now busy evacuating the camps and the stores accumulated at Abd. Our Horse Artillery got close enough to shell the enemy convoys which they reduced to small dimensions, but they were heavily shelled in return, and the Turks made tremendous efforts to beat us back. The Turkish commander brought up fresh infantry that had not previously been engaged, and some six thousand men made three violent counter attacks in the afternoon. During one of these our guns and machine guns caught a battalion in column and inflicted very heavy losses upon it. A final counter attack was made at half-past six with all the available Turkish resources, but though it was pressed with extreme determination by a numerically superior force, our cavalry and gunners triumphantly beat it off.

These counter attacks cost the Turks a great portion of their effectives, but it was clear they possessed too many rifles for our cavalry, and we had to withdraw a short distance for the night. An idea of the fierceness of the fighting may be formed from the fact that heavy horse casualties during the afternoon rendered one, if not two, of our batteries immobile for several hours, and some horses belonging to the Lowland Division were hurried up to them. The Ayrshire Battery had several horses killed and some of the enemy got within two hundred yards of the guns, but the coolness of the gunners did not desert them and they, assisted by some Australians, hauled

the guns to a new and better position and continued their excellent practice on the Abd dumps. The vigour of the attack and the bravery of the mounted men told on the enemy who, knowing time was pressing heavily against him, burned the remainder of his stores. We continued to exercise the utmost pressure on the Turks, who completed their evacuation on the 12th, being chased as far as Salmana, while the camel corps had actively pushed in the enemy flankers on the 11th, destroying the whole baggage and all the ammunition animals, forcing the flanking body to join up with the rearguard.

The cavalry remained at Abd while the infantry were brought back to the old line at Romani until such time as railway construction could provide a more advanced point for the distribution of supplies. Our victory was complete. The prisoners captured numbered almost 4000. There were some Germans and Austrians among them (this was a great satisfaction to the captured Turks), and about fifty officers. One German machine-gun company was taken complete. The official report estimates the total enemy casualties to be 9000, and arrives at that figure from the number of dead we buried, generally a very sound basis for calculation. Officers engaged in the battle do not put the Turks' losses at so high a figure, and think from 7000 to 8000 would be nearer the mark. If the Turks lost only 7000 out of a total of about 20,000 men we are entitled to claim a big



ROMANI. No. 6 Post.

Along the front of the Romani sand hills right to the sea are still what remains of the chain of posts or redoubts which resisted the attack of the Turks in the fierce fighting in August of 1916, though now they are but tumbled mounds of sand from which protrude sand bags and rivetting wire.

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victory. The enemy got his big guns away, which was regrettable, though no troops could have worked harder to cut them off than our mounted forces. A Krupp mountain battery of four guns with 400 rounds of ammunition, nine German machine guns so made that each could be drawn over the sand as a sledge by one man, 2300 rifles, 1,000,000 rounds of small arm ammunition, 100 poor class horses and mules, 500 camels, and two fully-equipped field hospitals formed the bulk of the booty falling into our hands.

Of the many gallant deeds during the battle I will relate just one which will serve to illustrate the spirit of the Australians who came forward to do their duty to the Empire. When the Australian infantry left Egypt for France in March, a Light Horseman, named Curran, deserted his mounted regiment and went away with an infantry battalion. He had been decorated for bravery on Gallipoli, and though his action meant difficulties in drawing pay, etc., he accepted any trouble that might come along in order to “get to the place where they would be fighting against Germans.” In due time, as was bound to happen, Curran was found out—and I suspect the officer who heard the case had a lump in his throat when he made the order—the deserter was sent back to his unit to be dealt with. Curran arrived at Romani the day before the battle began and was placed in a guard tent. During the night the sound of heavy firing awoke him

and he stole out of the tent and proceeded in the direction where the musketry was hottest. Being a prisoner awaiting trial Curran was an unarmed man, and when he came up to a field ambulance he asked if he could be of service. Someone said there were wounded to be fetched from the firing line and Curran went forward eagerly to find a case requiring help. I was told the following day that Curran had actually carried on his own shoulders fourteen wounded men to the field ambulance before a bullet passing through the head removed this brave man from the Empire's Army. Investigation afterwards proved, indeed, that he had walked up and down in the thickest parts of the fight and had carried to safety at least six comrades and probably more. Being as I have said a prisoner awaiting trial, Curran did not even get a mention in despatches, much to the regret of comrades who knew and appreciated the spirit which prompted the "desertion." But if Curran's relatives have no medal or posthumous award to remind them of a good soldier's work in the heat of battle, they may be satisfied his memory is a rich treasure and an inspiration to the brethren with whom he fought and for whom he made the supreme sacrifice.

Our wounded in and about Romani congratulated themselves upon the early attention they received. Many of them got safely and snugly to the hospital at Kantara within six or seven hours of being hit. But men wounded farther

afield had a very different time. It was unavoidable, and absolutely the best was made of the conditions, but troops wounded at Bir el Abd, miles away from railhead, had an exhausting experience. The badly wounded were carried in broad-tyred sand carts and they were fairly comfortable. What are termed walking cases, or men with wounds in the legs which were not serious or dangerous were sent in on camels. Some sat in a contrivance like a chair, one on each side of the saddle, others were laid down in a cacolet, a sort of trough with a sun screen slung fore and aft, on either side of the camel. The walking action of a camel does not tend to the comfort of a rider, but when one is slung on a camel's side the movement is horrible. Rest you cannot get, ease is impossible, and a man I saw lifted out of one of these cacolets at Romani, after being two days on trek, told me that, although he had got two bullets through his leg, he would a hundred times sooner try to do the journey on foot than submit again to the tortures of the camel-ride.

Many Australians have a strong aversion to the camel. This incident may be cited as a case in point. A Light Horseman with a nasty-looking bullet wound across his cheek had his head bandaged with a field dressing and was taken to a camel ambulance train. “No, thanks,” said he. “I’ve made up my mind never to ride on a camel and I hate the beast and his ways the more I see of him. My horse is good enough for me.” With

that he got into the saddle and turned his back on Bir el Abd. On his way towards Romani he met an Australian supply train halted, and passed the time of day with some friends.

"You'll go into hospital at Romani, I suppose," said one of them.

"Perhaps," was the reply.

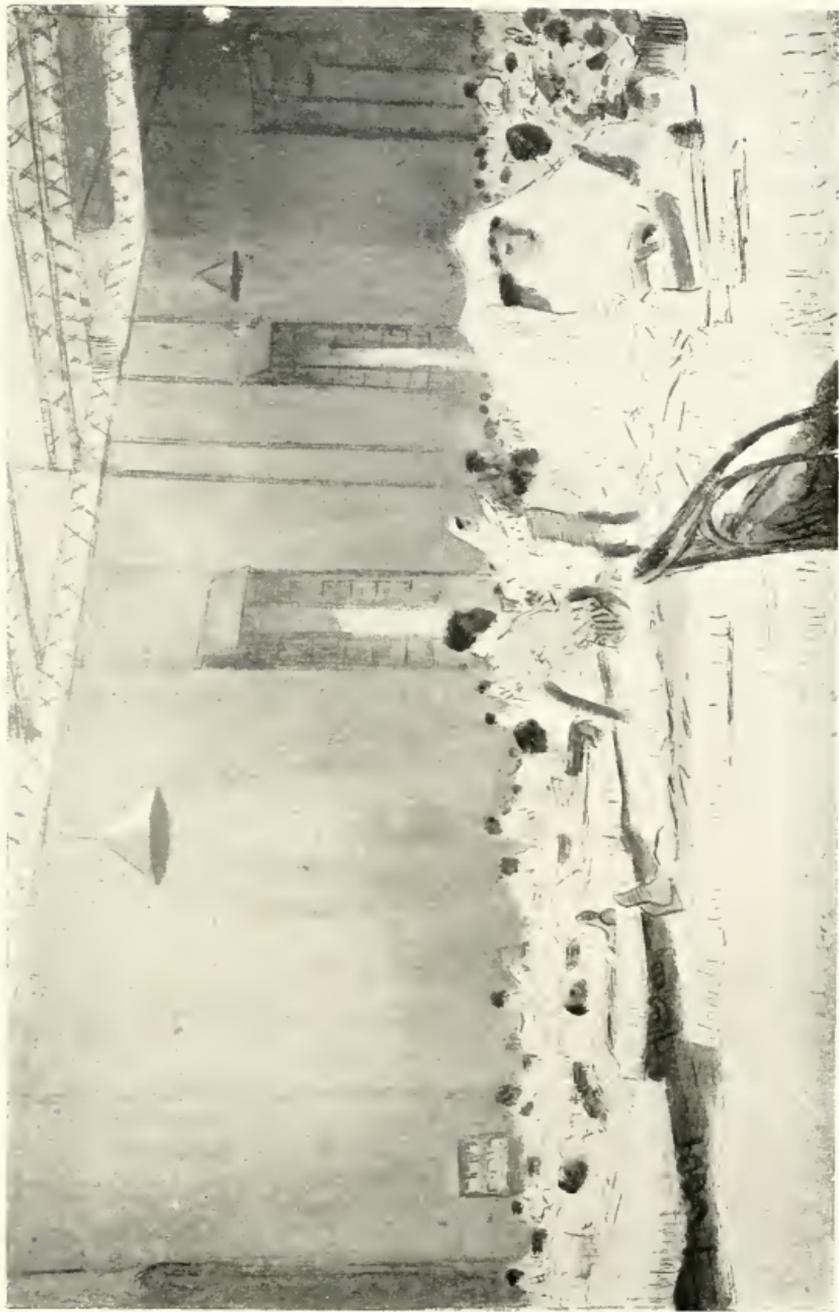
"There's a splendid hospital in houses at Ismailia. Possibly they will send you there," said another.

"Where?" asked the wounded man.

"Ismailia. They're sending wounded Australians to it."

"Good," was the final remark of the trooper, and off he went westwards again. Now Ismailia is seventy or eighty miles from Abd. In two days' time the wounded man had crossed the Canal by the pontoon bridge at Kantara and got to El Ferdan, where he watered and fed his horse at a camp and told his story to some British Tommies. One who heard him went off to a surgeon attached to a field ambulance, who came up and, like a kindly man, told the trooper he had been on the road long enough and he would send him to Ismailia in a motor car.

"Who will look after my horse?" asked the man. He received assurances that his horse would be well cared for and would be ready for him on his discharge from hospital, so, after off-saddling the horse himself, the trooper was motored to Ismailia. When he arrived at THE Australian



A HOSPITAL WARD.

A dysentery ward of the great General Hospital at Port Said—the adapted new buildings of the Suez Canal Co.

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Stationary Hospital—I have this from the doctors who received him—he would not have his face unbandaged until he had ascertained if a particular pal wounded in the same action was in the hospital. Nor would he go to rest until he had seen his friend, and a sister, to humour him, took him to his comrade’s bedside. There the two sat laughing over their experiences till the sister insisted that the new patient must go to bed.

“Can’t I have a bed near Bill?” asked the man.

“No, certainly not” (this with an affectation of firmness). “It would not be good for Bill or for you, and the whole ward would not get a wink of sleep. But you may come and see Bill every day.” Tough fellows, these Australians, but there is an inborn chivalry about them which makes them accept a sister’s orders more readily than an officer’s or a surgeon’s. So the trooper went to his bath and his bed, and—of this you may be positive—he saw Bill every day, and sometimes they had the sister’s company. It was good for both.

How did the Turk fight at Romani? He was brave. At this date it is almost unnecessary to state that. He fought cleanly, too, as a rule. There was one case, if not two cases, where a tricky use of a white flag was suspected; in one instance it was a German who was supposed to have fired after a signal of surrender had been shown, but on investigation the charges were not proved. The Turk deteriorated sadly when we got into Palestine, and a number of our wounded were

killed in hospital by shell fire and aerial bombs. But at Romani the Turk was a clean enemy. Prisoners told us our wounded in Turkish hands and the few prisoners they secured were well treated. When we got to Oghratina we found a notice tacked to a board that Lieutenant ——, of the New Zealand Mounted Rifles, was a prisoner, was a gentleman, and was dining in the officers' mess. An officer in charge of a field ambulance told me that at Abd on August 9th, he was riding ahead of his convoy to find a place for it to stand, and, in going over a ridge attended only by an orderly, he was shelled. The convoy followed, and when the Red Cross carts appeared the firing was instantly cut off and for the remainder of the day no shells burst near them. Similarly at Rafa the ambulance moved up and down the firing line all day long, and not a man, an animal, or a cart was hit.

CHAPTER X

EYES TO THE EAST

FOR a long period after the battle of Romani big preparations were afoot for a forward move. It was General Murray's intention to drive every detachment of the enemy from Egyptian territory, on a portion of which they had cast their blighting influence for nearly two years. I believe the Commander-in-Chief, after weighing up all the difficulties in the matter of obtaining material for his railway and pipe line, and taking into consideration various possibilities which would necessitate new formations, had set his mind on clearing the Sinai Peninsula by the first month of the new year. In this he was successful, for at Raza we killed and took prisoners the last Turks on our side of the frontier. That the General's time-table worked as well as it did is sufficient testimony to the self-sacrificing effort of all ranks. The northern section of the Canal was alive with troops as busy as ants all through the remainder of the summer, the autumn, and the winter. They built the railway, the pipe line, reservoirs, and pumping stations,

fortified positions, and entrenched as they moved forward step by step, camp succeeding camp with wonderful regularity. Indeed the march eastwards was a fascinating study of precise military movement.

Romani as I knew it in the days of its impressive power gave way to Bir el Abd as the chief centre of importance. Abd lost its size when Mazar became our forward position. Kilometre 128, with its vast tanks filled from water trains which took first claim on the railway system, was supreme till we made the sudden dash on El Arish and yet, when railhead was at El Arish the importance of 128 was gone, and the station with the splendid works about it was dismantled and disappeared. Any one moving along the Desert Railway to-day would gather no idea of the vast organisation required to build that undertaking, or of the labour involved in carrying the army and its supplies along that iron road. Sand has blown over camping grounds which had accommodated divisions and not a sign of their presence remains. A cross here and there over the grave of some brave fellow, who died that England might live, marks a spot where our right to move eastwards was contested, but the desert whose silence for countless generations was broken by the hum of toiling thousands, has almost fallen back into its old state, and little remains but the busy railway to tell the story of the Great Advance. It is only where we find blockhouses and entanglements put up as measures of precaution that we



DAWN.

