James Irwin

4th Battalion, Cheshire Regiment
&
Imperial Camel Corps

The Great War

1914-1918

Produced to celebrate the 100th Anniversary of the end of The Great War on November 11th 2018

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Introduction

This is an account of the wartime experiences of James Irwin, my grandfather. Also of course known to others as husband, father, uncle, great-grandfather, J.I. and so on. I have referred to him here as ‘Jim’ as that is the name most used at the time of these events, and of course these are the adventures of a young man so it seems appropriate.

Modern Turkey didn’t exist as a nation until 1923, after World War 1. The conflicts Jim was engaged in were with the Ottoman Empire, often supported by soldiers from other ‘Central Powers’ such as Germany and Austria. However, most accounts at the time refer to the Ottomans as the ‘Turks’ because most of the soldiers were Turkish and certainly all of the officers were. I have followed the same approach here. In similar fashion, Jim is fighting for the ‘British’ which indicates the British Empire, often consisting of troops from Australia, New Zealand, India and other nations/dominions of the Empire. The Ottoman Empire included the area we now know as Turkey, but also Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia and Arabia. Its capital was Constantinople.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Norah for providing the key photographs of Jim as a young man and soldier, essential documentation and most of all for her clearly remembered anecdotes from the period relating both to the war years and to the early Irwin family history. Also for patiently responding to my many queries, and for proof reading key sections of the story.

Thanks also are due to Vanessa for researching and compiling an excellent and thorough account of the Irwin family history, much of which is included in the appendix. The notes she encouraged her father Philip to record have been tremendously effective in bringing his voice back to life.

Pat, my mother, provided records in a document known as ‘Patricia’s Story’, which included many nuggets of information not found elsewhere.

The numerous grandchildren who contributed their own memories, the ‘oral history’ that they inherited from Jim’s children.

Not least the many enthusiasts, complete strangers, encountered online who have generously contributed their time and invaluable information.

Declaration of War

Showing great initiative, and keen to get on in the world Jim had been making himself known at the gates of the famous Cammell Laird shipyard looking for work and had been taken on as an apprentice 'brass finisher'. In the years before the War, while Jim served his apprenticeship, the shipyard was building ships for peacetime purposes; the '*King Orry'* a packet steamer for the Isle of Man crossing, plenty of barges and passenger ships destined for Ceylon, Norway, India and myriad other destinations, the '*Leonard Train Ferry / Ice Breaker*' bound for the Canadian Transcontinental Railway Co. Ottawa. Many other ships, and even railway carriages.

At 17 he was able to join the Territorials, and signed up for the 4th Battalion, Cheshire Regiment. This was highly significant in several ways. The Territorials were forerunners of the current Territorial Army and so were amateur soldiers, training in their spare time at their headquarters in Grange Road West[1] , and camping at weekends. Jim had already made a commitment to serving King and Country at this early age as he joined a '1st line' battalion. At the time, a Territorial soldier could not be asked to serve abroad and so many of their battalions were so called 2nd line outfits. While the demand for men eventually meant that many of these did contribute active service in Europe, many went no further than defending Hilbre Island against invasion or looking after prisoners. Soldiers of a first line battalion had already waved this right and could be sent wherever needed. The 4th Cheshires were also a '*yeomanry'* battalion. Yeomanry battalions were mounted on horse, but were not cavalry. They would act as mobile infantry, riding to a point out of the range of gunshot then leaving the horses in the care of handlers while they proceeded to fight on foot. The battalion name is often seen written as 1/4 Btn Cheshire Regiment to indicate their first line status.

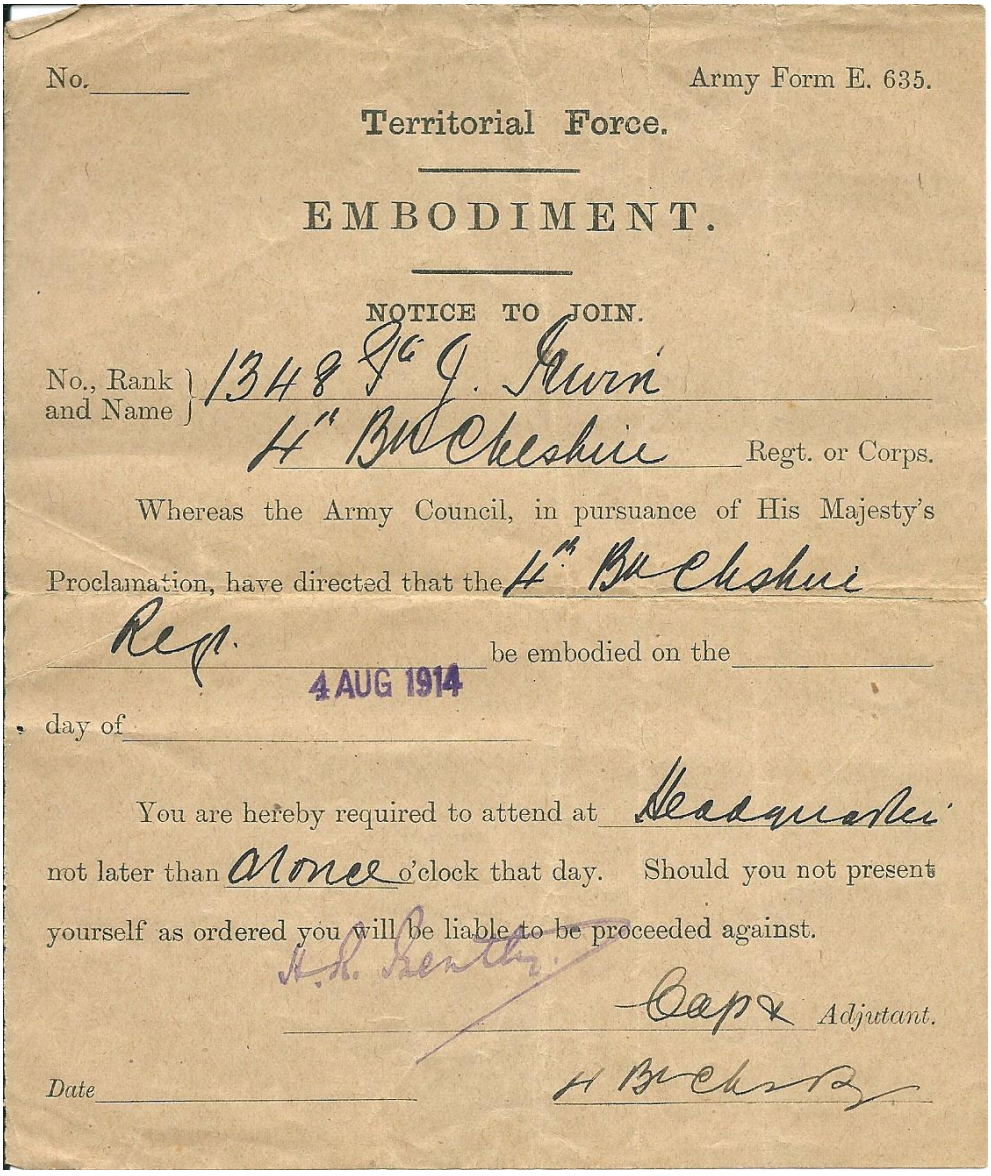
Mobilisation

The decades from 1910-1930 are seen as the height of the silent film era, with theatre, and variety shows popular alternatives. On Tuesday 4th August 1914 Jim, with sisters Annie and Catherine and friends, was enjoying an evening of light-hearted entertainment at 'The Argyle Theatre of Varieties' in Birkenhead. Perhaps with rumours of impending war they saw this as a possible last chance for a good night out for a while, at least until Christmas, by which time of course it would all be over. The theatre was a national institution, known nationwide and often regarded affectionately as the starting point for famous showbusiness careers, including

[1] Still standing today and used as a Sports Centre.

Charlie Chaplin, Stan Laurel, Flanagan and Allen. *Houdini* also put in an appearance. A copy of the playbill for Tuesday the 4th is inserted into this booklet. It looks like good fun, but during the evening there was a change in mood that could not be more dramatic.

An official took to the stage to declare that Britain had declared war on Germany and that any men who were in the Army or 1st Line Territorial battalions must report to their headquarters immediately rather than return to their homes. In Jim's case headquarters was Grange Road West where he received his 'Embodiment' form. Note the requirement to attend *'at once'*.



No._____ Army Form E. 635.

Territorial Force.

EMBODIMENT.

NOTICE TO JOIN.

No., Rank and Name 1348 Gr J. Irwin

4th Bn Cheshire Regt. or Corps.

Whereas the Army Council, in pursuance of His Majesty's Proclamation, have directed that the 4th Bn Cheshire Regt. be embodied on the 4 AUG 1914 day of _____

You are hereby required to attend at Headquarters not later than Noon o'clock that day. Should you not present yourself as ordered you will be liable to be proceeded against.

A. L. Kenyon Capt. *Adjutant.*

Date _____ 4th Bn Cheshire

The next day saw unprecedented scenes in Birkenhead. In addition to the regular soldiers and Territorials being mobilised, men were simply quitting their jobs on the spot and walking into registration centres to sign up to join the forces. There were crowds of men on the streets

clamouring to enlist, huge queues of men down Grange Road. There was frantic competition for requisition of clothing, equipment and transport. Every sort of cart, horse and harness was used for transport and transport lines established on waste ground near the Drill Hall.

Once the 4th Cheshires were all mustered they were taken by train to Shrewsbury and given the Midland Carriage Works to billet in. Shortly after they were marched across pleasant countryside, the eleven miles to Church Stretton. The Church Stretton camp was close to the railway and train after train was seen to pass, taking coal to the fleet. There is a curious and apparently famous tale about carriages full of Russians with fur hats '*with snow still on them*' going past on the nights of August 27th and 28th. Perhaps imaginations were running wild, who knows? Training was fine for the men at Church Stretton and helped to prevent boredom, but there was great anxiety and dark rumours about the fate of the 1st Cheshires in France. They were right to be concerned, although little news was made public at the time. The 1st Battalion were regular soldiers and had been stationed in Londonderry before the war, due to unrest in Ireland. They had been sent to France and engaged in the battle of Mons, suffering heavy losses.

The 4th Cheshires were now sent to Suffolk and spent the next few months practising trench digging. This is when Jim turned 19 on Friday 23rd October and was now old enough to enlist, the minimum supposedly 19 not 18 as most assume. Out of the blue there was an order that they were to equip in tropical kit as they were to be despatched to India, and Jim and his pals found themselves in Northampton being kitted out in drill clothing and tropical helmets. Their rifles were replaced with Japanese ones for some reason, probably due to a shortage of the standard issue ones. On the 15th of November the plan was abruptly cancelled. You can imagine the tension felt by Jim and fellow soldiers, uncertainty around what would happen next. What did happen next was more trench digging, now in Stowmarket until after Christmas.

Jim spent Christmas 1914 in an army camp at Stowmarket, at least it wasn't a trench in France.

They spent most of the spring in Royston & Baldock so at least they were enjoying regular changes of scenery. Jim met sister Annie in London while on leave during this spell, she was working there as nurse at the time, and they had this photograph taken at Mason & Co. It's

Jim and Annie, London March 1915.

dated 1st March 1915. In April they were located in Bedford, and in mid July 1915 they were kitted out and set sail. Although they were a yeomanry unit, there were no horses involved as the landscape was unsuitable so they were '*dismounted'*. Perhaps that was just as well, the average lifespan of a horse in the campaign they were headed for was one day.

Destination unknown. Somewhere warm and sunny was all they were told.

Suvla Bay

The ships heading for this warm and sunny destination carried the 53rd Welsh Division, a larger grouping including the 4th Cheshires and various other regiments carried on a collection of troopships. They set sail from Devonport between 14th and 19th of July 1915. Jim and the rest of the 4th Btn Cheshire Regiment aboard the *SS Euripides* (later known as the *SS Akaroa*), a fairly new ship whose maiden voyage was in 1914. The *SS Euripides* was built as a passenger ship and though Jim and his fellow soldiers were installed in the 'third class' accomodation it will have been pretty good for the time, and a very pleasant cruise to the Mediterranean under different circumstances. The men shared cabins, four men to each[2] and there were lots of drills and lectures on deck.

SS Euripides

[2] Probably more. Four was the allocation for peacetime but there were probably men sleeping on the floor and anywhere else that they could be squeezed in.

A view from the mainmast of the *SS Euripides* showing men taking instruction on the upper decks.

A recreation deck on the *SS Euripides*.

Third class cabin on the *SS Euripides*. Note the camera visible in the mirror.

First class dining salon, *SS Euripides* – no doubt reserved for officers

As the ships were not escorted the oil lanterns had to be out by 7:30 p.m. and the men became rather bored, there was nothing to be done than go to bed and sleep. Eventually they reached Alexandria, then on to Port Said. Though the ships were here for 6 days, no-one was allowed ashore. Then on 4th August they set sail over the blue Mediterranean, arriving three days later at Mudros. Eventually, and still completely unaware of where they were, the convoy of ships set out on the night of 8th August and anchored in the dark off an unknown coast. The land could be made out in the distance and the men on board could hear the sounds of musketry and see flashes of signal lights.

It's hard to imagine quite what it would be like to be in this situation, waiting for it all to start. The first time you have been called into action. A landing at Suvla Bay a few nights earlier, included amongst its ranks a Ceylonese tea planter, John Still. He had volunteered to do his bit for King and Country and joined the East Yorkshire Regiment, leaving his pregnant wife in Ceylon. His war lasted just three days before being taken POW and interned in the Turkish mountains for the rest of the war. While there he found time to compose '*Ballard of Suvla Bay'*, a few stanzas of which are included here as they seem to sum the mood up pretty well.

Ballard of Suvla Bay

A bell rang in the engine room,
And with the ceasing of the sound
Small noises sprang to life all around.
Across the water, in the gloom,
We saw the coast like a long grey mound.

The water babbled along the hull,
The scent of thyme was in the air,
Borne from the shore just over there,
And in that momentary lull
The world to me seemed very fair.

The sweetly-scented starlit hills
Breathed of bees and summer flowers
Dreaming through the midnight hours,
While fate's slow-grinding mills
Rolled their resistless powers

Suddenly shots rang out, and flashes
Shattered the dark with stabbing stings,
And bullets borne on whistling wings
Rang on the hull, or made small splashes
Like living, eager, evil things.

Then at last it was our turn to land
From the slow-panting barge, crammed as tight
As a theatre, and all full of fight
We sprang out on the enemy strand,
In the dark of that wonderful light.

Deep in my mind and ever bright
Remains that first impress of war;
The feeling of that foreign shore;
The sounds, the scents, and the starry night;
Fresh from that hour for evermore.

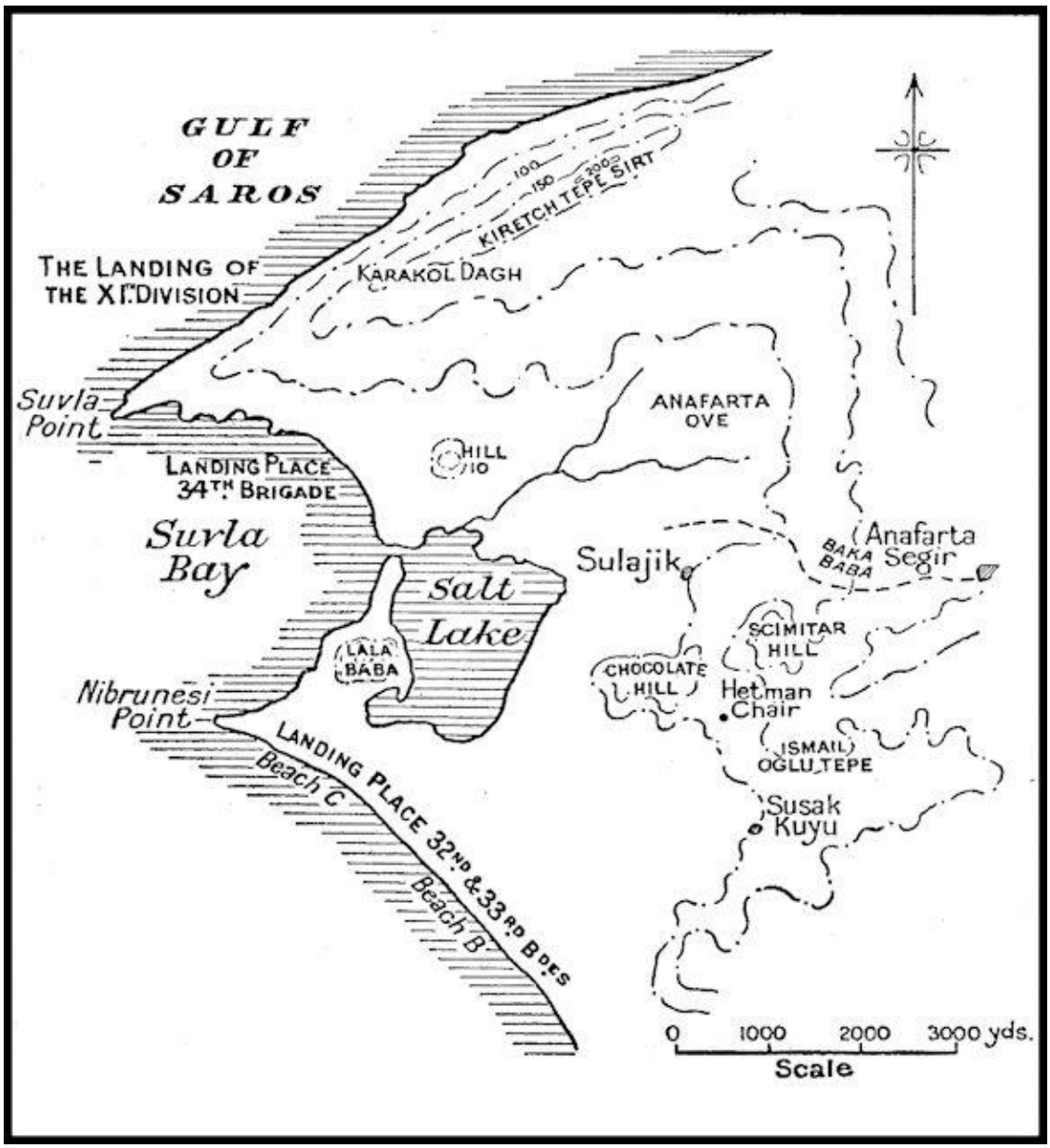
It is easy to imagine that Jim and his fellows would also always carry with them vivid memories of that first experience of being an active participant in war, stepping out onto a foreign shore, gun in hand. Few of these men had ever ventured further than North Wales before this.

At dawn the landing craft, ‘beetles’, appeared. The men had been sitting in marching order on the deck awaiting this moment. An instruction had been given that they were to go ashore in the clothes they stood in, lacking ammunition, food, even water. Some disobeyed this order, and had wisely smuggled essentials into the beetles during the night. Most arrived on the pebbly beach as directed. Fortunately this landing was unopposed, though the troops were dismayed at how ill equipped they were to go into battle. Still nobody knew where they were, not even which country this was, or what they were supposed to do there, not even the officers. Quartermaster Fred Weston discovered a case on the beach and on opening found maps, revealing the fact that they were at Suvla bay. These were promptly distributed to all of the officers.

British troops landing at Suvla Bay, August 1915

There was still no instruction regarding their mission, and frequent calls back to the ships and senior officers, proved fruitless, they didn’t seem to know either.

Beyond the pebble beach was the dry bed of a salt lake and after that a sandy plain and scrub, beyond the scrub an imposing circle of rugged peaks. Their objective, if anyone had known it, was to take the summit of Tekke Tempe, which the Ottoman forces already held with fortified defences and overwhelming numbers. This venture was doomed from the start. Jim's battalion set off across the salt lake in 'artillery formation' under shrapnel fire.



They had to fight their way through streams of injured men coming in the opposite direction. Some grumbled that *'they had been given better orders for a Saturday afternoon bun-struggle on Birkenhead Park*'. Reaching the thick scrub they were confronted with steady, heavy rifle fire and no obvious way to proceed. Night fell and three battalions became lost. The Major spent most of the night searching the scrubland for his men. The next day an order came for a

general advance at 5 p.m. Those men brave enough to attempt it were soon killed or wounded. They still had little in the way of food, ammunition or tools. The Turks showed little interest in burying their dead and there was an enormous population of flies, it became difficult to eat for flies covering food, and the flies brought disease, especially dysentery and enteric fever to both sides. The August heat was unbearably hot, and many men became desperately thirsty, poorly supplied by their own side and unable to reach the numerous wells for fear of snipers. The smell was unbearable with about 500,000 men dead or wounded between April and December in just a few square miles, and many of them remaining unburied. Many men took to carry bunches of crushed thyme in their hands in an attempt to counteract the stench.

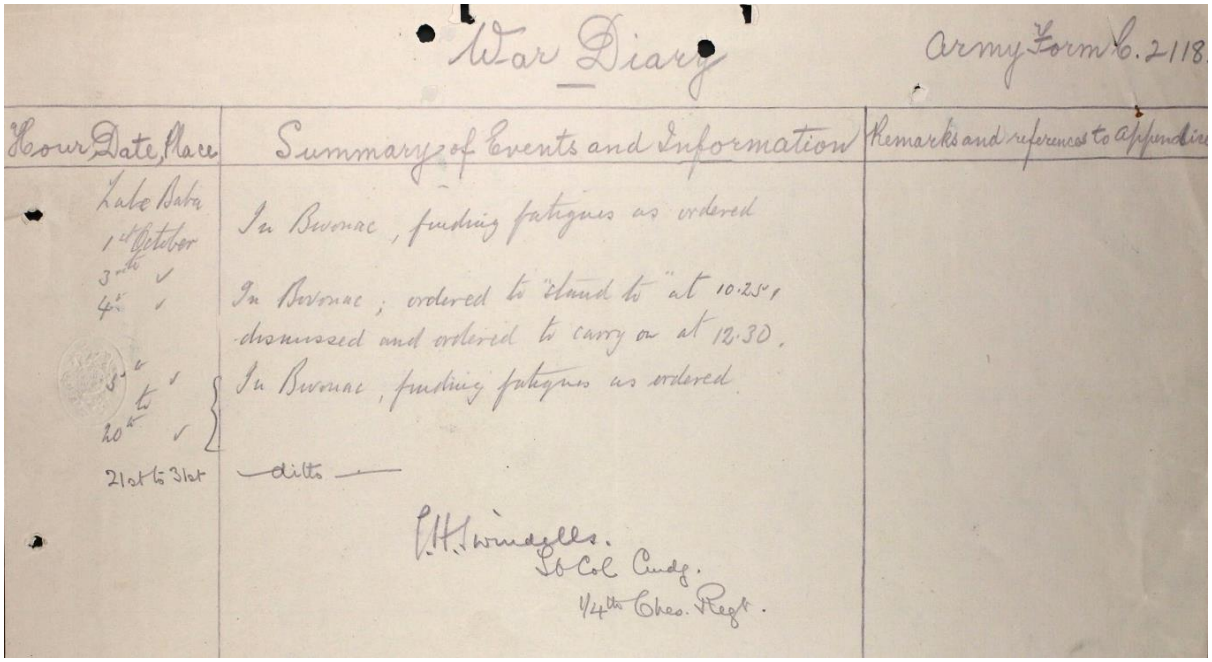
Movements were made at times and the 4th Btn Cheshire Regiment did reach as far as Chocolate Hill. On the 12th and 13th envoys from higher command appeared and found that Jim's battalion were '*as steady and calm as ever, despite the handling they had received'*. They kept their heads, and as Colonel Crookenden described it '*contributed in a greater measure than has ever been acknowledged to prevent a major disaster'*.

There followed the attack on Scimitar Hill. Hundreds of men were needlessly wasted in a hopeless attack. This was the last big attack of the Gallipoli campaign. On 21st August the attack was launched and under murderous fire the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers did manage to drive the Turks from the summit only to find that they were then exposed to fire from higher positions that swept them from the top. They had to retreat, but in heart breaking scenes witnessed by the rest of the division, the dry brush was set alight by shellfire and wounded men were caught in the blaze, each leaving a small patch of khaki as the flames passed over. If that weren't enough, five thousand men were then marched in formation towards the enemy across the dry bed of the salt lake in clear view of the Turkish guns. Most halted by Green Hill for cover, but a group led by Brigadier-General Lord Longford bravely carried on to the top of Scimitar Hill, taking the hillcrest but then finding themselves exposed to artillery fire with no chance of escape. Longford is reputed to have turned to one of his officers and told him '*Don't keep ducking, Fred. It upsets the men and doesn't do any good'*. In 1812 one of his ancestors had died fighting the Americans, and the Royal Navy had preserved his body in brandy so that it could be shipped back to Ireland. No such luck for Longford as his body was never found.

Fortunately, Jim's unit were in reserve but unused at this point, a close call indeed as 5,300 men were killed or wounded on this day. They were given the task of holding their trenches on the right of the main front, which they did well and thankfully did not have to take part in the main attack. Nevertheless, a baptism of fire for a young man in his second week of action to

witness such scenes. This chapter in Jim's war was coming to a close, there were no further major offensives.

An extended period of trench warfare continued through September and October. An extract from the official War Diaries for the battalion illustrates the relative tedium during this period. The gallant Colonel G. H. Swindells, later killed in the first battle of the Marne confirms that Jim's 20th birthday on October 23rd was a relatively quiet one, spent in a bivouac on the conical hill, *Lala Baba*, indicated on the map above, overlooking the salt lake and the sea.



War Diary

Army Form C. 2118

Hour Date, Place	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendix
Lala Baba 1st October	In Bivouac, finding fatigues as ordered	
3rd ✓ 4th ✓	In Bivouac; ordered to "stand to" at 10.25, dismissed and ordered to carry on at 12.30.	
5th to 20th ✓	In Bivouac, finding fatigues as ordered	
21st to 31st	—do/do—	

G. H. Swindells.
Lt Col Cmdg.
1/4th Ches. Regt.

War Diary for 1 / 4 Cheshire Regiment October 1915

The weather became the next great threat. There was a violent storm on 26th November, torrential rain filling trenches four feet deep in water, soldiers drowned and torrents rushing down formerly dry river beds brought the bodies of unburied Turkish soldiers and equipment. The rain was followed by a severe blizzard and freezing conditions. Men now suffered frostbite and exposure. On one occasion an officer found thirty men frozen to death in a trench. It was a blessing when the order to withdraw was given, and this part of the campaign was planned to perfection. The men left over a period ending in the early hours of 20th December in complete secrecy from the Turks and not a man lost.

'*I ran so fast to get to that boat that I could not feel my feet touch the ground*'. Jim Irwin.

The 53rd Welsh Division lost 85% of its men at Suvla Bay, and the remaining 2,428 men, including Jim headed for Egypt. In Jim's case there was first a detour to Malta, the nurse of the Mediterranean, to recover from a minor wound and dysentery.

'Jim was slightly wounded, had awful dysentery and was shipped to Malta. He was some months there'. Philip Irwin.

So Jim spent Christmas 1915 in hospital in Malta. Despite the dysentery a far more cheerful experience than the months before, and a well-earned rest.

A Military Hospital in Malta at Christmas

Mentioned in Despatches.

Numb. 29455. 1195

SUPPLEMENT

TO

The London Gazette

Of FRIDAY, the 28th of JANUARY, 1916.

Published by Authority.

The Gazette is registered at the General Post Office for transmission by Inland Post as a newspaper. The postage rate to places within the United Kingdom, for each copy, is one halfpenny for the first 6 ozs., and an additional halfpenny for each subsequent 6 ozs. or part thereof. For places abroad the rate is a halfpenny for every 2 ounces, except in the case of Canada, to which the Canadian Magazine Postage rate applies.

FRIDAY, 28 JANUARY, 1916.

War Office, London, S.W.,
28th January, 1916.

The following despatch has been received from General Sir Ian Hamilton, G.C.B.:—

1, *Hyde Park Gardens,*
London, W.
11th December, 1915.

My Lord,

I have the honour to submit herewith a list of the names of the officers and men whose services I wish to bring to your Lordship's notice in connection with the operations described in my despatch of 11th December, 1915.

I have the honour to be,
Your Lordship's most obedient Servant,
Ian Hamilton, General.

Major-General (temporary Lieutenant-General) E. A. Altham, C.B., C.M.G.
Major-General (temporary Lieutenant-General) F. J. Davies, K.C.B.
Major-General F. S. Inglefield, C.B., D.S.O.
Major-General W. Douglas, K.C.M.G., C.B., D.S.O.
Major-General G. G. A. Egerton, C.B.
Major-General W. E. Peyton, C.V.O., C.B., D.S.O.
Major-General F. C. Shaw, C.B.
Major-General G. F. Ellison, C.B.
Major-General E. A. Fanshawe, C.B.
Major-General W. R. Marshall.
Major-General W. P. Braithwaite, C.B.
Major-General F. S. Maude, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O.

Lieutenant-Colonel (temporary Brigadier-General in Army) J. B. Pollok-McCall (Major, Reserve of Officers).
Captain J. B. Cook.
Captain S. A. Cunningham (killed).
Second Lieutenant W. S. Pirie.
No. 7856 Private (Acting Corporal) W. Crolley.
No. 7352 Private (Acting Corporal) J. Ritson.

Cheshire Regiment (Territorial Force).

Major J. A. Pemberton.
Lieutenant (temporary Captain) A. J. Christie.
Captain W. W. Leete.
No. 1767 Corporal (Acting Serjeant) W. J. Cope.
No. 1348 Lance-Corporal J. Irwin.
No. 2830 Private J. G. Sumner.

Captain G. N. Heath.

Cheshire Regiment (Service Battalion).

No. 10931 Corporal (Acting Lance-Serjeant) P. R. M. Mundy, South Wales Borderers.
Captain C. E. Kitchin, Reserve of Officers.
Temporary Lieutenant T. C. MacD. Austin.
Temporary Lieutenant J. Farrow.
No. 12268 Serjeant H. Worthington.
No. 12640 Serjeant H. Holliday.
No. 13113 Corporal W. Myles.
No. 12253 Lance-Corporal L. Booton.
No. 4/12935 Private (Acting Corporal) W. Gronow.
No. 4/13102 Private M. Beary.

King's Own Scottish Borderers.

Temporary Major J. Sherwood-Kelly, Norfolk Regiment (Second Reserve Battalion) (attached).
No. 6074 Company Serjeant-Major H. Dalton.

King's Own Scottish Borderers (Territorial Force).

No. 535 Acting Regimental Serjeant-Major G. Murray (Scots Guards) (attached).
No. 6550 Lance-Corporal D. M. Dick.

When a soldier was mentioned in despatches his name was listed in the next edition of the London Gazette. This is still the case today. Jim appeared in the 28th January 1916 edition for men in action in the Gallipoli campaign. It is interesting to note how few are listed for each battalion, and so how significant the act of bravery had to be to gain this recognition.

The term MiD is a typical British understatement. A soldier had to do something highly impressive to be awarded MiD and there was often very little, if anything, to choose between the action resulting in MiD, or higher awards. There was one important difference. If an officer recommended someone for a VC, for example, the result was a mountain of paperwork and a review of the incident. Award of MiD was much less troublesome and so often provided an easy option for a busy officer. In Jim's case he demonstrated exceptional courage in braving enemy fire and risking his own life (and ours) to rescue a wounded captain. The captain was inconsiderate enough to die following the rescue and so Jim was informed that the award would be the highly creditable MiD, but no more. Had the captain lived Jim would probably have earned something higher, namely the Military Medal or Distinguished Conduct Medal. It seems harsh until you appreciate that the act of bravery leading to a higher award had to be witnessed by an officer, and of course Jim's witness was now sadly deceased.

The story of James bravery was reported in the Birkenhead News.

It is also interesting to note from the cutting that Jim now bears the title of Lance-Corporal, he has been promoted from ‘Private.

Local Soldier's Distinction.

Amongst the gallant patriots who have been mentioned in Sir Ian Hamilton's despatch for bravery and devotion to duty during the Dardanelles operations is Lance-Corpl. James Irwin, aged 20, son of Mrs. Irwin, of 113, Rodney-street. Lance-Corpl. Irwin joined the 4th Cheshides about three

Lance-Corpl. JAMES IRWIN.

years ago, and was called up on the outbreak of war. He was amongst the first to volunteer for foreign service, and left with his regiment for the Dardanelles at the latter end of the summer of 1915. He is at present in a Convalescent Camp at Malta.

Before joining the colours Lance-Corpl. Irwin was employed at Messrs. Cammell-Laird's as an apprentice brass finisher, and his numerous friends will hear with pride of his bravery.

