TENTH CAVALRY BRIGADE COMBINED FIELD AMBULANCE OPERATIONS IN PALESTINE, SEPTEMBER, OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER, 1918.

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INTRODUCTION.

The unit whose work is described in the following narrative was attached to the 10th Cavalry Brigade, one of those which formed the 4th Cavalry Division. This division, together with the 5th Cavalry, Anzac and Australian (Ausdiv) Mounted Divisions made up the Desert Mounted Corps, whose operations during the campaign are recorded in the published dispatches.

The unit was formed in May, 1918, when Indian cavalry replaced the yeomanry regiments sent to France, and its establishment, published then in provisional form, was constantly being modified right up to the last. It was complicated, as Indian medical establishments are, by the mixture of military personnel and followers, and by the specialization of duties due to the caste system. As it never received a final form, and as it was reorganized, as described in Section I, on the eve of operations, it is not proposed to do more here than give a general idea of its resources, comparing it with the Cavalry Field Ambulance whose establishment is familiar from Field Service Manual, Army Medical Service, and omitting all description of its establishment in detail.

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It consisted of three sections (one British, two Indian) and the transport section.

(a) The British section consisted of 3 R.A.M.C. officers, 2 assistant surgeons, a pack-store sergeant, a clerk, 5 British nursing orderlies and 4 signallers. The remaining personnel were Indian and included 16 bearers, 5 ward servants, 2 cooks, 2 sweepers, a washerman and water-carrier. Its equipment was practically the same as that of a section of a cavalry field ambulance. Ten R.A.M.C. privates were temporarily added to this establishment a few weeks before the campaign opened.

(b) The two Indian sections each contained one I.M.S. officer, the remainder of the personnel being Indian and consisting in the case of each section of two sub-assistant surgeons, hospital store-keeper, pack store havildar, sixteen bearers and an allotment of ward orderlies (nursing personnel), cooks, bhistas, dhobies and sweepers. A section's equipment resembled that of the British section in all important particulars, with differences in the cooking utensils, etc.

(c) The transport section contained no Indians, the drivers being approximately half British and half Egyptian, while the N.C.O.'s and artificers were British and were much the same as those of a cavalry field ambulance. British drivers also acted as grooms to the officers, assistant and sub-assistant surgeons. The transport consisted of 6 light ambulance wagons, 4 Ford motor ambulance cars, 5 limbered general service wagons, 5 general service wagons, 2 water carts and 3 pack mules. Each of the horsed vehicles was drawn by 4 mules, the total of draught animals (including 4 spares) being thus 76. Two days before operations began twenty camels with cacolets were temporarily added to this establishment, enabling forty additional patients to be carried. The establishment of riding animals was 39 riding horses and 16 donkeys, though the numbers actually available were 41 horses and 24 donkeys. The distribution of these to the personnel on the War Establishment need not be described as it was not adhered to in practice.

It should be added that the general shortage of assistant and sub-assistant surgeons caused them to be replaced in practice by R.A.M.C. serjeants, with the exception of one sub-assistant surgeon who was the only Indian officer with the unit. None of these serjeants had any previous experience of service with Indian troops. Similarly one I.M.S. officer was replaced by an R.A.M.C. officer.

It will thus be perceived that the organization of the unit was very different from that of a cavalry field ambulance with its two equal sections, each further split up into bearer and tent subdivisions; and reorganization on similar lines to these had to be undertaken on the eve of operations.

This narrative was written in 1918 and the references to War Establishments as laid down in Field Service Manuals are to the pre-war editions. Recent changes in numbers and nomenclature are not taken into account.
PRELIMINARY ORGANIZATION AND THE MARCH INTO POSITION.

It was not till early September that the first hint of a forthcoming campaign was dropped in the shape of instructions to organize the combined field ambulance into mobile and immobile sections. Owing to the distribution of the unit between Ain Hujla and the main dressing station on the Jericho-Jerusalem road, this could only be done on paper and no sectional training was possible. The paper organization was devised on the same general lines as for the Jerusalem campaign, but the specialization of duties in an Indian unit attendant upon the caste system introduced complications which were not present with wholly British personnel. The establishment had been temporarily increased by ten R.A.M.C. privates who joined on August 29 and the next day a draft of thirty-one Indians arrived, bringing the unit up to strength.