The night has been quiet. By five o'clock the camp is astir, and the blankets and possessions are collected.
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get a sign of the soldier's labour. Generally, what he did was undone and never done again. The troops were the destroyers as well as the creators of their own vast works, and you must remember that when you calculate the sum total of their endeavours to save Egypt from an invader under whose touch the tree of prosperity always withered, and to release Palestine from the thralldom of many centuries.

During the advance the hardest part of the work was done by Lowland Territorials. They marched every inch of the long way from the Canal. The mounted troops did too, of course, but their horses carried them wherever they went. They were always ahead of the infantry, searching the country for scores of miles for Turks or marauders, who required as much careful attention as the Turks themselves. Fatiguing marches fell to the cavalry's lot almost daily, and they guarded not only our front but often went out to the hilly broken country to the south for a day or two at a time, to ascertain at close quarters if the cunning of the enemy had enabled him to hide himself from the eyes of observers in the flying machines. The Australians, New Zealanders, and the Yeomanry did have something to relieve the monotony of desert life. The infantry had not. Theirs was a daily round of digging, of marching, of striking camp and pitching it again. Not a camp of tents mark you. The bell tent was a luxury left behind at Romani, and for the rest of the journey right

up into Palestine the braw Scot and the other troops lived in holes scraped in the sand, with only a ground sheet to shield them from the piercing rays of the sun at noon and a blanket to cover them at nights, some of these as cold as on their native hills. The hour of rest during the early afternoon would have been grateful but for the plague of flies, a legacy left us by the Turk, though the country was in a cleaner state than we expected. The East Lancashires following the Lowlanders up the line had digging to do also, because one commander's ideas of strong points and trenches do not always coincide with another's. The Welsh and Home Counties troops likewise had a busy time, but the Scots were there before them, and had become veterans in this Eastern Desert before the other troops began to arrive.

And there were others to share the toil. The Royal Engineers were never without a job. They had to search for water for animals, and then dig to improve the supply, and the signal companies were always laying telegraph and telephone lines. The Army Service Corps had to fill up the trains of the Camel Transport Corps, and it was one of the strangest of the many fantastic sights of the desert to see the extraordinary loads the camels carried. One line you would meet would be transporting iron water pipes twice as long as the animal, and as the animals proceeded at their steady two and a half miles an hour gait, the pipes



KATIA.

After their disastrous attack on Romani, the Turks retreated to the Katia Oasis, which they occupied till driven out by mounted troops and Scottish Territorials pursuing them after the battle.

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moved up and down like engine beams raising the water the pipes were to carry. A camel carrying timber is packed up so high that he seems hopelessly overloaded, while a column bearing barbed wire for entanglements look for all the world as if, by some monstrous freak of nature the Army had bred gigantic porcupines with long legs for its service. About the ration camels there is nothing unusual; it is the camel with stores from the engineers' park that arrests attention. One got accustomed even to the most weird scenes and everything seemed to go on the same day after day.

When the railway construction was resumed after it had been held up at Romani, the mounted troops held a line as far east as Bir el Abd and the infantry gradually worked out to meet them. They had the best part of the desert to cover, for much of it was salt flats, and here and there were hods with a shallow well or two and a few palms. The change was agreeable. They did not stop at Katia for long, because in one part of the oasis the Turks left cholera behind them, and we had one or two fatal cases, although very few cases in all, because inoculation, perfect medical arrangements, and a strict quarantine did their work well. But though Katia with its thousands of palms now yielding luscious fruit was refreshing to the eye, it was regarded as unfriendly or at least neutral, and those who could do so merely tasted the fruit and passed on to a district which was bare and

forbidding. Abd is an ugly place unless you look at it through military eyes. Then that iron railroad, passing through sand which lacks the sparkle it possesses in many another place, becomes a band of metal more precious than gold, and the reservoir holding many gallons of purified Nile water is a jewel as priceless as all the treasures of Ind. The private soldier, however, does not take in the surroundings with the same eye for beauty as a general, and when he had enclosed Abd in a ring fence of wire he was again glad to pass into the outer world and explore the beyond. So he came to Mazar, passing on the way, at Mustabig, several miles of hard level ground which was soon to become an aerodrome with the best landing place in Egypt. Mazar the foot slogger knew by reputation; the cavalry had been there long before. The Turk, with a shrewd appreciation of the importance of the position, had made it his advanced post after we had knocked him reeling out of Abd.

It was too close to Abd to be convenient, so on September 16th and 17th, before we had made Abd really strong, a column of Light Horse, Imperial Camel Corps, Territorial Horse batteries and the Hong Kong and Singapore Artillery went out under General Chauvel to show the enemy that his presence at Mazar was undesirable for us and unhealthy for himself. General Murray insisted that a general action against entrenched positions was not part of the column's mission, but the Turk

was so taken aback at the cavalry's wide radius of action that he struck camp and retired to Mazar, a little west of El Arish. Mazar was attacked at dawn from three directions, several small posts were rushed, the first series of trenches were taken, and a heavy artillery fire was poured into the remainder.

We became strong in numbers at Mazar in December, and it proved it was here we were to jump off for an advance eastward as rapidly performed as it was well conceived, and the results it gave were of extreme importance. The whole organisation of the forces in the Canal area had undergone a change in the late summer and autumn. The command of what was known as "East Force" of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force had been given to Lieutenant-General Charles Dobell, whose whirlwind campaign in the Cameroons earned the King's gratitude. The striking force in the Sinai Peninsula was designated the "Desert Column," and this was commanded by Lieutenant-General Sir Philip W. Chetwode, who, from Mons down to the latter part of October, 1916, had handled first a brigade and then a cavalry division in France with consummate skill. He had been through the first battle of Ypres, where for seventeen days his brigade held the line from Hollebeke to Wytschaete against awful pressure, and with men and young officers so fatigued that only senior officers could be given command in trenches at night and they had often to tread on

men to wake them. Sir Philip had also taken part in the other great battles down to the Somme that will live in history, and he brought to bear in Egypt a long military experience, ripened and fortified by what he had seen and learned in the world's greatest battle ground. His arrival was timely and welcome. The task ahead was one requiring all the attributes General Chetwode possessed—coolness, dash, courage, an indomitable will, complete faith in the soldier from Britain and overseas, and a thorough believer in the part organisation takes in achieving victory. Added to these qualities was a personality so agreeable that every man he spoke to looked upon him with perfect confidence as his leader in battle.

Let me give an example of how enthusiastic work was got out of officers with whom Sir Philip got into personal touch. An Australian officer, who between the first and second battles for Gaza had helped to make an exceptionally good map of the ground between the two positions, was whiling away an idle evening hour by trying to catch fish from the beach. He and I talked together for a long time, mainly about the labour situation in Australia. The conversation turned on the battle just over and upon that which was about to begin. The officer naturally mentioned his map, and told me when he was detailed to assist in making it he went to Desert Column Headquarters to get instructions. While he was waiting General Chetwode asked him whom he wished to see, and on

being told he was one of the map makers the General said: "Ah, I should like to tell you myself what I want done." He took the officer to his tent and, to use the Australian's own words, "He just told me precisely what he required, the details he wished brought out and, you may say, everything except the names of the hills and landmarks we have put in are the General's. He had a complete knowledge of what a map should contain and I, as a surveyor in private life, was very much impressed, but there was such an entire absence of stiffness and formality about the instructions that I left H.Q. Camp wondering whether I was not the General and the General the Captain. Do you wonder that the Australians would do anything for him?"

As a matter of fact they would. Their fighting qualities are so high that a certain free-and-easy discipline ceases to count. Their discipline in face of the enemy, the stern unbending self-discipline which makes a man stick it out to the last, to take on tremendous odds without question, the discipline which refuses to yield an inch of ground until an order is given to retire—that is the discipline the Australian practises. He knows General Chetwode, a soldier who has passed through the cavalry to an Army command, would expect it, though he would not do it for anybody he did not trust so highly. General Chetwode soon had their confidence, they quickly had his, and the power of the Desert Column became mighty.

There were at Mazar in December two infantry divisions, the Anzac Mounted troops and the Imperial Camel Corps with the full allotment of guns. We had to wait for the railway to be completed to Kilometre 128 and for the building of a large water siding before the advance on El Arish could be undertaken. All had set their minds on spending Christmas Day in El Arish. From 128 to El Arish was the worst piece of desert on the whole of the caravan route from the Suez Canal, and the building up of a water supply was the first and most vital consideration for General Chetwode. The advance could not be started before the amount of water in reserve at 128 was sufficient for all the troops and horses which were to be engaged in the attack on Masaid, a strong defensive position taken up by the Turks covering the town of El Arish from the west. In the third week of December there was feverish activity to carry water forward. Alongside the railway at 128 the engineers had built vast canvas tanks, strongly picketed with posts and sandbags to prevent collapse. There were constant signals to clear the line for water trains, and these ran up and down the line from and to the reservoirs at Abd, some thirty miles away, with extraordinary regularity night and day. One of them drawn by a London and South-Western goods engine hauled many trucks carrying tanks, and so magnificent was the effort to arrange the water supply that, while the tanks at railhead had only begun to be put

into position on a Thursday morning, by Sunday there were thousands of gallons of water in them on a siding three-quarters of a kilometre long.

The organisation was splendid. When a train was about to arrive the Water Officer was informed, he told the R.T.O. he wanted so many tanks at one place and so many at another, the R.T.O. had the train shunted as desired, a signal was given when the tanks were empty, the train was reassembled, and the railway control got it away again. The time of every one of these operations was signalled to headquarters and all arrangements for refilling were made accordingly. There was not a hitch on any one of these days, though enemy airmen frequently bombed the place, and made daily trips over Mazar to try to smash the railway there. Having got a sufficient storage of water at 128 with adequate means for keeping up the supply, General Chetwode decided to leave Mazar, make his camp at 128, and to hold his troops ready there to make a dash over the fifteen miles of desert to El Arish. December 20th was a busy day. From six o'clock in the morning till late in the afternoon troops were marching out of Mazar, and the whole stretch of ten miles of desert between that place and 128 was covered with marching columns. As far as the eye could reach on both sides of the railway you could see brigades of infantry and cavalry ploughing their way steadily through yielding sand. Camel trains bearing a vast amount of supplies to

relieve pressure on the railway, where everything continued to give way to water trains, could be traced like great veins on the surface of the desert. Batteries of artillery with gun team of eighteen horses and mules, two leaders and the remainder four abreast, hauled the guns laboriously and with frequent easies. The caterpillar wheels of guns and limbers were helpful, but the going was soft and very difficult. Roads improved the lot of the infantry and kept down the dust somewhat. That advance was the most picturesque thing I saw during the campaign, excepting the marvellous picture of the march across the wide Gaza plain at sunset. What struck one most was the orderliness of everything. Each column moved on its own route, there was no confusion, no clashing of columns, no stoppage to allow other troops to pass. If every hundred yards or so there had been finger-posts inscribed: "This way——Brigade," or "This way cavalry," the order of route could not have been more perfect. Flank guards were out of course. You could see their dust through the shimmering haze miles away to the south, while ten thousand feet in the blue vault above us you could pick out our airmen denying a place for enemy eyes to detect our movement. It was very grand, and the perfection of preparation gave us big hopes.

I arrived at 128 after darkness had hidden everything. Soon bivouac fires were lighted. The air had become penetratingly cold. Then I

became mixed up in a movement of horses and—learned that the enemy had evacuated El Arish, and the cavalry were going forward at once to see if this story were true and if so to occupy the town. I could not move till early the following morning when I accompanied Colonel A. C. Parker, Lord Kitchener's nephew, the Governor of Northern Sinai, to the sphere of his former activities. It was a delightful ride we had with a New Zealand convoy, and I am glad I made it in daylight, for one could never get a proper appreciation of the difficulties of the night march if the route had been crossed in darkness. The last five miles into El Arish is over a succession of lofty sand dunes, whose eastern and southern slopes are so precipitous as to approach the perpendicular. Up and down over this perilously steep and yielding ground the intrepid horsemen from English shires and Australian and New Zealand runs never faltered for a moment. There were their tracks to prove they had ridden, almost glissaded, down giddy slopes of shifting sand-hills in the inky darkness of a moonless night. It reminded me of films showing how trained Italian cavalry detachments take a hillside and, as I wrote at the time, it was a pity the necessities of the moment did not allow of a cinematograph picture being taken to show our people throughout the Empire that a whole division of Britons could do these things on service.

General Chauvel surrounded El Arish according

to his plans. Before dawn broke—it was a very beautiful sunrise and the troops pictured to themselves what it would be like on Christmas morning to see the sun appear over the distant horizon not very far from the birthplace of the Saviour of the World—there was a brigade east of El Arish, and three brigades on the south and west. Major Hudson of the Light Horse was first into the town and arranged for its occupation, but the troops kept clear of it until a clean bill of health was given to the population. El Arish is a mud-brick town of considerable proportions, built about a mile from the sea. There is a well-built court-house, a hospital, a substantial mosque, and there had been a fort near the mosque, but this our monitors had destroyed several months before. One of the inhabitants, present during the bombardment, said a good many of the shells fell beyond the fort at first. But this was the Navy's way of getting the range without destroying civilians' houses. The fort which fell to Napoleon's guns at a range of about 100 yards and was reduced by our Navy at 10,000 yards was surrounded by houses on three sides, and so thoroughly did our ships do their work that they completely demolished the fort without touching a house or the mosque. The streets of El Arish were sandy but remarkably clean, and I have been in no Egyptian town so free from noisome smells. The lessons Colonel Parker had taught the people had not been forgotten.

A small part of the population had departed two days earlier with the Turks, but the bulk remained and professed delight at our arrival. Their principal way of showing their gratitude was to ask for bakshish (a present), a truly Oriental method of displaying relief at deliverance from the hands of an oppressor. The military authorities would have put the people in a sounder frame of mind if they had compelled all able-bodied men in the town to do some sort of labour for the Army, but the majority gossiped their days away and searched the skies for the Taubes, which frequently came. They were taught there was to be no treachery, but they feared nothing from us, and Colonel Parker's courts of summary jurisdiction, assembled in the open air, were held by the native audiences to be the models of fairness, which their previous experience of Colonel Parker, as Governor, had led them to value.