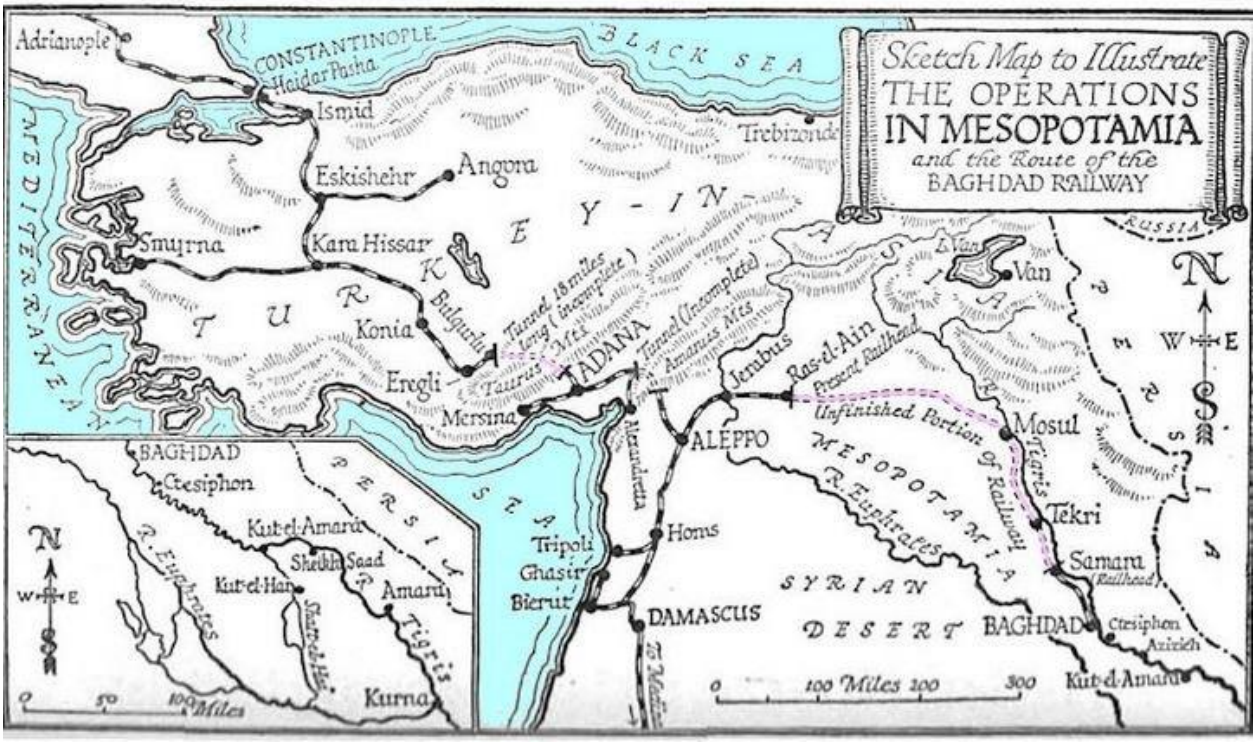
Birkenhead News 5th February 1916

Kaiser Wilhelm's jihad

Kaiser Wilhelm II was a grandson of Queen Victoria, and the future King Edward was his 'Uncle Teddy'. He was something of an Anglophile, but intensely jealous of the British Empire. In the years before the war started he made plans to win an empire of his own. Realising that he would never defeat the Royal Navy, the new German empire would have to be land based. His ambition centred on the construction of a great railway stretching from Berlin to Baghdad. Once established, Germany would be enriched by access to oil, and other resources of the East, and the trains could carry troops and munitions for a strike on India. A branch of the railway, known as the Hedjaz railway, would travel south to the Suez Canal. Control of the canal and invasion of 'British' Egypt would follow. However, in order to fulfil these ambitions he would need to motivate Muslims throughout the region to rise in a great jihad against the British and throw them out in favour of a new German-Turkish Muslim Empire. The railway would have to run though the wilderness of Turkey and the great natural barrier of the Taurus and Amanus Mountains. This great feat of engineering was to be the foremost manifestation of German power and influence. It was always conceived as a German railway, constructed by German engineers, and financed by Siemens and Deutsche bank. The contract was awarded to Philipp Holtzman of Hamburg, and most of the railway was completed before WW1 started, the missing sections including places where tunnels would have to be dug through the mountains.

A grand station at Haydarpaşa, on the Asian bank of the Bosphorus was the Kaiser's gateway to the new empire in the east, built by German engineers and a symbol of the great new alliance between Germany and Turkey.

All travel to the new empire had to pass through this impressive monument.



Berlin-Baghdad railway. Incomplete sections at the outbreak of WW1.

For several years before the war German agents travelled the land distributing leaflets smearing the British, *'this hateful, lying, conscienceless people of shopkeepers'* and also the French and Russians, while also hinting that the Kaiser had secretly converted to Islam, and even that his family were directly descended from the Prophet. He courted the Ottomans because the Sultan was also Caliph and so could declare *fatwah* on the British whereas the Kaiser couldn't. An attempt to bribe Emir Habibullah Khan with gold and twelve alarm clocks did not chime well with the Afghan leader, nor was the Shah of Persia persuaded to take the risk of joining the Germans. The Kaisser had a POW camp constructed near Berlin, the 'Half-Moon' camp, where Muslim prisoners were treated in luxurious fashion, even having a complete mosque constructed there, the first in Germany. They were subject to extensive propaganda encouraging anti-British sentiment and then recruited into the German army. They showed little appetite for fighting on the German side and the strategy was abandoned. All credibility was finally lost when it turned out that his key propagandist, Mehmed Zeki Bey, was actually a Romanian Jew who had once run a brothel. Those problems aside, the threat was real for a while.

To their credit, all but a few Muslims ignored the Kaiser's attempts to have them take up arms against the British. The idea was flawed from the outset, for why would the Muslims wage war simply to swap one European power as ruler for another one?

Both the jihad, and the railway are important in Jim's tale.

The tale of the Kaiser's jihad is relatively little known in Britain, although it figures in all the German texts on the period. The novel 'Greenmantle' by John Buchan, one of a trilogy of Richard Hannay adventures and following the successful '39 Steps', was published in 1916 and uses this theme as the basis of its plot. He should have known what he was writing about as he was Head of British Intelligence at the time!

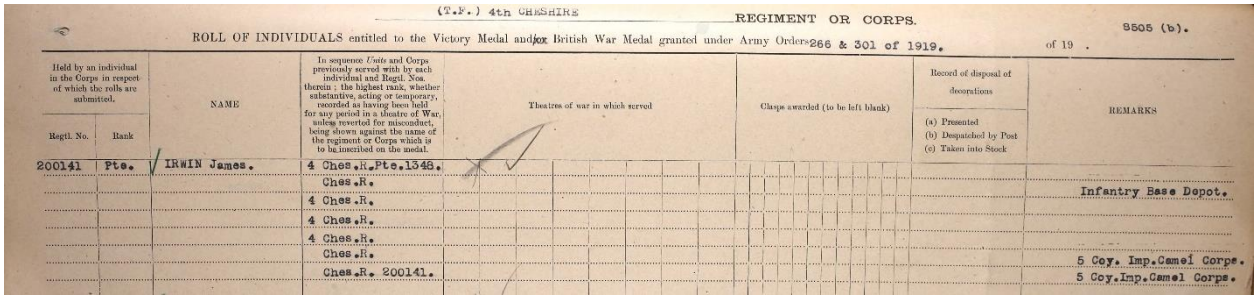
Muslim prisoners preparing food at 'Half-Moon' camp

The Imperial Camel Corps

After Jim's convalescence in Malta was complete he joined the rest of the evacuees from Gallipoli in Alexandria, and volunteered to join the newly formed I.C.C. His motive is unknown, but most of the men joining found the opportunity more exciting than the relentless, boring, training drills that they were subjected to at the time.

The Imperial Camel Corps (ICC) was formed in early 1916 following the successful introduction of a smaller unit of 'white cameliers' who were exclusively Australian. These had been employed in opposition to the 'Senussi' a sect who had been encouraged to wage 'Jihad' against the British by the Germans. The Senussi uprising has been supressed by the time the main ICC came into existence.

The Corps was organised into 4 battalions, the 2nd battalion being the British one. Within each battalion there were smaller units called companies. Jim was in one of the last to be formed, the 5th company, presumably because of his late arrival from Malta. A company had about 140 men, plus officers. They worked in teams of four, with the team eating, sleeping and fighting together. In action, one man would look after the camels while the other three went into action



(T.F.) 4th CHESHIRE REGIMENT OR CORPS. 8505 (b).

ROLL OF INDIVIDUALS entitled to the Victory Medal and/or British War Medal granted under Army Orders 266 & 301 of 1919. of 19 .

Held by an individual in the Corps in respect of which the rolls are submitted.		NAME	In sequence *Units* and Corps previously served with by each individual and Regtl. Nos. therein; the highest rank, whether substantive, acting or temporary, recorded as having been held for any period in a theatre of War, unless reverted for misconduct, being shown against the name of the regiment or Corps which is to be inscribed on the medal.	Theatres of war in which served	Clasps awarded (to be left blank)	Record of disposal of decorations (a) Presented (b) Despatched by Post (c) Taken into Stock	REMARKS
Regtl. No.	Rank						
200141	Pte.	IRWIN James.	4 Ches.R.Pte.1348.				
			Ches.R.				
			4 Ches.R.				Infantry Base Depot.
			4 Ches.R.				
			4 Ches.R.				
			Ches.R.				5 Coy. Imp.Camel Corps.
			Ches.R. 200141.				5 Coy.Imp.Camel Corps.

as infantry. This was the system previously employed by yeomanry units, and so adopted here. With five companies in the British battalion plus signallers and sappers there were about 1,000 camels in each battalion.

In addition to the ICC battalions the force included the Sikh Mounted Battery from the Hong Kong and Singapore R.G.A. Despite the name these were Indian army regulars and the 200 burly Sikhs were great favourites with the other troops for their big white toothy smiles and bravery in battle. They were known to all as the 'Bing Boys', after a popular Music Hall act of the time[3].

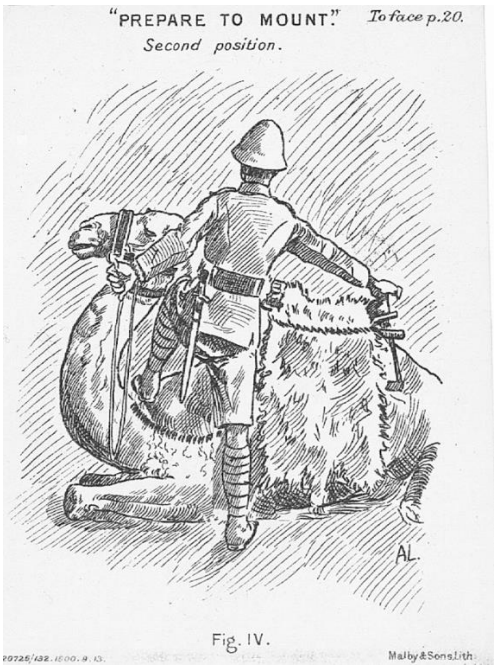
[3] Of 'If you were the Only Girl in the World' fame.

The ICC was the most diverse of all the fighting units of the Great War, and also included some volunteers from the Rhodesian Mounted Police, a South African mining prospector, a fruit grower from the Canadian Rockies, a pearl fisherman from Queensland, a famous polo player from Argentina, a Syrian, A Russian, a French gold digger from the Yukon, a Central American gun-runner, Jews, a single American, and at least one indigenous Australian[4]. The Australians, in particular, were a notoriously rough bunch as their officers had taken the opportunity of the formation of this unit to offload all of their most troublesome cases.

They bore close similarity to the French Foreign Legion, a comparison noted by Colonel P. de Piepape, O.C. of the French-Palestine contingent.

'The Imperial Camel Corps companies compare with our own Foreign Legion in regard to the diversity of nationalities amongst its members. Also the similarity is carried further in its wonderful fighting qualities'.

The camels were almost all male. They had the most appalling bad breath and were notoriously dangerous. In the first training session one of them bit through the skull of his Egyptian handler, killing him instantly. The poor man was being prepared for burial adjacent to the training ground while the new recruits were being introduced to their own camels. The teeth were the camels' favourite weapon, but they would also, on occasion, try to kill a man by knocking him over then dropping onto him, crushing his chest with their bony knees. They also saw horses as their natural enemy and the two had to be kept well away from each other. Despite this the cameliers grew very fond of their mounts, they could travel for 4-5 days without water and were not deterred by gunfire, lumbering on ahead despite wounds even when shelled. It was also said that when a camelier used one of their front legs as a pillow to sleep on the camel would never move that one leg, while twitching and stretching the others.



[4] Frank Eggerton. Who was jailed for a month in 1915 for impersonating a soldier, and enlisted into the I.C.C. in 1917.

The training took place at Abbassia Barracks, a little way outside of Cairo. Each man had his own camel, and the camels had names. Much time was spent grooming them, removing ticks and the like. The men also learnt how to mount the camels. This was called 'barracking' and involved the camelier pulling the camel's head to the floor, placing his foot on its neck and then lifting himself into the saddle.

Each camelier was provided with a standard issue rifle and 300 rounds, a 5 gallon galvanised iron *fantass* of water, a bag with 50 pounds of durra (camel food), a rope to the animals nose in place of a rein, and two canvas bags of sleeping material, clothes and cooking utensils.

The headwear varied between the nations involved. Initially, pith helmets were distributed to all but the Sikhs, but unfortunately dozens of those issued to the Australians were 'accidentally' damaged on the first night of issue and so they were allowed to keep the felt hats that they preferred.

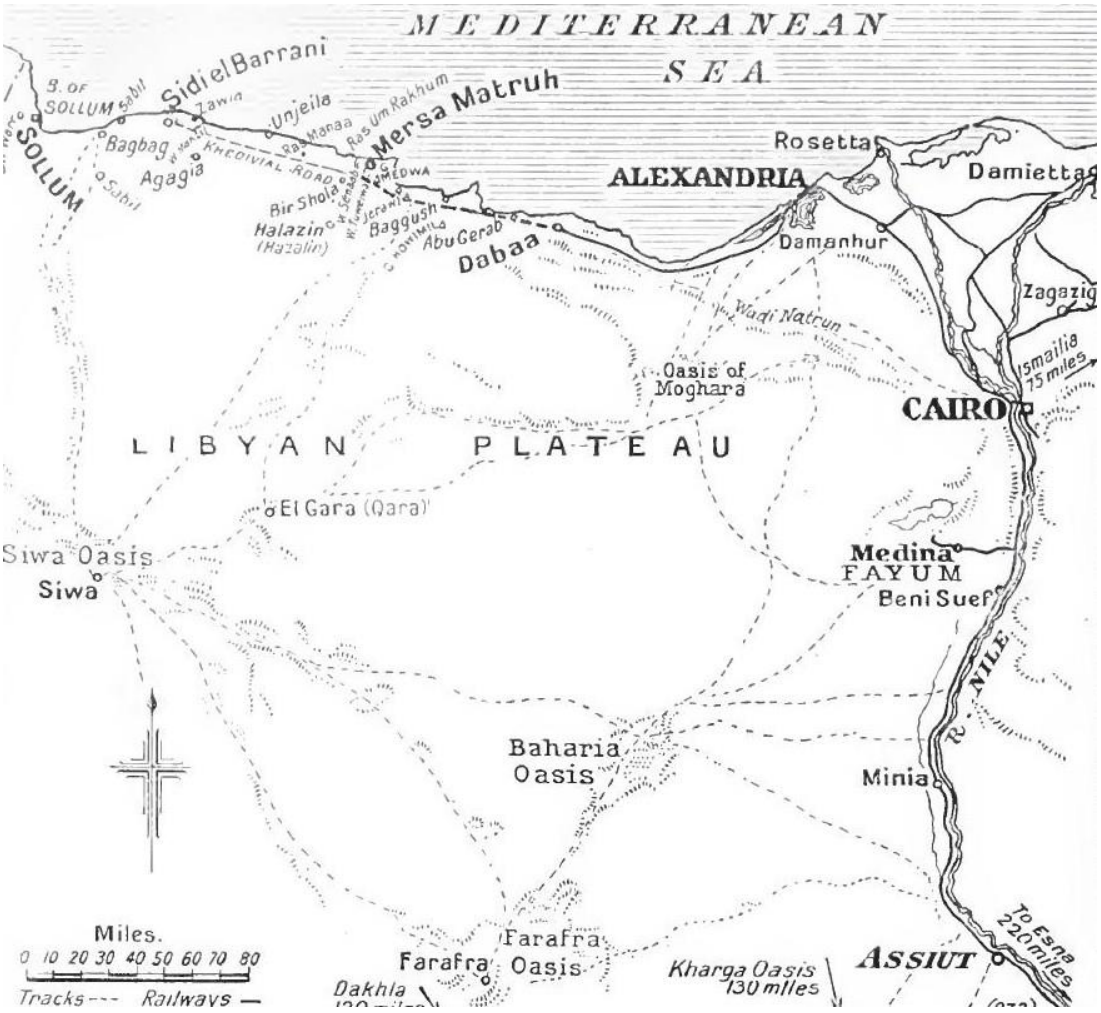
Australian, British, New Zealand and Indian ICC troopers.

Inevitably, there were long hours with little to do so the men needed entertainment and there was great enthusiasm for any form of revue or theatre that was organised. They had their own light-hearted magazine 'Barrack'. When possible, sporting events were a favourite, and though few records were kept it was accepted that the 'Bing Boys' always won the tug of war. Nights out in Cairo were a great distraction and must have been a real eye-opener for Jim, still too

young at 20 to buy a pint in Birkenhead. The Australians were particularly raucous and would regularly spend all their money on drink and then push the driver and conductor off one of the white trams and drive it at full speed back to Abbassia, bells clanging, people and animals scattered in their path. There was also the attraction of the ‘fleshpots’ of Cairo, but I am sure that a good Catholic boy like Jim would have shown no interest in those, and anyway, it was well known that ‘Tiger-Lil’ and her girls would have nothing to do with a man with a whiff of camel about him.

The Cairo Tram

The Western Desert



British Military Operations, Western Desert, 1914–1918

One of the Kaiser's successes in raising jihad was an uprising of the Senussi Arabs. These were not a tribe as such but a fanatical cult of Islamic extremists, mainly nomads from Libya, Egypt's neighbour to the west. They had invaded British-controlled Egypt, in the fertile strip of land close to the Mediterranean coast in the summer of 1915 but had been driven back, first defeated at Agagia, and literally '*put to the sword'* in a dramatic charge by the Dorset Yeomanry, sabres drawn. However, they still held on in the strip of oases inland and were there when Jim arrived in Egypt after completing his spell in hospital in Malta. The desert was huge and it was difficult to know where the Senussi where, especially as the maps such as existed were very poor, and large areas were simply indicated as 'unexplored' or 'unchartered territory'. Much of the work that followed was to patrol the desert in order to deter further incursions by the Senussi, and

upon locating them to organise attacks at company strength. Most of the patrolling was done by small groups of men, perhaps 4-32 in number.

The desert itself was a wonder to behold. Almost completely silent and lifeless bar a few spiders. The summer Jim spent here was the hottest for forty years, with periodic violent sand storms. Water supplies on patrol a constant anxiety. To navigate the men used a simple compass and the stars at night, all of them becoming expert astronomers. The desert sky was always the blackest imaginable and a vast and deep array of celestial brilliance. Any mistake in navigating back to base in a featureless landscape would be fatal so the cameliers quickly became expert at navigating by the stars, especially as much of the patrolling took place at night to avoid the heat of the day and to remain unseen.

Oskar Teichman, a junior medical officer serving with the British Army in Egypt, recalled the dramatic natural setting near the Suez Canal in early November:

'The landscape was grand and austere; the enormous vista of endless desert, here and there interrupted by gigantic sand mountains – fashioned into fantastic shapes according to the caprices of the wind – and by occasional palm-studded Hods nestling in tiny valleys, was most impressive. In this clear atmosphere the visibility was wonderful. Perfect silence reigned, and there appeared to be no sign of life except an occasional vulture hovering over the old Turkish battle-field or a jackal slinking homewards to his lair. At sunset the sky assumed most marvellous colours, which it is useless to try to describe. Then followed the deathly stillness of the desert night…'

We know that Jim enjoyed his time in the desert, a great adventure for an intrepid young man.

'They lived for months at a time in the desert and I think he developed a liking for it'. Philip Irwin

The fighting in this part of the war was sporadic. Short, intense engagements with groups of Senussi Arabs. Rifle fire across sand dunes at fairly close quarters. There was also close contact with disease; dysentery, malaria, sand-fly fever, typhoid, at one point an outbreak of plague in a local village.

Later in 1916 the Senussi were eventually driven from the oases that they had occupied. The supposed final assault on the Senussi at Baharia oasis became a formality as the Arabs had seen the writing on the wall and melted away before the ICC arrived. It was now November 1916. The oasis was a beautiful place of date palms, groves of oranges and limes. The ICC were

supposedly the first Europeans to visit Baharia, although there were rumours that Alexander the Great or the Crusaders had been here earlier.

The Senussi threat being effectively over the focus moved to the Suez Canal with the Ottomans having moved a large force in the direction of Romani in an attempt to take control of the canal. The Turks were defeated at the Battle of Romani, which secured the Suez Canal for the British. The ICC were not given a prominent role in this battle, but there was plenty left ahead for those with a thirst for action.

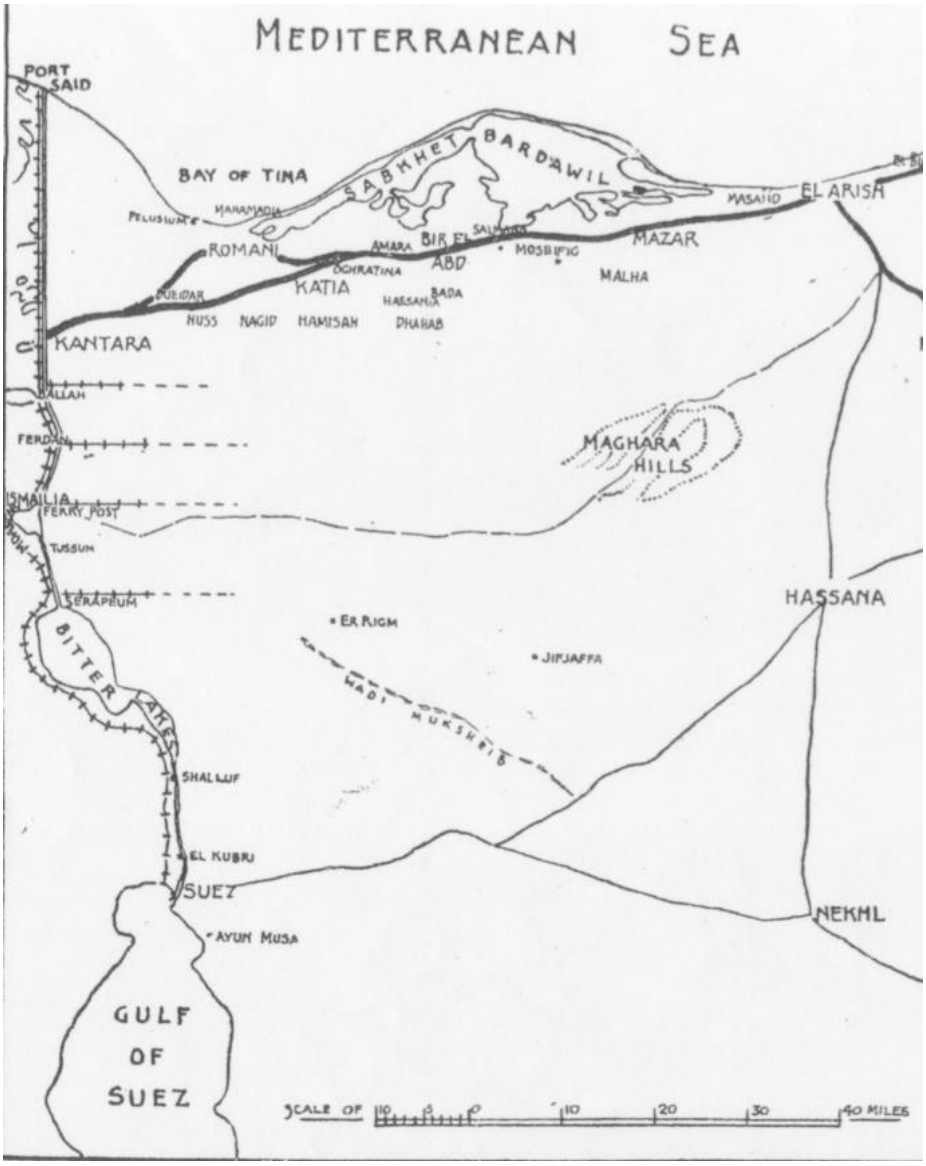
British Infantry on the march

The ICC were incorporated into a larger force, the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, EEF which included Australian Light Horse Brigades, New Zealand Mounted Rifles, British Yeomanry, infantry mainly from the north of England, Wales and Scotland, Indian cavalry, and a small unit of Australian light aircraft. There were also many other smaller units, some Gurkhas, engineers and so forth.

A shrewd move by Jim to volunteer for the 'camels' as his former colleagues in the 53rd Welsh had to walk all the way.

Sinai

There followed a period of pursuit, driving the Turks and Germans from the Sinai Peninsula. There were many skirmishes rather than battles as the enemy fought rear-guard actions. Jim participated in numerous patrols and these two more significant actions.



The Sinai Peninsula. Northern section.

Battle of Mazar, 17th September 1916

A long range mission to challenge the Turkish garrison at Mazar, to which the survivors of Romani had retreated. Mazar was far from the last source of water, and medical support. A real test of endurance with two nights of marching to get there and it ended in controversial circumstances with confusion about the water supply. The ICC were given a long route to get to the battle scene but got bogged down in soft sand and missed it. However, the enemy abandoned the post a few days later and lessons were learned regarding how best to conduct these long range operations.

Maghara Oasis, 14th October 1916

A more difficult undertaking than Mazar. Directed against a Turkish post at Bir el Maghara, 50 miles south-east of Romani, on the northern spurs of the Sinai hills. North of the hills, to the coast about Mazar, stretches the bleakest and most completely desert portion of the sand-dune country, while the ascent to Maghara is by way of a steep, narrow and rocky galley, gaining about 2,000ft. The force, commanded by Major General A. G. Dallas, marched out from Bir Bayud on the evening of the 13th October. After two night marches the enemy was found on the morning of the 15th occupying a strong position on the steep hills of Gebel el Maghara. The Ottomans were driven from their advanced position, 18 prisoners being captured. A two hour engagement followed, but General Dallas, perceiving that there was no likelihood of taking the second position without considerable loss, then drew off in accordance with his instructions, reaching Bayud on the 17th. Not a complete success, but enough to persuade the Ottomans to abandon the position a few days later. In comparison to some of Jim's adventures this account makes the expedition sound rather routine. It pays to reflect on the stamina required and the tension involved in riding a camel up those narrow mountain paths at night, not knowing what's ahead, being involved in a gunfight with a much bigger force, then making your exit, prisoners in tow, and repeating the journey in reverse. No mean feat.

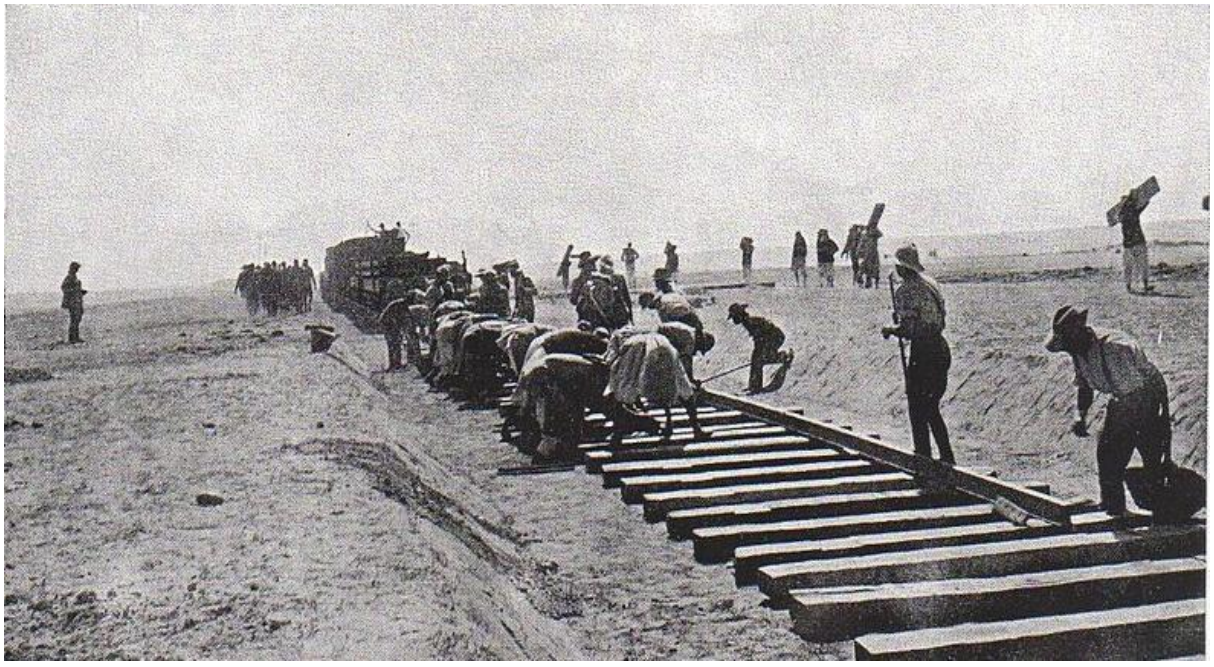
Jim's 21st birthday (October 23rd) seems to have passed uneventfully, probably at a camp at Mageibra.

The role played by Jim and his fellows changed dramatically, now fighting as part of the much larger Egyptian Expeditionary Force, EEF, which went on the offensive attacking east across the Sinai Peninsula. It is important to note that for each of the engagements that followed some troops would be rested, or simply not needed. Jim was in the 5th Company of the ICC so it was

necessary to establish when this group was in action rather than the ICC in general. Fortunately, an Australian, Frank Reid[5], though in a different company to Jim, happened to take part in most of the same engagements so his memoirs provide a very close account of the experiences that Jim had in this period.

The cameliers, and associated mounted units rode east along the ancient caravan trail used by so many before them, including Napoleon and Joseph, Mary, and Jesus.

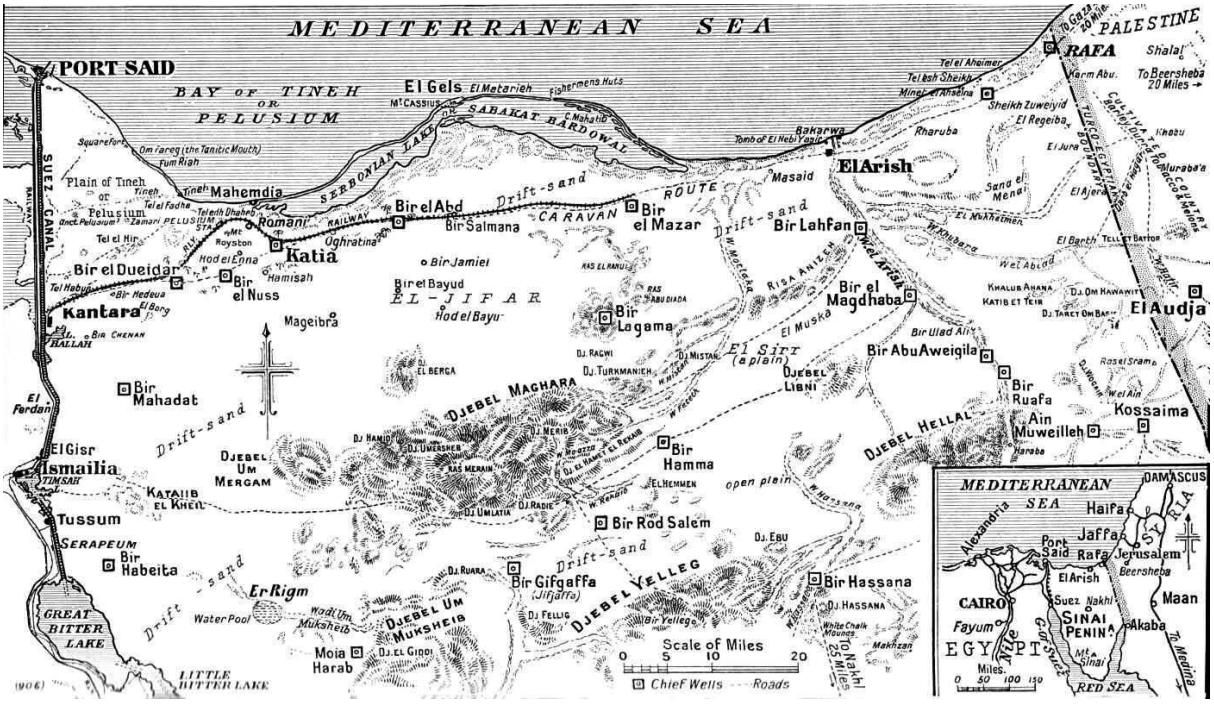
Behind them an army of men were constructing a rail track and water pipeline running west to east across the Sinai desert to support further operations. This was a tremendous feat of engineering and essential if water and food were to be provided for the entire EEF. It was impossible to advance anywhere without water. With thousands of horses and camels as well as the men the pipeline provided 600,000 gallons of water each day from Kantara, still only enough for a couple of bottles per man each day. Behind the front line the track was laid without pause. Egyptian labourers would unload rail and sleepers that were assembled by British engineers. The train trundled along behind, never having to stop. If you watched the work in progress for a couple of hours the track would disappear over the horizon.