As the War Establishment of a combined cavalry field ambulance only contemplates subdivision into three sections, one British and two Indian, all of which contain a number of dismounted men, it has been thought advisable to describe in some detail the reorganization into mobile and immobile sections, as the success of medical arrangements in the subsequent campaign largely depended on a wise choice of men, mounts, transport and equipment in this preliminary organization. It was drawn up on the following lines:

(1) Mobile Section.

A. Personnel and Horses.—(1) Three R.A.M.C. officers (Lieutenant-Colonel H. F. Humphreys, O.C., Captain W. E. H. Bull and Captain M. Morris), 1 Indian officer (an S.A.S.), 10 R.A.M.C. N.C.O.'s and privates (including 4 signallers), the transport N.C.O.'s and officers' grooms were all mounted on horses: of which 37 out of a total of 41 were apportioned to this section. The remainder of the horses were allotted to Indians, and 2 N.C.O.'s, 3 men leading pack mules and 3 complete stretcher squads of 4 men each were mounted in this way.

(2) Twenty-four donkeys were used to mount Indian followers. All the special duty men, such as cooks, bhistis, ward servants and sweepers, together with twelve A.B.C. followers (who acted as bearers at the dressing station), donkey syces and officers' servants were thus carried.

(3) Ten more personnel, made up of artificers, ward orderlies and wagon orderlies were carried on the limbers and light ambulances. It need scarcely be added that no men marched on foot with the mobile section.

(4) The remainder of the personnel were drivers, those of the horse transport being roughly fifty per cent British and fifty per cent Egyptians, while 19 C.T.C. drivers accompanied the camels. The total strength

\[1\] All details of this reorganization were left to C.O.'s and were probably different in the other cavalry field ambulances of the Corps.
of the mobile section was thus 3 British officers, 1 Indian officer, 35 British O.R.'s (one half of whom were drivers), 50 Indian N.C.O.'s and men, 31 Egyptians.

B. Transport.—(1) All the six light ambulance wagons were of course allotted to this section, but as one had to be sent into workshop for repairs early in this month the unit marched out on operations with only five.

(2) The four motor ambulances were increased to six, but these were detached to form a divisional motor ambulance convoy.

(3) Twenty camels, fifteen lying and five sitting cacolets, were drawn at Ramleh on September 17, but five lying cacolets had to be handed over on September 20 to the 12th Brigade Cavalry Field Ambulance who had not drawn them, so that the carrying capacity of the camels was reduced to thirty patients.

(4) All five limbered wagons were taken with the mobile section as it was not thought that general service wagons would be able to keep up with the brigade on forced marches. These wagons carried an average of 1,000 pounds of stores apiece, and in addition one water cart was taken. Only four mules per wagon were available for these as well as for the light ambulances, but the loss of one of the latter (see above) enabled an extra pair to be harnessed to the water cart and the "medical comforts" limber whose load somewhat exceeded that of the others.

(5) Three pack mules carried water in fanatis and sufficient stores lightly to equip an advanced dressing station.

C. Equipment.—In the selection of equipment the exigencies of transport necessitated the dumping of a certain amount of the authorized equipment to make room for other more important stores. Speaking broadly, the equipment of the British section was taken, plus sundry items (e.g., cooking utensils), from that of one Indian section to enable Indian requirements to be met. The medical equipment of one Indian section was dumped; in addition the forge, the bulk of the wheelers', farriers' and saddlers' tools, half the general service panniers with their contents, and No. 2 medical and surgical panniers were all left behind, though some of the more valuable items from these stores were taken in other panniers or bags. Previous experience of supply difficulties during a cavalry advance caused the inclusion in the loads of large quantities of medical comforts such as champagne, milk, cocoa, etc., a numerous assortment of splints, sacks of extra bandages and dressings, extra drugs such as quinine and sera, Red Cross bed rests for chest and abdominal cases (a most valuable item) and extra stretchers, blankets and ground sheets. Transport requirements included an extra number of spare poles and perches and a good supply of horse shoes—an addition which, though heavy, was fully justified in practice as no more were supplied for two months and the unit went through the campaign without a single case of lameness amongst its animals. These extra stores were indented for at once, though the bulk of them were not drawn till arrival at Ramleh.
D. Subdivision into Bearer and Tent Divisions.—This was established as follows: Two officers and about half the personnel (British, Indian and Egyptians) went to the bearer division, mounted on four-fifths of the horses and one-fifth of the donkeys. One officer and the remainder of the personnel formed the tent division, mounted on one-fifth of the horses and four-fifths of the donkeys, the personnel being allocated to one or the other according to the nature of their duties, bearers, nursing orderlies, ward orderlies, etc. All transport for casualties was included in the bearer division, while the water-cart and limbered wagons, together with the bulk of the stores, went with the tent division. One limbered wagon, however, and the three pack mules were allotted to the former and these carried sufficient equipment and water to enable an advanced dressing station to be formed.