Among the callers on the Governor while I was with him were several different types. Some were obviously out to make money, to sell a Christmas turkey, Jaffa oranges or eggs. But one old sheikh, who was an interesting old fellow, dropped in during breakfast time. Like many another inhabitant of El Arish he was hungry and, on being offered food, he ate nearly half a ration loaf and two whole native cakes of bread, with the best part of a pot of jam. He never complained that he was hungry or that the Turks had taken all the available food in the place. The sheikh said he

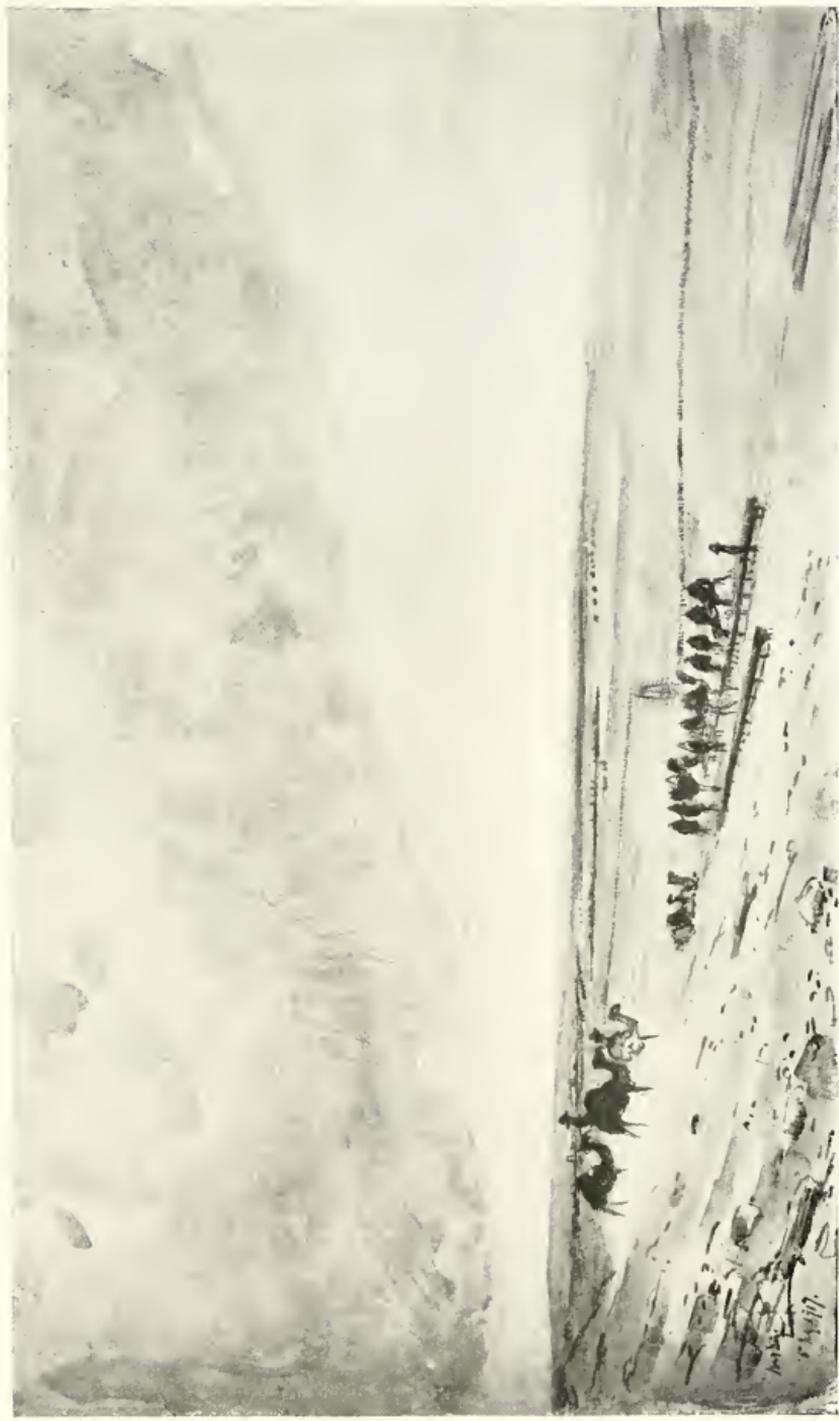
was 120 years old, but he romanced at times. Colonel Parker believed he was over ninety. He was quite willing to say what had happened when the Turks were in the town, though he preferred to talk of older times. He declared with much emphasis that, as a small child, he saw Napoleon enter El Arish. If true, his estimate of his age was approximately correct, but he may have dreamed a dream. He had been the owner of a good stretch of sandy waste through which the Suez Canal ultimately passed, and the compensation he received for displacement ran well into six figures. With this windfall he became extravagant in his expenditure and made marriage his favourite hobby. Colonel Parker asked him if he had recently taken unto himself another wife, and he replied in a tone of regret that he had given up marrying. Among his forty sons he had distributed his wealth, and they made him an allowance sufficiently small to prevent any further matrimonial excesses. He is a finely preserved old fellow and even now frequently rides out with a hawk. He tells you he often met De Lesseps ('Seps he calls him), and he regards the maker of the Canal as a very great man. However, he is prouder of having known Inglesi Cromer, the "King of Egypt and King of India." Cromer was the greatest man of all time in the sheikh's view. Most of the people of El Arish are lighter in colour than the average Arab, and their appearance suggests that Napoleon's army left an influence upon

succeeding generations. They follow pastoral pursuits. There are considerable flocks of sheep and goats which doubtless find a means of existence in the wide wadi when the winter rains have made the bed fertile, but how they live during the scorching summer months is a puzzle. There are thousands of fig-trees in and about the wadi, and near the shore the palms are luxuriant. Fortunately the wells give an abundant supply of water throughout the year.

CHAPTER XI

THE BATTLE OF MAGHDABA

WE occupied El Arish on the morning of December 21, 1916, by cavalry who had ridden twenty-five miles in an afternoon and night, and the Horse Artillery of the Anzac Mounted Division had had a strenuous time in getting their guns over the sand dunes. In some cases they had to cut away a portion of a dune to make a road, and even then the horses and mules arrived rather tugged up. But the mounted troops were to be given little rest. General Chetwode heard that the enemy still held the fortified place of Maghdaba, which lies about twenty-three miles up the Wadi Arish. The Turk had not waited to try the Desert Column's strength at Masaidin, though he had got a good set of trenches there, as well as along the beach at El Arish. The latter were well located, and so deep and well cut that one was thankful we had not tried a landing, as the enemy evidently expected we would. The Desert Column was ordered to move out of El Arish on the night of the 22d to try to round up the Maghdabá garrison of some



Noon.

For midday a halt is called, when the camels are unsaddled, and "Bivvys" quickly improvised.

[To face p. 96.

2000 men. This necessitated a revision of the arrangements for the following up of the infantry to El Arish. The Lowlanders were already on their way from 128. If the Turks had not run away from El Arish their positions there were to have been attacked by other troops, and one could not but feel sorry for the Scots who after all their labour for a year were denied the opportunity of getting at the enemy and taking the town.

As the cavalry and Camel Corps were to make a long move, it was necessary that their supply train should be supplemented. This could only be done by taking away the camels from their division, and, as the latter could be better supplied at Mazar than at 128, they were directed to return to the former place and despatch their camels to the front. On the 21st and 22d there was much bustle to get everything ready. To General Chauvel General Chetwode gave charge of the operations. At eight o'clock on the evening of the 22d the Australian Light Horse, the New Zealanders, and the Imperial Camel Corps assembled at a point in the wadi about three miles south of El Arish. A special convoy of rations, sent from railhead, commenced reaching the starting point at 7 P.M., but a portion of the supply column was late through having lost its way in the dark. The whole force was rationed and provided with horse feed by a little after midnight, and at 1 A.M. on the 23d it moved off. The march was uneventful. The bed of the wadi

was rough in places, but bad tracks were minor troubles for the cavalry, and before five o'clock the head of the column reached a spot three miles north-west of Maghdaba. General Chauvel and his brigadiers went forward to reconnoitre the position, a difficult task, as dawn was breaking and the sun was immediately behind the enemy's works, while the difficulties were increased by the dense smoke from numerous bivouac fires. General Chaytor's New Zealanders and General Royston's Australian Light Horse moved off at 8 A.M. round the north of Maghdaba under cover of sand dunes to the east and south-east of the position, to attack from those sides and to be ready to cut off a retreat. General Smith's Imperial Camel Corps were deployed to make a frontal attack from the north-west, whilst General Cox's Australian Light Horse remained in reserve. The Inverness, Ayrshire, and Leicestershire R.H.A. batteries, with the Somerset battery doing duty as ammunition column, took their guns to places from which it was believed they would get good targets, though the redoubts were very hard to locate.

The value of precise information in warfare cannot be over-estimated, and it is prudent for an observer, whether he be on cavalry patrol or in the air, to lose a few minutes, as it may seem to him, in order that he may verify a first impression before he makes his report. While our troops were moving to their positions aeroplane messages suggested that the enemy was retiring

from Maghdaba, and that the cavalry would have to press forward immediately if they were to cut him off. Consequently the enveloping force on the east was hurried into the attack and General Cox's brigade was brought up from reserve to endeavour to stop the enemy getting away. It was soon discovered that the enemy's position was still strongly held and that only a few were retiring. The Light Horse, moving at a fast trot, came under heavy machine-gun fire while riding across the front, and General Cox at once seeing he could not get to the trenches without heavy loss among his horses, rapidly changed direction to his right and gained the cover of the wadi. General Chaytor's movement round the enemy's right was also observed and was strongly shelled by mountain guns, while the camel corps, which had to move over a wide plain without as much as a bush for cover, got a lot of attention from the enemy. From the wadi a portion of another brigade operated in support of the camelry, the remainder moving south as originally arranged.

There were Germans with the Turks, and the selection of Maghdaba as a defensive position had probably been dictated by them. A mile away it looked absolutely flat, whereas it was a convex position with five redoubts, so cunningly placed that each supported the other and covered the whole of the approaches. As a matter of fact only one of the redoubts could be located by our gunners, and this they smashed up so thoroughly

that white flags were shown early in the day, but as a heavy fire continued from other positions, the surrender of a portion of the enemy could not be accepted. The attack progressed well on all sides, but it was slow, owing to the ground favouring the defence, and about noon the whole advance, except in the wadi, seemed to be held up. The enemy appeared determined to hold on, and it was a question whether we could last all day, because the horses had not been watered since the previous evening, and no water was available nearer than many miles to the rear. We continued to press by degrees, and at a given signal, at three o'clock, the guns began an intense bombardment and several aeroplanes dropped bomb after bomb on to the trenches. A final determined rush was made at four o'clock, when, just as the troops were approaching the trenches, the Turkish resistance collapsed. Individual firing continued from the sand ridges on the west side of the wadi until dark, when the whole position was in our hands.

There was a difficulty in collecting wounded and prisoners, and some Light Horsemen had to remain at Maghdaba till the following day, but we brought them in, over 1200 in all, and left a large number of Turkish dead to be buried. Another battery of Krupp mountain guns was captured, and the rifle and other booty was considerable. The Turkish commander, Klaat Bey, was among the prisoners. General Chauvel's position at the end of this suc-

cessful day was not an enviable one. He had scored a splendid success, the moral effect of which was certain to be great, but the condition of his own force, tired with previous exertions, caused him anxieties. Men and horses were not only fatigued but hungry, and no one knew exactly how far the force had to go to come up with supplies. Fortunately the "Q" work was excellently done. Thanks to the foresight of General Chetwode in placing every available camel at their service, the men had water on the field of battle, and water and food for the horses, and rations for the men, met the column in the wadi a few miles from Maghdaba. There was a long halt there for man and beast, and the column returned to El Arish early on the 24th in remarkably good condition, considering that the troops had been marching for three nights and fighting for a whole day with only one night out of the last four in bivouac.

This was the first time the Anzacs had seen the Imperial Camel Corps in an important action. They admired their coolness and dash, and from Maghdaba onwards the Anzacs and Camel Corps were close comrades. Our gunners did very well under circumstances which tested their capabilities severely. Of the Hong Kong and Singapore battery I will mention what General Cox told me. The battery was attached to the Camel Corps, but for a time it was placed at the disposal of the Light Horse. General Cox said: "The Major in command of the battery would do anything.

Whenever I showed him a target I wanted attacked he hurried up his guns, pounded it and destroyed it. The gunners came up with smiling faces, took their guns into exposed places, and served them under a heavy fire. Their magnificent work late in the afternoon did much to bring the action to a successful issue." And just the same warm praise was bestowed upon the battery for its part later on, at Rafa, when, at least once during the day, they took their little pip-squeak guns up to the very line held by our riflemen. The curious plaintive report of the mountain guns suggested the name of "Bing Boys" for the battery, and Canadians will doubtless pardon this appropriation of their own nickname by comrades from the Far East. The Australians will tell you that the Bing Boys with us were superb.



A LONG PATROL IN THE DESERT OF SINAI.

Before daylight the camels are saddled, loaded with rations for the camels and rations and water for the men, and the start is made as the East begins to lighten.

As the men ride out towards the dawn, two of them—the guides—draw ahead. [*To face p. 102.*]

CHAPTER XII

THE RAFA VICTORY

NEXT we come to Rafa, that picturesque battle won on the stroke of time, when large enemy reinforcements were held off by one regiment on a wide front enabling our attacking force, by a supreme effort, to get into the Turks' main defences within a few minutes of the same time on three fronts, a feat which, a quarter of an hour earlier, had looked impossible. Maghdaba was an admirable achievement; Rafa, coming so soon afterwards, was even better, for not only did it finally clear the enemy from the Sinai Peninsula, which had an important effect on Egyptian public opinion, but it made the enemy very jumpy about any position he held within a day's march of our mounted troops. Later on he evacuated the Wali Sheikh Nuran position, near Shellal, without firing a shot. Yet Wali Sheikh Nuran had been made into a position of such strength that it must have cost us from 6000 to 8000 casualties to take it. After Maghdaba and Rafa, von Kressenstein preferred to give us the place rather than lose another strong

garrison, and his caution was doubtless justified. There is no doubt whatever that the Turks in Rafa were taken completely by surprise. The railway had only just got to El Arish, and there was as yet no large accumulation of stores there. Enemy aeroplanes were over the place every day; they bombed it frequently and must have taken away satisfactory reports of the situation there. The jetty built by the Australian Naval Bridging train, under Commander Bracegirdle, was finished, but the landing of stores from the sea in boats had been grievously interfered with by heavy weather followed by ground swells, which made the landing of several hundred tons of stores a very long and dangerous process. Sea-borne traffic was by reason of winter weather quite unreliable, however hard the trawler crews and landing parties laboured, and when the railway reached kilometre 155 the supply service was maintained entirely by the line. The dumps not being large—indeed there was little more than a couple of days' reserve at El Arish at this time—the enemy thought an immediate advance was impossible, and herein lies evidence that it is not always wise to deny a knowledge of your state to aerial observers.