Building the Sinai Railway

[5] Author of 'The Fighting Cameliers'.

After briefly bivouacking at Mazar, they rode through the night in the direction of El Arish, a coastal stronghold to which the Ottomans had retreated after being beaten at Suez. The objective was to attack them there at dawn. Twenty three miles of barren desert. No smoking, no talking. Men dozing off in the saddle. Arriving at El Arish as dawn broke a surprise awaited them. The Turks had evacuated, and moved to Magdhaba, twenty miles away in the dried up Wadi El Arish. The Germans had organised elaborate defences there based upon six 'redoubts', fortified defences connected by trenches. A few days earlier General Friederich Friehier Kress von Kressenstein[6] himself had inspected the defences and declared them impregnable, and certainly too far from the British railhead to be in danger of attack. With hardly a delay of any sort for rest the order was given to keep marching to Magdhaba. A second night of continuous riding, a tremendous feat of endurance and at the end of it the first battle in which the Imperial Camel Corps went into action full strength. Everyone was desperately tired, forty hours since they last slept, but the enemy were taken by surprise.



At dawn they dismounted, alongside the Light Horsemen. The Ottoman guns opened fire and shells burst in the air above. Soon they were within rifle range and found themselves pinned down in the sand for several hours. They were in a very serious plight, though the 'Bing Boys' were doing the best to knock out the enemy guns and Allied planes dropped bombs over the

[6] Wouldn't fancy paying to have that put on the back of a football shirt.

Ottoman trenches. Reinforced by the 3rd Light Horse they were finally given the order to advance and having crossed a gully, came up on the other side and rushed the enemy with fixed bayonets.

The fighting was over quite quickly, some of the Turks jumping up promptly and offering to shake hands.

But then it was on to the next redoubt and the next, enemy trenches falling one by one. A famous victory was achieved by four thirty in the afternoon.

In later life, when asked about using a bayonet, Jim would explain to his children and grandchildren that he would close his eyes and run, hoping that it wouldn't stick in anybody. A laudable strategy and it seems to have paid off on this occasion.

Turning back to El Arish, and another long night of riding, the third in a row with no sleep. No-one spoke, many dozed in the saddle only waking when the camels halted. In the midst of the silence a tired voice cried out '*And it's Christmas Eve!'*.

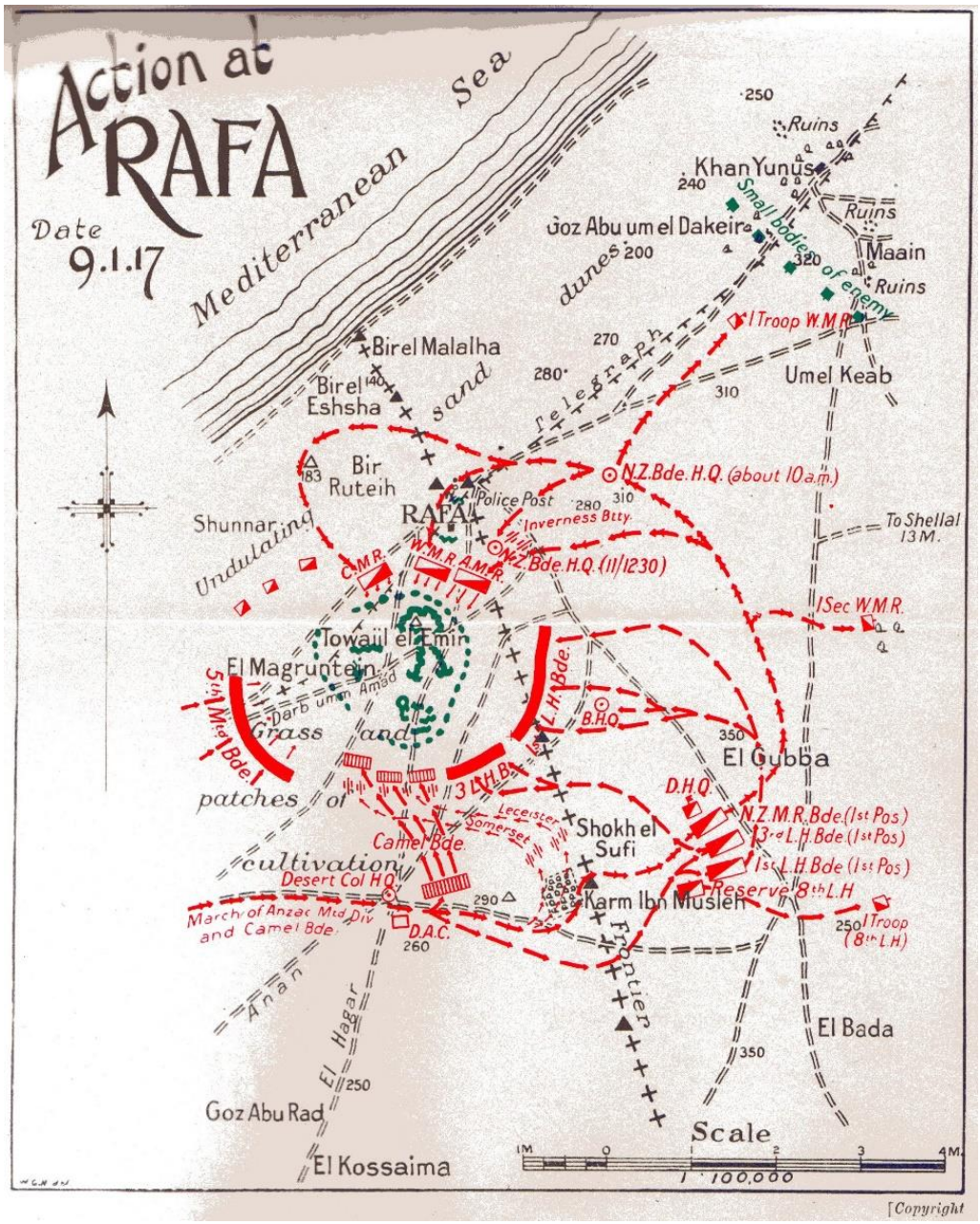
So Jim spent Christmas 1916 mostly asleep in a bivouac at El Arish, very tired and very satisfied. The Cameliers had established themselves as a fighting force, and shared a tremendous feeling of putting right what had gone wrong in Gallipoli. Magdhaba was the high point so far in Jim's war as far as success on the battlefield was concerned and was a boost to the Entente forces in general, one of the first battles won during the war.

The cameliers learned two important survival skills while staying at El Arish. One was that burning camel dung kept the mosquitos away, the second was a fashion for keeping chameleons as pets. They were common in the area and the men would create tiny harnesses and attach them within the tents where they helped to reduce the population of flies.

El Arish 1916

Battle of Rafa, 9th January 1917

Rafa was further along the coast from El Arish and marked the border between Sinai and Palestine. It has been recorded that at the camp used before this battle other units were warned to double their guard at night to prevent the cameliers stealing their food, such was their reputation as a bit of a rough bunch.



The Ottomans held strongly entrenched positions on high ground topped by a central redoubt and a system of further redoubts connected by trenches. It had the added advantage of 2,000 yards of clear ground all around, with no cover for attacking troops. The cameliers advanced over the open ground, swept by Turkish machine gun fire. At half a mile distance, and men falling all around the order was given to lie down. Each scraped a heap of sand for cover and lay still. Many of the men lying in the sand were already injured and suffering in the heat. They were trapped there for hours they made very slow progress, the main action being the 'Bing Boys' pounding the enemy trenches.

The Bing Boys

Then the British battalion started to move forward and began to charge with fixed bayonets. The remainder of the force providing covering fire from behind their heaps of sand. The cameliers reached the trenches and after a very short spell of fighting the Turks there surrendered. The New Zealand Mounted Rifles and other units almost simultaneously broke through and took the central redoubt. The men trapped in the sand all joined in the attack on the encircled Ottoman position and in very short time the day was won. Australian camelier Frank Reid, watching the British in action from behind his pile of sand observed.

'We had great faith in the fighting abilities of these Tommy comrades of ours in the Camel Corps. Most of them had been transferred from yeomanry units, and they were big sturdy men who could not fail to give a good account of themselves in a hand-to-hand encounter with the enemy'.

It was just as well that the decisive attack succeeded as quickly as it did as ammunition was running out, an error by Lieutenant General Philip Chetwode, and Ottoman reinforcements were on their way to join the battle. British forces now held the Sinai Peninsula and were about to press on into Palestine.

Bir el Hassana operation, 18th February 1917

There were a number of minor operations in this period. This is one example. Jim's battalion were sent to take over a Turkish garrison at Hassana. Another long night ride to attack at dawn. On this occasion the Turks surrendered without firing a shot. This was a particularly filthy place with a dead camel in the middle of the village, flies everywhere. Other than these skirmishes it was something of a dull period, waiting for the next move.

Palestine

Riding into Palestine brought a welcome change in scenery. No longer desert, but rolling plains of green vegetation, crops and flowering plants. It was hard to control the camels, desperate to get into that nice fresh vegetation. For the men too a little variety from bully beef and biscuits, their staple diet. There were a few occasions recorded when cameliers took sheep from local shepherds and enjoyed an unofficial barbecue. It's hard to blame them really, but they would always find that the deed would be noted by an officer who would deduct the cost from their wages and the shepherd reimbursed. An *'I-owe-ewe'* system of sorts. Another delight was when girls would come out from Jewish villages and sell oranges, an absolute treat.

Shepherds in Palestine 1917

Oranges for sale. Jewish girls offering oranges to the cameliers

First Battle of Gaza, 26-27th March 1917

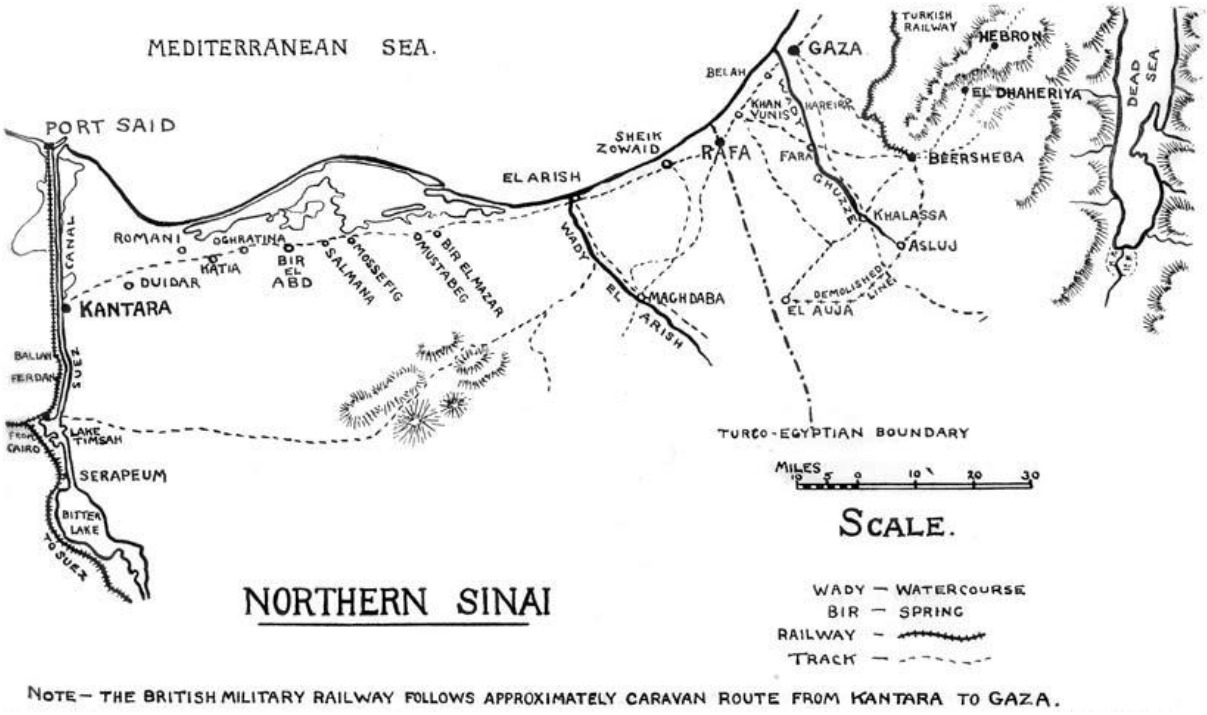
The first attack on Gaza, a coastal town, marked the beginning of hostilities in Palestine.

The Camel Brigade were positioned for the assault on Gaza on the Wadi Ghuzze at Tel el Jemmi, in a relatively defensive position. The main assault, on the key Turkish position of Ali Muntar, was to be a job for the 53rd Welsh Division. If Jim had not transferred to the ICC he would have been amongst them. A blessed decision it turned out to be. The battle started well with mounted troops encircling Gaza to the north with limited opposition. From the south steady progress was made, the ICC sending forward patrols to establish Turkish forward locations. Soon the Light horsemen and the 'camels' had closed off all roads out of Gaza and awaited the attack by the 53rd Welsh. They had to wait a lot longer than expected. A dense fog had descended over the whole area and the attack was delayed for hours as the British artillery was unable to give the infantry cover in the circumstances. By 11:30 still nothing had happened and time was beginning to run out. Around midday the various infantry divisions began their advances. The 53rd Welsh were given a dreadful task. Ali Muntar had the advantage of height and was well defended. It was a truly impressive feat when, in the Old Testament story, Samson carried the gates of Gaza to the top of Ali Muntar and it would be a legendary achievement if the Welsh Division could get to the top themselves. The infantry had to march across 4,000 yards of open ground to reach it. In long regular lines they pressed on for nearly two miles with hardly a shot fired, until at about 1,000 yards range the guns opened up and large gaps appeared in their ranks. Gallantly they struggled on under deadly punishment. The ground now was dense in cactus which held them up while they hacked at it with bayonets trying to cut a way through. The defenders had the easiest of tasks picking them off, especially as the British artillery was never able to provide adequate support. This desperate task continued all day in the hot sun until finally their objective was won. With most of the Turkish defences drawn to repel the infantry, the light horse men were able to make good progress from the north, occupying the town.

Murray then made the surprising decision to withdraw, with the battle seemingly won. He was concerned that with bad light, the delay due to fog, shortage of water, and enemy reinforcements on the way the risks were too great. It was a very unpopular and costly decision. The Turks could not believe their good fortune.

The troops set about withdrawing, and with the threat of a Turkish pursuit the ICC were tasked with holding a position at the Wadi Ghuzze while the other troops retreated across. At that time

the Turks were happy to let them go. The next morning a patrol of the 7th Light Car came across Jim and friends having breakfast to the east of the Wadi, completely unaware of a body of thousands of Turks in close proximity. With time to prepare their defences they held a position to the east of the Wadi for all of the next day. By nightfall the enemy was closing in, and close enough to describe as 'listening distance'. They took the decision to slip silently back across the Wadi, no easy task to keep the camels silent.



An overview to show some of the main locations for the conflicts in this period. The 'stalemate' of 1917 took place in a line running from Gaza to Beersheba, about 30 miles. The place Jim was captured is El Dhaheriya (top right).

Injured men carried on 'Cacolets', one each side of the camel. Incredibly uncomfortable, especially if one man was heavier than the other as then they would bounce up and down with every step.

Second Battle of Gaza, 19th April 1917

Jim was lucky this time, very lucky. Another large scale battle involving about 80,000 men overall. The Ottomans have had time since the first battle to strongly reinforce their defences and to bring in many more troops than had previously been present. The defensive line now led all the way from Gaza to Beersheba. For the first time there was the threat of gas being used by both sides, and the cameliers spent much of March and April training in the use of gas masks.

Action began on April 19th at 5:30 am. The ICC were established in the front line for the attack on the Khirbet Sihan group of trenches. The first and third battalions of the ICC were deployed to the left and right of the British line of attack, while the second, including Jim, was kept in reserve. The first battalion, ahead of Jim and to the left, were attacking three heavily defended redoubts, known as Tank, Jack and Jill. Tank redoubt was located on a flat plateau at 400m high which could only be approached by a slope 2,000m long with no cover. The attack was supported by a tank, the first seen in this conflict. It was a female[7] tank called 'Nutty'. All the tanks had names and gender, and included 'War Baby' a female, and 'Sir Archibald' a male. The two ICC battalions and men of the 5th Norfolks and 8th Hants, assisted by 'Nutty' attempted to take the first redoubt, and the few that made it that far in a bayonet charge were successful, but the losses were very heavy. Of the two Camel companies involved there were now only thirty men remaining from over three hundred who started out and they fought on. About twenty British infantry men had also reached this first line of Turkish trenches a little further along the line, a total of fifty men now attacking trenches occupied by 600 Turks and Germans. Their furious assault created panic amongst the Turks who fled and were mown down or taken prisoner. However, they were now exposed to fire from higher ground, but held out for two hours. The English press claimed that all of these men should have been awarded the V.C. Six runners were sent back for help. Only one made it. He had been shot three times but crawled back. He was too late to enable supplies or ammunition to be brought to the beleaguered men, who were now being overwhelmed as they ran out of bullets and had to fight with discarded Turkish weapons found in the trenches. Eventually, with no ammo left the last few had to retire. All across the line the Cameliers were being overrun and in retreat. An Australian, Roy Kelly,

[7] Male tanks had one large gun, females a number of smaller ones. By the end of the war there were also hermaphrodite tanks.

ran back to safety under fire all the way and survived, only to find there were five bullet holes in his hat.

By 5:55 p.m. they had lost the ground gained and the Turks were collecting wounded men as prisoners from the battle scene. Jim being in the reserve battalion was spared all of this, although no doubt an anguished observer. However, as the day wore on the third ICC battalion to Jim's right, after initial successes, was starting to be pushed back as well. It was dark by 7:45 and Jim's 2nd battalion replaced the remnants of the 1st battalion in the defences. Throughout an anxious night the Turks bombarded their positions continuously, and snipers picked off men who made themselves visible. Later in the night they silently moved further back for safety.

During the day's fighting the infantry had lost 6,500 men, but the Camel Brigade battalions fared proportionately worse. The 2nd Company of the ICC had started the day with 105 men, and at close had 5 left uninjured and had effectively ceased to exist. The 1st company had lost 70% of its men. A very sad day indeed, and Jim could be thankful for being in reserve for this one, but it wasn't over yet.

In the early hours of 20th April the remaining men of the ICC dug trenches on the Sheik Abbas ridge. This time the 2nd battalion, including Jim were in the front line, on its left. They lay all day in the scorching sun, troubled occasionally by planes dropping bombs into the trenches. The next night was spent reinforcing the defences, working in the cold with a fresh wind coming in from the sea. The next morning Jim's battalion were bombarded by the Turkish battery, six men being killed and more wounded. The bombardment was heavy and prolonged, resulting with at least one man wounded with 'shell shock'. Later in the morning planes dropped bombs on the lines of camels, killing many and two of the men handing them. They were exposed in this position for three days before being replaced. A very difficult experience by any measure but a safer option than the suicidal assaults of the 19th.

The losses incurred in this battle were on a similar scale to the worst instances in Gallipoli and were hidden from the British public. 137 camels were also killed. The waste of lives and resources was completely avoidable and morale amongst the troops very low. The British Government acted quickly to remove Sir Archibald Murray from command and replace him with General Allenby, and an inspired move it turned out to be.

Stalemate on the Philistine Plain

Following the 2nd Battle of Gaza there was a period of stalemate lasting six months. The belligerents established entrenched positions in two lines running roughly from Gaza to Beersheba, a distance of thirty miles. This narrow strip of fertile land is one of the most fought over in history. Pharaoh Shishak versus Solomon, Saladin fought the Crusaders here four times, Egyptian Mamluks defeated the Mongols, Napoleon Bonaparte thought it '*The most natural battleground of the whole Earth'*, and now the British Empire faced the Ottoman Empire.

All the fighting took place at night to avoid the heat of the day and often the moon was so bright that the light was close to daylight strength, on other nights 'star shells', magnesium flares floating on parachutes, would provide illumination for the combat.

Living conditions were dreadful. Camping outside all summer with the Negev desert behind them blowing regular *Khamsin* winds. Sandfly fever. The sand would impregnate clothes making them rough enough to damage the skin. Everyone had septic sores, partly due to poor diet, but mainly due to the activity of flies which covered everything. As soon as food or drink were produced, they would be covered by flies, and men had to push their mouths through a black coating of flies to get to the food, some just ate the flies as well. One man, for an experiment, on receiving a mug of tea, banged it hard on a table so that the flies would fall in. He counted 200. Another noted that the flies seemed to be the same type as plagued them at Gallipoli, only smaller – you could fit more of them on a piece of bread and jam. Daytime was spent removing fleas, lice and ticks. Placing your clothes on an ant hill was found to be effective.

The men would often dig a shallow trench to sleep in, it offered some protection from wind and sand, but the dung produced by thousands of horses and camels attracted multitudes of scarab beetles that would accidentally tumble into these trenches while a man slept.

Amidst this misery there were occasional highlights. Men were periodically given leave and either sent to Cairo by train for a few days rest and a good wash, or to the 'Palestine Riviera'. There were rest camps at places like Tel el Marakeb on the coast complete with entertainments including concerts, horse and camel racing, football, swimming in the sea. The most treasured treat was sleeping on a bed in a tent instead of out in the open in the desert.

The distance between the two lines of trenches varied from 400 yards to over a mile and there was much work for mounted troops in patrolling no-man's land, sabotaging enemy resources

and attacking each other's patrols. Having lost 10,000 troops in the two attacks on Gaza this was also a period of training new arrivals and reorganising depleted battalions. The following raid took place during the stalemate.

The Asluj / El Auja Raid, 23rd May 1917.

The railway linked Ottoman held Beersheba to the north with the military base at Hafir el Auja. The raid was undertaken by a combined force of the ICC and the ANZAC Mounted Division. The enemy had abandoned the base, but there was still the threat of rapid movement of troops there to attack the British, and so the railway track and bridges were to be destroyed.

The cameliers rode there from Rafa along a flat plain between banks of sand dunes. They had with them men from the Royal Engineers who had been providing intensive demolition training over the previous few days. At the same time a bombardment near Beersheba was underway to distract the enemy. As ever, the journey started at night, and soon a fierce *Khamsin* wind blew up, full of sand and electricity, and blowing into their faces making it hard to see or breath. The horsemen found that stroking a horse's mane produced a shower of sparks, dramatically visible in the dark. The blown sand whipped at any exposed skin bringing pencil lines of blood to men's faces.

The cameliers arrived at Hafir el Auja at 11:45. They could see the Turkish garrison disappearing into the distance. Using gun cotton charges and a 60-pound gun they destroyed 7,600 yards of track and seven bridges. Work completed by 17:00 and they returned towards

Rafa. Arriving at Wady el Abiad en route, a location where they had stopped for breakfast earlier in the day, they were surprised to find a damaged aeroplane complete with pilot. The pilot was about to destroy the plane to prevent it falling into the hands of the enemy. Ever resourceful, the cameliers lit a fire, used a piece of rail from the demolition as an anvil and repaired the axle.

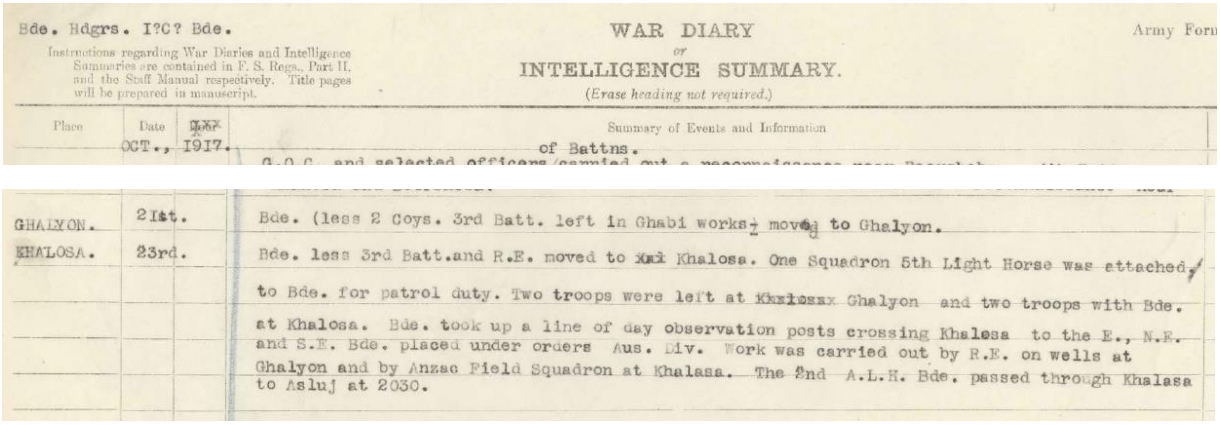
The El Auja raid was a complete success. The Turks could no longer assemble an army to the right of the British line. A job well done.

Allenby

In June 1917 General Edmund Allenby replaced General Archibald Murray as leader of the EEF. A few weeks later he received news that his only son, Michael, had been killed in Belgium. He took this very badly, breaking down in tears in public while reading a poem by Rupert Brooke. However, the loss filled him with an icy determination, and the rather lethargic campaign led by Murray was replaced with a whirlwind of action and inspired a wave of confidence amongst the troops. Over the next year, the EEF under Allenby would sweep away all in its path with a succession of brilliant victories from Beersheba to Damascus.

General Edmund Allenby

Jim's 22nd birthday was mostly spent riding his camel from Ghalyon to Khalosa (Khelasa) in preparation for the attack on Beersheba.



Bde. Hdgrs. I?C? Bde.

Instructions regarding War Diaries and Intelligence Summaries are contained in F. S. Regs., Part II. and the Staff Manual respectively. Title pages will be prepared in manuscript.

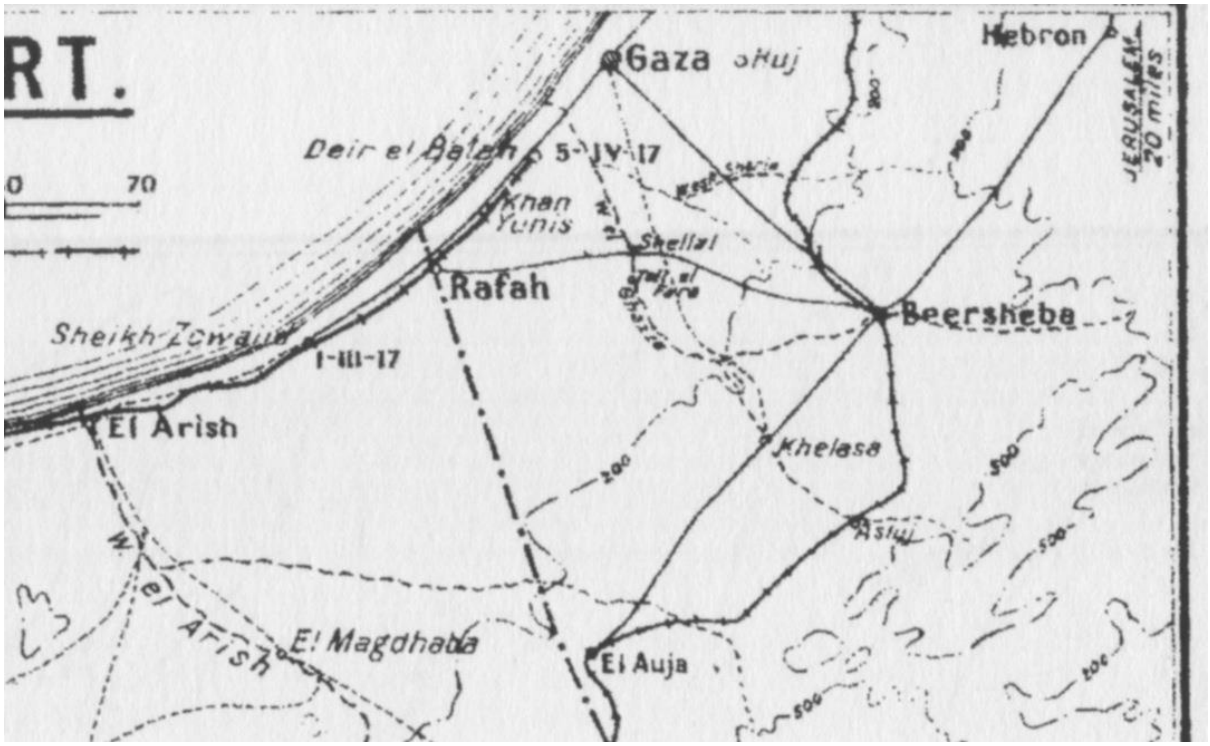
WAR DIARY
or
INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY.
(Erase heading not required.)

Army Form

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information
	OCT., 1917.		of Battns.
GHALYON.	21st.		Bde. (less 2 Coys. 3rd Batt. left in Ghabi works) moved to Ghalyon.
KHALOSA.	23rd.		Bde. less 3rd Batt.and R.E. moved to Khalosa. One Squadron 5th Light Horse was attached to Bde. for patrol duty. Two troops were left at Ghalyon and two troops with Bde. at Khalosa. Bde. took up a line of day observation posts crossing Khalasa to the E., N.E. and S.E. Bde. placed under orders Aus. Div. Work was carried out by R.E. on wells at Ghalyon and by Anzac Field Squadron at Khalasa. The 2nd A.L.H. Bde. passed through Khalasa to Asluj at 2030.

Completely unaware that he has just ten days of active service left in the war.

Beersheba and the Third Battle for Gaza



This was the crucial engagement that turned the war in Palestine in the Allies favour, but it was also the point at which Jim was taken POW under heroic circumstances.

Jim was a member of 'Newcombe's detachment', and the part that they played in this battle is famous to anyone with an interest in the war in Palestine. That said, there is scant detail readily available about what actually happened, and the names of most of the men who took part have been forgotten.

The battle for Beersheba was part of an elaborate plan to take Gaza at the third attempt, in which it was to be successful. Beersheba is due east of Gaza and blessed with wells. The plan was to take this town first in order to isolate Gaza on the coast. It would also provide invaluable water supplies for the push north.

The expanded Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF) was a diverse and colourful assembly, combining elements of men and weaponry that seem to belong to different eras. On the British Empire side there were 200,000 men, 46,000 horses, 20,000 camels, 15,000 mules and donkeys for transport, and a variety of artillery pieces. It included men from all over Britain, Australia and New Zealand. But also a West Indian battalion, the French *Détachement Français de Palestine* and the Italian *Distaccamento Italiano di Palestina.* A cavalry brigade of a thousand

Indians from the princely states of Hyderbad, Mysore, Patiala, Jodhpur and Alwar, still at this time armed with lances and sabres. What a sight they must have been. There were also primitive tanks and a few simple aircraft for reconnaissance, and able to attack the enemy by throwing bombs out of the cockpit. At sea there were 14 warships, both British and French, 2 river gunboats and 3 seaplane bombers. Gaza was a modern fortress and heavily defended, both the city itself and Ottoman entrenchments stretching in a line eastwards towards Beersheba, a challenging target evidenced by the two recent failed attempts at its capture.

Colonel S F Newcombe

A body of men were handpicked for a gallant mission behind enemy lines, led by Colonel Stewart Francis Newcombe[8]. Newcombe was a great friend of T. E. Lawrence and a tremendously charismatic leader, having already been awarded the DSO while leading ANZAC troops in Gallipoli. He had been working with Lawrence in sabotaging the Hejaz railway and had earned a reputation for extraordinary courage and energy, so much so that the Arabs complained to Lawrence that *'Newcombe is like fire, he burns friend and enemy'*. They also marveled at his habit of always sleeping with his head resting on the rail so as to gain early warning if a train was coming. The chosen men were assembled and addressed by the Colonel to the effect that *'I am looking for men with stout hearts to take part in a dangerous mission behind enemy lines. If any of you do not wish to take part, please step forward'*. One of the chosen few recalls later – none of us had a stout enough heart to step forward so we all stayed in our places, and went on the mission.

Newcombe's detachment comprised eighteen officers and NCOs from the Advanced School of Instruction at El Arish, 70 men from the ICC, 16 men from the 21st London Regiment, four machine gunners, 3 signallers, and a few Arab scouts. They were particularly heavily armed carrying ten heavy machine guns and a number of Lewis guns as well as numerous bombs and

[8] Newcombe had a chance encounter with Rudyard Kipling in the Boer War. His mistake almost lead to Kipling losing his life. Years later Newcombe sought Kipling's help to obtain a better posting. Kipling responded with a letter to Under Secretary for War, Colonel E. D. Ward. 'Isn't there any way by which you could set him on his return to Africa?' he wrote to Ward. 'If he dies there I shall be revenged for his attempt on my life at Karree Siding. If he lives I fancy the service will be richer by his work.' He got the post.

explosives. They were all directed to meet at Gamli station at 12:00 on 28th October 1917. The names of most of these men have been lost but it is interesting to note how many of those identified originated from the 1/4 Cheshire Regiment, so presumably must have been known to Jim, perhaps even as far back as Grange Road West Drill Hall and Suvla Bay.