(2) Immobile Section.

A. Personnel.—This consisted originally of 1 R.A.M.C. officer (Captain J. R. K. Thomson), 1 I.M.S. officer, 10 R.A.M.C. N.C.O.’s and men, 19 A.S.C., H.T. (including an N.C.O., a shoeing smith, 3 grooms and drivers), and 43 Indian N.C.O.’s and men. The last category included special duties, such as ward orderlies, ward servants, cooks, bhistis, sweepers and dhobies, plus the bulk of the bearers who could not be mounted in the mobile section. Four riding horses only travelled with this section (for the officers and R.A.M.C. serjeants) the remainder of the British personnel being carried on the general service wagons and the Indians marching.

B. Transport.—All the general service wagons went with the immobile section, but as the unit began operations short of establishment in animals, only four mules per wagon were available, and the section possessed no spares. One water cart was also taken.

C. Equipment.—In general the complete equipment of one Indian section was taken plus a few items from that of the British section (cooking utensils, farriers’ tools, etc.), the tents, blankets, stretchers, and ground sheets of the second Indian section, and extra stores as for the mobile section.

The March to Position.

On the night of September 11, the field ambulance left the Jordan Valley in rear of its brigade on the march to the left flank. The distance was covered by five night marches, the brigade resting during the day. These marches were probably of benefit to the animals and made them harder and fitter for the ordeal before them, but the lack of sleep (heat and the flies made it almost impossible to sleep by day) tried the men severely. The dismounted men of the unit had gone direct to Ramleh from the Jordan Valley by motor lorry and rail, and they rejoined the rest of the unit on its arrival at Ramleh on the 17th. The two days spent here were times of great activity and considerable strain. Remounts of horses and donkeys had to be drawn, all camels and cacolets sent for, numerous stores
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drawn from ordnance, medical stores, Red Cross, etc., and the many items of equipment which it had been decided to leave behind sorted out and sent to Ludd. Finally the division into mobile and immobile sections previously planned was carried out and the latter placed under the direct orders of the A.D.M.S. Eleventh hour casualties entailed some changes here as the I.M.S. officer went sick and the Indian S.A.S. was transferred from the mobile to the immobile section to take his place. This left the mobile section without a single I.M.S. officer, S.A.S., or assistant surgeon, and as only a slight knowledge of Hindustani was possessed by officers and N.C.O.'s, the difficulty of handling the Indian personnel and patients was serious and remained a grave handicap on the section throughout the campaign. The chronicle of the immobile section—which operated separately under the direct orders of the A.D.M.S.—will be reserved for a later chapter; this narrative will henceforth concern itself with the movement of the mobile section, which alone performed the duties of a front line unit and will be called the field ambulance. On the morning of the 17th the scope and intentions of the forthcoming operations were explained to O.C.'s field ambulances by the A.D.M.S., and the same evening the brigade moved to Selma by a night march, bivouacking in orange groves under camouflage all the next day. Late in the afternoon operation orders were received. Thus it was literally only a few hours before the unit marched out on operations that the nature of the operations and the distance it was proposed to cover were explained: too late to effect any of the reductions of wagon loads and of equipment, which would have been adopted with adequate notice. Indeed the extreme secrecy observed, the absence of any period of preparation, and the necessity for a long march across the entire Palestine front on the eve of operations probably told more heavily against the field ambulance than any other units of the brigade. For the field ambulance alone took the bulk of its transport into the field with the brigade, and the need of a complete reorganization of the unit in a few days, with only the most general notion of the task in front, imposed a severe strain and considerable anxiety on all those concerned.