But the enemy counted not upon Sir Philip Chetwode and the cavalry spirit. A raid on Rafa would have been justified even if it did not have completely successful results. If we got there and had to come away without the full bag it would, at any rate, "put the wind up" for the Turks, who

were getting very uncomfortable in Mesopotamia as well as in Syria, and we wanted to keep their morale on the decline. It was successful; and we could see the tremendous effect it had on the enemy, and if there had only been a timely supporting effort by Russia on the Caucasian front, the Turk would speedily have been knocked out of the war. At Gaza we felt the consequences of Russian inaction, but that is a matter for other pens to write upon. General Chetwode took out with him the troops which had done so well at Maghdaba, plus some further mounted troops and a few light armoured cars. The force started from El Arish at 4.30 P.M. on January 8th, just before it was getting dark, and after the Boche had made his last effort of the day to spy out the land. The move eastward was interesting. The horsemen took the straight line through the soft going to make for Sheikh Zowaid and left the caravan route to wheeled vehicles. The "road" in parts had been improved by the enemy, who had made brushwood trenches along it similar to those laid out between Salmana and Romani, and the artillery drivers accepted the situation thankfully. At Sheikh Zowaid there was a halt for a few hours, and the horsemen instead of resting were delighted to put their animals to nibbling at grass and growing crops of barley, a change of diet which was rare and refreshing fruit for them. Thenceforward the whole country changed, and, except in the broad sand belt by the

sea, there was grass, clover, and barley everywhere, with one or two mud-brick villages and gardens enclosed by cactus hedges, substantial enough to defeat an invader in the dark. The camel drivers gave some trouble at Sheikh Zowaid, for they would talk and try to smoke when silence was essential, but one must not be too hard on the Gypies, for they did a very hard job quite well, and before they got back to El Arish again they had trudged almost fifty miles at a stretch.

General Chauvel's mounted troops and the Imperial Camel Corps left Sheikh Zowaid at 1 A.M. and marched straight to Karm Ibn Musleh, a point about four miles south of Rafa on the border between Egypt and Palestine. At four o'clock General Chaytor's New Zealanders were detached to Shokh el Sufi to round up and disarm a large body of Arabs who were believed to be hostile. It was necessary to take this step before opening the attack, as it was undesirable to have many armed natives immediately in our rear. This was done before sunrise, and when the New Zealanders moved northwards they were followed by a horde of Bedouins chattering like monkeys. But our rear was safe. The attack orders given by General Chetwode provided for the Anzac Mounted Division and the Imperial Camel Corps advancing against the enemy's works from the south and east, whilst he moved with a mounted brigade towards the west of the position, at first holding the Yeomanry in reserve. Rafa proved

to be another of the enemy's admirably sited positions. The main works were on a mound, the approaches to which were gentle slopes for about half a mile, and there was flat ground for, in some directions, quite two miles. The slopes were well entrenched on all sides, and many pits extremely difficult to locate until you were right on them, had been dug to hold two or three riflemen and a machine gun. There were three lines of defences. The outer line, in shape a half-circle, faced west and south, and extended slightly to the south-east. In it were some very strong redoubts. About three hundred to four hundred yards to the rear was a second line very much like the first, while the mound defences were about the same distance from the second line. The face of the mound had been cut to pieces to form a remarkably strong series of entrenchments and communications, and, viewing the position in all its bearings afterwards, one came to the conclusion that two British battalions would have crumpled up the attack by any division the Germans could put against them.

General Chaytor was to make the New Zealanders' favourite enveloping movement and attack the enemy's position from the east. The Light Horse were to advance from the south-east and the Imperial Camel Corps from the south, and the enemy's front facing west was temporarily disregarded. The dismounted attack was timed to begin at ten o'clock, and the guns commenced

to register at nine. General Chaytor's brigade moved very quickly over the rolling grassy ridges to the east, directly on Rafa's two buildings, an old and a new police post, which were held by small detachments. They were at once secured, the telephone was cut, a small party of prisoners was taken, and a troop was sent off after a number of camelmén on their way to Khan Yunus, four or five miles off, where another Turkish garrison was stationed. The New Zealanders then began to make preparations to advance on the mound from the north so as to make a ring of British troops round it, but before doing this General Chaytor had to protect his flank and rear. With this object he detached the Wellington Mounted Rifles to hold the ridges east of Rafa with orders to keep a keen watch on the roads leading from Khan Yunus and Shellal. The New Zealanders' work that morning was a fine lesson in mobility, for General Chaytor was in Rafa and had established his headquarters there almost as soon as the action commenced.

The action, as I have said, was a picturesque one, and the scene more resembled a battle of a generation ago than a fight with modern-type rifles, field guns, and machine guns. The Inverness, Somerset, and Leicester batteries galloped to positions which were unavoidably exposed and well within range of the enemy's guns, and actually carried on direct fire. It is very seldom during this war that our gun-layers have seen their targets over

their sights, but they did so at Rafa all day long. B Battery of the Honourable Artillery Company enjoyed the same privilege when the mounted brigade came into action, and the Londoners, as you would expect of them, quickly settled down to good rapid shooting. Then there was the stirring picture of the Light Horse galloping into action over a wide stretch of green turf, "getting a move on" much more quickly than the German textbooks, on which the Turks were fed, had led the Turks to believe possible. And all this time there were Bedouin spectators who had come out to watch a battle fought with the same coolness as if it were field day in peace time. So confident were the natives that they would be unharmed that they sent their womenfolk to graze flocks and herds behind our lines, and at one period there was actually a girl with some sheep between the trenches and our firing line. The whistling shells overhead neither interfered with the feeding sheep nor disturbed the girl's equanimity. And when the Light Horse made their rush to the trenches, a cow and her calf accompanied them. But do not suppose the enemy remained inactive. From the first our advance was opposed by a very heavy machine-gun and rifle fire, the mountain guns were well served, and both shrapnel and high explosive shell burst accurately. While our attack from the south and south-east was developing, our aeroplanes reported the enemy leaving his western works in considerable numbers to reinforce those

being attacked, and General Chetwode then put in the mounted troops and H.A.C. battery to engage the western face of the position, at the same time instructing General Chauvel to reinforce his lines and press on. It was then that the magnificent spectacle was presented of Light Horse and Yeomanry galloping into action at the same time that the dismounted camelry moved steadily forward within rifle range, making, as all agree, a model infantry attack.

The advance afterwards became much slower. The enemy was in the shelter of strong works, and he had the advantage of many machine guns well hidden and cleverly handled. From the southern and south-eastern side we could only move a few yards at a time, and every attempt at an advance was met by a tremendous volume of machine-gun fire. In the meantime the New Zealanders had left the police post a mile and a half north-east of the Turks' main position and begun to get round the rear of it, overcoming some resistance on the way and adding to their captures another seventy prisoners. Although progress had now become slow, it was none the less substantial, but it became necessary to force a decision. The Horse batteries with the Anzacs, the H.A.C., and the Inverness battery which had moved right round to the north-east to co-operate with the New Zealanders, began an intense bombardment of the mound and trenches at three o'clock, and the Hong Kong and Singapore battery joined with them, making

it perilous for a German or Turkish head to show itself above a parapet. The Hong Kong and Singapore gunners nobly supported the Camel Corps and, absolutely regardless of shrapnel which burst around them, they kept pushing up their guns almost level with the camelry's front line. The state of the Turkish trenches afterwards showed the accuracy of our guns, which, during the intense bombardment, got two direct hits on enemy artillery and put guns out of action.

Now came a critical moment. At half-past three the Wellington Mounted Rifles sent in a report that a Turkish officer they had captured told them a Turkish regiment had left Shellal to relieve Rafa as soon as the attack began in the morning, and would quickly be on our heels. A patrol was sent along the Rafa-Shellal road to investigate, and the Wellington Colonel was directed to push out his patrols further in the Khan Yunus direction. At half-past four the Wellingtons reported two thousand Turks advancing from Khan Yunus and already within three miles of the position we were attacking, and that other enemy troops were following. Almost simultaneously a report was brought in from the patrol on the Shellal road that enemy in considerable force was observed moving across ridges from Shellal and was within four miles of Shokh el Sufi. General Chetwode was in the position of having used up all his reserves in an attack which was not completed, and of having a substantial force rapidly

advancing against his rear. He acted promptly. The necessity for a final big effort was at once signalled, but actually before the orders could reach our troops the day was ours. The New Zealanders were the first to succeed, but so rapidly were the trenches taken in other places that the different brigades do not know which was in the trenches first. The New Zealanders made a tremendous rush on the strongest part of the northern position and, just as the sun was going down, they won it and quickly pushed right and left into the subsidiary trenches. While the New Zealanders were taking surrenders, the Light Horse dashed forward with a cheer and completely smothered the defence in the south-eastern works, and almost simultaneously the Imperial Camel Corps gained the south-western line by a very gallant and well-timed assault. The Yeomanry did not actually get into the western works, but kept the Turks heavily engaged, and by dark the whole garrison had surrendered.

And what of the Turkish reinforcements? A thin line of the Wellington Mounted Rifles accounted for the Khan Yunus column, not only checking its advance, but forcing it back after dark. If, as it turned out, the Shellal column never seriously threatened to come to the relief of Rafa in time, there was always a danger that it would harass our troops while we were evacuating prisoners and wounded. In view of the proximity of the enemy, whose reported strength was from



THE WADI.

For hour after hour have been visible two trees, towards which the Patrol has been making so as to reach them by sunset, for beside them lies the Wadi, the camping-ground for the night.

The camels are tired, because since dawn they have covered twenty-nine miles of heavy sand, all ascent.
[To face p. 112.

3000 to 4000, General Chetwode decided to get the troops off the battle ground as soon as possible. Prisoners were hardly taken before they were on the march west. The wounded, however, presented a more serious problem, and it became necessary to leave behind a field ambulance with a regiment of Australian Light Horse to protect it. All our wounded and many Turkish wounded were collected during the night and were sent off to Sheikh Zowaid before 9 A.M. on the 10th. At 4 A.M. on that day a squadron of Light Horse was sent back with all the available limbers from Sheikh Zowaid to collect rifles, ammunition, and other material on the battlefield, the Light Horse remaining to give them protection. While this was being done and while a party were burying our dead—they lie, poor fellows, in the area allotted to the brigade in the attack, the New Zealander's "cemetery" on the north of the mound, the Light Horse and Camel Corps on the south—an advance squadron of a regiment came into action against a Turkish squadron of cavalry and a squadron of camelry. They drove the enemy off, capturing fourteen prisoners belonging to formations which had not previously been seen in southern Syria.

The enemy's aircraft were active during the 9th. Three of them, while the final assault was being carried out, heavily bombed some Bedouin shelters where the led horses of the Anzac Mounted headquarters and the led camels of the Imperial Camel

Corps were barracked. Two camels and one Bedouin girl who was looking on, were the only casualties. Bombs were also dropped during the afternoon on Sheikh Zowaid, where the convoys were in waiting, the enemy evidently being very anxious to damage our mobility. The enemy airmen were well up in their duties. On a captured German officer we found an aviator's report timed 11 A.M., which gave all our dispositions for the attack one hour after it had started, and gave them correctly. The total number of unwounded prisoners taken at Rafa was thirty-five officers, one warrant officer, and 1437 other ranks, with 162 wounded prisoners. The unwounded Germans taken included one officer, one warrant officer, and nine other ranks, all machine gunners, and several wounded Germans fell into our hands. The Turkish killed were about three hundred, and there is no doubt many slightly wounded Turks got away in the darkness. Our casualties were certainly very light considering the number of troops employed and the nature of the ground over which they had to move to attack a strong position.

We now returned to El Arish and sat down to wait for the railway constructor to complete the next section for us. The work began to get troublesome. The railway engineer was not ruffled and looked on all his trials as being part of the daily round. But all were fretting to get on. The Promised Land! "That," said the Scots,

blithe and gay, the sound English, the men from gallant little Wales (plus the Home Counties' troops)—the stalwarts of the Anzac Mounted Division and the Yeomanry had already had a peep at it during an interval on the lively day of Rafa—"That," said they all, "is the end of a long first stage in our journey . . . and the beginning of the second." The Promised Land! Let them get to it. "All in good time," replied the railway man, who had heard something of the wayward nature of the Wadi El Arish in winter. He went warily. There was some rain at El Arish, which was grateful and comforting, but not much. The railway man who knew things thought that in a few hours he would be able to answer the question of the man who did not know why it was that if he could lay his rails on the soft sand of the desert he could not lay them on the hard, firm surface of the wadi. There was rain in the south, and stormbursts on the hills sent water dashing in cascades over the rock-strewn sides, and it all came down the wadi, a spate three feet deep and in places half a mile wide. That was why the railway man had dug a trench across the wadi and filled it with sandbags.

The remark of the cobbler who did not stick to his last that "it seemed a waste of good sandbags" had no point in it.

CHAPTER XIII

FIRST VIEW OF THE PROMISED LAND

WE came to Sheikh Zowaid with our horsemen, infantry, and guns, and all were exceeding glad. Again a halt, but this time it was not unpleasant. For we had got out of the desert and from that ridge to the east, on which the Lowlanders, the Principality's men, the men from the east coast and southern and Midland counties dug their bivouacs, we espied Palestine, rich and bright and beautiful, as good to think about as it was to see, and glorious to fight for. As these brave, clean-minded boys marched up to that ridge, battalion after battalion, on different days, they spontaneously burst into cheers. In front of them was a country worth fighting for. Their eyes told them that, and the last 2000 years of its history was so engraven on their hearts that if they had only seen rock and sand before them they would still have cheered. Here was the Promised Land on which the Maker had bounteously scattered His gifts, and this hallowed ground they were to deliver from the unclean, unhealthy rule which



A MORNING MIST.

Sometimes of a morning a dense mist sweeps slowly along, through which at intervals the sun appears like a silver disc on a sheet of lead.