On 30th October, carrying three day's supply of water and food they departed Asluj and took a secretive, curved route East towards the road leading South from Jerusalem and Hebron in the direction of Beersheba. The journey to get to the road was hazardous. Newcombe had been in this district before the war, making maps of the area while pretending to conduct an archaeological survey. However, the map available for this expedition was a simple one that gave the relative locations of places quite accurately, but had no information about contours, the lie of the land. Travelling largely at night they picked their way through rugged countryside until reaching their destination. They took up positions straddling the road, dug in, and cut the telegraph line on October 31st. The idea was that the Turks, retreating from Beersheba at night, would encounter this heavily armed force and be put to rout. Newcombe also planned to recruit the assistance of the local Mecca Arabs to bolster the British force.

During the Third Crusade at Khuweilfeh, close to the spot that Jim and his fellows now occupied, there took place a highly successful raid carried out by Richard the Lion Heart, on June 23rd, 1192. Richard had word that a very valuable caravan, laden with treasures of all kinds, and stores and arms for the Saracens, was coming up from Egypt, so he made a sudden incursion from the coast, and intercepted it here. Mounted on a powerful charger, the King, with lance and sword struck terror into the hearts of his enemies. It seems that Newcombe's detachment had a similar effect. The Turkish high command panicked, thinking a much bigger force must be making its way up the road to Hebron. There was frantic activity in their headquarters in Hebron, emptying offices, evacuating people, fleeing in the face of the perceived threat.

While Newcombe's men were waiting for fleeing Turks to come up the road from Beersheba in the South, they were surprised to find enemy troops arriving from the North. They first successfully intercepted motor transport and supplies coming from Jerusalem. However, these were followed by the 19th Division of the Ottoman 15th Corps who were arriving to reinforce the Beersheba defences. It had been delayed and arrived a day late or it would have been in the defences at Beersheba when the town was attacked on the 31st October. Along with this unit was the 12th Depot Regt (or part of it), who were on their way to Beersheba with replacements for Turks fallen in the battle. They were also accompanied by 100 German soldiers.

Newcombe's small force was massively outnumbered. Over to the West, the German commander for the defence of Gaza, General Kress von Kressenstein also panicked. He despatched four battalions of the 143rd Ottoman Regiment from Tel esh Sheria, approximately two thousand men, including many of his best troops. The Mecca Arabs did not materialise, as was so often the case, and the gallant company now hopelessly outnumbered continued to fight, and did so until midday on 2nd November before running out of water and food, and having exhausted their ammunition.

They were also tormented by a terrible *Khamsin*, a hot dry wind full of sand that blew up on 2nd November, winds over 80 mph with almost zero humidity and carrying huge weights of sand. Impossible to bear for men on their last drops of water. Newcombe was obliged to surrender. Twenty of the company, had been killed and at least as many wounded. Ten machine guns put out of action. The Arabs were right, Newcombe's 'fire' had made a significant contribution to the eventual victory at Gaza, but at a price. They had kept the road blocked for 40 hours in total, isolating Beersheba for the successful attack on October 31st, and then drawing a huge body of Ottoman troops away from the defence of Gaza. On the evening of the surrender two Turkish divisions and two cavalry regiments were deployed in the area, and a third division was on its way. That left only two regiments stretched over six miles of the Turkish front. The Ottoman plan for the defence of Gaza was left in disarray by the relocation of these forces and Major-General Philip Chetwode's divisions crashed through this line, swinging the battle in favour of the British, a turning point in the Palestinian campaign. The British occupied Gaza on November 7th.

Lieutenant Geoffrey Inchbald, an officer in the ICC recognized that

'The entire operation had shown a magnificent example of initiative, courage and determination … I cannot help feeling that in the story of the Imperial Camel Corps this episode must surely rank as one of its finest achievements'.

'He was somewhere behind enemy lines carrying out destructive work when the whole company, including the Colonel were captured…' Jim's brother Phil.

This image is interesting in that it was taken close to the point where Newcombe's force was captured, and on the same date. The incident would be just down the road to the right of this photograph. Alternatively, the group of men could include the captives if this image was taken after the surrender.

Taken at 600m over Edh-Dhahiriya by the German Squadron 303 at 07:30 hrs on 2nd November 1917, it "...may document Turkish activities related to that attack (*on Newcombe's force*): it shows a large number of men near the regularly laid out buildings east of the road"

Precious and honoured guests of the Sultan

Every Turkish soldiers training manual included an instruction that prisoners were ‘precious and honoured guests of the Sultan’. This was included to inform their illiterate enlisted men that the captured prisoners did not belong to them but were the guests of the Sultan. Officers were certainly treated a lot better than were the ‘other ranks’, and the barbaric treatment by guards led to much cynical humour on the part of poorly treated prisoners.

The surviving men were rounded up and almost certain to be dispatched on the spot by their captors when a German officer intervened and demanded that they be taken prisoner instead. I don’t suppose any of us would be here but for the ‘good’ German.

Instead they were stripped of their boots and much of their clothes and set to march north. Though this is in November, the temperature was 42ºC in the shade and there was no shade.

‘On one occasion, a soldier pointed a gun at me and told me to take my shirt off. I’ve never taken a shirt off so fast in my life’. Jim Irwin.

North meant up the road to Hebron where they stayed a night, then on to Jerusalem. An arduous journey, bare-footed, and with Jerusalem 1900ft higher up in the Judean Hills than Beersheba. They stopped in Jerusalem for a week. No doubt for interrogation, after all, they were far behind enemy lines when captured. Horace Yates, also captured in Palestine recalls that the interrogation was simply a series of questions put to him in good English by a German officer. It seems that von Kressenstein himself often conducted these interviews. There is no suggestion of rough treatment being involved. It is probable that the guards escorting the prisoners were changed at this point, the original captors being front line troops would return to action, and prisoners were typically guarded on their journey into captivity by conscript Kurds or Arabs.

General Kress von Kressenstein, Jim’s likely interrogator.

The Spanish Consul for Jerusalem, Antonio de la Cierva y Lewita, Conde de Ballobar, recorded in his diary on November 8th that he had visited six British prisoners.

'Their leader is Lieutenant Colonel Newcombe. I gave them cigarettes, money and novels in English for which they were very grateful'.

Nice to know that at least the officers had something to read, and no doubt kept their boots.

Jim's party must have departed Jerusalem in the middle of November, just ahead of the advancing British who arrived here and commenced the battle for Jerusalem on November 17th.

The party now headed North-East, down into the great rift valley of the river Jordan, to Jericho. At the time of Jesus this road was known as 'The Way of Blood', because of the blood often shed there by robbers. It also the road referred to by Martin Luther King Jr in his 'I've been to the mountain top' speech, his final speech on the day before he was assassinated. This is the road where a traveller 'beaten and stripped of his clothes' was discovered by the Good Samaritan. No such good fortune for these travellers who made their way along the meandering rubble strewn path, unchanged since ancient times. The descent to Jericho was an arduous, dry and dangerous trek even without the hazard posed by robbers, or in this case hostile guards. Though only about eighteen miles in distance, the road descends from Jerusalem at 2,500 feet above sea level to Jericho which is 825 feet **below** sea level. It first circles past the Mount of Olives, then passes Bethany, after this it descends rapidly to Jericho itself, the last three miles passing alongside the Wadi Qelt, dry at this time of the year. Passing Herod's castle they entered Jericho. They had completed the route that Jesus took, though in reverse, when advancing his ministry to Jerusalem. Just north of the Dead Sea, this is one of the lowest spots on the face of the Earth and the prisoners must have been feeling pretty low too. Jericho has a very dry climate and a desert landscape, more akin to Africa than Palestine. The lowest parts of the valley are 1,250 feet below sea level and incredibly humid. Water evaporating from the Dead Sea is trapped by surrounding mountains and with summer temperatures reaching as high as 52^{o}C in the shade very little grows here, the substrate is a dry, salty marl that forms a dust like flour, at some points a foot deep and covers everything. When the British Army reached here in 1918, the physical conditions and the relentless attack by flies and other insects led them to call it the 'Valley of Desolation', the most hated place they visited in the war. Trooper R. W. Gregson, described the Jordan Valley to his family,

"...it's a terrible place. I will never tell anyone to go to hell again; I will tell him to go to Jericho, and I think that will be bad enough!"

There is an oasis ‘Elisha’s Well’, and no doubt the prisoners were relieved to find water.

From Jericho the road turns roughly north-eastward and goes back up the steep side of the valley to Nablus. Nablus is 1800 feet above sea level, so an overall climb of 2,625 feet. It lies in a lush spring valley between Mt Gerizim and the arid Mt Ebal. The distance is 27 miles as the crow flies, substantially longer on the winding mountain paths.

The serious walking started after Nablus, another long winding descent into the Jordan River valley, crossing south of the Sea of Galilee then up again over the Golan heights, through Caesarea Philippi and then joining the Via Mari. They were now travelling through a land of low terracotta hills and sparse olive groves, becoming more fertile and eventually they reached a high plateau, having ascended another 2,230 feet. Approaching Damascus in 1917 presented one of the most dramatic vistas in Arabia. A shimmering walled city of white held in a green embrace, the boundless desert fading to the horizon in a haze of heat beyond golden domes, tapering minarets and labyrinthine alleyways, gardens and orange groves. The prophet Mohammed turned back at this point in his travels with the observation that *‘a man should only enter paradise once, and that is upon his death’*. The beauty of the view quite possibly lost on Jim and comrades. The ancient city of Damascus lay on the plateau, sheltered by the Anti-Lebanon Mountains and set amidst a fertile plain of irrigated fields of vegetables, cereals and fruits. It was at the crossroads of trade routes running west-east connecting Lebanon with the Euphrates river valley and north-south from Asia Minor to Egypt. Goats and sheep were shepherded south. Cattle, camels and men driven north. Damascus was blessed with plentiful, cool water so at least there would be some relief from the torment of thirst.

The distance for this leg of the journey was 170 miles, with many a change in altitude and climate along the way.

From Damascus the party headed north to Aleppo. This is the longest stretch at 240 miles. It’s a relatively straight road with 500 miles of the Syrian Desert to the east and the Al-Ansariyyaha mountain range to the west. A long, dry, dusty track with insufficient water, food or clothing. That late summer march to Church Stretton through the verdant Cheshire countryside must have seemed a long time ago at this point.

By the time the men reached Aleppo they were in a very sorry state. They had come this far shoeless and shirtless, dehydrated and half starved, burnt by the sun and beaten by their captors.[9]

'We were stripped of everything, from then on it was pretty terrible, somewhere in the wilds, starved, beaten, ill most of the time. In some of the villages we went through the local women came out and daubed salt on our backs…' Jim Irwin.

Aleppo 1918

In Aleppo their luck changed for the better. The Spanish consul recognised their plight and gave them money. With raging inflation this didn't buy as much as it might have done but it was more than welcome, possibly a lifesaver.

The journey continued. Fellow prisoner, John McPherson, wrote about his ordeal in a church newsletter after returning to his native Australia and provided an outline of the route taken but did not provide any details of the final section of the route from Aleppo into the Taurus Mountains, but it seems reasonable to suppose that it would be similar to that of other prisoners

[9] The sequence of towns passed through on this journey, and the intervention of the Spanish Consul, was reported by John McPherson, one of the survivors of Newcombe's force. The details of the routes between the towns was suggested by Barry Britnell of 'Exploring Bible Lands' website, an expert on ancient walking routes in the Holy Land.

who had been taken from Aleppo to the POW camps. The best known example being the 'Prisoners of Kut'.

In April 1916, British forces suffered one of their worst ever setbacks at Kut Al-Amara, south of Baghdad. They were besieged in Kut for 147 days, before finally surrendering with the men in very poor condition. Around 13,000 British and Indian prisoners began a forced march from Kut to Aleppo. Half died en route of exhaustion, dehydration and ill-treatment. Those who couldn't keep up were killed at the roadside or left behind in mud shelters, lazar huts, at the mercy of the Arabs. The plucky Ghurkas marched all the way in regimental formation to keep up the spirits of the other soldiers, but by the time they reached Aleppo the survivors were in such a sorry state that at an Austrian officer, on seeing them, remarked that it was *'Like a scene from Dante's Inferno'*. From Aleppo they were taken in airless cattle trucks, packed upright like sardines, 30-40 men to a truck and many of them with dysentery, across the Cilician plain and then walked again in steeper sections up onto the Anatolian plateau[10].

It seems probable that Jim and company were entrained in similar fashion and then walked up through the mountains via the Cilician Gates. Steeped in antiquity, this mountain pass is the route taken by the Crusaders, by Alexander the Great, St Paul, Genghis Khan, the Romans and no doubt many a sorry prisoner. They reach the Anatolian plateau and are taken to Belemedik at 2.295 feet.

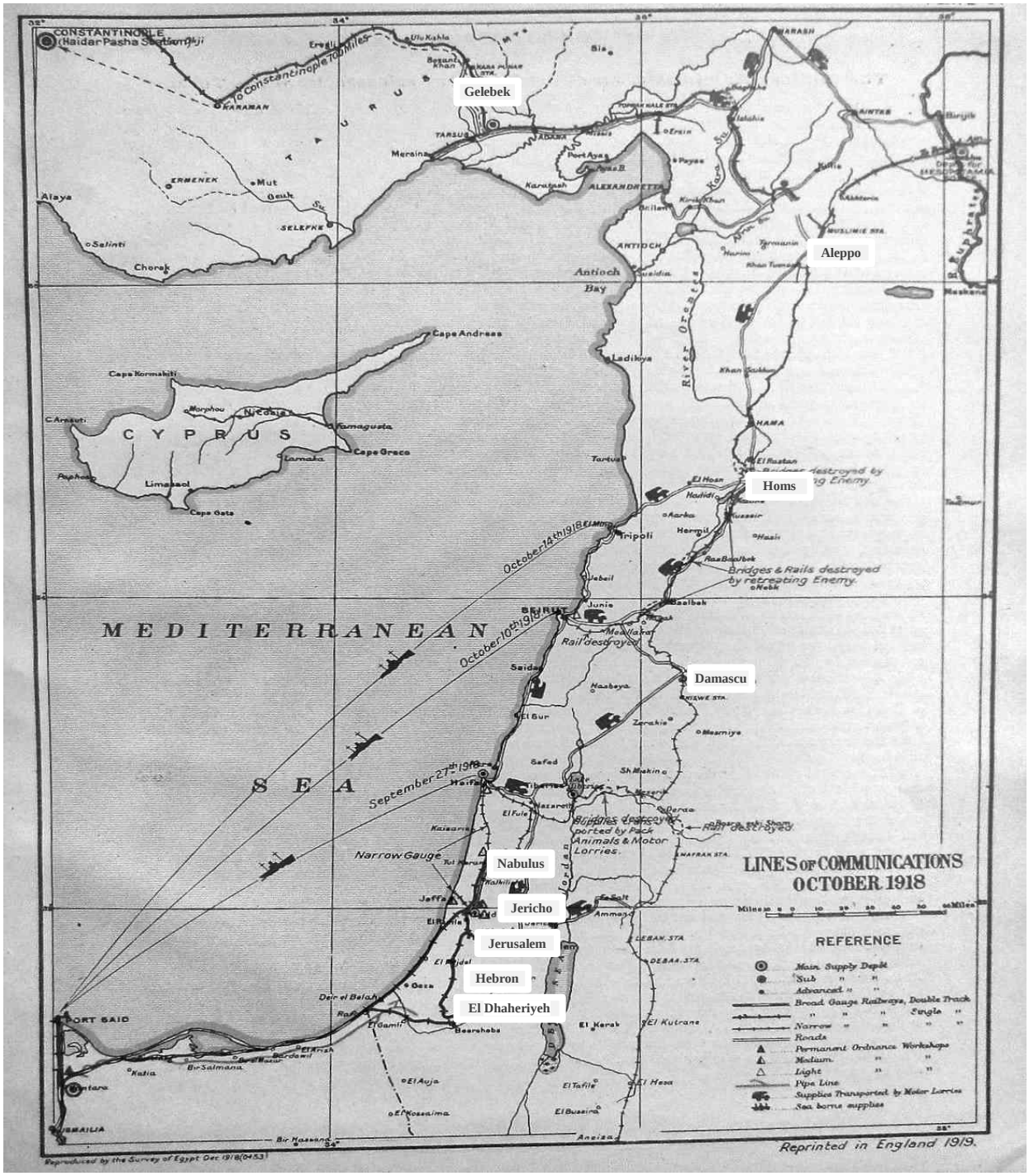
It was now winter. Jim exchanged the heat of the Syrian Desert for the deep cold of winter in the Taurus Mountains. The temperatures up here could be extreme in both winter and summer. A travelling German doctor, Wilhelm His passed through this region in June 1917. Delayed at Gelebek to wait for missing baggage, and struggling with the intense summer heat he observed that

'He who travels through Anatolia in this broiling heat, can have but a poor conception of the terrific cold which prevails there in winter. In February 1917 a train with soldiers had to halt for days in the open at a temperature of 32 degrees centigrade (about 26^0F) below zero. The majority of the soldiers froze to death'.

It is important to note that marching conditions, and the desperate shortage of food and water were no better for rank and file Turkish troops. They arrived at the battlefields in Palestine and Mesopotamia in similar fashion, often marching for four months from their bases in Turkey to

[10] Half of the survivors went on to die in POW camps. To put this in context, more men died in this affair than did Australians at Gallipoli.

the scenes of conflict. Like Jim, most lacked boots and suitable clothing. The Ottoman Empire simply lacked the infrastructure to support the huge numbers of men and animals fighting in remote desert areas, and not helped by the British blockade of Mediterranean ports. They suffered too. British soldier Horace Wake, taken prisoner and marched to Turkey in a similar fashion to Jim acknowledged that '*you could understand it really, most of the Turkish soldiers didn't have boots so they took yours'*.

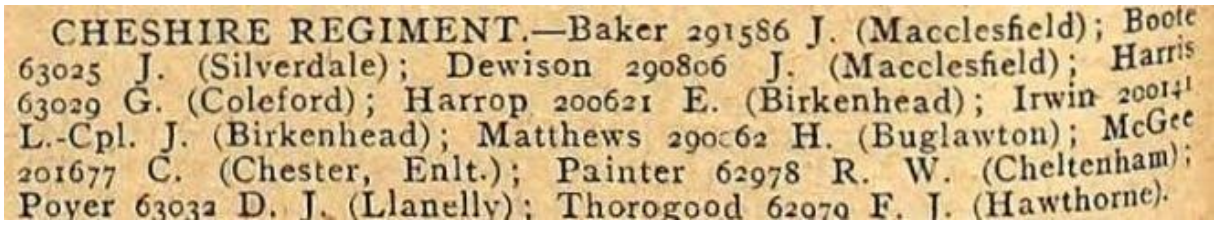


The march from El Dhaheriyeh to Gelebek

Sami Yengin, a Turkish conscript, kept a diary in which he recalled that desperate men would drink the urine of donkey and camel to stave off the thirst. Water when available was usually salty or muddy from military wells, or rainwater stored in filthy petroleum canisters, and rationed to two cups a day for all purposes. In the great retreat from the British advances in 1918, the Turks were so short of food that soldiers were selling their guns for a few loaves of bread, and were often seen lying belly down eating grass. At that point in the conflict their pay was 50 grams of wheat a day. Something in the order of a third of the Turks deserted in this period and made their own way back to Turkey on foot, you can understand why.

Back home

This must also have been a traumatic period for the Irwin family back home in Birkenhead. They cannot have heard from him since about October 1917, soldiers being typically permitted to send a letter every two weeks. Jim was first reported missing in the Daily Casualty List of 8/1/18.


CHESHIRE REGIMENT.—Baker 291586 J. (Macclesfield); Boote
63025 J. (Silverdale); Dewison 290806 J. (Macclesfield); Harris
63029 G. (Coleford); Harrop 200621 E. (Birkenhead); Irwin 200141
L.-Cpl. J. (Birkenhead); Matthews 290062 H. (Buglawton); McGee
201677 C. (Chester, Enlt.); Painter 62978 R. W. (Cheltenham);
Poyer 63032 D. J. (Llanelly); Thorogood 62079 F. J. (Hawthorne).

A short time after this casualty list was published, a patrol led by Lt Kingston located the bodies of those men of Newcombe's force who died in the conflict. There seems no record of the number or their names, but a few weeks later 24 men were transferred to 5th Company so that might give a reasonable indication.

It must have been a miserable Christmas in Birkenhead, 1917. Jim's whereabouts unknown since October, an empty place at the table.

The family subsequently received confirmation that he was POW in Turkey on receipt of this notification in March 1918. While no doubt deeply troubling, at least he was confirmed alive.

Army Form B. 104—83A.

No. 4/6/200141.
(If replying, please quote above No.)

No 2. Record Office,
Shrewsbury Station.
25/3/ 1918.

SIR ~~OR MADAM~~,

I have to inform you that a report has been received from the War Office to the effect that (No.) 200141.
(Rank) Pte. (Name) J. Irwin.
(Regiment) CHESHIRE
is a Prisoner of War in Turkey.
Camp. Gelebek.

Should any other information be received concerning him, such information will be at once communicated to you.

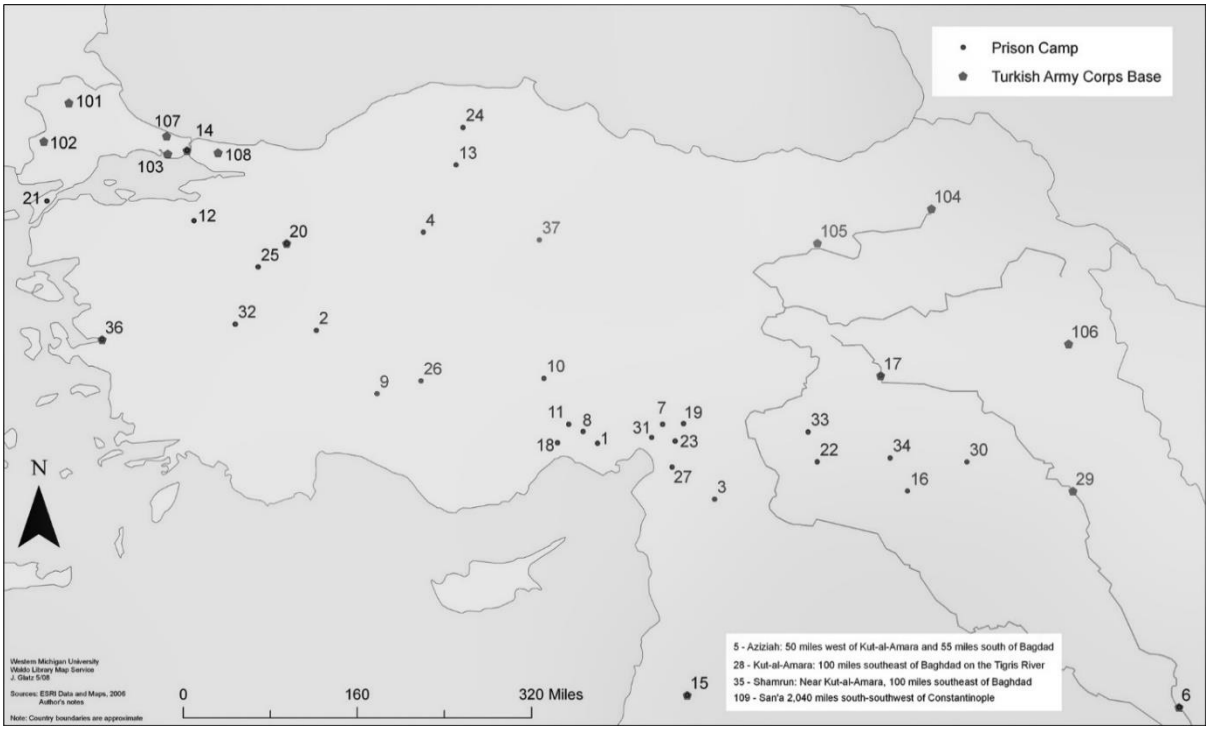
Instructions as to the method of communicating with Prisoners of War can be obtained at any Post Office.

I am,
SIR ~~OR MADAM~~,
Your obedient Servant,
R. D Lucas Capt
for Officer in charge of Records.

IMPORTANT.—Any change of your address should be immediately notified to this Office. It should also be notified, if you receive information from the soldier above, that his address has been changed.

(9 38 5) W 13495—5013 80,000 12/15 H W V(P 1362) Forms/B. 104—83A/1
17,810—356 60,000 2/16

Life as a POW



Ottoman Prisoner of War Camps

Key: 8 / Belemedik 14 / Constantinople 36 / Smyrna

None of the Turkish POW camps were camps in the recognized sense. There were no fences, no barbed wire, and no dogs. The guards were usually ‘old fogeys’, men too old for frontline duty. The prisoners called them ‘Greybeards’ and mocked their ancient blunderbuss rifles and curious ways. Security did not need to be tight as it was clearly impossible for any prisoner to escape in this remote and hostile territory.

Officers were treated very differently to ‘Other Ranks’, and were usually allocated to houses vacated by Armenians, and these were plentiful. Some officers lived in hotels. The officers could request British orderlies to look after them, and many asked for as many orderlies as they could get away with in order to relieve the suffering of those less fortunate. They were paid the equivalent of five British pounds per week and expected to buy their own food in local shops and markets and generally look after themselves. This was not a comfortable existence, the houses were cold with scant bedding and the money bought little with rampant inflation reducing purchasing power. They suffered from boredom and entertained themselves by organising theatrical events and the like, and in at least one case, trained local dogs to go fox hunting. Most tried very hard to support their men by arguing for improved conditions with the

Turkish and German authorities, and spent much of their own money to buy food and clothes for the men, though this was made difficult by the fact that they were typically housed in different towns.

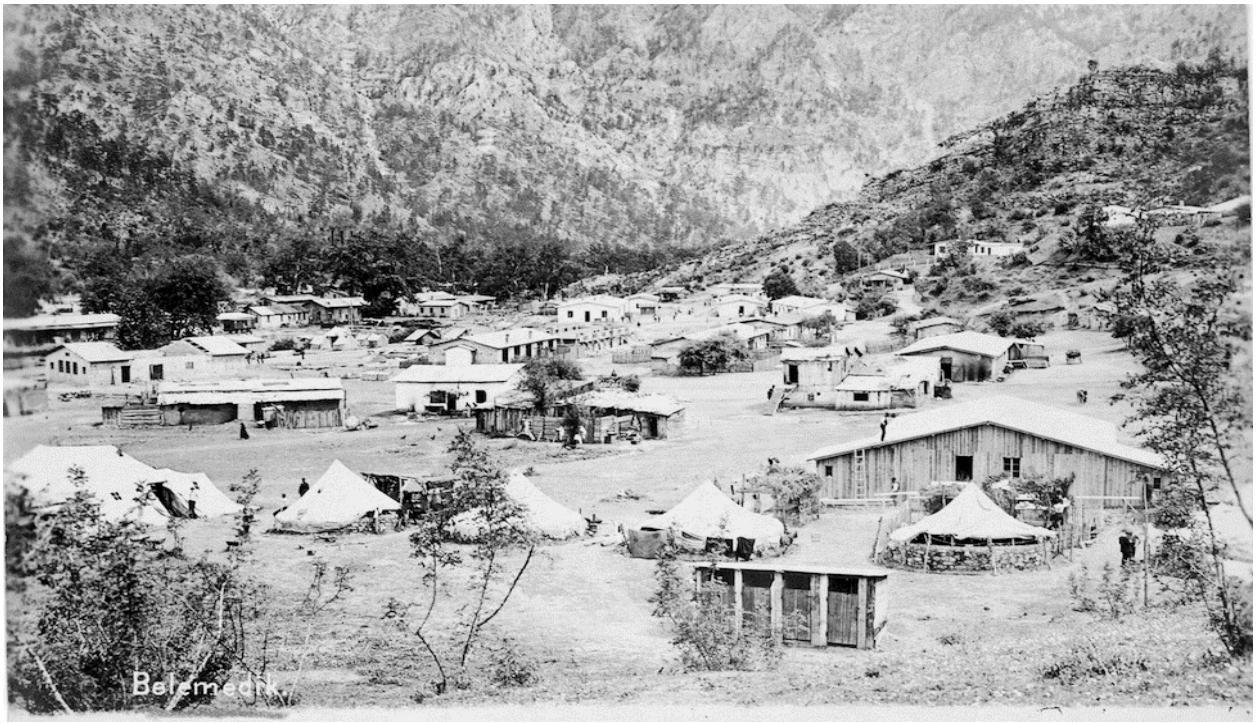
The 'Other ranks' ORs

Man who were 'fit', in the sense that they did not require hospitable treatment were sent to work on the Berlin-Baghdad railway line in the Taurus Mountains. Construction of the railway was undertaken by Philipp Holtzman, an engineering company from Hamburg. The men became their 'employees', though perhaps better described as slaves.

Conditions at the camps varied enormously, and depended entirely on the nature of the German engineer in charge. Some were seen as models of good practice for the time. Belemedik was seen as the best, run by a retired naval officer who had been trained by British Admirals. An Anglophile, he took great interest in the men in his care and organised walks in the countryside and picnics on the river bank. Belemedik had an inn where men were allowed to drink, if they had sufficient money, and would be escorted back to their huts by one of the guards after closing time. The town itself was likened, rather favourably, to a Swiss mountain village and had a number of shops where the men could buy clothes and additional food out of their wages of two shillings a day (equiv. in piastres). There was even a rudimentary cinema showing German films. It was still a very hard life with ten hour shifts in the tunnels, unheated accommodation, and just enough food to keep alive. Flogging was the routine punishment for any misdemeanors. Sited in a beautiful sheltered bowl in the mountains it was also prone to epidemics of malaria that periodically swept the region. At the other end of the scale, and only ten miles along the track, was Gelebek. Gelebek was simply a labour camp run by '*A typical Hun of the worst kind'*, and had the worst reputation for work, food, and sanitation. The men there lived in draughty huts if they were lucky, others making do with 'dug-outs'. These were huts dug into the side of a hill with an earthen floor and roof, so full of fleas that the men would sleep outside in good weather. Bunks, as far as they existed were made from stolen wood and there was no heating.

I'm sure you can see what's coming next. Jim and company arrive at Belemedik, which is the centre of operations in the area, but then are allocated Gelebek as their new home.

Every cloud must have a silver lining. At least Jim is in the company of friends as most or all of the men he has travelled with join him at Gelebek.



Belemedik POW Camp. Main centre for the *Pozanti* district to which Jim was allocated.

Gelebek is 645 miles from Hebron. They walked for at least 500 of them. Having been captured on November 2nd, taking a day to reach Hebron, and a one week stop in Jerusalem, the route from there involves about 450 miles walking, and a train journey of 150 miles. The Turkish troops marched at a rate of about 15-20 miles per day, and prisoners were expected to do the same. At the slower rate they would take 30 days walking, and perhaps one or two entrained. Even with a few stops it means that they would get to Gelebek in good time for the bleakest Christmas imaginable. The prisoners found their isolation much harder to bear at times like this and POW John Wheat must have vocalized the sentiments of all prisoners in declaring that

'Christmas was a time for remembrance when many a man found an unaccustomed lump in his throat at the memory of absent friends'.

Generally speaking, an effort was made to allow men to enjoy Christmas in some way, a little extra food, a game of football and suchlike. Let's hope there were some festivities at Gelebek.