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oppressed the people and was a clog in the wheel of civilization. Even where the troops were it was a fair country, but beyond it appeared richer, the rolling downs, not unlike our own Berkshire Downs in spring, were greener, the cornfields wider in area and brighter in colour, and the flowers—words could not describe the delight they gave to the troops. I have seen the sisters of a large stationary hospital put down in the desert, walk for miles among the scrub to find the little cream bell-shaped flower and the pink and green berries, and very tiring the search must have been for them, so that a simple bowl of flowers might divert a sick man's thoughts from past trials in the sand. What would the sisters have done with the flowers of Sheikh Zowaid and Rafa? Their wards, always bright and cheery, and always brightest when they were in them—so every war-worn Tommy agrees—would have become a feast of colour. The anemones with a sheen of satin and brighter than any rubies, the lilies, the short purple iris, a miniature sweet pea, clover, gold, and mauve, were in wild profusion, and, holding their heads high as if to challenge comparison, were crocuses and narcissi, the whole joyously lighting up the landscape to welcome our men. And as if the very brightness of the picture was not enough to gladden the Desert Army the birds must chime in. Some had rich plumage but no song. Others were neither bright nor beautiful, but it was good to see the saucy sparrow again, to

hear his chirrup and to watch him, with the same confidence as at home, invade the men's lines and pick up the crumbs that fell from warriors' laps. Every soldier was a friend to every bird. There was something more homely and delightful still than the sparrow. While the infantry were still standing to arms, which they did an hour before dawn every day, the larks rose to greet the morning with notes as clear and pure and as fresh, too, as the larks spiralling aloft from our Surrey commons. These birds, even more than the flowers, carried our thoughts across to our Old Land, whose missionaries we were, now as ever, fighting the battles of freeborn men for the freedom they love.

The Promised Land opened up a great prospect. It was to cost us many lives and many wounds, but holding close to our traditions all declared the sacrifice to be worth the price. Wheels and the tramp of many feet had crushed and bruised the green surface of Sheikh Zowaid before we left it, and it looked parched and dry and almost desert-like. Our camps at Rafa were more widely scattered, and except about the station, where never-ending demands on supply dumps caused wheels to churn up the earth, the country retained its virgin freshness and the triumph of colour. The mornings were gorgeous. The whole countryside presented a broad smiling green face freckled with the poppy, anemone, and a hundred and one flowers of every hue. The sky was nearly always

unclouded, and the puffs from anti-aircraft shrapnel as they chased bomb-droppers away from important areas, were usually the only smudges in the blue vault of the heavens. Northward golden sand dunes were a not inartistic foil to the richly clothed land nearer us, while beyond the sand were the dancing sunlit waters of the Mediterranean, a turquoise blue of surpassing beauty fading into an opalescent haze obscuring the horizon. The air was dry and rarely oppressively hot. The mornings of that fortnight's stay at Rafa will live in the memories of the troops.

I went out on a reconnaissance to see more of Palestine than glasses opened up. The Staff Officer I accompanied was one of the type which had trained and rendered unbeatable the first of the "contemptible little Army" that helped to save France. A love of nature enabled him to name every bird and flower he saw, the very stones in our path had an interest for him, and while he was ever on the lookout for the enemy or traces of him, the gifts with which God had endowed this land were always a delight, and inspection of them added to his stock of knowledge. The history of the place he knew very thoroughly, and while we were looking at the red roofs and minaret of Gaza, framed in the sage green of olive groves he, omitting the Biblical history of Gaza, which one ought to know, rattled off the Crusader's fights with Saladin in the town, and Napoleon's attack. And when we got into Khan Yunus he told me an

incident in Napoleon's march which few histories relate, although it nearly cut short the career of a great soldier of France. After Napoleon had reduced the fort at El Arish he sent his main force forward through Sheikh Zowaid and Rafa to Khan Yunus, but his commander took the wrong track and found himself a long way to the south, with no water. Some of his troops became mutinous and broke their muskets. Napoleon with an escort of only two hundred men took the right road and was actually on the outskirts of Khan Yunus before he discovered that his army was not in front of him. Arabs attacked the escort and Napoleon had to retire hurriedly to avoid capture. He found a Bedouin at Sheikh Zowaid who had seen the troops in the south and guided Napoleon to them. What the Little Corporal said to his General is not recorded.

When I was in Khan Yunus, on my return to Rafa, field engineers were improving an ancient well in the centre of the town and were placing an engine and pumping set in position. Some Light Horse were guarding them. A Turkish cavalry patrol had not long left the town and had probably crossed the path we had taken. Khan Yunus as you approach it appears a blazing emerald. The art of husbandry is practised here. Barley is the main crop on the veldt outside the town, but within its borders are rich gardens full of fruit trees, tomatoes, artichokes, and all sorts of vegetables. Almonds, peaches, oranges, apricots,



May 13 Aug 1917

NIGHTFALL.

The last night in the desert. A Queensland *chef* prepares a dish of curried bully. [To face p. 120.]

figs, and pomegranates grow everywhere, and the planting does not seem to have been done in any haphazard fashion, though pruning the trees has not been thought of. The town as well as all the gardens are enclosed by dense cactus hedges on high banks, some of the hedges being a dozen feet thick. The living quarters of the town do not cover much ground, and there is a mean bazaar with nothing of interest in it, but facing the square where water is drawn there are the remains of an old palace which local tradition attributes to Saladin. More than one architect has been at work, and the double archway has not been improved by embodying in it two styles of architecture. The inhabitants seem a cheerful, happy-go-lucky lot, but they would be better if habits of cleanliness were forced upon them. The children were indescribably filthy, and the population's idea of sanitation—Ugh!

CHAPTER XIV

AN ARMY OF SPORTSMEN

WHEN we were encamped at Rafa someone looking over the battlefield pointed out that the country to the south and west would make an ideal race-course. There was broad, flat grassy ground in the valley, and the slopes of the mound and on the other side of the valley would accommodate 50,000 spectators with ease. "Here's a course; let us have a meeting," exclaimed another, and forthwith the idea took root. General Chetwode, having faith in the axiom that all work and no play makes a fellow dull, approved, and in a couple of days a meeting—subject always to military exigencies—was planned. In the long history of racing this meeting must hold a unique place. It was held on a battlefield shortly after an action had been fought on it. The horses engaged had nearly all carried men in the battle, and one gallant winner was actually wounded on the very spot where he ran to victory. At least one half of the spectators were officers and men who had fought the action to a triumphant finish, and, having played the

Big Game for the Empire, they came out to see their noble chargers in the sport of kings. And underlying all the sport was never a thought of personal gain. That was abandoned at the inception of the idea. These sportsmen raced and went racing for Generals' cups, and added money they themselves subscribed, but they knew war charities would benefit from a proportion of all entry money and bets, and a sporting crowd was never more satisfied than that at Rafa when it learned that, though not a penny was charged for admission to the course, over £200 was made for charities. The meeting was actually held within a few miles of the enemy, who was always on the lookout for us, and the splendid monetary result would have been bettered if the military situation had not demanded that the date should be advanced one day, on the very morning of which it was necessary to send an infantry division on the march from Rafa.

Sportsmen will read the programme of this classic meeting with interest. "The Desert Column First Spring Meeting" was assured of success from the start, the only concern the promoters had being whether anything in the military situation would demand the attention of the soldier sportsmen. There never was a danger of any of the nine races not filling. Indeed the difficulty was to keep down the entries. Most soldiers believed their chargers to be the speediest in the Command, and nearly all of them thought they were capable jockeys. An

appallingly heavy list of entries was threatened, but good advice tendered by friends curtailed the list, and probably the entrants were the fastest animals in Desert Column. As it was, two races had thirty-nine starters each. What would the mule race, the "Jerusalem Scurry," have been like if the Committee had not limited the entries to one per unit? No gunner, sapper, or attendant of a pack mule would have conceded that another man's mule was faster than his or that to get the best pace out of him (or should it be her?) a whip or spurs were needed. Both were barred in the mule race, rightly you will agree. You could see some training spins all over the countryside before the entries of mules were limited. The trials were gorgeous. At sunset with "no truthful touts or wily watchers" about, mules were put through their best paces. Some displayed their usual unfriendly attitudes on the journey and confounded the timekeepers, others declined to be hustled, and none took a hopeful view of the prospects. When the best mule in a unit had been selected there remained a good deal of doubt about the wisdom of the choice. That was inevitable.

Think of the brisk times the names of the races recalled to the soldier sportsmen of the Desert Column. The Sinai Grand National. The Rafa Cup. The Promised Land Stakes. The Syrian Derby. The Border Stakes. The Anzac Champion Steeplechase. The Ubique Stakes—and the

Jerusalem Scurry. What recollections of other race days when the world was at peace, of race meetings in the home of horse racing, and of those racing festivals in Australia and New Zealand when everybody who is anybody at all makes holiday! Do you think the efficiency of Desert Column suffered? Not a bit of it. It made everyone keener for his work, gave him something else to think of than horse lines, outposts, and patrols, and brought him back for one day at least to the enjoyment of a form of sport nature had fitted him for. Right well did these soldiers play the game. They built the jumps of sandbags and scrub, they enclosed the paddock, put up the starting board, marked out the course, made the totalisator enclosure, and did all things necessary to complete the preparations for a perfectly conducted meeting. To them it was a labour of love. There were no objections and no complaints. The spirit of all was summed up in a paragraph at the end of the day's regulations: "It lies with all ranks to assist the officials and military police in every way in their power. A good day's sport has been arranged for, some small matter may have been overlooked, but, remember, there's a war on."

Most people retain the memories of popular wins and popular horses on the turf. My memory of these matters is short, but I shall always recollect the scene after Minoru's Derby and some wins of Pretty Polly. The racegoer loves a plucky horse

and he will appreciate how it was his brother sportsmen acclaimed Clawstoi when he won the Sinai Grand National, the race of the day at Rafa. Clawstoi has a war record. He was one of a few horses saved from a torpedoed transport hurried into Queenstown with her decks awash. He had been twice wounded in Egypt before he carried his owner into action at Rafa, where he got his third bullet wound. Yet the gallant charger, after having a pipe opener (and third place) in the first race of the day, nobly cleared the heavy jumps in the "National" and came in a winner over the actual course on which he was hit. Can you wonder the soldiers, knowing these things, were boisterously enthusiastic? Some had backed him in the totalisator, more out of sentiment than anything else, for his third earlier in the day was not encouraging, but it was not winnings that accounted for the cheers. It was love for a war-scarred veteran with a big heart that moved the crowd. Through the totalisator that day £2000 passed. As you would expect with big fields some winners paid good money. The starters were too many to hoist all the runners on the board, so only non-starters were put up, and they were very few. All the owners were out to try their luck, but what think you of the lot of the starter who had to marshal thirty-nine starters at the post with no gate? He had little trouble from that crowd of sportsmen whose places at the post were printed on armlets and saddle cloths. It was a glorious

and memorable day. And now, as the sporting papers have it, for—Details!

SINAI HUNT CLUB

Desert Column First Spring Meeting

Proposed to be held at Rafa on Thursday, March 22, 1917,¹ under the patronage of Lieutenant-General Sir P. W. Chetwode, Bart., C.B., D.S.O.

11.30.—The RAFA CUP, presented by Major-General A. G. Dallas, added to a sweepstake of 3510 piastres, open to all ranks of Desert Column, catchweight of 11 st. or over. One mile.

Captain Tooth's Dipso	1
Sergeant Davies' Local	2
Captain Gooch's Clawstoi	3

12.30.—The PROMISED LAND STAKES, cup presented by Major-General W. E. B. Smith, added to a sweepstake of 4140 piastres, open to all ranks of Desert Column except cavalry and artillery, catchweights 11 st. 7 lbs. or over. Six furlongs.

Major Hercus's Maori Chief	1
Major Hercus's Jean	2
Captain Hine's Lancer	3

1.0.—The SYRIAN DERBY for Arabs, for cup presented by Major-General W. W. Hodgson, added to a sweepstake of 3240 piastres, for officers of Desert Column, catchweights 10 st. 7 lbs. or over. Five furlongs.

Lieutenant-Colonel Maclean's Yem Ken	1
Lieutenant Hope's Macrough	2
Lieutenant Thomas's Nobby	3

¹ It was actually held on the 21st.

1.30.—The SINAI GRAND NATIONAL, for cup presented by Sir P. W. Chetwode, Bart., C.B., D.S.O., added to a sweepstake of 5670 piastres, open to all ranks of Desert Column, catchweights 11 st. 7 lbs. or over. Two and a half miles over the steeplechase course.

Captain Gooch's Clawstoi . . .	1
Lieutenant Eustace Smith's Riston . . .	2
Captain Daniells' Lexham . . .	3

2.0.—The STEWARDS' WELTER PLATE, for a piece of plate presented by the Stewards, added to a sweepstake of 5220 piastres, 13 st. or over. One mile.

Lieutenant Neill's Sultan . . .	1
Captain Greer's Kim . . .	2
Trooper Foster's Jim . . .	3

2.30.—The BORDER STAKES, for cup presented by Desert Column Headquarters for ponies 14.3 or under, open to all ranks of Desert Column, catchweights 10 st. 7 lbs. or over. Five furlongs.

Captain Madrell's Directly . . .	1
Major Farr's Mohammed Ali . . .	2
Lieutenant Nugent's Connole . . .	3

3.0.—The ANZAC CHAMPION STEEPLECHASE, for cup presented by Major-General Sir H. G. Chauvel, K.C.M.G., C.B., added to a sweepstake of 5670 piastres, open to all ranks of Desert Column, catchweights 12 st. or over. Two miles round the steeplechase course.

Lieutenant Walker's Seymour . . .	1
Sergeant Steven's Don Tomas . . .	2
Trooper Owen's Baldie . . .	3

3.30.—UBIQUE STAKES, for cup presented by Brigadier-General A. D'A. King, C.B., D.S.O., added to a sweepstake of 2520 piastres, confined to all ranks Royal Artillery, catchweights 11 st. or over. One and a quarter miles.

Lieutenant Isherwood's Lord Rivers	1
Lieutenant Worrall's Trixie	2
Major the Hon. R. Preston's Ladybird.	3

4.0.—The JERUSALEM SCURRY of 600 piastres, for mules, open to N.C.O.'s and men of Desert Column, catchweights. Five furlongs.

2d Battalion Sikh Pioneers, No Name.	1
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IN THE LIBYAN DESERT

CHAPTER XV

THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE SENUSSI

ONE cannot write of the campaign in the Western Desert without feelings of sympathy for the troops, some of whom spent far more than a year in preparing defences, patrolling, and watching the movements of more or less friendly natives, without having the slightest prospect of realising the hopes of a battle or even a skirmish. Some of the first line Yeomanry regiments never fired a shot at the Senussi. The Dorsets and the Bucks had their chances in the early part of the campaign, when Sollum and the coastline to the Italian frontier were won back for Egypt, and we know they made the most of their opportunities, but other regiments, composed of men who did their duty in preparing themselves for Britain's defence before a devastating hand was spread over Europe, had to do the drudgery of war without the compensating excitement of fighting. It was a sore disappointment to become foot sloggers after being trained as cavalry,

but there was not a yeoman who did not willingly surrender his horse when many mounted regiments were brought together and trained as infantry to fight in Palestine. They had had enough of inactivity, whether they had been stationed on the coast refreshed by breezes cooled by the Mediterranean's blue waters, or had been parched and tanned by blistering sands and blazing sun in the silent desert wastes. They were of the breed which sighs for action, men who, after sweltering when the sun was high in the heavens, revitalised their bodies by strenuous field games. They played football with their helmets on, lest an afternoon sun should decrease their fighting qualities. In the Libyan Desert I have heard men ask: "Shall we ever fire a round? How can we go home and meet our people if we keep on like this till the war ends?" These questions betrayed a real anxiety to be at the post of danger, and the answer that the job had to be done by someone brought no consolation. The feeling that they were on "a soft thing" was affecting their morale and sorely distressed them. They will not look with pride upon their part in the Western Desert campaign, though they performed that part as well as it could be done. But it was thin war as war has come to be reckoned.

The Grand Sheikh of the Senussi, Sayed Ahmed, was the head, if not the actual leader, of an elusive force. It kept us on the alert over a front much longer than England, and as difficult to penetrate as any in Africa. We got our hands on the coast-

line as soon as possible and our grip was tight, preventing any supplies of food or weapons reaching the interior. The blockade of the Senussi sphere of influence was complete. The Senussi regular army was never much more than three thousand strong, and the other levies were an undisciplined and ill-armed rabble.

It was not till November, 1915, that Sayed Ahmed was prevailed upon by enemy intriguers to throw in his lot with the German-led Turks. His attitude had been threatening for some time, but on more than one occasion, when it appeared he was about to break with his former friends he changed his policy and became more reasonable, outwardly at least. During the summer we were taught to be on our guard. In the middle of August two British submarines, one of them commanded by the young and gallant officer who was first to navigate a submarine through the nets and mines in the Dardanelles Straits, were driven by stress of weather into an inlet on the rocky coast west of the Gulf of Sollum. An officer and an engineer responded to calls from the shore and set off in a collapsible boat. They were fired upon and both wounded, and the submarines' guns exacted retribution. The Senussi Chief apologised for the incident, and with some show of sincerity declared that the Arabs (there was a German with them) were wholly unaware that the submarines were British. In November the *Tara*, better known as one of the L. & N. W. railway boats running in

peace times between Holyhead and Kingstown, and another ship were torpedoed, and their crews were landed on Cyrenaica and handed over to Senussi. When their release was demanded Sayed Ahmed blandly replied he had heard nothing of the crews, and he affected not to believe the story. Even then we were patient, and it was not till an Egyptian coastguard cruiser had been sunk in Sollum harbour by shells from a German submarine, and three coastguard posts had been attacked by Senussi, that our minds were made up to treat the Grand Sheikh as an open enemy.

Nuri Bey, Enver's half-brother, was in Tripoli and knew the Grand Sheikh's foibles. His vanity, love of money, and a desire for power made him an easy prey to Turkish artifices, and the lure of the wealth of Egypt eventually decided him to join the enemy.

When the vain-glorious Sayed Ahmed decided to test Britain's strength in Egypt, we gave him battle on the coast with a portion of the best troops then in the Protectorate, some Australian Light Horse, New Zealanders, Sikhs, British Yeomanry, and Horse Artillery, the magnificent force of South Africans, who proudly upheld the banner of the Union in France some months after I saw them, and British infantry. It was not an easy task. The country was under winter with heavy rainfalls, bright days, and extremely cold nights. All supplies had to be brought by steamer from Alexandria to Mersa Matruh and other harbours to the west,

and then transported over rough ground, sometimes so sodden that movement was almost impossible. The rains quickly ran off the hard ground to wadis and escaped to the sea, and during the latter part of the march to Sollum the troops suffered agonies of thirst. But they triumphed gloriously, and between December 11, 1915, and March 14, 1916, our troops fought outside Matruh and marched 150 miles to Sollum, beating the enemy wherever he was met, and securing a hold on the coastline which has never since been relaxed for a moment.

No correspondents witnessed the operations. In February there were in Egypt four of us possessing the War Office licence to accompany troops in the field. Our licences attached us to the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force which was General Sir Archibald Murray's command. General Sir John Maxwell, commanding in Cairo, had the direction of operations in Western Egypt. However, soon afterwards, when Western Egypt was brought under Sir Archibald Murray, two of us travelled as far as Sollum and gathered details from officers engaged in the conduct of that vigorous, brilliant little campaign. If I cannot describe the operations as an eye-witness, I can at any rate write from the best possible sources of information.

The operations against the Senussi were uniformly successful. We did not effect the capture of the Grand Sheikh, though a bomb dropped near

him and killed two of his attendants, but many of his followers were killed or wounded. Not one "unfortunate incident" marred the campaign. Sayed Ahmed was not a courageous man like the Mahdi, old Osman Digna, or Ali Dinar. He always fled on the first shot being fired or on a report that the British were approaching, and if his frequent movements necessitated columns being sent out from many points on the western frontier, we have the satisfaction of knowing the treacherous Chief of the Senussi was driven from all his retreats to the wilds of the Sahara. Here, his love of luxury could scarcely be gratified, and he has had time to ponder over the past. Doubtless he is a sadder, perhaps a wiser, man.

In December, 1915, General Wallace went to Mersa Matruh with mounted troops and some infantry. Matruh is more easily reached by sea than by land. There is a railway from Alexandria to Dabaa, built by the Khedive Abbas when he thought there was money to be made by developing land on the north. If rumour is to be relied upon, Abbas's method of acquiring railway material made railway construction a comparatively inexpensive matter, and when he was negotiating with some capitalists (among them, Germans) for the sale of his line after the development of his land schemes proved unpromising, the price he was to obtain was remunerative. But Lord Kitchener got wind of the negotiations, and, to the discomfiture of Abbas, the Great Man's "No, no," ended

the deal and the line was secured for Egypt. Abbas, however, was paid a good market price and the line is unlikely ever to yield interest on the outlay. Dabaa is eighty-five miles from Matruh, and what is known as the Khedivial road connects the two places. Cars move over it at fair speed.

Our camp at Matruh was near the harbour, a beautifully situated anchorage with water so deep that vessels could tie up to the side, not far from where a portion of Cleopatra's summer villa still remains, without a pile being driven for a wharf. Some high sand-hills were occupied to protect the camp and the few Senussi snipers who crept in at night did no damage. On December 7th General Wallace moved his headquarters to Matruh and collected his force, or as much of it as was not required to guard his line of communications and the wells.

The outlying garrisons from Sollum eastward were brought into Matruh, and gradually the troops left at Dabaa on the road joined the main body. During a reconnaissance on December 11th, Colonel Snow, of the Egyptian Coastguard Service, was shot in the stomach and killed by a native he was interrogating, and the force was poorer for the loss of the officer who more than any other knew the country and the people. Wherever I went in the west I heard regrets at Colonel Snow's death, and I am sure that in this case the Bedouins' expressions of sorrow were sincere. There were two or three energetic en-

gements in the middle of December. A small column moving westwards encountered 1200 enemy with two guns in the Wadi Shaifa on the 13th, and was in a critical position until the arrival of two guns of the Notts R. H. A. battery and some of the Australian Light Horse when the enemy was driven back with the loss of 180 killed. We had a few casualties.

The Senussi became overbold and brought his army towards Matruh. About eight miles southwest of the port is a dominating hill called Jebel Medwa, and near it, running in an irregular line to the coast, is the Wadi Mergid, a rough watercourse torn by winter torrents, the sides of which are full of caves, solely inhabited, when Bedouins leave these holes, by vermin. In winter the country is stony and barren, but in spring the bed of the wadi is carpeted with flowers of the most brilliant hues, crimson, blue, and gold blooms nodding in the breeze and making a riot of colour. On Christmas Eve the enemy had concentrated about five thousand men near the hill of Medwa with four guns and machine guns under the command of Gaafer, a Turk with a German military education, an officer capable of acting with boldness. General Wallace decided to drive the Senussi away from Matruh, and formed his force into two columns, that on the right being commanded by a resourceful officer, Colonel J. L. R. Gordon, of the Sikhs, while Brigadier-General J. D. T. Tyndale Biscoe had charge of the left column, consisting exclu-

sively of mounted troops. H.M.S. *Clematis*, one of the rapidly built "flower" class of sloops, stood by to help from the sea. The columns moved out of Matruh at half-past four on Christmas morning, hours before the Eastern sky gave any promise of light. The infantry came under fire at daybreak, but drove the enemy beyond the hill to an escarpment near the wadi. The Sikhs, reinforced by the New Zealand Rifles, made a frontal attack, supported by the Bucks Hussars and a Territorial battalion of the "Die Hards,"¹ and the behaviour of the Indians and New Zealanders made the men of the two battalions strong comrades. The Senussi got into the caves and gullies when the Notts battery shelled them from the escarpment (a direct hit on a Turkish mountain gun was one of the many good rounds fired that day), and the progress down the wadi became difficult. Every cave was cleared, and then the column engaged in sweeping the country south, consisting of mounted troops, finally drove them off; in the afternoon we had the satisfaction of counting 370 enemy dead and eighty-two prisoners. The Senussi took their wounded away, but they left a large amount of live stock, camels, and ammunition.

The columns got back to Matruh on Boxing Day, but Brigadier-General the Earl of Lucan was on the move again on the 28th with a small column to attack a force at Jerawla, where aviators reported enemy camps. The column covered

¹ The Middlesex Regiment.



BACTERIA.

In the laboratory of a Field Hospital, the London specialist and his assistant (an ex-grocer) examine the contents of a test tube.

[To face p. 138.

twenty-seven miles in thirty-two hours over extremely rough country and destroyed several encampments, but the enemy had taken his Wadi Mergid lesson very much to heart and had fled on our approach. A hundred camels and five hundred sheep were a welcome capture. The next month was mainly devoted to preparing for a bigger move. There were some minor operations, but these were much interfered with by a week's tremendous rainfall, the heavens opening and sending down a deluge with scarcely a bright period for seven days. The soil yielding the much-prized Matruh barley became a mass of slippery mud and, when the clouds lifted, it took three days of sunshine and wind to make the tracks passable. Airmen made long flights whenever the weather was clear, and on January 10th a report was received that between three hundred and four hundred tents including the Grand Senussi's were at Halazin, twenty-five miles south-west of Matruh. That looked as if the enemy was in strength, and General Wallace waited until the arrival of one of the South African battalions before setting out to engage him, which he did on January 22d. The attack was made when the elements were in forbidding mood. The country was a mass of mud. Horses toiled in it and became excessively fatigued, the infantry were often over their boot tops, the armoured cars could not move, and the field ambulances and supply column had to be left miles in the rear. It was a desperately hard day of fighting on the 23d, with a cunning

enemy refusing to be drawn into close quarters, retiring slowly and methodically on to his main positions, and yet frequently threatening our flanks and always holding the advantage of ground. The mirage was another of our enemies, and it is doubtful whether anywhere on earth this fickle, dancing light, which magnifies some objects while completely obscuring others, could be found so troublesome as it was before Halazin. Led by the Sikhs, the South Africans and New Zealanders had to move over a long unbroken flat, but the enemy's guns and machine guns, accurately served though they were, could not stop them, and the main line was reached while the flanks were still threatened.

The day's fighting ended about three in the afternoon with the rout of the Senussi army, but no pursuit was possible in the condition of the ground, and the remainder of daylight was given up to the destruction of the camp. The trials of the troops were not over, however. It is not prudent to bivouac near the site of a Senussi camping ground, which is not only covered with biting insects but is otherwise unclean. Therefore our men marched two miles to the east where no down wind would carry traces of the tainted encampment. But sleep was denied to weary frames. The night was very wet and bitterly cold. To secure freedom of movement during the day, blankets and greatcoats had been left with the supply train which was bogged several miles away. The field ambulance was full, and the troops had just to huddle together

and shiver through the long dark hours. Dawn came without any comforts, and the force had to trudge in the mud for several miles to Bir Shola, hauling all vehicles by hand, for the trace horses could only manage to pull themselves out of the clay. The wounded were carried on stretchers, twelve men in reliefs being allotted to each stretcher, and it took eight hours to reach the bivouac and food. A bright and fine day on the 25th brought the column whistling and singing into Matruh, happy at the thought that they had "Knocked spots off" the Senussi, whose casualties are believed to have been at least seven hundred in this engagement. General Maxwell reported: "In the success obtained on the 23d, especial praise is due to the leading of Colonel Gordon, who commanded the main attack, and to the gallantry of the Sikhs, the South Africans, and the New Zealanders, who fought with invincible dash and resolution throughout the day." I have heard similar praise of these troops from officers unconnected with any of these battalions, and all regretted that circumstances compelled the New Zealanders to rejoin their brigade on the eastern bank of the Canal and thus sever their connection with the West Force.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MARCH ON SOLLUM

MAJOR-GENERAL W. E. PEYTON took over the command from General Wallace on February 9th, and it was decided to make for Sollum, not by the Khedivial road which runs from Barrani by the shore, but, after defeating the enemy barring our path to Barrani, to scale the steep escarpment which holds up the vast inland plateau several hundreds of feet above the sea level and to get behind Sollum and its old walled fort. The Navy was to assist by gunfire and by landing troops and supplies, but to surprise the enemy by sea at Sollum was an impossibility, because ships could not go into the bay without a preliminary sweep for mines. The town of Sollum consists of three houses on the flat shore of a beautiful bay. Beyond the few hundred yards of fairly level sand there is a rough uneven wall rising very abruptly some seven hundred feet above sea level, and this escarpment runs round the Libyan Plateau for many scores of miles. To approach the plateau from Sollum with the line of the escarpment occu-

ped would have courted disaster. There are only one or two possible paths, and half a dozen well-placed machine guns could easily control them. One of the ascents is a Roman road scarcely used for 1500 years but still in good condition in places, and when I walked up it Royal Scots and Middlesex men were preparing a better surface than the road possessed in the days of the ancient colonisers. Nobody who has seen Sollum could doubt the wisdom of recapturing the place from the top.