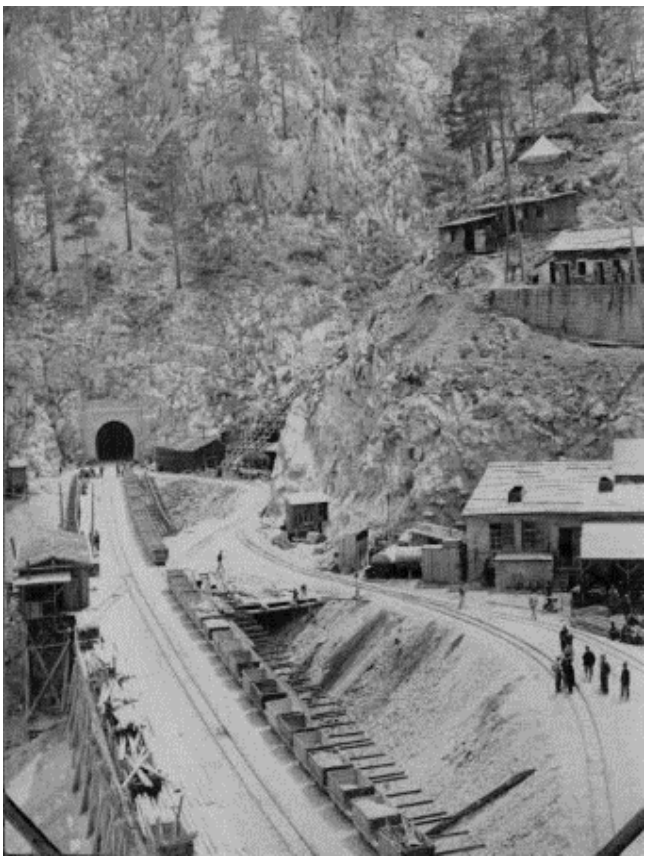
British and Australian prisoners at Belemedik

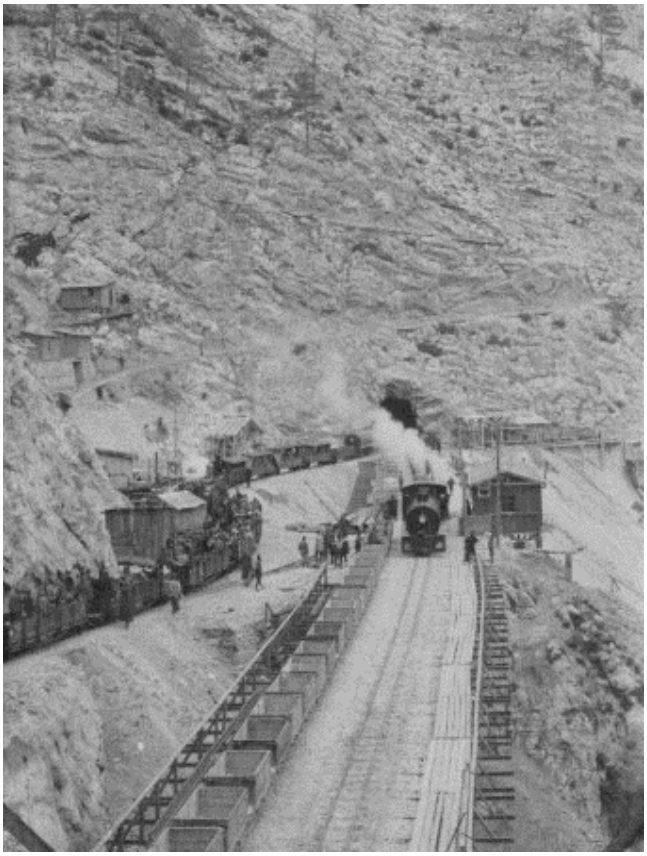
Hard labour

The men were put to work in a variety of jobs related to the railway. Whatever the job they worked 10-12 hours per day, with shifts continuing day and night. Men could elect to work inside the tunnels on nightshifts and receive a little extra pay, and many took this option to get some relief from the heat and the mosquitos. The tunnels had been completed by 1918 but there was related work in road construction and quarrying, and especially in moving heavy goods like the airplane overleaf from the broad gauge line arriving from Constantinople to the narrow gauge track that ran east from Gelebek. Men were usually allocated tasks according to any skills they brought with them, so some had roles in engineering, design and administration. Whatever the task it was very hard work, slave labour. This is where the admonishment that Jim's children grew up with '*Heidi Karlum, Heidi suss'* (or so it sounded) originates. This was usually applied at home as an instruction to get up the stairs to bed and go to sleep. A few attempts at translation broadly agree with each other, meaning 'work faster and shut up'.

"Haydi kazalim, haydi sus" might mean *'dig faster and be silent'*, this would be repeated over and over many times. Oguz Ozkan.

"Hadi oglum, hadi sus ' could mean *" Hurry up young man "* and *" Close your mouth now ".*
Dr Dr K Buyukataman





The Berlin-Baghdad railway, Taurus Region. Tunnels constructed by POWs.

Fellow prisoners

The camps in Turkey were mainly populated by British, French, ANZAC, Russian, and Indian prisoners. Other than the Russians, they were mostly taken at Kut, Gallipoli, and the Eastern Front in Palestine. They also included the crews of several British, French and Australian submarines who were rather susceptible to capture once a submarine was incapacitated. The Indians were mostly sent to sections of the railway to the east of the Taurus range where the temperatures were hotter while the majority of prisoners in the Taurus area were Russian soldiers captured in the Caucasus campaign.

A prisoner's diet

This is a prisoner's account of food at Gelebek in 1918, and so must be exactly what Jim was living on. No wonder he looked thin when arriving back at Birkenhead Central in December.

'The bread was made from mixed pea and bean meal and flour, it was a small heavy loaf of about a pound weight. The bread was issued from the timekeeper's office; if a man didn't work he got no bread. We started work at six in the morning and finished at half past five in the evening, having two hours off for meals. We worked five and a half days a week, working half a day on Sundays.

We were given four kilograms of haricot beans and a pint of olive oil for twenty men. Talking to the German Quartermaster Sergeant who issued the rations, he told us we were allowed four kilos a day of beans, wheat, lentils or peas, or only three kilos of rice, if we drew rice. This with a pint of olive oil was for twenty men. We got meat sometimes. We got three issues of meat the first month, after that we went a month without getting any, then we got an issue once a week for a few weeks. When a consignment of lentils came we would be issued with lentils five days a week until they were finished; if a lot of peas come, we would have peas nearly every day; it was the same with horse beans. Occasionally they would give us haricot beans or wheat or rice for a change. The lentils contained a good percentage of small beetles which we sorted out while eating. The peas were the small, hard, white pea, hard even when cooked; the prisoners called them shrapnel. The horse beans, so called by the prisoners, were a sort of dried broad beans; they were rather tough eating and each bean contained a beetle. One man was allowed as cook, we were given one large cooking pot. For about two months we got no meat; what they gave us was the livers and lungs of the cattle that were killed for the German soldiers'.

'Food at Gelebek was rather expensive to buy. Eggs were three to five piastres each, according to the time of the year; potatoes twenty-five to thirty piastres an oke[11], meat was sixty to seventy piastres an oke, onions forty piastres an oke, butter was three hundred piastres an oke. Ration loaves were bought and sold twelve and a half piastres to fifteen piastres, according to the demand. Turkish soldiers' ration loaves were twenty to twenty--five piastres each and I have seen kilo loaves sold for fifty piastres each'.

The prisoners could add to this using their wages, and there were a couple of simple shops in Gelebek for this purpose, but it wouldn't buy much more. The men were always hungry, starving in fact, and on those occasions when wild food was available they would take it. Sometimes fish could be caught in the rivers using primitive homemade nets, for example. The Russians would catch crayfish which they would sell to the other prisoners. The British were hungry enough to try frogs on occasion, but only the French would eat the tortoises, which were commonplace on the Anatolian plateau, or at least were until the arrival of the French.

The diet the prisoners were receiving was in fact the standard rations of the Ottoman troops, but the British were unused to this vegetable based diet and craved meat and dairy products. Used to a diet rich in meat, the prisoners were unimpressed by the Turkish menu of vegetables and legumes they considered "*food you would feed the chickens on".* The Indian prisoners fared much better on the same diet. The British also greatly resented eating with their hands and using shared utensils, especially from a communal source.

It should be recognized that the whole country, indeed most of Europe was starving. Men were queuing up in local villages to work for one loaf of black bread a day. The prisoners were inevitably starving, as the least important people, and in the remotest of locations, in a starving land.

Jim sent several postcards home from Gelebek, asking for parcels of food. Sad to say, parcels from home rarely arrived at their destinations intact, if at all. You can readily understand why Jim so much enjoyed a nicely set table and a good meal in later life.

Medical Care

Disease was a major problem for the prisoners. Regular epidemics of malaria swept through the camps, and there were outbreaks of typhus, usually carried by the Russians. Dysentery and

[11] About 28 ounces, 1.3 kilo.

gastritis were regular killers. Far more prisoners died of disease than by violence at the hands of their captors.

There were two doctors at Gelebek. The German doctor, Dr. Wagner enjoyed boasting that he had '*Killed more Britishers than any German soldier'*. Fortunately, by the time Jim arrived at Gelebek there was an English doctor too. Dr. Clifford was a saintly man. One of the prisoners of Kut. He was such a good person that his two Turkish nurses decided that the English were much better people than the Turks and switched allegiance. He was an expert in the treatment of malaria[12], which was rife in the camps, and Jim is sure to have benefitted from his care. He was known to all as 'Blessed' Dr. Clifford.

There was no 'sick pay' for a man unable to work, the policy was no work / no food. Very poorly cases were sent to hospital, though the care there was pretty awful.

At Gelebek there were baths, erected by the company, to which the prisoners could go. The latrines were deep holes dug in the ground and a floored hut put on top. When the hole was full, the hut was taken away and the hole covered over. There were no facilities for washing clothes and washing clothes was forbidden in the baths. No wonder Jim described himself as 'filthy' after his escape.

Colonel Newcombe was encountering a rather different level of medical care. Interned at Bursa, and recovering from smallpox, he was falling in love with his Franco-Turkish nurse Elsie Chaki. They arranged clandestine meetings at the top of the Bursa clock tower, she pretending to be there to sample the spa water, and he taking the opportunity to spy out the lie of the land and plan his escape. Eventually he succeeded and spent most of 1918 living incognito in Constantinople.

Isolation

The men in these remote mountain camps suffered greatly from feeling isolated from the world outside. '*We got most of our news from a Turkish paper, published in French, called the "Hilal". Occasionally we got two newspapers from the Germans, printed in English, called the 'Continental Times" and the "Illustrated War Journal". Both of these papers were printed in Berlin and the news distinctly pro-German. We received no war news from England or Australia, our letters and parcels undergoing strict censorship'.* POW John Beattie.

[12] Malaria was unknown in the Taurus Mountains until the arrival of the POWs. It was brought there by Indian prisoners and was a particularly aggressive strain *Malaria tropica*.

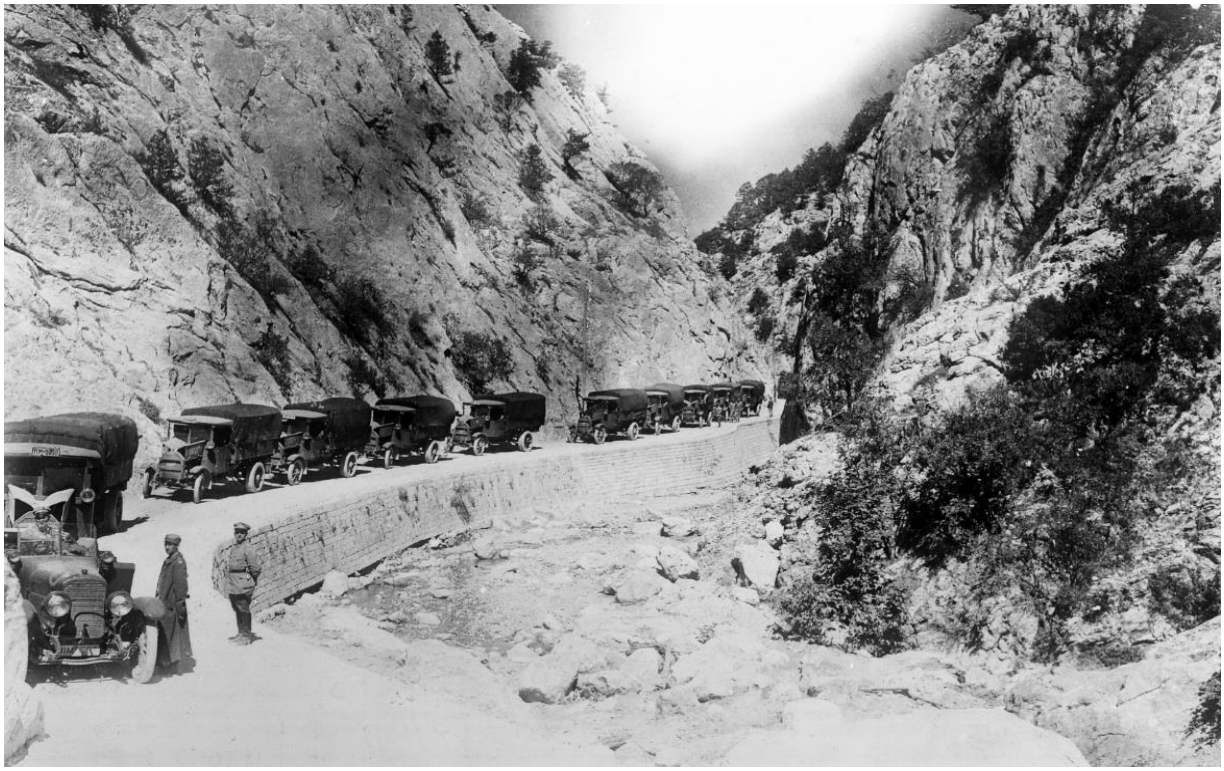
Nevertheless, rumours spread rapidly along the railway line, the prisoners being in regular contact with local Turks and Greeks, many of whom also worked on the railway or were employed as interpreters.

Most of the German and Austrian soldiers encountered by the prisoners were friendly and well disposed towards them, a notable exception being the Commandant of Gelebek of course. The Turks varied tremendously. The commandant at Yozgat was described as a *"Turk of the old school - polite, honest and silent,"*, while his counterpart at Afyonkarahisar wielded a bullwhip. The guards often showed little regard for their welfare and floggings were frequent. There were constant curses on lines of

'When the war is over we will keep you as slaves'.

'When the Germans go, you infidels will become slaves of the faithful'.

The locals were surprisingly indifferent, friendly even, except for the children who would make silent 'cut-throat' gestures at them, and follow them with repeated cries of '*Ingleez chok fena'*, English very nasty.



The road through the Taurus Mountains, constructed by POWs.

Welfare

The American Consul was very active in trying to improve the lot of the prisoners, as America was a neutral country until late in the war, and at this point the role was taken over by the Dutch Legation. Both provided a lifeline for money to buy food, and direct supplies of clothes.

'The only clothes we received in Turkey were from the American Ambassador and the Dutch and Spanish Consuls. They also sent money to the prisoners in the convalescent camps. I received from the Ambassador and Consuls while I was a prisoner about five suits of clothes, six suits of underclothing, five pairs of boots and four overcoats.

For about the last twelve months the clothes supplied to the working camp were of poor quality. The suits of clothes were of a sort of grey coloured loosely woven canvas, very poor wearing stuff, and the boots averaged about two months wear. Clothing seems to be very scarce and hard to get in Turkey'. POW John Beattie.

Jim's story of a nightmare forced march across the mountains and deserts of Palestine, Syria and the Taurus Mountains followed by slave labour and punishment in the labour camps, was shared by all of the soldiers, other than officers, captured by the Turks. Doubtless, therefore, they would all recognize the sentiments espoused in these stanzas, taken from a longer poem by captive Leonard Woolley.

'Precious and Honoured guests'

Famished and spent across the waste, beastlike you drove us on,

And clubbed to death the stragglers by the way.

Our sick men in the lazar[13] huts you left to die alone,

And you robbed the very dying as they lay.

Naked and starved we built you roads

And tunnelled through your hills,

And you flogged us when we fainted at our work,

Fevered beneath the sun we toiled, wrecked by winter chills,

Till death released us, kindlier than the Turk.

[13] Lazar huts were simple mud shelters located at the roadside. Men who could not keep up were either killed on the spot or left in these at the mercy of local Arabs. None were seen again.

And the tunnels we drove for you, and the roads that we have made,

Shall be highways for the armies of your foe.

We shall mock you in your graves, that in what we did as slaves

We helped, we too, to work your overthrow.

Royal Flying Corps Flight-Lieutenant Leonard Woolley RAF.

Jim was 'fortunate' in being imprisoned late in the war. Some men had been here since Gallipoli, and in the first few years of captivity suffered dreadful neglect. In the first few years of the war the Turks prevented any visits from the representatives of neutral countries, or from charities like the Red Crescent. Mortality rates in this period were running at an astonishing forty percent, or thereabouts, and it seems that even the Turks became embarrassed by this. International condemnation lead to the Berne agreement in late 1917. There followed rapid improvement in the care of POWs throughout 1918, although I rather doubt that Jim would have recognized this. Certainly the mortality rate dropped, and the degree of support coming through from the Americans and Dutch was much better. It also seems that it became very clear throughout 1918 that the Allies were going to win the war, and the Turks perhaps treated the men better in fear of possible repercussions when the war was over.

Nobody lives at Gelebek anymore, though there is a tiny rail station. It was only a labour camp with no permanent settlement. The nearest habitation now is the small village of Durak, which has a café '*Kelebek Köyü'*.

The Taurus Mountains

Jim was imprisoned in area of fabulous natural beauty, appreciated a little more, perhaps, by officers who had more time to enjoy their surroundings. Snow-capped peaks ascended to 12,000 feet, and were abundant with wildlife. There were ibex, chamois, wild pigs, lynx, wolves, porcupines, bears, and the Anatolian leopard. The Caspian tiger[14] was still resident in the mountains at this time, though you would really have earned your stripes if you located one of those. This is where big cats, especially leopards, were trapped for the Roman Amphitheatre and stone traps from that time survive in the mountains to this day. In happier circumstances a wonderful place to visit. It is easy to recognise how fellow prisoner John Still felt inclined to contrast the freedom of the wild things he observed with the frustrations of captivity.

[14] Sadly the last of these seems to have been shot in the 1990s.

Captivity

I saw a flight of herons cross the sky,
Borne by slow-beating multitudinous wings;
Spread in a twinkling crescent flying high,
They travelled eastward, seeking many things.

I watched a thousand swallows in the air
Weaving wide patterns with invisible thread,
Speeding and fleeting swiftly here and there,
And seeking in the heavens their daily bread.

I saw a hanging hawk above a spire,
Outspread and motionless while wind rushed past,
Suddenly stoop deep deep down to inquire
Into some stir that promised to end his fast.

With bayonets fixed the sentries pace below,
With bayonet fixed one stands beside my door.
The days drag on, the hours seem strangely slow.
The sentries footsteps clump along the floor.

Yet freedom is and ever will remain
Moral, not physical, and those are free
Who can rise morally above their pain,
Their minds uncrippled by captivity.

More free by far than any bird that flies,
My mind is free to climb amongst the stars,
My soul is free to wander o'er the skies,
Only my body lies behind the bars.

John Still

Escape

I have pieced together an account of Jim's escape and repatriation, and feel that I need to explain my thinking along the way as there is scant evidence of his experiences and movements in this period.

In September 1918 with the war going badly for the Central Powers on all fronts the Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire, Talat Pasha, travelled to Sofia and discovered that the Bulgarians were going to make a separate peace. When he returned to Istanbul his first words to brother Enver on the station platform were apparently "*Boku yedik*"; a colloquialism that literally means "*we have eaten the s**t*". Indeed they had.

Bulgaria agreed an armistice on September 30th, and from that point it was clear that Turkey would have to follow. Losing Bulgaria meant that it was cut off from Germany, surrounded, and with Palestine also lost there was no choice but to seek an armistice in turn. An armistice with the Ottomans was agreed on Mudros on October 30th 1918. The end of war with Germany on November 11th.

However, with the end of the war seemingly just a formality, POWs had started to leave camps as early as August. In some camps the guards had already stopped making the prisoners work, and they started to make their way to either Constantinople or Smyrna. In Smyrna, an English nurse, Grace Williamson, recorded in her diary

September 22nd. '*English prisoners have come and some are lodged in the American College, and some in the town in different institutions. They are in a very poor condition, and have hardly any clothing. The English ladies are making shirts as hard as they can, and everyone is doing their best to send comforts. But there are so many, and it is a drop in the ocean what we can give. What revelations they will make'.*

Then a few weeks later

October 6th: '*The past month the prisoners have been coming from up country in batches of 50 or 60. Sometimes the poor fellows are very ill and dying. One lot journeyed for 5 days with nothing to eat. Several have died since coming. It is dreadful to think of the suffering they have gone through'.*

The scenario in Constantinople was very similar.

An exchange had been arranged for ill and wounded prisoners, with each side to provide 1,000 men. The exchange to take place at Smyrna. The Turks struggled desperately to find such a number. Most of the prisoners being 'healthy'. This was not the result of benevolent treatment of prisoners, more likely because the policy of 'no work / no food' meant that wounded or ill men usually died, leaving very few in this category. They started to trawl the camps for men to fill their quota and this became farcical. Some men were accepted having declared symptoms such as *'I have been feeling really tired lately'*. This must have had an effect on those left behind, encouraging them to take matters into their own hands and leave as well. John Beattie, imprisoned at Belemedik recounted that

'On October 7th some Turkish civilians were sent to take the place of the British prisoners working in the power station at Belemedik. The next day the Commander told the British sergeant in charge that he would be sending the prisoners away in a few days' time. The first part of men to go – about forty – left the following day; two days later another party left, and two days after that another party. ***In a week all the British prisoners had left the Taurus and Amanus districts***. *At Afion Kara Hissar we got hold of the news that the Turkish army had been utterly routed and Turkey was asking for peace terms. A bout the same time we heard that Bulgaria had signed an armistice.*

About the 17th October we had a medical inspection and all the weak and disabled men were picked out to go to Smyrna for exchange. We went to Smyrna in two parties at two days interval, the second party reaching there about the 24th. Altogether I think there were about four hundred'. POW John Beatie.

This statement is really interesting because it indicates that Jim's camp was emptied by about the middle of October, a fortnight before the armistice with Turkey was signed. Jim must already have left. So what exactly happened between this point and his appearance in Birkenhead on 12th December? This has been the most difficult part of Jim's story to unravel. I am going to attempt to do so by first explaining my reasoning and then telling the tale as seems most likely to have happened.

Documented evidence / facts.

He started at Gelebek labour camp in the Taurus Mountains.

He crossed from Calais to Dover on December 8th.

Oral History.

He had heard that the war was effectively over, and fearing that the Turks would keep them as slaves he decided to escape.

He was aided in his escape by a Greek(s).

He was disguised as an Arab / woman / other.

He was helped by an English man.

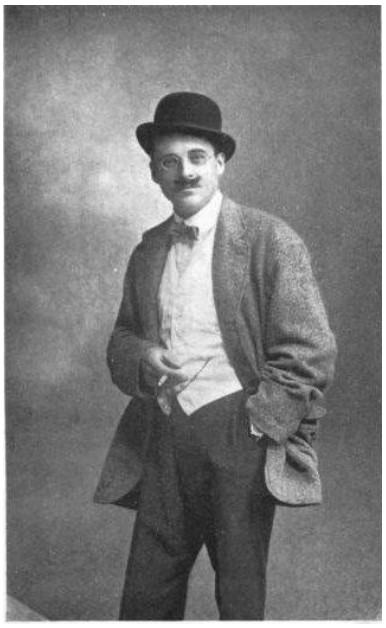
He saw some soldiers at a waterfront. He approached them. On the realisation that they were British he sat down at the roadside and cried. They may also have informed him that the war was over.

'.. he landed at the port of Brindisi. Up until then train journeys had been on the roof of the trains as did most of the poor in the manner of the times. That is in Turkey anyway. For the most part Jimmy did travel on the train roof. I remember asking him about that. He said he was in rags, dirty, and hardly distinguishable as different from the other travellers. Anyway, he did arrive at Constantinople or Istanbul whatever it was called then. He did meet an English man there who helped him. Turkey had called for an armistice in the October (1918) so he was no longer in hostile country'. Philip Irwin.

Fear of being held captive after the war is over. Certainly the Turks would regularly curse that they would keep them when the war was over. Gelebek had a particularly nasty commandant so Jim understandably took the threat seriously. The surrender of Bulgaria on September 30th triggered widespread expectation that the end was in sight so it may have provided the impetus for Jim to take off, he could have left earlier as Grace Williamson records prisoners arriving in Smyrna in September but these are likely to be the wounded and ill prisoners to be exchanged. The first organised group to leave Belemedik do so on October 8th and no doubt word would reach Gelebek just a few miles down the track. If he hadn't fled already this might have caused him to do so. More left on 10th and 12th and all seem to have gone by 15th or so. If he was still in Gelebek by this time he would have come home the easy way. He seems most likely to have made his move in early October, perhaps earlier still. There is also the possibility that the commandant at Gelebek was reluctant to let prisoners go and that that was the reason why Jim decided to escape. I hope to find the answer to that question in the Repatriation Statements of several Australian POWs which are currently undergoing digitisation in Australia but are not yet available to view at the time of printing this document.

Helped by a Greek? There were very few escape attempts from the Taurus camps and all that I have read of involved help from Greeks or Armenians. This part must be true. The main help that could be provided was information; a primitive map or verbal instructions regarding where to go, contacts perhaps. The area was so impoverished that much in the way of food or clothing seems unlikely.

Disguise? Unlikely to have been needed. Note that Jim described himself as hardly distinguishable from the other travellers. That statement may have become distorted over time into 'in disguise'. Equally, there seems no reason to think he would dress as a woman (Wind in the Willows someone?), although Francis Yeats-Brown an officer captive in Constantinople did attempt to escape dressed at various times as 'Miss Josephine' an eccentric German companion to a lady known as 'Miss Whitaker', or on another occasion as a Hungarian mechanic. In any event Miss Josephine and the mechanic were both recaptured so it didn't seem to be a useful strategy. Happily, Yeats-Brown did escape eventually, and his memoirs are helpful in deciding how Jim may have been sheltered in Constantinople.



F. Yeats-Brown as a
Hungarian mechanic.

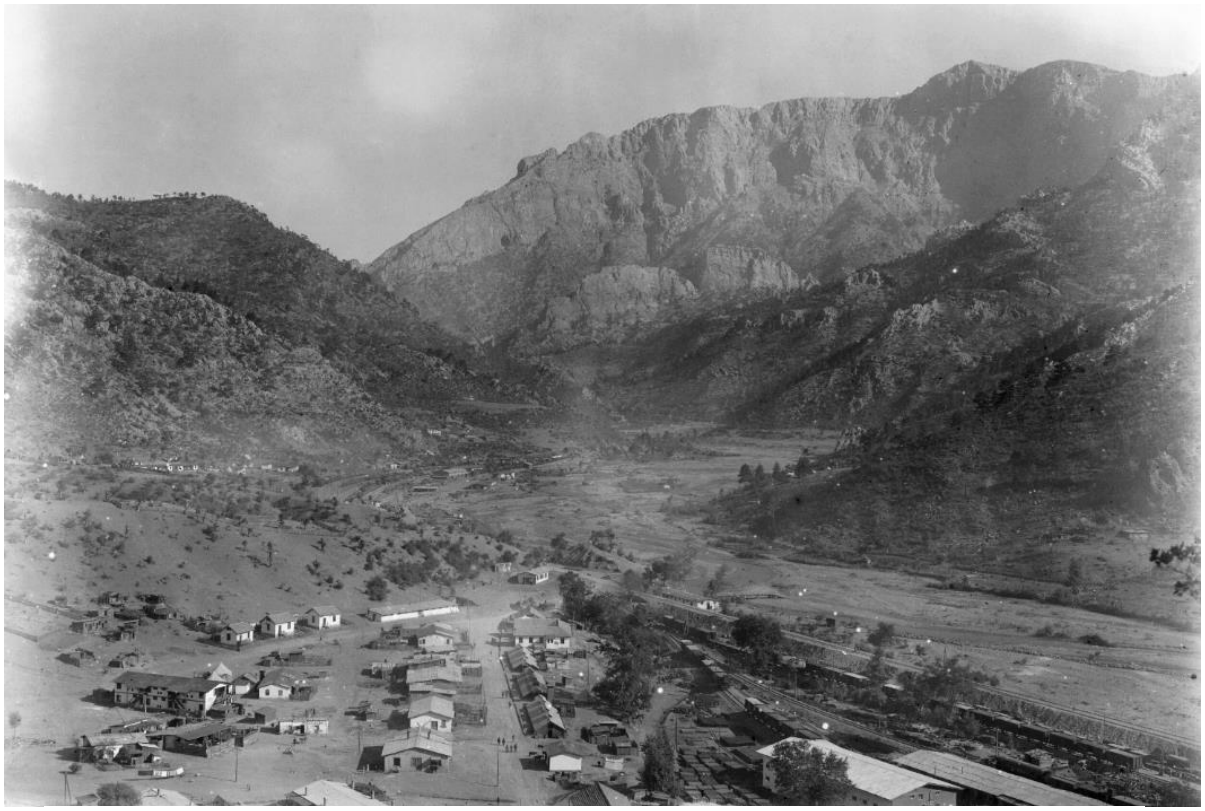
F. Yeats-Brown as
'Miss Josephine'.

Travelling on train roofs? Travelling on the roofs of trains was normal for the poor, and for troop transport. These are Turkish troops off to the front using the Baghdad railway. The train(s) Jim travelled on will presumably have been similar to this one, only by the time he

made his journey the train would be largely populated by Turkish and German soldiers retreating in the opposite direction.

Take a look at the opening sequence of the James Bond film ‘Skyfall’. Available on YouTube. Bond is seen travelling and fighting on the roof of a train that is travelling on the Baghdad railway.

The train passed over the Varda Viaduct (above). This is just 7 km west of Gelebek and Jim was reportedly on the roof. Almost immediately after the viaduct are two huge tunnels, the first 2,102 m long, the second 3,795 m. It is following the course of the Chakit torrent which



The rail track through Belemedik clearly visible here

cascades in huge waterfalls 1,600 ft through this section. All this in the first 15 miles of his journey. He described it himself as *'a difficult and dangerous journey'*, and it certainly must have been. The track continued through rugged mountain scenery, steep narrow gorges a thousand feet deep where the sun never penetrates. The train ascended almost 5,000 ft before starting a descent on the northern side. It eventually levelled out at Bulguru and then there was 127 miles of relatively flat terrain, This scenic section ran through the Anatolian plateau including views of picturesque mosques and attractive arable countryside, though other sections closer to desert, and came to Konya, spiritual home of the Sufi sect better known as the 'Whirling Dervishes'. Jim probably felt pretty dizzy himself as the track then dropped 950 feet in seven and a half miles through a continuous sequence of bridges, tunnels and cuttings into the Karasu valley. The landscape here was dominated by the cultivation of tobacco and chillies by the *Muhadjers*. The train then passed the swampy land surrounding Lake Sabaudja. Having reached the shores of the Gulf of Ismid it encountered gentler terrain with princely villas and gardens to admire before reaching Haydarpaşa station, a total journey of around 700 miles. A glorious experience for the fictional characters Hercule Poirot, Colonel Arbuthnot and Miss Debenham who travelled this route in luxury on the 'Taurus Express' in the first chapter

of ‘Murder on the Orient Express’, several decades later. For Jim it must have looked more like this next image, a view from the top of a train travelling through the Taurus Mountains in 1918.

There were other dangers too. The countryside was awash with bands of brigands, thousands of deserters from the Turkish Army desperate for food, transport and clothing. The trains were often held up for many hours. The carriages too were populated mainly by German and Turkish troops who were often intent on killing each other by this stage in the War.

In Constantinople an Englishman helped him? This would seem impossible. The British were expelled in 1914 when war broke out, as you would expect, and did not arrive back until November 13th 1918. It is tempting to think that this means ‘the English’ helped him, in the sense of soldiers once they arrived there. However, there is an intriguing alternative that might help resolve this inconsistency. A clue from Craig Uncer of the Levantine History Foundation led me to this tale.

Florence Nightingale was an English nurse based in Constantinople during the Crimean War (1853-56), with 36 fellow nurses. She worked in the military hospital of Scutari on the Asian shore of Constantinople and revolutionised nursing care. Her work set the standards for modern nursing. Less well known are British civilian nurses who worked with the Ottoman *Hilal-i Ahmer* (precursor of the Turkish Red Crescent) and this tradition went as far back as at least

the Russo-Turkish war. Many of these British nurses did receive medical training in the West and so their skills would have been very welcome to the hard-pressed Ottoman authorities who

British nurses on Galata bridge collecting money for *Hilal-I Ahmer*, 1915.

faced numerous disastrous wars through the period of the Balkan Wars and the First World War. The numbers of war wounded in these horrific wars were immense and often the soldiers suffered from contagious diseases such as cholera and typhoid, so these volunteer nurses were certainly heroes in their day. In gratitude the Ottoman authorities allowed the British and French families of these nurses to remain in their Empire without restriction on the outbreak of WWI, when the Ottomans quickly allied with the Germans and went about expelling the remaining British and French Levantines from the capital.

If an English man helped Jim it could be someone from this tiny community, and he would need to know how to find him on arrival at the capital.

The main hospital for Constantinople at the time was the 'Faculty of Medicine', otherwise known as 'The Imperial School of Medicine'. It was constructed on the Asian side of the city as the air was seen to be beneficial to the patients in contrast with the more polluted atmosphere on the European side. It was located next to Haydarpaşa rail terminus. If the English nurses working with the Red Crescent were employed in this hospital then Jim would find friendly faces conveniently placed just a few streets away from the end of the railway line. This extract from 'A History of the Istanbul Faculty of Medicine' also reveals that the Red Crescent was actually running the hospital at this time, as the doctors have been sent to the front to care for the wounded there.

'After the professors and students had been dispatched to the military troops, the Faculty of Medicine was forced to close for a year and was given over to operate as a hospital for the wounded ……. The hospital was at first affiliated with the Ministry of War, but was later put under the command of the Red Crescent'.

View of the Imperial School of Medicine from the sea, Haydarpaşa

There is also an intriguing insight into the presence of a small British community in Constantinople at the time of Jim's arrival there provided by Francis Yeats-Brown of 'Mademoiselle Josephine' fame. After his final and successful escape, lacking an elaborate disguise, but donning the fez that he always kept tucked inside his waistcoat he and friend Robin made their way to safety

'Avoiding main streets, we toiled on and on, through dark by-ways where the moonlight did not come, until we reached the old bridge across the Golden Horn. Here we decided to separate for the time, so that if one of us was caught by the toll-keepers, the other could still make good

his escape. But the toll-keepers took their tribute of a stamp without demur. They knew nothing of British prisoners.

Crossing, we turned right-handed, passing behind the American Ambassador's yacht Scorpion, at her berth near the Turkish Admiralty, and then went up into the European quarter. ***In Pera we knew a score of houses, between us, that would be glad to give us lodging****, and it only remained to choose the most convenient'.*

It is late at night, some days before the Armistice. I am in the gardens of the British Embassy, with a certain Colonel, an escaped prisoner of war like myself, who is in close touch with the political situation. We had come here, in disguise, to be out of the turmoil of the town.

Outside, in the unquiet streets, men talk of revolution. Gangs of soldiers are under arms for twenty-four hours at a stretch. Machine guns are posted everywhere. The docks are an armed camp. Detectives and informers, the prison and the press-gang are at their old work. All is still dark in Constantinople; but we, fugitives at present, and meeting by stealth, speak of the day so soon to come when the barren flagstaff on the roof of the Embassy will carry the Union Jack.

Below us, as we walk on the terrace, lies the Golden Horn, silver in the starlight, and across its waters the city of Stamboul stands dim, forlorn, and lovely. The slip of moon that rides over San Sofia seems symbol of the waning of misery and intolerance. Soon that sickle will disappear, and when the moon of the Moslems rises again and looks through the garden where we talk, she will see all round it a happier city. . . . Let us hope so, anyway'.

The Colonel of course, must be Newcombe, another escapee who has been living in the capital incognito for several months. The interesting revelation here is that in Pera, the European quarter of the town there are many English, or English sympathising families. It also tells us that in these few days before the armistice an escaped prisoner would still need to be in hiding. If Jim arrived in these weeks as seems likely, he would have been much safer if protected by a person(s) either in Pera or perhaps close to the Haydarpaşa hospital.

Note as well that in the 'Mademoiselle Josephine' escapade, Miss Whitaker is English. She is clearly able to live openly and freely as an Englishwoman at the time, part of the tiny English community that persisted there. I am indebted to Quentin Compton-Bishop for this information who, hearing that I was interested in the English presence in Constantinople during the war, contacted me to let me know that Miss Whitaker was his great-aunt Eveline Whitaker. She was adopted by Alice and Edgar Whitaker (he was the publisher of the Levant Herald

newspaper in Constantinople), they were part of a small British community living in Pera throughout the war.

The existence of a helpful Englishman is therefore entirely plausible, and could explain why Jim, imprisoned in Gelebek in south-east Turkey has travelled over 700 miles to reach Constantinople in the north-west when Smyrna, significantly nearer by train, seems a friendlier prospect. He seems to know in advance that he will find help there. Smyrna was largely Greek at the time, with English and French families and an American College. It was eventually used as the main departure point for the prisoners in the Taurus Mountains who left by the conventional route.

Jim's journey

So this seems to be how Jim made his way home. At some time in early October all the signs indicated that the war was over. Perhaps the Gelebek commandant seemed reluctant to accept this, but Jim in any event decided to take matters into his own hands. A Greek friend associated with the camp presumably provided him with directions or a simple map of the route by rail to Constantinople and contact details for an English man who will help him there.

He took a train from Gelebek in the direction of Afon Kara Hissar. A precarious ride, perhaps made more stressful by the fact that the carriages are mostly occupied by Turkish and German soldiers who are fleeing the British advance in the east. This seems to have been a particularly turbulent time. The Dutch newspaper 'Der Telegraaf' reporting that

'London, 25 October [1918]

There are many Turkish deserters in Asia Minor, all armed and in many cases under command of their own officers. Last week these deserters held up a train, carrying many German officers.

These Germans were dragged out of the train, severely beaten and some had their throats slit.

Others could escape by placing themselves under the protection of a group of British POW's who were also on that train. Amongst the passengers there were also some Austrians, who were treated very well by the Turks, as they consider them fellow victims of Germany. The tension between the Turks and the Germans runs very high, and the German troops in Constantinople are regarded with hate and mistrust. Their domination of the Turkish capital has come to an end since the dissipation of Enver Pasja's power'.

An incredible account. This was weeks before the war officially ended, and just at the time that Jim would have been making his way to the capital. At Afon the track divided and Jim took

the northern option to Constantinople. Perhaps he had to swap trains here. Approaching Constantinople he may have encountered another obstacle. A year earlier, in September 1917, the British had succeeded in a devastating act of sabotage. Adjacent to the Haydarpaşa terminus was a huge arms dump, waiting to be dispatched to the eastern front, but held up by the narrow gauge sections of the railway in the Taurus Mountains acting as a bottle neck. A huge explosion

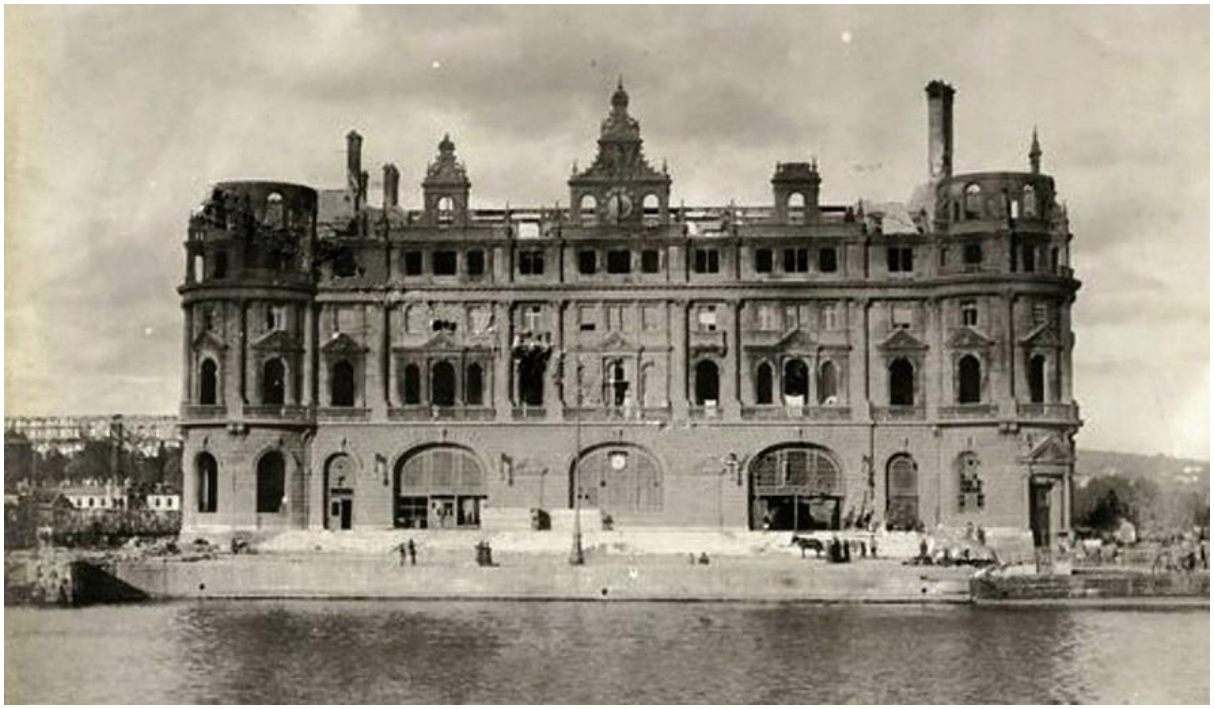
Haydarpaşa September 1917

destroyed the stored weaponry, including five planes. Sadly, the fabulous station building close by was badly burnt and not fully restored until 1933.

There are divided opinions regarding the status of the rail link to Haydarpaşa in 1918. A Turkish local historian, Signal Officer Lieutenant Ismail Tosun Saral confirmed for me that the track behind the station was intact and still in use. He sounds like someone who should know what he is talking about on this matter so I think it's safe to go with the railway line being viable all the way to the damaged station. However, the diary of Turkish conscript 'Sami', when returning from Palestine in 1919 bemoans the fact that the train only takes him as far as Izmit, after which he has to wait several days for an expensive ferry to take him to the capital. Either way Jim must have reached the terminus, if the train only took him to Izmit he will have had to walk along the track for the final 60 miles or so. There is no other way he can go. Waiting for him at the terminus, assembled for a final great push on the eastern front are 10,000 German and Turkish soldiers in camps at Haydarpaşa and its environs, though he wouldn't have known this whilst en route.

What a dramatic scene it must have been when Jim emerged at Haydarpaşa terminus. Making his way to freedom against the backdrop of the burnt out ruin of Kaiser Wilhelm's great symbol, the gateway to Germany's new empire in the east. A rather thin and yellow young man in rags who has done more than most to reduce the Kaiser's vainglorious plan to dust. A cinematic moment that any director would be proud of. Jim of course must be oblivious to the greater picture and probably picked his way across the streets to seek out the Englishman who was going to help him.

If anyone is planning the 'Jim Irwin tour', then a visit to Haydarpaşa station has to be high on their itinerary.



Haydarpaşa Station after damage in September 1917

Jim probably arrived between mid-October and the first week of November. If he started out, for example, on October 7th he had over a month to get here. A distance of 750 miles could be walked in about 40 days at a rate of around twenty miles per day, and we know that Jim had taken a train for all or most of the way, so it should have taken less than a month perhaps just a few days.

Meanwhile back in The Taurus Mountains, and elsewhere in Turkey, the camps were emptied of prisoners. Most found their own way to Smyrna, often accompanied by their officers who escorted them on trains. The first of these, after a welcome break in the largely Greek and therefore pro-British city, left on the SS Kanowna and headed for Alexandria. The Australians

were camped there to await ships home via the Suez Canal, the British for ships to Taranto / Brindisi. Colonel Newcombe returned home around this time and wasted no time in marrying his nurse, Elsie Chaki on 16th April 1919. Their first child, Stewart Lawrence Newcombe had T. E. Lawrence as godfather. John Still, the poet, left via Smyrna carrying a hollowed out walking stick in which he had hidden the poetry he has spent three years writing, 'Poems in Captivity'. He is headed for Ceylon to meet a daughter, now two years old whom he has yet to meet. All of them are desperate to be reunited with their families.

To Eileen

Oh, baby my baby I never have seen,
Don't grow too fast till I come home.
When the birds make love and the hedges are green,
My ship will race through the roaring foam,
So wait a while till I come home.

The Armistice was declared on October 30th and everything changed in Constantinople. Prisoners now became abundant on the streets and were unmolested. The whole atmosphere became very pro-British, especially amongst the Greek community. The disillusioned Turks were glad to see the back of the Germans and threw rotten vegetables at them in the street. The Greeks wore British 'Cockades'[15] in the streets. In the absence of a British Embassy, the Dutch Legation had taken over their work for the latter period of the war, and was now looking after the interests of the prisoners. The prisoners turned up here, and at Smyrna from camps all over Turkey. The Turks, despite their dire threats to keep men after the war were simply disinterested now, and understandably, just wanted to go back to normal themselves. A few prisoners with valuable skills were offered paid jobs with the Philipp Holtzman Company to continue work on the railway, but all declined.

The Dutch legation provided the men with food parcels, new clothes, washing facilities, haircuts, and all other 'comforts', to assist their recovery. They installed them in 'Crockers hotel' as it was known to the POWs, or other hotels in the Pera district. 'Crockers' was in fact the Grand Hotel Kroecker, a very smart establishment before the war, and though rather short of tourists in 1918 the Germans who had been enjoying the delights of the hotel were turned out to make way for the new arrivals. It must have seemed a world away from the cold miserable camps in which the men had been struggling to survive.

[15] A rosette, usually worn on the hat or lapel.

'Crockers' Hotel.

If Jim was sheltered by an English household up until the Armistice, it seems more than likely that he will have been passed over to the Dutch and started the formal process of repatriation. The Dutch Legation had worked very hard throughout the war years, in getting money, clothes and food to POWs across Turkey. No mean feat given the remoteness of most of the camps, and Jim and fellows were no doubt grateful for the efforts of The Dutch Envoy at the time, representing Great Britain, USA, France, Russia, Romania, and Bulgaria: *The Hon. P.J.F.M. van der Does de Willebois* who was married to a German lady (who was staunchly German, and was known to shout from the steps of the legation "We have won again!" after yet another German victory – in the earlier days of the War of course. Nevertheless, it was a surprise to find that there were over 3,000 parcels that the Dutch had been unable to get to prisoners, some of them three years old, and these were finally matched up with their intended recipients.

Something like a nice city break in Constantinople followed next. The former prisoners spent their days exploring the city. There were organised trips to the bazaar, and other sights of this beautiful place, a day trip to the Mosque St Sophie[16]. Officers with money enjoyed champagne meals in restaurants. Food for once, was in reasonable supply which was probably foremost in importance to Jim and his fellows.

[16] A strange name for a Mosque? The building had previous been a Roman Catholic Cathedral and a Greek Orthodox Cathedral before conversion to a Mosque after Constantinople fell to the Ottomans in 1453. Known as the *Hagia Sophia*.

Mosque St Sophie, the Hagia Sophia, in 1918.

Relatively little was recorded by the former POWs themselves in Constantinople at this time, but it must have been an inspiring experience. The best insight available is perhaps the diary of a young German conscript, Georg Steinbach. He had been living in the city for several months before having to leave soon after Jim arrived. There were probably a few weeks when both were present, though of course unknown to each other. The German is quite taken with the delights of the city;

'The blue water of the Bosphorus Strait, the tremendous force of the unruly cluster of colorful houses, the mighty palaces in shiny white – the lively boat traffic: it all creates a scene of colorfulness, magnitude, and beauty, the sight of which entrances the eye. I'll never forget this moment, because it was the most intense and the most beautiful'.

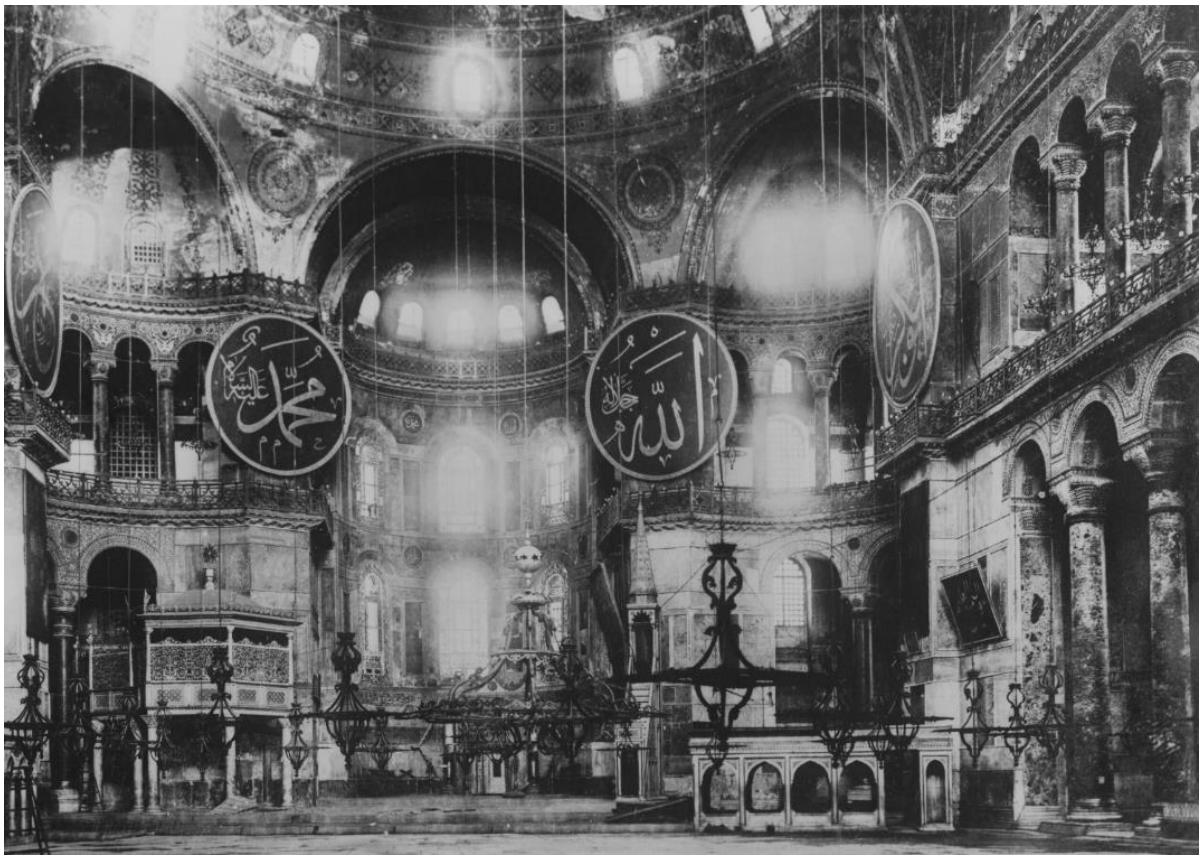
……..

'Somewhere, during this time, I see a particularly well-dressed Muslim in the old national costume. He is wearing a traditional bolero in blue with black ornaments and braids and a dark green bodice. He has adorned his neck with chains. The trousers, typical Turkish pants, are tight-fitting and buttoned at the legs. The backside extends down to the knees. Slippers and

bright yellow stockings serve as footwear. About the body flashes the inescapable red waist belt. Smiling giddily, he walks along with his blue-ribboned fez placed somewhat nonchalantly upon his ear'.

……..

'Some passengers stand because the steamer is quite full. Before me sits a group of Greeks, one of whom has a mandolin. They sing a beautiful, melodious song, much, much nicer than the monotonous tootling of the Turks. The beautiful scenery and all the new experiences do not fail to leave their imprint on one's mind'.



Hagia Sophia interior, 1918.

Jim must have spent at least a few days in Constantinople, but quite probably more like 2-3 weeks. He didn't leave until November 16th having arrived at any time from mid-October onward. While he may well have enjoyed the sights of Constantinople to a degree, I am sure that must have come a long way second behind the overwhelming desire to get back home and start normal life.

The Golden Horn, Constantinople, 1918.

Seafront in Constantinople 1918.

There is a key incident in Jim's story, as reported in oral history, when he saw troops at a quayside, approached them, and on discovering that they were British, and perhaps that the war was over, sat down at the side of the road and wept. Who wouldn't? The feeling of relief that it was all coming to an end must have been overwhelming.

There seem to be three potential scenarios

- British forces occupied Constantinople on November 13th 1918. If Jim was already in Constantinople could he be surprised to find British troops at the quayside? It seems highly unlikely. The arrival of the British fleet, a massive 61 ships consisting of 22 British, 12 French, 17 İtalian, 4 Greek, and 6 submarines was anticipated and crowds filled the quayside to welcome it. There was a guard of honour of former prisoners waiting for General Wilson. Jim would have to have known who these troops were before approaching them, and is probably in the guard of honour waiting for them. There couldn't be a surprise discovery of British troops on this date, and anyway his brother Philip recalls that he arrived in Constantinople during the Armistice, not after the war ended. I think we can discount this one.
- The second is that he arrived in Constantinople after November 13th. In which case he was more likely to have encountered British troops at Haydarpaşa terminus (which has a quayside) on the eastern side of the Bosphorus. In addition to its importance in terms of transport, Haydarpaşa was also a major munitions store and barracks for enemy troops. It was one of the first places taken over by the new occupants. For this to be correct he would had to have taken close to a month to travel 700 miles. It also conflicts with the idea of being helped by an Englishman. If he met troops as soon as he arrived at Haydarpaşa then he would have been taken into the care of the British forces and no English civilian would need to have been involved.
- There is a third possibility. According to the Official Records of the Great War, as recorded by the official British observer G. Ward-Price, a British ship arrived on 10th November, carrying troops, and seen as a 'herald' to the main fleet. It would seem to make sense that you would land some troops and secure the area, maybe also organise a guard of honour, in advance of the General's arrival. In addition to this, on 7th November four British officers arrived on the Turkish torpedo-boat 'Basra'. These were taken to Pera Palace Hotel and the Tokatlıyan Hotel, where 80 rooms were rented for incoming Entente personal. In either case the officers would have been accompanied by ordinary soldiers who might well be waiting around at the waterfront while any

official business is concluded, guarding the ship etc. While everyone would expect the British at some point, these early arrivals could well be encountered as a chance event at the quayside. It seems most likely that Jim encountered soldiers from one of these two arrivals rather than the main contingent on 13th November. There is also the attractive possibility that if he met soldiers from the 10th November party on the morning of the next day, they may well have had the pleasure of sharing the news that the war with Germany had just ended as they would probably have heard this before it was proclaimed to the general public.

To summarise, the most likely sequence of events is as follows

- Jim arrived at Haydarpaşa station by train sometime between mid-October and early November 1918.
- He was helped by an Englishman either in the region of Haydarpaşa, or after crossing the Bosphoros, in the Pera district of Constantinople.
- After initial support by the English man / family, he reported to the Dutch Legation and official repatriation started.
- He was kitted out in light khaki, and placed in a hotel, quite likely the Grand Hotel Kroeker, and enjoyed some time exploring Constantinople.
- He met British troops at the water front in Constantinople between Nov 7th and 11th.
- Jim departed on the SS Katoomba on November 16th 1918.

Repatriation. The journey home.

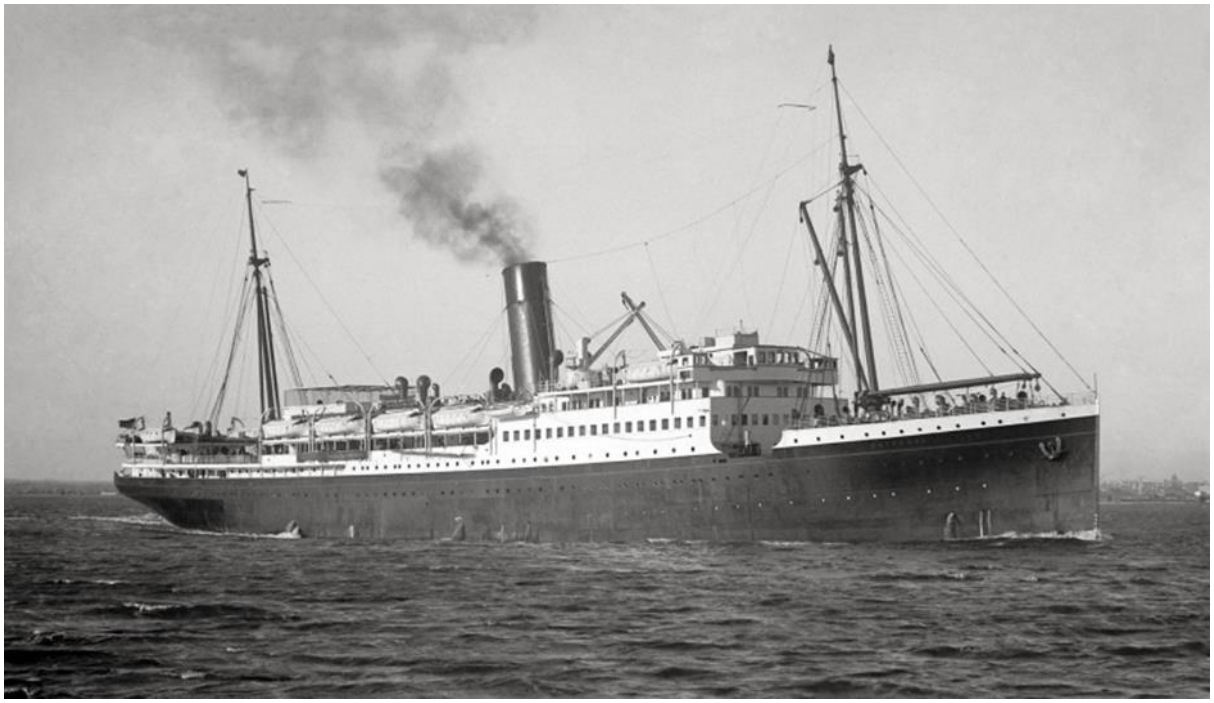
On October 1st 1918 the troopship SS Katoomba, an Australian coal-fired steamer, slipped out of Huskisson dock Liverpool, proceeded to the Princes landing stage, and then at dusk put out in mid-stream and headed for the Mediterranean. It was part of a convoy of sixteen ships carrying garrison troops to Gibraltar amongst others. She survived several torpedo attacks before entering the Mediterranean on October 9th. After completing various duties in the Eastern Mediterranean she was berthed at Salonica on November 11th when news of the surrender of Germany came through. On board the Katoomba, Frank Fenton a native of Heywood near Rochdale and employed as a wireless operator, was recording his memoirs. These he eventually stored in a cardboard tube that was discovered in a kitchen cupboard in his family home years after his death. Like so many WW1 veterans, he never discussed his experiences while alive. I am grateful to his grandson, Jeff Fenton, who generously provided a copy of his memoirs which include many detailed insights into this part of Jim's story, and also some fascinating photographs.

'The Katoomba started her buzzer and flew flags from every halyard whilst almost every bell on board rang. This was the commencement & all the ships in the harbour, 30 or 40 in number, took up our example. A French cruiser then opened fire with her heavy guns & the Jack Tars sang and cheered. This continued for 40 minutes. In the town many people took advantage of the excuse and got drunk whilst revolver shots became quite a common occurrence. Visited New Salonica in afternoon & at night there was rocket or star light display. Went down to White Tower with the LM. It seemed like Christmas Eve with all the soldiers singing & the French sailors singing "It's a long way to Tipperary" & the Marseillaise'.

The Katoomba was assigned the role of taking a garrison of troops to Constantinople, and exchanging them for former POWs. The next afternoon at 2:15 p.m. it set sail. The Katoomba was the first troopship to enter the Dardanelles since hostilities began, one of the large fleet detailed above. Having disembarked the new garrison at Constantinople she embarked former POWs, including Jim.

'We embarked many prisoners of war who had been in Turkey for almost 3 years they having been captured in Kut when General Townsend had to surrender. There are many German soldiers parading the streets of Constantinople with full side arms – dagger, sword and revolver but they are perfectly harmless. The prisoners have not a word to say against the Germans as to ill treatment but against the Turks they cannot say enough. Strange though it

may allow our Tommies were drinking with Germans on the termination of the war'. Frank Fenton.



SS Katoomba. In 1918 it had 'dazzle' paintwork.

Jim seems to have been part of the guard of honour for General Wilson on November 13th. In the following photographs the former POWs are shown forming the guard of honour, lined up alongside the tramlines at the quayside. To the amazement of all, a Turkish regimental band was present as well and played 'God Save the Queen' as General Wilson stepped ashore. The former POWs could hardly believe their ears! The General wished them God speed home, saying that they had heard of the POWs hardships at home and no time would be lost in arranging their departure to England. They had a few more days to enjoy in Constantinople before that happened.

On the 15th of November they were told that they would be leaving on the 16th. One of the men recalled. *'That afternoon we were invited for tea on one of the gunboats which had come in. We went ashore after tea to have our last look around Constantinople. We slept very little that night, our thoughts were only for tomorrow. It arrived at long last. We were all on the quay, all present, no missing... At last we were off and as we moved away we gave one long lusty cheer'.*

General Sir Henry H. Wilson, Chief of General Staff was received by Djevad Pasha, Turkish Chief of Staff. The Australian and New Zealand former POWs were to be transported to Egypt, the British to Salonica on their way home. There was a big cheer from the former when General Cory told them that ANZAC troops had been landed to hold the forts at Gallipoli.

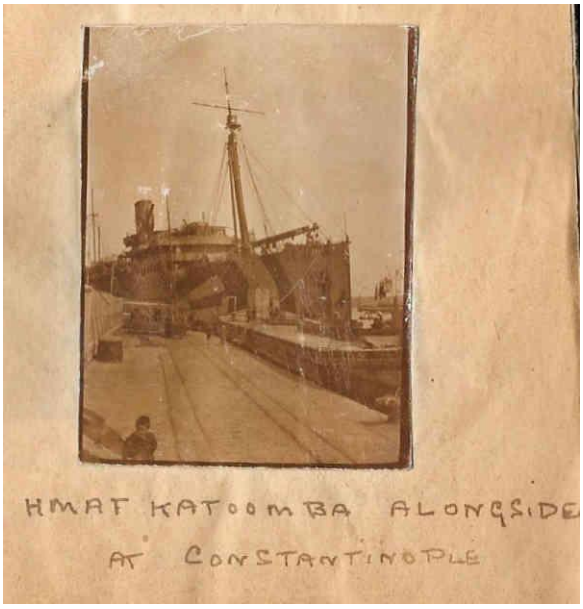
The British troops are wearing the blanket cloth civilian outlets provided by the Dutch Legation.

Former prisoners form a guard of honour for the arrival of General Wilson on November 13th 1918.

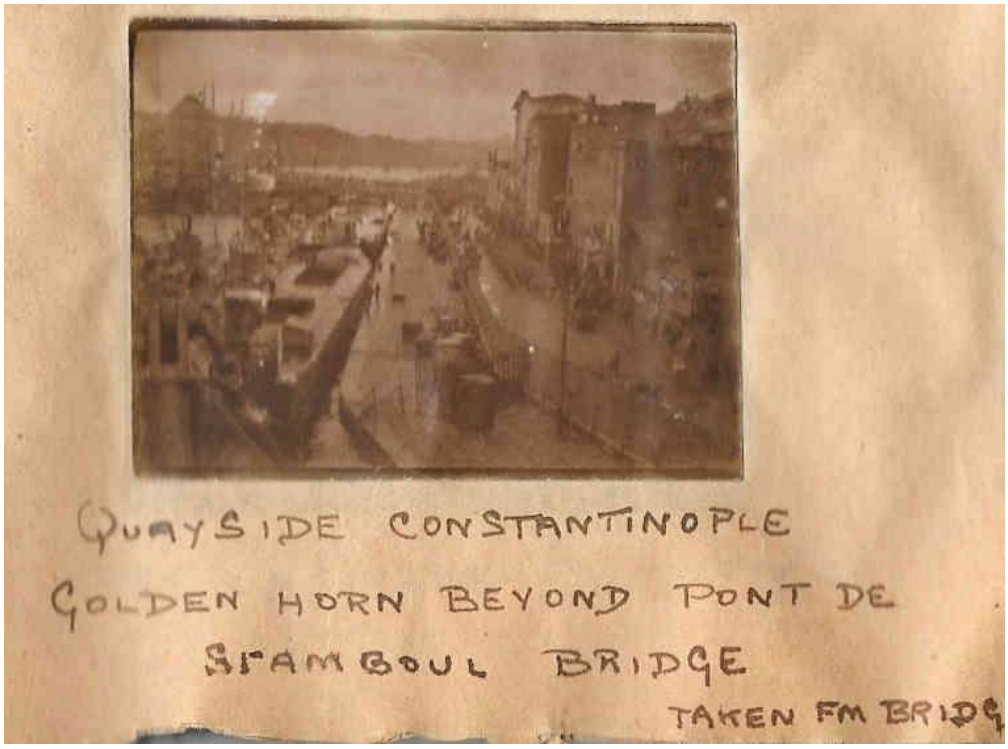
Former prisoners of war forming a guard or honour for the arrival of General Wilson.

British former prisoners of war boarding a steamer to leave Constantinople

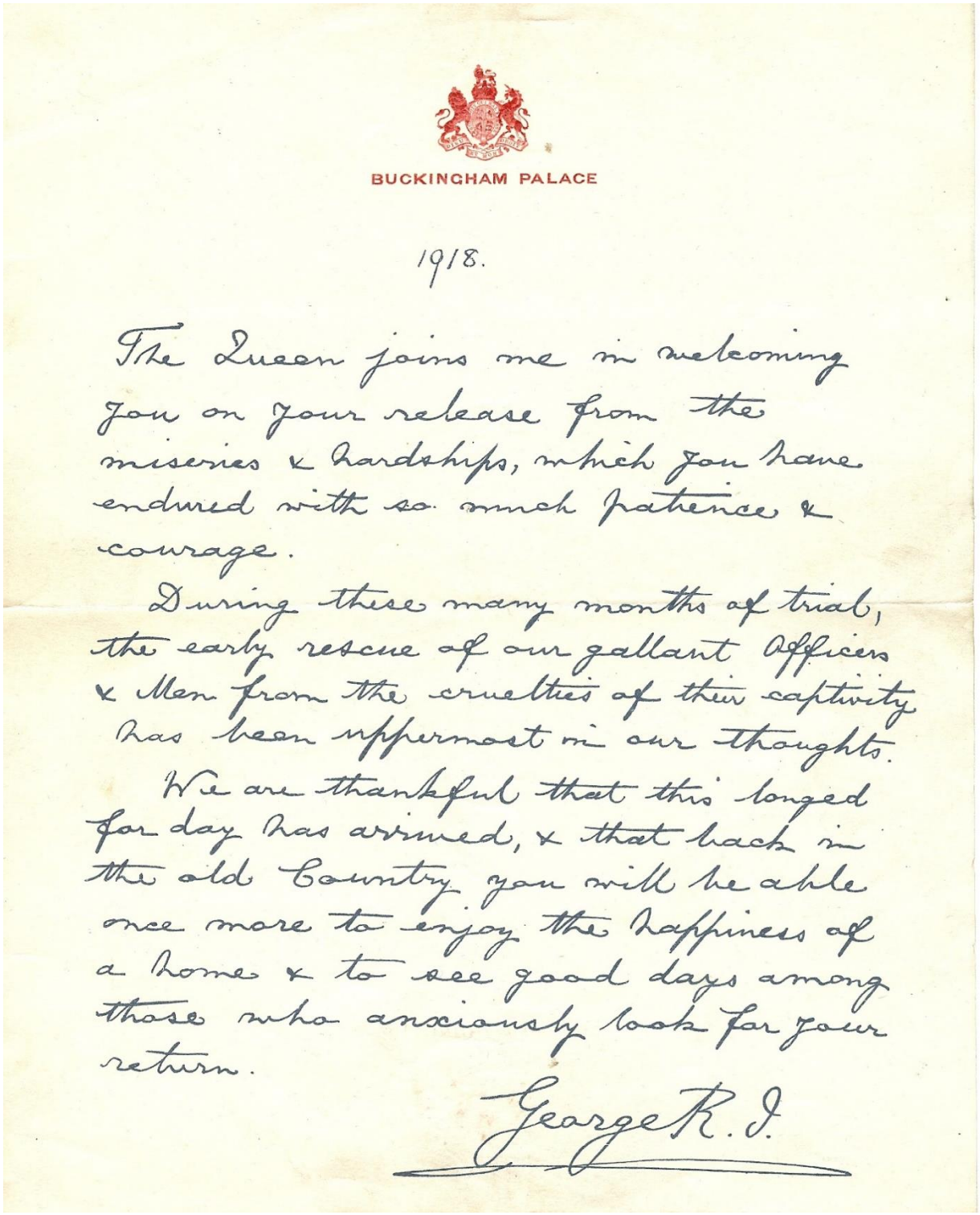
Frank Fenton, the wireless operator on board the Katoomba took a few amateur photographs and developed them in his cabin. Without an enlarger he could only make tiny prints and so the quality is limited, but they make a unique contribution to the story nevertheless.