On February 20th General Peyton ordered General Lukin to advance with his force of the South Africans, a squadron of the Bucks Hussars, the Dorset Yeomanry, Notts battery, and a detachment of the Royal Scots. Barrani was the objective, and this port was to be the jumping-off place for Sollum, stores and water being ready for despatch by sea to Barrani when it should be gained. General Lukin soon ascertained that the main body of the enemy was at Agagia, fourteen miles south-east of Barrani, and with it were Nuri Bey and Gaafer. The Grand Sheikh, trembling in his slippers, was on his way to Siwa by easy stages enjoying all the possible comforts his followers could provide. He travelled *viâ* Sollum, and at Bir Waer I saw the ruins of his burnt tent and high four-post bedstead, which he had to destroy when we pressed closely on his heels. General Lukin thought he was strong enough to attack Agagia, and camped a few miles from it on the 24th, intending to rest his men on the 25th and attack the

following day. Gaafer, however, thought otherwise. He had shown no little ability in leading, and on the afternoon of the 25th he brought up two guns and machine guns and fired into our camp. Little damage was done, but General Lukin changed his plan for a night march and attacked in daylight. By eleven o'clock he was attacking Agagia with the South Africans, the Dorset Yeomanry, and two armoured cars placed on the right flank ready to pursue the moment the enemy broke, and two armoured cars and the Bucks Hussars on the left. Adopting tactics similar to those at Halazin, the *muhafzia* moved at the double to get round our left, but some of the South Africans were quickly in support, and the counter attack ebbed away. Immediately the General withdrew the Bucks and sent them to reinforce the mounted men on his right, then, throwing in the remainder of his reserves and two other armoured cars, attacked the main position and compelled the enemy to fly. This was the Dorset Yeomanry's opportunity, and Colonel Souter embraced it without a moment's hesitation. He did not wish to get mixed up in the sand-hills where wire and trenches might have held him up, so for a time he pursued a line parallel to the line of retreat, attacking with dismounted fire whenever the horses required a breather. The Bucks had gone on ahead. The enemy camels and baggage were in front with the Senussi regulars with Maxims forming the rear and flank guards. Then Colonel Souter decided to go

for the enemy in two lines, and galloping steadily till within fifty yards of the rearguard, he gave the order to charge, and, to quote his report, "with one yell the Dorsets hurled themselves into the enemy, who immediately broke. In the middle of the enemy's lines my horse was killed under me, and, by a curious chance, his dying strides brought me within a few yards of the Senussi general, Gaafer Pasha." Colonel Souter had only an officer and a yeoman with him, and around them were fifty Senussi, but a machine-gun section soon came up, and Gaafer and his staff were captured. Colonel Souter says: "It is difficult accurately to express the effect of this cavalry charge on the enemy. Throughout the day he had fought with extreme boldness, but when the horses got into him he had only one thought, and that was to get away." That charge will live in Yeomanry history. The victory was bought at a price. One squadron, all of whose leaders were killed or horseless, rode too far, the yeomen, exhilarated by this charge through the enemy, carrying on when, under officers' control, they would have been pulled up. This squadron had most casualties, but the survivors know how their work that day put the Senussi in great fear, so that they never stood up to us again.

General Lukin got to Barrani, and the two thousand supply camels allocated for transport were not able to supply the force at once. The Navy, however, always ready in an emergency, accommodated itself to the acceleration, and laden supply

ships poured stores into the port and got up the remaining regiments of the South Africans, while a mounted brigade and the Hong Kong and Singapore mountain battery were at Barrani by March 8th. General Peyton's scheme now was that the Plateau force should consist of two battalions of infantry, a camel corps company, the armoured cars, and the Hong Kong and Singapore battery, and that the remainder of the troops should proceed west by the coast road. On the night of the 13-14th the two columns were abreast of each other, and when proceeding on their respective routes in the morning, an aeroplane dropped a message that the enemy was leaving his camps. The mounted troops then joined General Lukin on the plateau. A little later, an aeroplane discovered a large party of Senussi about twenty miles west of Sollum, and the armoured cars under Major the Duke of Westminster went after the enemy.

On this and on some subsequent days the carmen had some thrilling experiences. They passed by the fort of Sollum, which was empty, and skirted Bir Waer, where a German-owned ammunition factory had been burnt. Guided by a native who knew the Tobruk road, a curious highway which begins in the desert, the cars bumped along at a steady pace till they came to a well on the left side of the road. A camp there was examined, and the cars proceeded to Aziza, about two miles farther on, where they came under shell fire. Then



from Wesley 10 July 1917

BIVOUACS.

Patches of priceless shade are obtained by stretching blankets on the butts of rifles stuck in the sand by the fixed bayonets, with, as weights, water fantasies, saddlebags and saddles. [To face p. 146.

they turned to the left at a given signal so as to get in line, and charged into a Senussi position, wiping out a mountain-gun and two machine-gun crews and guns. The appearance of the cars struck terror in Senussi hearts, and the whole country was soon covered with men and camels trekking off to the south-west. On getting through the camp the cars went on independently, shooting all loaded camels and men within reach. Two of these camels carried mixed loads of petrol and high explosive shell. The perforated petrol cans caught fire, and the shells exploded, which made the camp followers fall on their knees, beat the ground with their foreheads, and call on Allah's aid. "The Turkish gunners stuck to their guns like good men. When we passed them without killing them they turned round and continued firing at us, so that we had to go back and finish them," one of the officers told me. The cars collected three mountain guns and nine machine guns with 250,000 rounds of small-arm ammunition and several boxes of shell. Two of the cars stood by all night to protect the captures, and the remainder retraced their tracks to Sollum, to find our infantry in occupation. The Senussi did not venture on Aziza again.

Thus ended the campaign on the coast, though a day or two later the armoured cars and light ambulance cars made the historic dash to Bir Hakim to rescue and bring back the *Tara* prisoners. Of that remarkable exploit a great deal, but not too much, has been written. It was a feat worthy

of the armoured car divisions and of the Duke of Westminster, who, when most of those in the small mobile column were afraid the guides had lost their bearings, was always an optimist. On the drivers seeing a group of starving men, astounded at the sound of throbbing engines when they had resigned themselves to starvation—their diet of snails had almost given out—the cars started to race towards them. That race was won by Lieutenant W. Griggs, the famous jockey, who told me it was the finest "classic" in which he had ever ridden.

In slightly over three weeks General Peyton's force had cleared 150 miles of country, had severely damaged the influence of Sayed Ahmed as spiritual head of the Senussi confraternity, and had relieved the Administration of much anxiety in the Delta, where a good deal of agitation had been carried on in secret. The success of the force in the coastal area may even have prevented an outbreak of rebellion in Egypt.

The campaign had an importance to the Empire far beyond that of relieving the Egyptian seaboard of the presence of an enemy invader. It was an object lesson of Imperial unity, and long after the war the effect of this little "side show" of the world war will be felt in most corners of the earth where the British flag flies. The comradeship of troops drawn from four continents was cemented by the strongest welding influence—close association on the field of battle—and mutual admiration

of each other's qualities forged ties which will grow firmer when the Empire's soldiers separate after their work is done, and return to spread the good report among their people.

A word or two about the country which has been regathered to the British and Egyptian flags. Except for the fringe along the coast, it is inhospitable, and everywhere it is waterless. The wells are not worth the name. Save in the sponging season, when a profitable trade is allowed to be carried on by Greeks, who spend nothing in Egypt and carry away their harvest to be handled in their own country, there is no export other than Matruh barley. Whether there will ever be commercial prospects for Western Egypt is problematical, but politically the importance of the long stretch which we have garrisoned is unquestionable. Mersa Matruh is the principal town. It has a dozen houses, nearly all owned by Greeks who fled on Senussi rumours. The harbour is quite good for vessels drawing fifteen feet, and in it I was comfortably stormbound on a small coastguard vessel in one of the worst gales the veteran skipper remembered in these waters. There are many traces of an old civilisation here, and Cleopatra's villa, now only a few feet above the white sands which enclose the blue waters of the harbour, is worthy of an antiquarian's studies. So are the tombs. Catacombs are found for miles around, but they were long ago visited by people with less respect for burial-places than British troops, and

only the holes cut deep into stone are of interest. Sidi Barrani and the other small ports are of value to the coastguard, who ceaselessly watch for the smuggling of arms and other things harmful in Bedouin hands. The country is barren and is a fickle support for Arabs, their camels and flocks, and unless water, which has eluded the search of engineers, is found, the plateau will never support more than a wandering population.

CHAPTER XVII

DESERT DRIVES

TO put an end completely to his power for mischief it became advisable in the autumn and winter to drive Sayed Ahmed from the three important oases in the Libyan desert whither he had fled. His army was very much attenuated. Typhus and other fell diseases had taken a heavy toll, and of the prisoners we captured many were sick and emaciated. The daily ration of $1\frac{1}{2}$ lbs. of rice and fat for cooking was a thing of the past, thanks mainly to our control of the coast, and the muhafzia lived on what they could rob from the population of the oases, who are themselves rarely plentifully supplied except in the date season. Consequently, the Senussi were not welcome guests, and when British light car patrols and Australian Camel Corps chased them out of Dakhla, the people rushed out of their rude mud huts and kissed the hands of their deliverers. There was no mistaking the welcome. A simple, artless folk, who were under no sort of direction, left their work in the small square fields to break down the irriga-

tion channels they had prepared with care and no little skill, in order that the armed motor cars might have an improved path to go in pursuit of the enemy. Anything they had was at the service of the troops, and the whereabouts of the few Senussi sick remaining in Dakhla were disclosed with a readiness which suggested how truly pleased the people were to be rid of them and to be at peace again. Similarly, when there was that remarkable dash of cars to Siwa early in the following year, the Siwans came out in crowds and expressed their thankfulness at the departure of the Senussi rabble, offered presents of sheep and asked to be allowed to send men to repair the road up a pass which the enemy had blown up, so that the cars might make a comfortable ascent up the escarpment on the return journey. The Senussi army had lived by terror in Siwa, and had proved themselves worthy allies of the Hun and the Turk.

Of the three oases from which Sayed Ahmed was ejected Siwa is the most interesting, if not the most ancient. Until our troops got to it few white men of this generation had cast eyes on the town, which, from a few miles off, looks like a gaunt and battered mediæval fortress, standing sentinel to the hidden secrets of some ancient unknown world beyond. On closer approach nothing less like a fortification could be imagined. The town is built on a rock. The houses stand tier on tier till sometimes eight ramshackle dwellings cumber a few square yards of ground. The material used in construction is

rock salt and mud-bricks with palm-trunk supports, the walls being thick at the base and very flimsy in structure at the top. When it rains the walls become soft and unstable, and the annual death-roll from falling houses is substantial. There is a wall on the east side of the town 120 feet high, and this is continued round the town, though on the west it is of a lower height—about seventy-five feet. The main gate facing north is approached by a long flight of steps cut into the rock.

There is scope for the town planner at Siwa. Any place more unsanitary or more impossible to Western ideas of decency and comfort cannot be conceived. What serve as "streets" are noisome passages a yard or even less wide, the surface frequently broken by steps, and always slimy and slippery with accumulated filth. These passages carry roofs of palm logs and in places form tunnels beneath houses. They are always dark, and in parts no ray of light ever relieves the unutterable gloom. Who can be surprised in these circumstances that the Siwans are extremely unreliable, superstitious, have a low code of morals, and are dirty? Fortunately a new town is being built, with streets less likely to become saturated with filth and breeding places of pestilence, and the stone-walled houses should be proof against sun and rain. Dates form the principal crop of Siwa, and being large and of good quality, they command a ready sale in Egypt, whither in peace times large camel convoys proceed. Other fruits, apricots,

figs, lemons, grapes, and olives, grow luxuriantly, and the oasis also yields some grain.

Perhaps a future Administration will teach the Siwans the virtues of cleanliness. There is no excuse for their dirt, for Nature has been abundant in her gifts of water in this spot awaiting the touch of the civilising hand. There are two hundred springs in the neighbourhood, about eighty of them yielding water fit for drinking and irrigating the cultivated land. Here, as in many other places in the desert which guard the flanks of Egypt, evidence of the skill and industry of the old Romans still remains. Some of the wells are lined with stone, hewn and shaped by Roman masons, and generally it is in these wide-mouthed water holes that the water is clearest and most sparkling. The Romans made the most of the best that was offered them. Probably they, too, originated the cisterns which store water when it is plentiful and not wanted for irrigation. In both the eastern and western deserts I have been lowered into some of these cisterns which have stood the disintegrating effect of many centuries, and do their work as well to-day as when they were cut with instruments probably softer than the modern soldier's entrenching tool.

A mile and a half east of Siwa is the substantial village of Aghurmi, which, like Siwa itself, is built on a rock and on the same unhealthful pattern, though the streets are somewhat wider. The population is of a better class than the Siwans,

who, fairer than the Egyptian fellaheen, are physically below the Nile Valley standard. Within a circumference of a quarter of a mile underneath the hamlet of Aghurmi are a dozen springs, and you may take your choice of them as your fancy leads you to hot or cold, fresh or salt water. There are other smaller congregations of people in the oasis, the lowest in the order being the rock dwellers at Maraghe, who, being unwilling, incapable, or too lazy to build habitations for themselves—or perhaps it is from choice—live there in the tombs of some long-forgotten people.

It is a journey of many days from Siwa to the Dakhla oasis, to which Sayed Ahmed wended his weary way when dreaded armoured cars were seen on reconnaissance on the top of the escarpment a few miles north of Siwa, in April, 1916. Only an Arab or a white man with a stout heart and well-laden convoy would make the trip, which for hundreds of miles is over a wilderness of sand unrelieved by a single palm, and without a well to yield comfort to a parched tongue. Sayed Ahmed and his crowd later in the year had to make the journey in the reverse direction through the Baharia oasis, which we were approaching, and his stay there was only sufficiently long to enable his men and camels to take a short rest and to drink of the gratifying, though poor quality of water the wells there yield. The progress south had been more leisurely, because undisturbed by us, but though he got to Dakhla and remained there some

months (it is to be hoped the mosquitoes bit him as fiercely as they attacked our troops) he never got within a hundred miles of the Nile Valley, which, in his boastful moods, he threatened to overrun. While he was in Dakhla there was always a possibility that he would exert an evil influence on a portion of the Egyptian natives, not because British rule has not worked untold good for the fellah, but because he is easily stirred on religious grounds. Senussi emissaries did get to Kharga, and possibly they moved towards Assouan, but a vigilant watch prevented any untoward incident, and the overwhelming defeat of the Sultan of Darfur, at the end of May, must have forced Sayed Ahmed's hopes down to zero, as it undoubtedly convinced the Upper Egyptian fellahen that Britain was invincible.

The Senussi chief remained at Dakhla until October, when he must have spent some very anxious hours. In a country where Bedouins are always moving about, he doubtless heard of our preparations at Kharga, an interesting oasis wherein enterprise and a large expenditure of private capital have failed to regain for the district the prosperity it is reputed to have had when it formed part of the Egyptian Empire in the period about 1500 years before the Christian era. Ninety miles from the Nile Valley Kharga stands in a vast natural depression. Our troops in Kharga did very well. There was a fine swimming bath for men and another for officers. Into the latter

water poured from a gushing spring, and the presence of this splendid flow accounted for the Roman fort and other remains of the early colonisers. There was a substantial body of these Romans in Kharga at one time, for here was their penal settlement (a convict establishment at Sherika, near by, was used until recently by the Egyptian Government), and the ruins of early Christian monasteries and a necropolis of more than ordinary interest still exist. The village of Kharga was rarely visited by soldiers. Parts of it offended more than one of the senses, and a plague of mosquitoes made a long stay in it undesirable. There were some cases of typhus here.

In order to prepare for our advance on Dakhla supplies were accumulated, and, later on, the Water Dump became a base for the armoured and light cars, and from this spot the troops in Dakhla, over fifty miles away, were provisioned, a heavy task most successfully accomplished. The clearing of the Dakhla oasis was quite a dashing little affair, and I purposely go into details to tell how eagerly our men did their job, undeterred by the trials of heat, thirst, and fatigue in a country quite unknown to them, and where at any moment they might have been ambushed. The work was typical of that which had to be accomplished in other places, and it will help to convince the people at home that, if there were periods of enforced inactivity in Egypt which were distinctly distasteful to the troops, the moment there was big business

afoot they displayed the finest military qualities. On October 9th and 10th, Lieutenant Armstrong, Intelligence Officer, made a reconnaissance of Mut, at the southern end of the oasis, about 110 miles from Kharga, and reports brought in, subsequently confirmed by aerial observations, were to the effect that a general exodus of the Senussi from the oasis had begun. Colonel McNeill (afterwards Brigadier-General commanding some dismounted Yeomanry), who commanded in this area, decided to try to get into touch with any of the enemy left in Dakhla, and after making arrangements for the establishment of an advanced post for water and rations, at daybreak on October 15th, despatched Lieutenant Armstrong, Lieutenant Lindsay, and Lieutenant Gayford with six light patrol cars and three Lewis guns, a Ford delivery van with signallers, and ten motor cyclists. The signallers were dropped at Mount McNeill, thirty-five miles on the Gubari road. An armoured car and tender, which had been searching for a track up the scarp north of the Gubari road, was recalled and sent to meet the light car patrol at a former Senussi post seventy-three miles on the road, while two sections of the Australian company Imperial Camel Corps under Lieutenant Mills went out in support of the cars. A motor transport train of six cars commenced making a dump of water, petrol, and rations fifty-six miles from Kharga.

Captain Wright, of the Imperial Camel Corps, who was in Cairo on duty when it was decided to

move into Dakhla, made a record journey south to Kharga, and immediately left in a supply car to take charge of the operations, the light car patrol having more than a day's start of him. Lieutenant Armstrong occupied Tenida on the afternoon of the 16th, and sent in a message that the Senussi who had not already left the oasis were concentrating with a view to proceeding to Siwa. The supply arrangements were found to be working exceedingly well, and it was therefore decided to send another section of the camel corps into the oasis. On the afternoon of the 17th, Lieutenant Armstrong with four patrol cars was on his way through Belat, on the northern fringe of the oasis, where a number of the enemy were reported to be, to make a sweeping movement towards the centre of the western portion of the oasis, the road being favourable that way; Captain Wright moving westwards through the oasis. Armstrong's party made magnificent progress and late in the day reached Budkhulu, between Rashida and Qasr Dakhil, the principal village in Dakhla. The going became impossible for cars, but as it was learned that a body of Barassa Arabs was just ahead, a few men from the cars, taking two Lewis guns, pressed on and found the enemy on a hillside nine hundred yards away. Shortly after the attack began, the headman appeared with a white flag and surrendered with forty-five men, camels, and donkeys. Information was forthcoming that the Siwa taboor was at Bir Sheikh Mohammed, the westernmost of the wells,

nine miles away, but the car crews had had little rest for three days and nights, and they were compelled to bivouac at Budkhulu to await the arrival of the camel corps. Mosquitoes gave them no peace. The insects were so thick that a man standing up had a cloud of them around him. On the 18th, while awaiting Captain Wright's arrival at Budkhulu, Lieutenant Armstrong rushed down to Rashida and arrested ten Senussi in the Omda's house. Captain Wright assuming command went on to Bir Sheikh Mohammed, rounded up forty Senussi, and burnt the Grand Sheikh's farm buildings there. A systematic drive of the whole oasis was afterwards begun, and after a three days' search of the villages a total bag of 181 Senussi was secured, including several officers and seven Egyptian coastguards who had traitorously left their posts in the coastal section and joined the enemy. A large number of rifles and ammunition and revolvers were taken. There was some fine work done during the operation. The Australian camelry marched 130 miles in four days, and the motor supply column and two camel convoys carried 50,000 lbs. of rations, forage, and petrol. The cars were a great success in this region. The desert from Water Dump A was criss-crossed with their tracks, and where the going was hard, as it often was, excellent speeds were maintained. You could not get together a better band of cheery, loyal, energetic, robust men than the fellows serving with the motors, armoured-car sections, light car patrols,

and supply cars. They possessed the keenness of scouts and had the determination to get the most out of their machines, and the way they nursed Ford cars, which had done thousands of miles of the roughest possible travelling in the desert and still carried heavy loads over long journeys, stamped them not only as good motorists but as splendid soldiers of the King. So we who have seen them at their work in places a hundred miles or more from civilisation will always regard them.

The Senussi chief travelled north from Dakhla through the Farafra oasis to the Baharia and did not wait to meet us there, although we added to our toll of prisoners. Sayed Ahmed sought the seclusion of Siwa, from which, as I shall presently tell, he was summarily ejected, together with his chief of staff, the Egyptian ex-coastguard officer who went over to him at Sollum early in the war. The Senussi had a rough journey from the Baharia oasis, and many of his men, weakened by disease and lack of food, died on the way. In the Baharia, as in other places in the Western Desert, the motor-car services were most admirably performed. I went out from General Herbert's camp at Shousha to Blockhouse Six, where the Montgomery Yeomanry were encamped, in a Rolls-Royce touring car which carried five men and a pile of kit.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE DASH ON SIWA

So far as those of us who were with the Egyptian Expeditionary Force know, no motor-car column has done anything on so large a scale in the war as the swift descent on the Siwa oasis in February, 1917, when, apart from the splendid feat of conquering tremendous natural obstacles and of revictualling and munitioning a force which had only left its base, two hundred miles behind, three days before, the car crews fought a stubborn and well-hidden enemy for twenty hours, and during the night twenty-two men remained within five hundred yards of a foe outnumbering them by fully twenty-five to one. Sayed Ahmed was known to be at Siwa during the winter with Mohammed Saleh, his coastguard chief of staff, and the remnants of his army, eight hundred strong. It was decided to oust him from Siwa and to send him on his travels again. To employ infantry or camelry was absolutely out of the question. It was exclusively a motor column, and only the fighting, medical, and supply services were carried.

Soon after dawn on February 1st, out of the western exit from Matruh, motors of various classes churned up the road. Rolls-Royce armoured cars, Talbot wagons, Ford light patrol and supply cars, a Daimler lorry carrying a Krupp gun made in 1871 and captured from the enemy in 1916, and over a score of motor lorries sent up a cloud of dust which made travelling exceedingly uncomfortable. To the surprise of everybody but their riders, two motor cycles managed to plough their way through from end to end.

The force under General Hodgson bivouacked ninety miles from the coast and went on next day to near the top of the escarpment, some fifteen miles from Siwa. It was then three o'clock, and when bearings had been taken, the road shown on the map was found to be inaccurately marked. A reconnaissance was necessary not only to locate Girba, a series of low rough hills where the enemy was hiding, but to discover a place down which the cars could enter the depression, our information telling us that the Segga Pass, which had always been considered by Bedouins as the only possible road from Siwa to the country beyond the escarpment, was mined. An officer returned with the news that he had found a possible track for the cars. Like all other armoured-car men, he was a cheerful optimist. An ordinary motorist would have turned giddy at the thought of driving over the place. The officer had selected a spot where the escarpment, instead of having a sheer cliff face,

bulged slightly outwards towards the flat, and knowing the drivers' willingness to take any risks, he was confident they would get to the bottom. At any rate nothing else concerned him at the moment, the question of getting back again was a matter to be settled by-and-by. The capacity of the men at the wheels had not been underrated. If you have seen a boat descending a water chute and throwing up clouds of spray as it enters the water, you get some idea of the passage of the cars down that giddy unstable sandy path, which Nature never intended should be used by man, machine, or beast. Every car negotiated the rough-and-tumble track except those in the supply service and twenty cars detached to take the Munasib Pass, thirty miles to the west, in case the enemy should attempt to break out on the caravan route to Jarabub. The armoured cars led the way to Girba, and the whole of them were in action by ten o'clock within three hundred yards of the enemy's position. They had a hot reception. The tops of the turrets had been removed to save weight, and the muhafzia scampered from their places of security behind rocks to the top of the limestone cliffs and poured down a plunging fire in the hope of hitting the machine gunners inside the cars. Leaving one car in the centre to engage the enemy, the remainder moved to the right and left to enfilade the position, and for half an hour this one car received the heavy fire of two ten-pounder mountain guns, two machine guns, and eight hun-

dred rifles. The crew fought most gallantly and gave infinitely more than they received.

Farther in the rear the patrols in unarmoured Ford cars with machine guns soon came into action, and so sprinkled the hill that the enemy dared not show a head. At noon a Senussi bugler sounded the "charge," and many of the enemy rose as if to make an advance, but our machine gunners did such execution that they quickly dropped back into cover. In the meantime the armoured cars retired to one thousand yards to get out of the plunging fire, but in the afternoon they advanced to within five hundred yards, and whenever a target presented itself an enemy usually fell. So matters remained till the sun went down. All through the night the armoured cars were stationary, being continuously sniped and occasionally giving a burst from their guns on spots the bearings of which had been taken before darkness fell. Such a wholesome dread have the Senussi of the armoured cars, that more than six hundred of them made no attempt to rush the band of twenty-two.

The moon sank behind the sand dunes at 5 A. M., and immediately after the Senussi fired two shells, evidently the signal for retirement. Flames broke out on the top of the ridge, and a succession of reports told that a mass of small-arm ammunition was being thrown on the fire. We could do nothing more than use the machine guns against this target, and when dawn broke, figures silhouetted against the sky line showed the enemy and their

camels trekking westward, a long way out of range and impossible to reach owing to the precipitous hillside. We destroyed the remainder of the camp, collected arms and ammunition which the Senussi could ill afford to lose, and waited for a report from the party at Munasib. The commander, Captain Mangles, was in wireless communication with General Hodgson. His guides had caused him to go eighty miles out of his way, but when he arrived opposite Munasib it was found absolutely impossible to take the heavy armoured cars down the escarpment, and only by man handling were a few light patrol cars got on to the sandy flat. Even these were unable to operate owing to the difficult ground. Nevertheless with his depleted force Captain Mangles ambushed the head of the Senussi column, which was caught in such a deadly fire that an eye-witness described the whipping of bullets in the sand as giving to the surface the appearance of boiling water. The men who escaped ran up the hill well out of range and signalled to the remainder to take another route.

Sayed Ahmed and his commander were never in the fight. They left Siwa when they heard of the arrival of the cars, and nothing was seen of them. Five of the nine Turkish officers with the enemy were wounded, and fully two hundred Senussi soldiers were killed or wounded. At 9 A.M. on February 5th, our force entered Siwa where a salute was fired and the General received the notables on the steps of the court-house. Captain Prothero



ARMENIAN REFUGEE MAKING FLY-NETS.

From a hut comes the clack of looms as the old men weave cotton for the Red Cross. In another hut the dyers stir the blue in vats.

Further on the women make rugs and fly-nets, and throughout the whole camp is the hushed stir of quiet industry.

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captured a Senussi officer in one of Siwa's dark streets, his demeanour indicated that he expected death, and his surprise was almost ludicrous when he found next day that the General, being unable to find a seat in the cars for a prisoner, released him. The column got back to Matruh on the 8th, having come over a track terribly cut up by the cars. Our total casualties were three officers slightly wounded. Since this Siwa fight, Sayed Ahmed has given us a minimum of trouble, and he keeps a very long distance from our posts.

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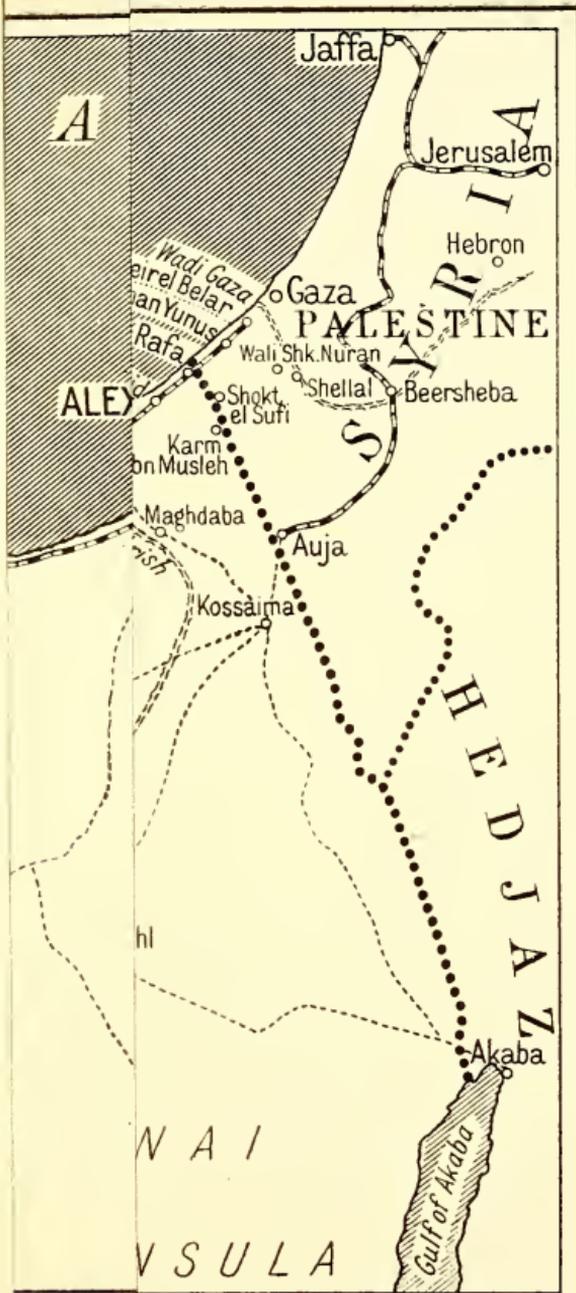
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