Note the ‘dazzle’ paintwork, used as camouflage. The railings and tramlines are also clearly the same as seen on the other photos.



At 6 a.m. on the morning of Sunday 17th November the Katoomba weighed anchor and left Constantinople. Stopping at Mutania to pick up some dreadfully emaciated Indian POWs they stopped at the famous Gallipoli Bay to spend the night of Monday 18th. This was done as the straits were too treacherous to navigate after nightfall, floating mines still a hazard and invisible in the darkness. A poignant experience no doubt, and bound to bring back memories for all those who had fought for this terrain in 1915. At 8:45 a.m. in the morning of Wednesday 20th they stopped at Salonica and moored there until 4pm. General Great was presented with a DSO, and General Milue welcomed and inspected the men who were now back in British Army uniform and feeling more like their old selves again. The men were each presented with a letter of gratitude from King George V. This was a handwritten letter, printed using a lithographic technique to such a high standard that it seemed that each had been written individually. It was the first mass communication by a British monarch. The letter is signed George R.I. which means ‘*Rex Imperator’*, or ‘*King and Emperor’*. It seems a tremendous feat of organisation and foresight to have the letters produced and transported to positions on all of the routes the former POWs would take to come home and all in just 9 days following the armistice.



BUCKINGHAM PALACE

1918.

The Queen joins me in welcoming you on your release from the miseries & hardships, which you have endured with so much patience & courage.

During these many months of trial, the early rescue of our gallant Officers & Men from the cruelties of their captivity has been uppermost in our thoughts.

We are thankful that this longed for day has arrived, & that back in the old Country you will be able once more to enjoy the happiness of a home & to see good days among those who anxiously look for your return.

George R.I.

A personal letter from King George V

The letter reads:

'The Queen joins me in welcoming you on your release from the miseries and hardships, which you have endured with so much patience and courage.

During these many months of trial, the early rescue of our gallant officers and men from the cruelties of their captivity has been uppermost in our thoughts.

We are thankful that this longed for day has arrived, and that back in the old Country, you will be able once more to enjoy the happiness of a home and to see good days among those who anxiously look for your return'.

George R.I.

The Katoomba then sailed on to Taranto. She arrived there on November 23rd a Saturday, and the passengers disembarked the next morning at 6:30 a.m.

You might well consider that Jim had a tough time in captivity, he certainly did. Nevertheless, Jim's ordeals pale in comparison to those of one of his fellow passengers on the Katoomba. At Taranto, Frank Fenton records meeting Tom Dexter.

'Spent the morning playing quoits with the lieuts. Sailed at 3.30 & whilst adjusting the wireless gear met Tom Dexter – the most well-known British Spy in the East. This poor chap was half mad with Turkish tortures of one kind or another. He was captured in the guise of an Arab trader & put in solitary confinement in a dungeon for over 11 months. He was then put in a large box 6ft by 3ft & left for 6 days without food. After this he was strapped on a table for another of their tortures but the Turks thought better of it and did not carry it out. The chap is now 62 and his motto is, "Never mind I'm still alive and kicking." During his 11 month imprisonment he only saw the light of day 5 times. I may add that he was captured at Kut el Amara'[17].

The route home that starts at Taranto/Brindisi and finishes with the Channel crossing was known as the Mediterranean Line of Communication, M.L.C. This was established during the war to provide a transport route that was safe from German submarines. At the end of the war it was used for repatriation of troops.

[17] Which means that aged 59-60 he survived the 'death march' from Kut, an even longer distance than Jim's forced march.

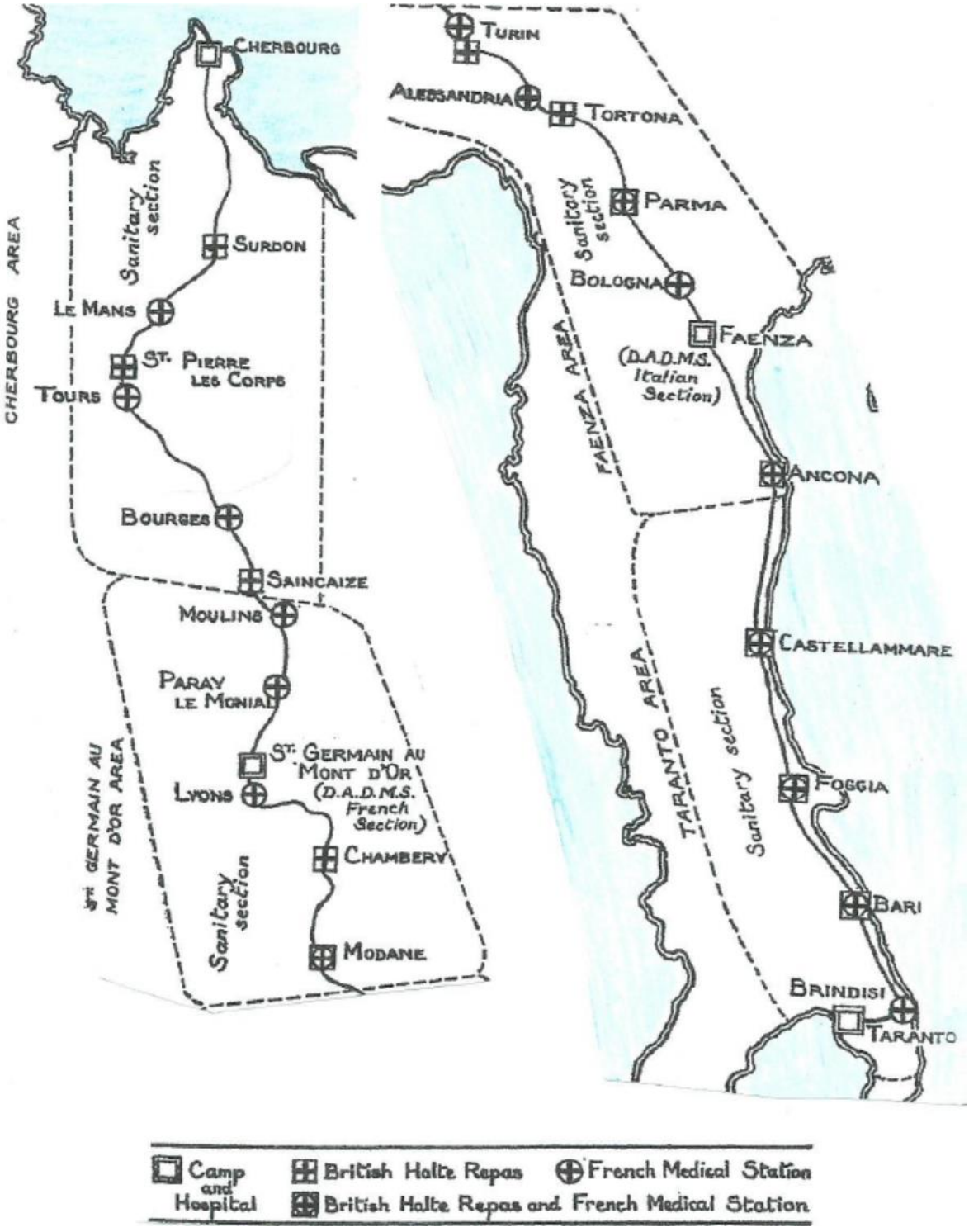
Taranto had a huge camp, capable of holding 5,000 men and used to hold soldiers until it was their turn to entrain. In Jim's case they had to wait for several days. There then began a painfully slow trip along the Adriatic coast of Italy. The speed of the trains was restricted to enable the complex routing of large numbers of trains in each direction, and never exceeded 30 mph. They had to take a defined length of time to complete each 'Area' shown on the map. Along the way were organised a series of resting points, the *Halte-Repas,* where the men could get out and stretch their legs, and enjoy a cup of tea. Charitable organisations like the American YMCA had organised members to board the trains at stops along the way and offer the men tea, cigarettes and food.

There was a big camp and more facilities, including baths when they reached Faenza. The stop here was long enough for men to walk into town and buy postcards and other souvenirs, including the beautiful pottery that the town is famous for. It was a particularly beautiful spot and a more than welcome break after the very basic *Halte-repas* encountered along the way.

At some of the towns crowds would gather and cheer, offer the troops flowers, fruits and cigarettes. Sometimes a train full of Italian troops would pass in the opposite direction, cue much cheering from both sides. Eventually the Italian/French border at Modane was reached and there was a delay for customs procedures and time spent in cafes and buffets, and exchanging Italian Lire for French Francs.

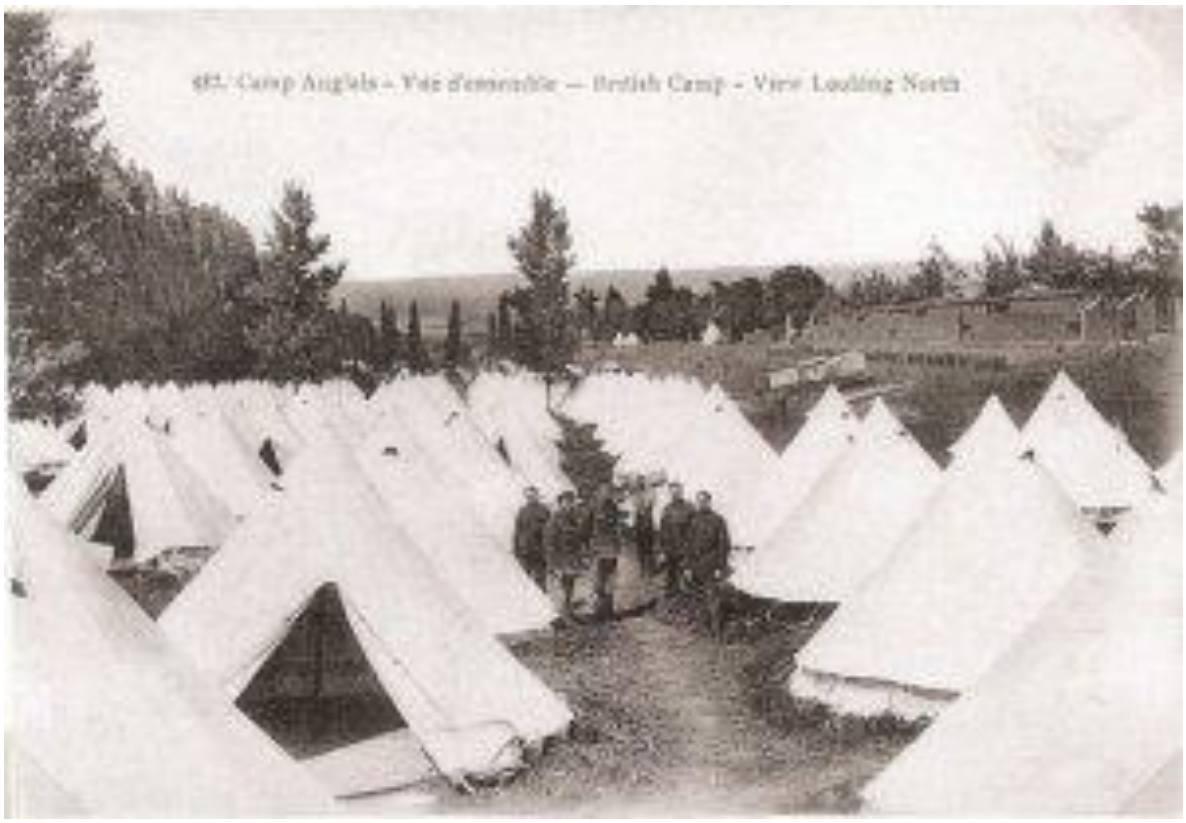
The train carried them ever northward, following one of the main migration routes for cuckoos returning to Britain. Like the cuckoos, many of these men were going to seem rather alien, out of place, when they got home. They were carrying with them trinkets and souvenirs, pieces of Faenza pottery, malaria, and Spanish flu which went on to kill 40 million people over the next few years.

The next major stop was at St. Germaine au Mont D'Or just north of Lyon. Plenty of facilities for the men to rest and relax here including concerts organised by officers and men. There is also a sizeable Commonwealth Graves site here for those who didn't quite make it all the way home.



The Mediterranean Line of Communication

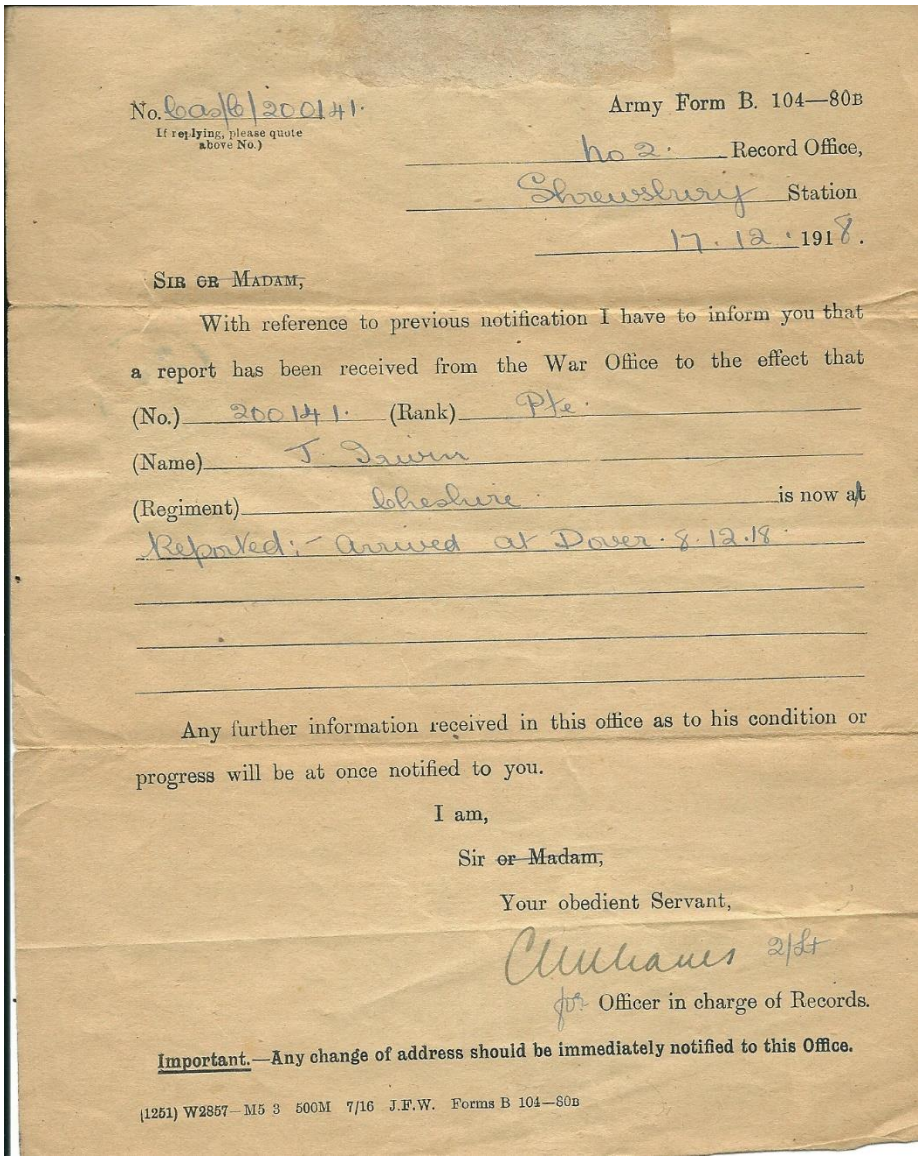
At any of the French stops local crowds would be likely to gather and make more presentations of gifts, sometimes singing the '*Marseillaise'* with the troops doing their best to join in.



Camp Anglais at St. Germain au Mont D'Or.

Eventually Boulogne was reached and after staying here for two days they were moved across to Calais. The crossing took place on December 8th, having landed at Taranto on November 25th, a very slow journey with stops of several nights at some of the camps. The crossing itself

was a very rough one, but Jim arrived safely back at Dover with great relief at 11:30 on a Sunday morning.



No. 200141.
If replying, please quote above No.)

Army Form B. 104—80B

No 2. Record Office,
Shrewsbury Station
17. 12. 1918.

SIR OR MADAM,

With reference to previous notification I have to inform you that a report has been received from the War Office to the effect that

(No.) 200141. (Rank) Pte.
(Name) J. Dawn
(Regiment) Cheshire. is now at
Reported:- Arrived at Dover. 8.12.18.

Any further information received in this office as to his condition or progress will be at once notified to you.

I am,
Sir ~~or Madam~~,
Your obedient Servant,
C Williams 2/Lt
for Officer in charge of Records.

Important.—Any change of address should be immediately notified to this Office.

(1251) W2857—M5 3 500M 7/16 J.F.W. Forms B 104—80B

Although he might have been cursing the slow speed of the trains through Europe at least he had had a seat inside this time.

At Dover they were supplied with a cup of coffee and a bun. To a man they would have preferred a pint of beer. The men were then transported to a local barracks and were entertained on the way to see the blacked out windows of houses. They were less impressed to see the cards in pub windows reading 'No Beer'. The final and cruellest turn of all. Imagine how much they must have anticipated a couple of cold pints back home after all the privations they have suffered, not least the journey itself. The lack of beer was the result not just of wartime

shortages, but also because 'locals' in every town had been drinking the pubs dry since November 11th.

After further delays, perhaps including repatriation administration he made the final glorious leg of the journey from London to Birkenhead on December 12th. Awaiting him at Birkenhead a large gathering of grateful locals crowded the platform, the Lord Major Roger Rowlands was waiting to hang a medal around his neck, a brass band, a chorus of 'God Save the Queen', confetti, tickertape, girls blowing kisses, the loving embrace of his family….

No actually. It was a grey, damp Thursday at Central Station, Birkenhead. His brother Philip, aged 12, was standing alone on the platform.

Philip aged about 14

'I was twelve rising thirteen at the time. Why not one of the older members of the family I don't know. They were all at work I imagine; Annie was then a nurse in London, Kitty was working in the tramway offices by then. She was a cashier and had been promoted from tram conductor – clippie as they became known in later years.

I didn't have long to wait at Central Station. He soon appeared. In khaki, thin and yellow looking and with a cough. We recognised each other immediately. He is so like his father and also like our mother too. To me the familiar (and all long gone) features were marvellous to see, and for me anyway quite moving. He didn't smile or make a fuss 'Guess I've got a touch of the grip' was all he said. So there was no initial awkwardness and we soon plunged into talk of family matters both present and antecedent. He was then 23. It was only a few hundred yards to our home 113 Rodney Street. Mother was in. It must have been hard for her. She hadn't seen him since August 1914 except for one embarkation leave in 1915 prior to his going with the Cheshires to Gallipoli'. Philip Irwin.

A touch of the grip! Having his life threatened by bullet, shell, shrapnel, bayonet, bomb, extremes of heat and cold, cholera, dysentery, malaria, typhus, beating and starvation talk about understatement.

A nice birthday present for his mother, whose birthday it had been on the previous day, but how hard as well to deal with the emotional turmoil following years of separation. It is easy to understand why perhaps she chose to have the reunion in private rather than the platform of a railway station.

Central Station, Birkenhead

Normal life now started to reassert itself.

Christmas 1918 must have been a delight. With rationing in force it would hardly be a bountiful feast, but back home and taking his place at the family table again it must have been an immeasurable improvement on 1917.

A typical Christmas card from 1918

Joseph O'Neill

This is a curious tale. Joseph O'Neill was a member of Newcombe's detachment. Not a camelier, he had been seconded from the machine gun school at El Arish just for that mission. An Australian farmer from Stanley, Victoria. He had been taken prisoner in the same incident as Jim, and completed the forced march to the Taurus Mountains with him. If they hadn't known each other before then, they must have been very well acquainted by the end of the march. It is not clear which camp he was imprisoned in as the one listed for him, Bor by Nidge, was a convalescent camp that was often a short term stay before working at one of the labour camps, such as Gelebek. Whilst the rest of the Australians returned home, he didn't. He travelled to England, arriving at Dover on December 8th, the same day as Jim. In itself this isn't completely out of the ordinary. All of the Commonwealth soldiers were given an option to take two months leave in England with a wallet full of back pay before returning home. Many took this as a holiday in the 'mother country'. They had a great time, being treated like royalty wherever they went. Joseph O'Neill wasn't one of these. He was heading for hospital with a particularly severe case of malaria compounded by starvation. He started at Weymouth, receiving treatment at several hospitals around the country before eventually sailing to Australia in May 1919, from of all places, Liverpool.

He was also on the Katoomba, sailing from Constantinople, the same journey as Jim. This also means he was in Constantinople as a former POW, despite, as far as is known, being a prisoner in the Taurus Mountains region like Jim.

This is all probably completely coincidental, and it may be that neither was aware of the close relationship between their respective itineraries for the journey home. It could be that they met on the ship or train. There is also, of course, the outside possibility that they escaped and travelled together from the start. The first explanation is probably the correct one.

Sadly, Joseph O'Neill never fully recovered from the damage to his health caused by malaria and malnutrition. He died in 1933 aged 45 and his wife, Violet Pearl O'Neill won a landmark case, establishing that his death was a consequence of his wartime experiences, and so was bestowed a widow's pension.

After the War

In February of the following year a welcome home evening of entertainment was laid on at Birkenhead Town Hall. This news article appeared in the Birkenhead News on February 5th, by coincidence the same date as reports of his MiD in 1916. An incredible 310 men were former POWs from the Birkenhead area alone.

THE WELCOME HOME.

BIRKENHEAD'S REPATRIATED PRISONERS OF WAR

ENTERTAINED AT TOWN HALL.

One of the most notable functions that make normal events pale into insignificance was the official welcome home given by the town on Saturday evening to Birkenhead's repatriated prisoners of war. Some 310 of these returned men were entertained to a dinner and concert in the Town Hall. The arrangements were carried out by the Cheshire Regiment Discharged Prisoners of War Aid Association, of which the Mayor (Mr. D. Roger Rowlands) is chairman, Mrs. Glover hon. secretary, and Miss Cunningham hon. treasurer. This association has been forwarding parcels to local prisoners of war ever since 1914. Some of these former prisoners were in civilian clothes and some in hospital uniform, but the majority were khaki-clad men, and from their fine healthy appearances it was somewhat difficult to imagine that they had endured the rigours of a confinement that was out of the ordinary category of restriction of liberty. It was this feature that struck both the Mayor, as he received his honoured guests, and an "Advertiser" representative, who was chatting at the same time with His Worship. "It speaks volumes for their powers of recuperation," remarked the Mayor, a reflection he subsequently gave expression to in his address to his guests. And when in conversation with one of the men who had spent eighteen months in a punishment camp, a cheery sergeant with imperturbable good humour, the impression was also gained that these were the type of British soldiers whose spirit could not be bent, much less broken.

An appreciated informality pervaded Saturday evening's proceedings. As already stated, the ex-prisoners of war were received by the Mayor at the entrance to the large hall, where the tables were set for dinner. The hall was profusely decorated with flags, which included two captured German emblems, while over the platform was the greeting, "Welcome Home." In the later proceedings invited members of the public occupied seats in the gallery of the hall. The wants of the guests at table were attended to by the following ladies: Mesdames Glover, W. Beausire, Flinn, Buchanan, H. Johnston, M. MacSymon, Sharples, Hulme, B. Johnston, Misses Gillison, Cruttenden, Henry, E. Stubbs, H. Sayer, D. Nickels, E. Ryalls, McAllister, Bolton, Tate, Gavin, Makin, MacSymon, N. Woods, E. Beazley, Beausire, M. Lorimer, H. Lorimer, M. Tate, Aldridge, E. U. Cunningham, G. Ollive, J. Johnston, E. Gavin, Evans, Woods, Smyth, Hulme, Leete, N. Montgomery, Boxwell, A. Oliver, D. Johnston, B. Johnston, G. Nickels, Hickson, B. Hickson, E. Nickels, Vance, Raschen, and Jevons. As has become quite customary at Mayoral functions, members of the 22nd Birkenhead Boy Scouts did useful service during the evening.

After dinner, and prior to the beginning of

Rifleman E. Finn, 25, Primrose-road.
Pte. J. McArthur, 222, Cleveland-street.
Corpl. W. Forshaw, 215, Lansdowne-road.
Corpl. W. Warrington, 115, Park-road, Tranmere.
Pte. D. Piercy, 67, Craven-street.
Pte. A. E. Maiden, 31, Town-lane, Rock Ferry.
Seaman Henry Murphy, 87, Watson-street.
James Cunningham, 6, Seymour-street.
Pte. C. Naylor, 30, Shakespere-avenue, Rock Ferry.
Pte. James Pulford, 5, Bridgend-terrace (off Bridge-street).
Pte. E. Harrop, 38, Keightley-street.
Pte. R. G. Lewis, 38, Keightley-street.
Pte. T. Oxton, 67, Cavendish-street, Birkenhead.
Pte. G. Baty, 14, Richmond-cottages, Oxton-road.
Pte. E. O'Toole, 24, Frederick-street.
Pte. J. Burns, 17, Grace-street.
Pte. J. Wiggins, 27, Oxton-road.
Pte. L. Lonengan, 24, Adelphi-street.
Rifleman T. Cheers, 46, Jackson-street.
Lance-Corpl. A. Pegg, 13, Seabank-cottages.
Pte. F. Martin, 8, Quarry Bank-place.
Pte. A. E. Jones, 12, Sycamore-road.
Pte. H. Hughes, Ivy Cottage, Gautby-road, Bidston.
Petty-Officer J. Silverwood, 49, Clifford-street.
Pte. T. H. Warnock, 3, Back St. Anne-street.
Rifleman J. Cheshire, 56, George-street.
Corpl. W. Nicholson, 62, Russell-road, Rock Ferry.
Pte. Kenneth Shankland, 5, Shrewsbury-road, Oxton.
Rifleman S. Upton, 78, Argyle-street South.
Pte. A. Gregory, 9, Combermere-terrace.
Rifleman G. F. Cowderoy, 5, Thorneycroft-street.
Pte. P. Allen, 44, Penrith-street.
Pte. W. Thelwell, 4, Grove-street, New Ferry.
Pte. W. Fernhead, 4, Willaston-place (off Chapel-street).
Pte. J. Naismith, 145, Brook-street.
Pte. F. Goulbourn, 16, Helmingham-road.
Corpl. J. Pendlebury, 63, Mill-street.
Pte. J. W. Carruthers, 13, Tyrer-street.
Sergt. J. Morton, 4, Grace-terrace.
L. J. Dimmer, 86, Willmer-road.
Pte. H. A. Maynard, 13, Newling-street.
Pte. J. Lewis, 19, Chapel-street.
Pte. C. Chapman, 3, Leinster-street.
Pte. W. J. Hale, 298, Price-street.
Pte. J. Sharp, 49, Holt-hill.
Sergt. Manser, 40, Wycherley-road.
Pte. A. C. Thwaites, 64, Church-street.
Pte. D. Baty, 14, Richmond-cottages, Oxton-road.
Corpl. J. F. Roberts, 202, Claughton-road.
Pte. J. McGuire, 61, Flamank-street.

Extra Qu

TABLE W

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ESTABLISH

Gunner J. S. Galston, 145, Elmswood-road.
Pte. J. L. Rogerson, 89, Hillside-road.
Bandsman R. N. Smart, 41, Highfield-grove, Rock Ferry.
Rifleman J. Weaver, 3, Wilton-street (off Hope-street).
Pte. T. Renshaw, 17, Vincent-street.
Lance-Sergt. J. Phillipps, 18, Harriet-street.
Pte. N. R. Leatham, Ward 34, Town Hall Hospital, Wallasey.
Pte. R. J. Lightfoot, 31, Hope-street.
Pte. A. Platt, 284, Cleveland-street.
Pte. J. Edwards, 20, Beaconsfield-road.
Pte. A. Hudson, 160, Borough-road.
Pte. A. C. Pussey, 243, Borough-road.
Pte. E. Griffiths, 320, Park-road North.
Pte. G. P. Coverley, 65, Claughton-road.
E. D. Rider, 26, Rock-lane.
Pte. W. E. Anderson, 20, Sun-street.
Pte. T. J. Davies, 20, Crown-street.
Corpl. J. H. Strongman, 22, Clwyd-street.
Pte. H. L. Wainwright, 26, Fountain-street.
Pte. D. H. Cookson, 32, Balfour-road.
Pte. C. Cowin, 16, Grosvenor-street, Rock Ferry.
Gunner W. Bouch, 33, Upper Brassey-street.
Pte. W. H. Edwards, 20, Price-street.
Pte. E. Margerum, 41, Albion-street.
Pte. A. Campbell, 24, Exmouth-street.
Pte. G. McKenna, Market-street.
Pte. F. G. Hughes, 40, Fountain-street.
Pte. F. Wycherley, 23, Lloyd-avenue.
Pte. G. Roberts, 29, Woodville-road.
Seaman U. Chambers, 113, Bridge-street.
Gunner G. Edge, 31, Clarendon-street.
Pte. J. D. Roberts, 4, Churchill-avenue.
Deckhand H. Jones, 20, Borough-road.
Pte. J. Ellison, 141, Bridge-street.
Pte. W. Robinson, 24, Eldon-place.
Pte. H. Renshaw, 82, Cobden-street.
Pte. A. Prince, 153, Laird-street.

As the print is rather small here is a transcription.

'One of the most notable functions that make ordinary events pale into insignificance was the official welcome home given by the town on Saturday evening to Birkenhead's repatriated prisoners of war. Some 310 of these returned men were entertained to a dinner and concert in the Town Hall. The arrangements were carried out by the Cheshire Regiment Discharged Prisoners of War Aid Association, of which the Mayor (Mr D Roger Rowlands) is chairman. Mrs Glover hon secretary and Miss Cunningham hon. treasurer. The association has been forwarding parcels to local prisoners of war ever since 1914. Some of these former prisoners were in civilian clothes, and some in hospital uniform, but the majority were khaki-clad men and from their fine healthy appearances it was somewhat difficult to imagine that they had endured the rigours of a confinement that was out of the ordinary category of restriction of liberty. It was this feature that struck both the Mayor, as he received his honoured guests and an 'Advertiser' representative, who was chatting at the same time as His Worship. 'It speaks volumes for their powers of recuperation,' remarked the Mayor, a reflection he subsequently gave expression to in his address to his guests. And when in conversation with one of the men who had spent eighteen months in a punishment camp, a cheery sergeant with imperturbable good humour, the impression was also gained that these were the type of British soldiers whose spirit could not be bent, much less broken.

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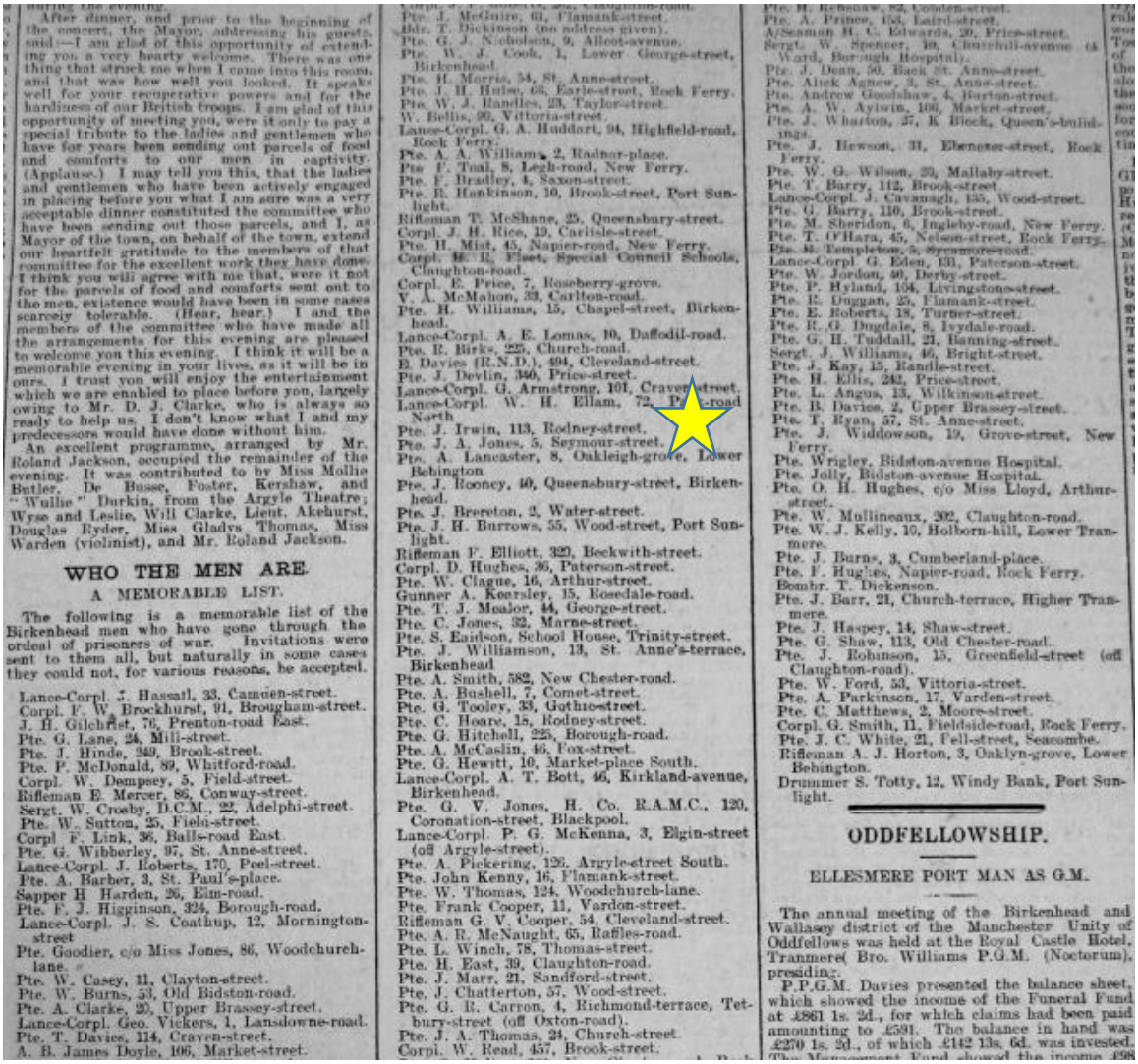
After dinner and prior to the beginning of the concert, the Mayor, addressing his guests said – 'I am glad of this opportunity of extending to you a very hearty welcome. There was one thing that struck me when I came into this room, and that was how well you looked. It speaks well for you recuperative powers and for the hardiness of our British troops. I am glad of this opportunity of meeting you if it were only to pay a special tribute to the ladies and gentlemen who have for four years been sending you parcels of food and comforts to our men in captivity.

(Applause). I may tell you this, that the ladies and gentlemen who have been actively engaged in placing before you what I am sure was a very acceptable dinner constituted the committee who have been sending out those parcels, and I, as Mayor of the town, on behalf of the town, extend our heartfelt gratitude to the members of that committee for the excellent work they have done. I think you will agree with me that were it not for the parcels of food and comforts sent out to the men, existence would have been in some cases scarcely tolerable. (Hear, hear). I and the members of the committee who have made all the arrangements for this evening, are pleased to welcome you this evening. I think it will be a memorable evening in your lives, as it will be in ours. I trust you will enjoy the entertainment which we are enabled to place before you…'



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An excellent programme, arranged by Mr. Roland Jackson, occupied the remainder of the evening. It was contributed to by Miss Mollie Butler, De Busse, Foster, Kershaw, and "Wullie" Durkin, from the Argyle Theatre; Wyse and Leslie, Will Clarke, Lieut. Akehurst, Douglas Ryder, Miss Gladys Thomas, Miss Warden (violinist), and Mr. Roland Jackson.

WHO THE MEN ARE.

A MEMORABLE LIST.

The following is a memorable list of the Birkenhead men who have gone through the ordeal of prisoners of war. Invitations were sent to them all, but naturally in some cases they could not, for various reasons, be accepted.

Lance-Corpl. J. Hassall, 33, Camden-street.
Corpl. F. W. Brockhurst, 91, Brougham-street.
J. H. Gilchrist, 76, Prenton-road East.
Pte. G. Lane, 24, Mill-street.
Pte. J. Hinde, 249, Brook-street.
Pte. P. McDonald, 89, Whitford-road.
Corpl. W. Dempsey, 5, Field-street.
Rifleman E. Mercer, 86, Conway-street.
Sergt. W. Crosby, D.C.M., 22, Adelphi-street.
Pte. W. Sutton, 25, Field-street.
Corpl F. Link, 36, Balls-road East.
Pte. G. Wibberley, 97, St. Anne-street.
Lance-Corpl. J. Roberts, 170, Peel-street.
Pte. A. Barber, 3, St. Paul's-place.
Sapper H. Harden, 26, Elm-road.
Pte. F. J. Higginson, 324, Borough-road.
Lance-Corpl. J. S. Coathup, 12, Mornington-street
Pte. Goodier, c/o Miss Jones, 86, Woodchurch-lane.
Pte. W. Casey, 11, Clayton-street.
Pte. W. Burns, 53, Old Bidston-road.
Pte. A. Clarke, 20, Upper Brassey-street.
Lance-Corpl. Geo. Vickers, 1, Lansdowne-road.
Pte. T. Davies, 114, Craven-street.
A. B. James Doyle, 106, Market-street.
Pte. J. McGuire, 61, Flamank-street.
Bdr. T. Dickinson (no address given).
Pte. G. J. Nicholson, 9, Alcot-avenue.
Pte. W. J. Cook, 1, Lower George-street, Birkenhead.
Pte. H. Morris, 54, St. Anne-street.
Pte. J. H. Hulse, 66, Earle-street, Rock Ferry.
Pte. W. J. Randles, 23, Taylor-street.
W. Bellis, 92, Victoria-street.
Lance-Corpl. G. A. Haddart, 94, Highfield-road, Rock Ferry.
Pte. A. A. Williams, 2, Radnor-place.
Pte F. Toal, 8, Legh-road, New Ferry.
Pte. F. Bradley, 4, Saxon-street.
Pte. R. Hankinson, 10, Brook-street, Port Sunlight.
Rifleman T. McShane, 25, Queensbury-street.
Corpl. J. H. Rice, 19, Carlisle-street.
Pte. H. Mist, 45, Napier-road, New Ferry.
Corpl. H. R. Fleet, Special Council Schools, Claughton-road.
Corpl. E. Price, 7, Roseberry-grove.
V. A. McMahon, 33, Carlton-road.
Pte. H. Williams, 15, Chapel-street, Birkenhead.
Lance-Corpl. A. E. Lomas, 10, Daffodil-road.
Pte. R. Birks, 225, Church-road.
E. Davies (R.N.D.), 494, Cleveland-street.
Pte. J. Devlin, 340, Price-street.
Lance-Corpl. G. Armstrong, 101, Craven-street.
Lance-Corpl. W. H. Ellam, 72, Park-road North
Pte. J. Irwin, 113, Rodney-street.
Pte. J. A. Jones, 5, Seymour-street.
Pte. A. Lancaster, 8, Oakleigh-grove, Lower Bebington
Pte. J. Rooney, 40, Queensbury-street, Birkenhead.
Pte. J. Brereton, 2, Water-street.
Pte. J. H. Burrows, 55, Wood-street, Port Sunlight.
Rifleman F. Elliott, 322, Beckwith-street.
Corpl. D. Hughes, 36, Paterson-street.
Pte. W. Clague, 16, Arthur-street.
Gunner A. Kearsley, 15, Rosedale-road.
Pte. T. J. Mealor, 44, George-street.
Pte. C. Jones, 32, Marne-street.
Pte. S. Endson, School House, Trinity-street.
Pte. J. Williamson, 13, St. Anne's-terrace, Birkenhead
Pte. A. Smith, 582, New Chester-road.
Pte. A. Bushell, 7, Comet-street.
Pte. G. Tooley, 33, Gothic-street.
Pte. C. Hoare, 15, Rodney-street.
Pte. G. Hitchell, 225, Borough-road.
Pte. A. McCaslin, 46, Fox-street.
Pte. G. Hewitt, 10, Market-place South.
Lance-Corpl. A. T. Bott, 46, Kirkland-avenue, Birkenhead.
Pte. G. V. Jones, H. Co. R.A.M.C., 120, Coronation-street, Blackpool.
Lance-Corpl. P. G. McKenna, 3, Elgin-street (off Argyle-street).
Pte. A. Pickering, 126, Argyle-street South.
Pte. John Kenny, 16, Flamank-street.
Pte. W. Thomas, 124, Woodchurch-lane.
Pte. Frank Cooper, 11, Vardon-street.
Rifleman G. V. Cooper, 54, Cleveland-street.
Pte. A. R. McNaught, 65, Raffles-road.
Pte. L. Winch, 78, Thomas-street.
Pte. H. East, 39, Claughton-road.
Pte. J. Marr, 21, Sandford-street.
Pte. J. Chatterton, 57, Wood-street.
Pte. G. R. Carron, 4, Richmond-terrace, Tetbury-street (off Oxton-road).
Pte. J. A. Thomas, 24, Church-street.
Corpl. W. Read, 457, Brook-street.
Pte. A. Prince, 153, Laird-street.
A/Seaman H. C. Edwards, 20, Price-street.
Sergt. W. Spencer, 10, Churchill-avenue (a Ward, Borough Hospital).
Pte. J. Dean, 50, Back St. Anne-street.
Pte. Alick Agnew, 3, St. Anne-street.
Pte. Andrew Goodshaw, 4, Burton-street.
Pte. A. W. Aylwin, 106, Market-street.
Pte. J. Wharton, 37, K Block, Queen's-buildings.
Pte. J. Hewson, 31, Ebenezer-street, Rock Ferry.
Pte. W. G. Wilson, 20, Mallaby-street.
Pte. T. Barry, 112, Brook-street.
Lance-Corpl. J. Cavanagh, 135, Wood-street.
Pte. G. Barry, 110, Brook-street.
Pte. M. Sheridan, 6, Ingleby-road, New Ferry.
Pte. T. O'Hara, 45, Nelson-street, Rock Ferry.
Pte. R. Templeton, 5, Sycamore-road.
Lance-Corpl. G. Eden, 131, Paterson-street.
Pte. W. Jordon, 90, Derby-street.
Pte. P. Hyland, 104, Livingstone-street.
Pte. E. Duggan, 25, Flamank-street.
Pte. E. Roberts, 18, Turner-street.
Pte. R. G. Dugdale, 8, Ivydale-road.
Pte. G. H. Tuddall, 21, Banning-street.
Sergt. J. Williams, 46, Bright-street.
Pte. J. Kay, 15, Randle-street.
Pte. H. Ellis, 242, Price-street.
Pte. L. Angus, 13, Wilkinson-street.
Pte. R. Davies, 2, Upper Brassey-street.
Pte. T. Ryan, 57, St. Anne-street.
Pte. J. Widdowson, 19, Grove-street, New Ferry.
Pte. Wrigley, Bidston-avenue Hospital.
Pte. Jolly, Bidston-avenue Hospital.
Pte. O. H. Hughes, c/o Miss Lloyd, Arthur-street.
Pte. W. Mullineaux, 302, Claughton-road.
Pte. W. J. Kelly, 10, Holborn-hill, Lower Tranmere.
Pte. J. Burns, 3, Cumberland-place.
Pte. F. Hughes, Napier-road, Rock Ferry.
Bombr. T. Dickenson.
Pte. J. Barr, 21, Church-terrace, Higher Tranmere.
Pte. J. Haspey, 14, Shaw-street.
Pte. G. Shaw, 113, Old Chester-road.
Pte. J. Robinson, 15, Greenfield-street (off Claughton-road).
Pte. W. Ford, 53, Vittoria-street.
Pte. A. Parkinson, 17, Varden-street.
Pte. C. Matthews, 2, Moore-street.
Corpl. G. Smith, 11, Fieldside-road, Rock Ferry.
Pte. J. C. White, 21, Fell-street, Seacombe.
Rifleman A. J. Horton, 3, Oaklyn-grove, Lower Bebington.
Drummer S. Totty, 12, Windy Bank, Port Sunlight.

ODDFELLOWSHIP.

ELLESMERE PORT MAN AS G.M.

The annual meeting of the Birkenhead and Wallasey district of the Manchester Unity of Oddfellows was held at the Royal Castle Hotel, Tranmere(Bro. Williams P.G.M. (Nocturum), presiding.

P.P.G.M. Davies presented the balance sheet, which showed the income of the Funeral Fund at £861 1s. 2d., for which claims had been paid amounting to £591. The balance in hand was £270 1s. 2d., of which £142 13s. 6d. was invested.

Recovery

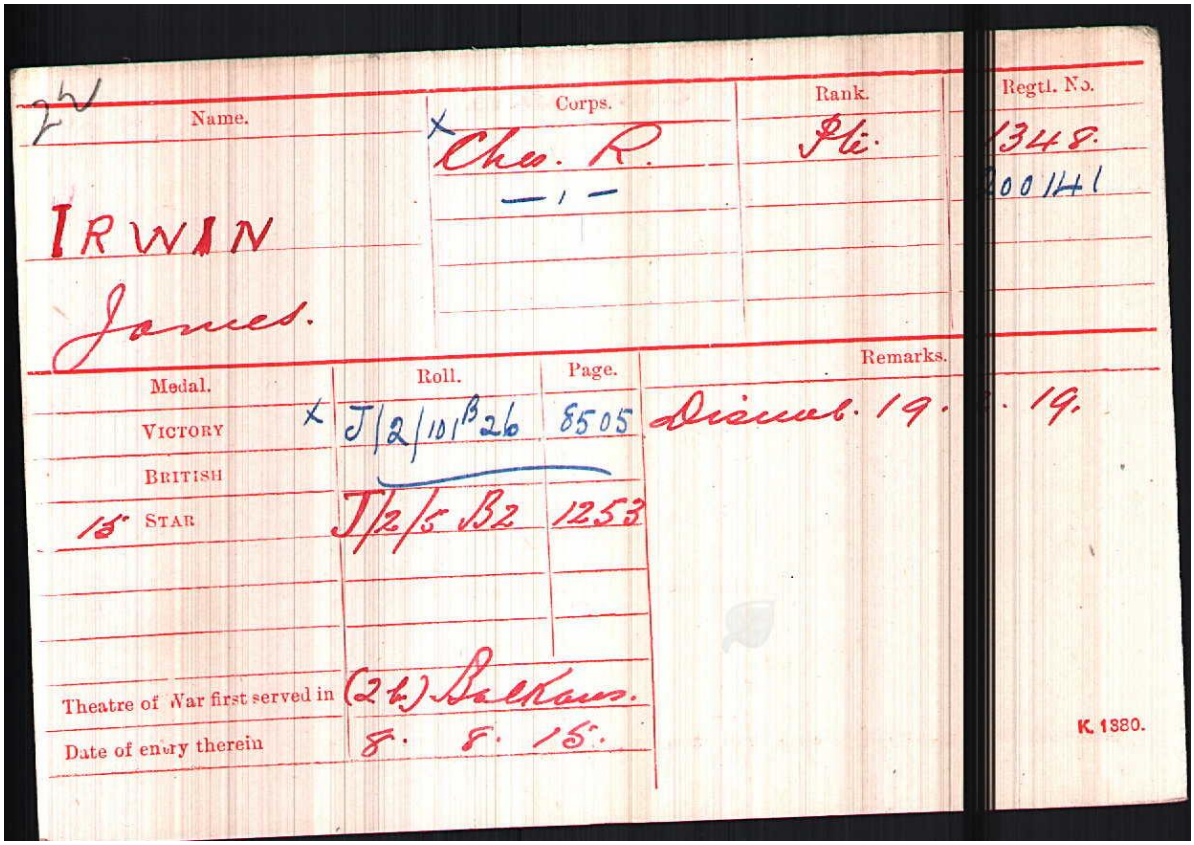
On his return from the war in December 1918 Jim was entitled to a month's 'furlough', or leave. Not much really. Imagine the 'return-to-work' package, and support that someone in a similar situation would enjoy today. In the New Year of 1919 he returned to work at Cammell Laird. There were cancelled orders from the Royal Navy, but six submarines to be dismantled. No doubt a refreshing change from the servitude at Gelebek, so recently endured.

When the prisoners were released in October and November 1918 photographers rushed to Turkey. Their task was to take photographs of emaciated prisoners for propaganda purposes. They were disappointed. The men they encountered looked surprisingly fit, well and happy. This was partly because the worst cases had left early in an exchange arrangement, but also because young men when well fed and happy to have their freedom again, recovered very rapidly. It is remarkable that by some point in 1919 when this image was taken, that Jim could look so healthy again, and not as grey as we expected from oral history.

Jim in 1919

Medals

Jim was awarded three campaign medals for his service in the Great War. This is his Medal Index Card confirming the awards.



Jim's Medal Index Card

The 1914-15 Star. Was awarded to all who served in any theatre of war against Germany between 5th August 1914 and 31st December 1915. The 1914-15 Star was not awarded alone. The recipient had to have received the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. The reverse is plain with the recipient's service number, rank, name and unit impressed on it. The ribbon colours reflect the French tricolore. Popularly known as 'Pip'.

British War Medal. The silver medal was awarded to officers and men of the British and Imperial Forces who either entered a theatre of war or entered service overseas between 5th August 1914 and 11th November 1918 inclusive. The front (obv or obverse) of the medal depicts the head of George V. The ribbon colours represent the combined colours of the Allied nations, with the rainbow additionally representing the calm after the storm. The ribbon consists of a double rainbow with red at the centre. Known as 'Squeak'.

The Victory Medal. The British version depicts the winged figure of Victory on the front of the medal and on the back, it says 'The Great War for Civilisation 1914-1919'.Interestingly, eligibility for this medal was more restrictive and not everyone who received the British War Medal ('Squeak') also received the Victory Medal ('Wilfred'). However, in general, all recipients of 'Wilfred' also received 'Squeak' and all recipients of 'Pip' also received both 'Squeak' and 'Wilfred'. The recipient's service number, rank, name and unit was impressed on the rim.

Pip, Squeak, and Wilfred. A popular newspaper cartoon at the time featured Pip the dog, Squeak the penguin and Wilfred the rabbit. Soon the three main campaign medals (the 1914 or 1914-15 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal) were nicknamed 'Pip, Squeak and Wilfred'.

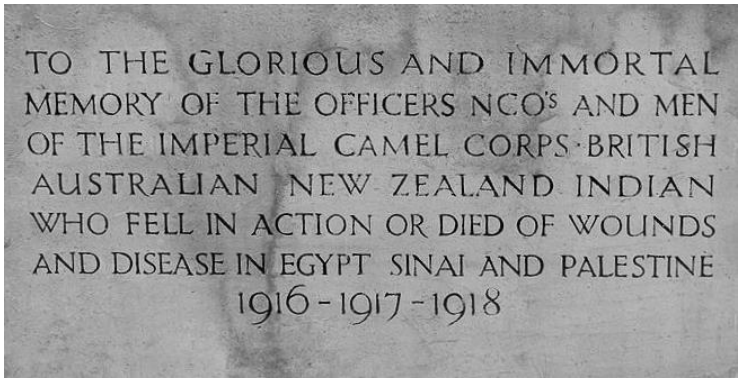
When only the British War and Victory Medals were worn together they became 'Mutt and Jeff' after another pair of cartoon characters.

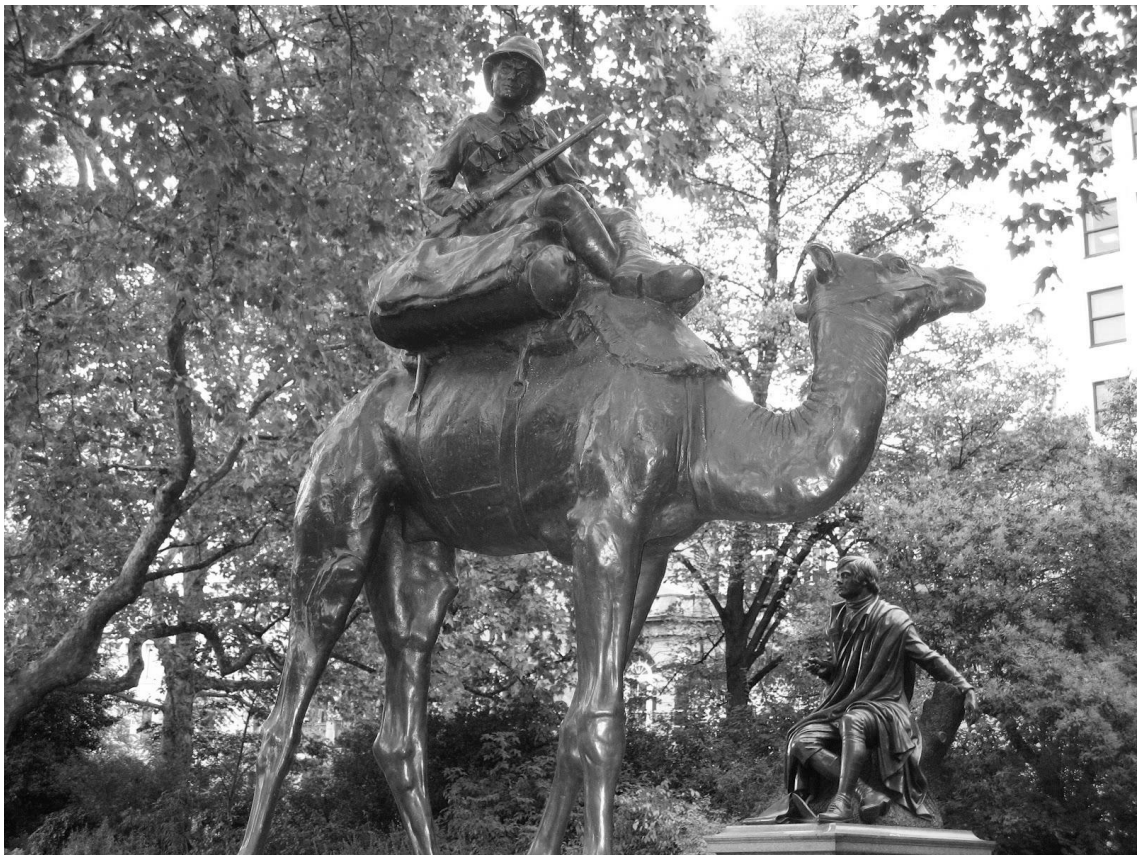
Pip, Squeak and Wilfred. Note that the British War Medal has a bronze oakleaf attached to indicate 'Mentioned in Despatches'

The Imperial Camel Corps Monument

On 22nd July 1921 a monument to the Imperial Camel Corps was unveiled in the Victoria Embankment Gardens, London by Lieutenant-General Sir Philip Chetwode, who was the first commander of the Desert Mounted Corps. The ceremony was attended by the Bishop of London and the Prime Ministers of Australia and New Zealand. The statue was sculptured by Major Cecil Brown who himself served in the ICC. The memorial is seen as one of the most successful of the Great War Monuments.

Cast in bronze and set on Portland stone, it bears this inscription.





I think this description suits it best.

The mounted soldier and his camel are startling and somewhat poignantly situated in the verdant park, especially against the backdrop of modern skyscrapers as shown above. They seem to pause amid a long and arduous journey from a world far away.

Married Life

Jim soon settled down into normal life again, living in Marsh Lane where his parents ran a tobacconists shop and travelling to work on the train with his brother Chris. They started to notice, and admire, a young girl who took the same train. Not knowing her name they referred to her as 'Norah' in their conversations about her. She was commuting to Liverpool by train from her family home in Gloucester Road, Bootle to complete her apprenticeship as a confectioner. Her actual job was in Stanley Road. 'Norah's' real name was Mary Winefride Graham, though known to all as 'Minnie'. In due course Jim recognised her in St James Church, and plucked up the courage to speak to her after mass. Romance ensued and Jim married Minnie in 1924 in West Derby.

They had three children; Patricia, Norah (you can see where that one came from!), and Christopher. Jim was a gentle and humorous man with a love of poetry and literature. Favourites included Kipling, Shakespeare and Gilbert & Sullivan. He might have appreciated these lines (John Still again) which seem to suit him rather well.

Cheery and mellow, and quick of wit;
Lovable too with his twinkling eye,
His wicked jest and his caustic hit,
A merry philosopher, full of grit,
Whose fund of gaiety never ran dry.

He really enjoyed a good meal at a nicely set table, which was very easy to understand after the experiences he had been through. He preferred to eat after the children and would be dismayed if the table setting was less than perfect, on one occasion leaving a note with the comment *'I got here as soon as I was able. And I had to sit at a second hand table'.*

Always very smartly dressed in three piece suit, shirt and tie. He carried a micrometre calliper in his suit pocket to measure the thickness of things, items at the dinner able and the like. We were delighted when this resurfaced a few years ago complete with his name engraved into the metal. His engineering expertise eventually led him to employment as a Supervisor at the Royal Ordnance factory in Aintree, supervising apprentices.

It is a tribute to his generosity of spirit that despite the trials he had been through he could readily empathise with the much more mundane concerns of others, in this case writing a typically entertaining ditty for granddaughter Mary who was worried about passing her 'eleven plus' exams.

It's hard to write an odd, odd ode,
It's hard to drive along a crooked road,
It's hard to do the things you should
It's hard to refrain from the things you 'would'.
It's hard to wash behind your ears
When the weather's perishing cold,
It's harder still when you're like me
Approaching the stage called 'old'.
It's hard to pass the eleven plus
Meet it not with sorrow
Because it's harder still to enjoy today
If you worry about tomorrow.

Jim's descendants now include children, grand-children, great grandchildren, and great-great grandchildren. The total population of the descendants grows by the year, each and every one of whom owes their existence to the great survivor, Jim Irwin, a man of sterling character.

Appendix: Irwin Family History

Cootehill, and County Cavan in general had enjoyed relative prosperity during the eighteenth century and the early part of the nineteenth century. Its success was based upon the success of the 'brown' flax industry and production of linen. This was a semi-industrialised cottage industry with individual homes undertaking various stages in the production of fine linen. It struggled once demand fell and coastal areas including Dublin took over much of their previous work, using more efficient industrialised methods. The inhabitants turned to growing crops by tillage, and as in most of Ireland, the potato became their staple crop. Irish Catholics were prohibited from owning land and from entering any profession. Many rented small plots of land from absentee British Protestant landlords, and poverty intensified as landlords took any opportunity to sub-divide plots of land so making them smaller.

When potato blight struck they were particularly badly affected, having become reliant on this single crop. The main years of the famine were 1845-49, and the winters of 1846-47 were particularly bad with heavy snow burying homes up to their roofs, unusual for a country with a typically damp but relatively warm winter climate.

The potato crop having failed, families like the Irwins were forced to live off the land, eating berries, nettles, turnips, old cabbage leaves, roots, roadside weeds, even grass. They sold their livestock and pawned everything they owned, including clothing to pay the rent to avoid eviction, using any residual money to buy food.

The response from Government, both locally and in London was poor and often involved schemes to get people to work in order to 'better' themselves. Road building schemes were introduced with rocks broken locally to construct rough roads, with no real destination. Roads to nowhere. Payment was 'in kind'. This meant a handful of 'India meal' a day, this being the corn usually fed to chickens. Women, including the great grandmother of Jim and his siblings were included in the labour force.

It is estimated that approximately a million people died of starvation or disease during this period, and another two million emigrated to the New World or to England, including Liverpool. Conditions in Cootehill did not improve for a long time after the famine years and its Workhouse (accommodating 800 'paupers' in a town whose population was about 2,000) became notorious for its squalor and wretchedness and was eventually closed down after an inspection in 1895. The Irwins probably made a sensible decision in leaving.

Many genealogical records were lost or destroyed at this time, but it seems that Philip Irwin (born 1838) and Bridget Brogan, living in Cootehill at the time, had four children. Patrick, Mary, Susan and Frank.

The family left Ireland later than most who emigrated. In 1880 the family split up with Philip leaving for New York with daughters Mary and Susan, and son Frank. Little in the way of precise detail is known about this group, although Frank is reputed to have drowned in the Hudson River, and Philip lost an arm in an accident, believed to be in some sort of railroad work. It is known that Susan lived at 24 Wood Place, Yonkers, New York, having married Julius Link, the proprietor of the Hillside Inn. He died at some point prior to 1919 when the census indicates Susan as 'widowed'.

Philip Irwin returned to Liverpool from New York in 1913, living at 113 Rodney Street, Birkenhead with Patrick and Mary and their children. He died there on 22nd September 1916, aged 77, while Jim was away at war.

Patrick Irwin made his way to Liverpool about 1880, when about 16-17 years old. He found lodgings with Mr and Mrs Segrave, another Irish family, and commenced work in the City Tannery in Blackstock Street, Liverpool.

Thomas Segrave had emigrated from Dublin on the boat with five children and all of their possessions, apparently seated on a blanket on deck. Mr Segrave had had his own business in Dublin making parchment, employing several men and apprentices, but the invention of 'paper' threatened his business and he travelled to America and Germany to seek new outlets. In Liverpool he had to find new employment. His wife, Catherine (ne Ward) had stayed behind

to await the birth of their sixth child. She sailed for Liverpool with the child in due course, but inexplicably her husband failed to meet her on the landing stage as planned. She returned to Dublin on the next boat. She eventually made a second crossing which succeeded in reuniting the pair, who went on to have four more children born in Liverpool, ten in total. Catherine Ward's mother had been sent out at age eighteen to be a housekeeper to a widower with five sons. She subsequently married him, and they produced a single daughter, Catherine. Catherine's own sons were named after her half-brothers; James, Michael, Patrick, Joseph, Philip. Her daughters included Mary, Catherine and Esther.

Their eldest daughter, Mary, struck Patrick as being outstandingly beautiful. Mary had also been born in Ireland, in her case Dublin on 20th December 1897*. His affection was reciprocated and in due course they were married in September 1889, in St Anne's church, Rock Ferry. Patrick was then 25 and his wife 21.

Patrick and Mary had 8 children. Annie, Patrick (died at seven months), Catherine, James (Jim), Joseph (died aged five from Scarlet fever), Christopher, Ellen and Philip. The Irwin family were living in Rock Ferry throughout this period.

James was a bright boy who felt keenly his family' poverty. His father Patrick was now suffering the fate of so many immigrants in working on a poorly paid, unattractive, job (tanner). However, he had a great interest in books. During quiet evenings he would read aloud to his wife while she mended clothes and completed other household chores. He would take James to book stalls, studying and occasionally buying, second-hand books.

When James left school he worked as an errand boy, delivering goods in a handcart. At 15 years old, showing great initiative, and keen to get on in the world he had been making himself known at the gates of the famous Cammell Laird shipyard, hanging around the gates looking for work, and had been taken on as an apprentice 'brass finisher'. In two years' time, at 17 he was able to join the Territorials, the 4th battalion of the Cheshire Regiment.

NB Philip in mid to late teens, and perhaps sharing a thirst for adventure with his older brother, left to go to Canada on a whim. His friend Colin, working for the White Star Line had contacted him to tell them that a ship was leaving at 2pm the same day. He went home, packed some belongings and left without even telling his parents, boarding the ship as a member of the crew.

He completed this voyage several times, until on one occasion he saw the police in Quebec hold a man down and then shoot him dead. Disinclined to visit Canada again he returned home. Apparently his parents never mentioned his absence and accepted him back into the family. He never forgave himself for giving his parents, especially his mother, the worry that must have been caused by his sudden departure, and perhaps because of this he suffered a period of depression.

The Irwin Family. Please note that Vanessa has mapped out the family trees of James' siblings. I haven't included them here. They are available if anyone would like a copy.

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Philip Irwin

Bridget Brogan</td><td rowspan="8">Patrick Irwin
Born 1864, Cootehill, County Cavan

Mary Segrave
Born 1868, Dublin</td><td>Anne Sept 1890</td></tr>
<tr><td>Patrick born 1892</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Thomas Segrave

Catherine Ward</td><td>Catherine 28th August 1893</td></tr>
<tr><td>James 23rd Oct 1895, Kirkdale</td></tr>
<tr><td>Joseph 1898</td></tr>
<tr><td>Christopher 23rd Dec 1900</td></tr>
<tr><td>Ellen 1903 Birkenhead</td></tr>
<tr><td>Philip 12th Feb 1906 Birkenhead</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="3">James Irwin
Mary Winefride Graham</td><td>Patricia Mary 17th August 1924</td></tr>
<tr><td>Norah Winefride 21st August 1926</td></tr>
<tr><td>Christopher Michael 29th Sept. 1928</td></tr>
</table>

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