SECTION II.

THE MARCH TO BEISAN.

At 06:00 hours on September 19 the ambulance started.

After a two hours' march it arrived at the Nahr Auja and watered there, reaching after another hour the position of readiness. Here a halt of one hour was made in which the animals were off-saddled and fed while the men had breakfast. At 09:30 hours the brigade moved off again; the going which previously had been very fair now became heavy, and the field ambulance fell behind the brigade, but caught it up at Ayun el Basse, where it halted for twenty minutes after two hours of continuous marching. Following this the going became worse than ever—sandy and broken—and
the brigade began to trot at intervals: the draught animals soon began to show signs of distress, so it was decided to proceed at an independent pace, keeping in touch with the brigade by means of connecting files, Captain Bull and four men, spaced out at about half mile intervals, being told off for this duty. After the ambulance had struggled for another one and a half hours through sandy soil, a halt of twenty minutes was called and the animals given a small feed. On starting off again at 14.15 hours the going improved, and the mules, refreshed by the feed, settled down to their work. From this point the camels were left behind with orders to proceed at their own pace, the direction of the march and the ultimate objective having previously been carefully explained to the private in charge. The ambulance was still in touch with its rear connecting file, and four hours of steady marching brought it to Tell-ed-Dhur, with the brigade a little over a mile away. But as dusk was falling fast, and the brigade was on the move, it was decided not to try and find the brigade in the dark but to march direct to Kerkur and join it there. This was done, and Kerkur reached at 20.00 hours. Here good watering was found at a well, the animals were off-saddled and fed, tea was made, and animals and men alike had a good rest of two hours, after which the ambulance proceeded to Sumrah and marched off from there in rear of the brigade. No casualties had yet occurred and the mules had got their second wind and were well into the collar. On leaving Sumrah at 23.00 hours the brigade lost two hours by a mistake in direction and did not finally enter the Lejjun Pass till 01.00 hours on the morning of the 20th. From this point on, the narrative of the field ambulance is identical with that of the bulk of the brigade, as on the road no difficulty was experienced in keeping up with the regiments. An all night march was followed by a rest of two and a half hours at Lejjun, but the watering here had been cut up by the troops in front and few animals drank. El Afule was reached at noon, and at 13.30 hours the brigade led the division on the march to Beisan. On the advice of the A.D.M.S. all wheels and the donkeys made this march at a walk with the transport of Divisional Headquarters, only men mounted on horses, and the pack animals proceeding with the brigade, the intention being in the case of an action at Beisan to form an advanced dressing station with these until the wheels came up. Most of the sixteen miles to Beisan were covered at the trot, and the advanced detachment rode in on the heels of the brigade at 17.00 hours; but as no action took place no dressing station was formed, and the detachment went into bivouac, the rest of the ambulance arriving after being hung up by other transport at 20.00 hours.

Thus a straight march of eighty-five miles, increased to over ninety miles by the circular tour at Sumrah, was covered by the field ambulance in thirty-eight hours, and by the advanced detachment in thirty-five. It has been described in some detail chiefly because it is easily a record for field ambulances, again because the field ambulance (and R.H.A.) alone amongst the units of the brigade took all its transport on the march and
had teams of only four animals to the wagons. Its salient features and the lessons to be learned from it may be summarized under the following heads:

The Striking Absence of Casualties.—Only one or two cases of sickness or minor injuries were picked up on the journey and carried forward to Beisan. Had heavier casualties occurred it had been intended to carry them forward till our carrying capacity was fully taxed, and if it were exceeded to leave dumps of patients, with small detachments of personnel in charge, at convenient places on the road close to water, such as Sumrah, Lejjun or Afule, where they would have been collected by the Divisional Motor Ambulance Convoy. That this was not necessary made the medical arrangements relatively simple.

B. The Capacity of the Animals to Stand the March.—That the camels would drop behind was a foregone conclusion, and had been provided for by giving the R.A.M.C. private in charge, an exceptionally intelligent and resourceful soldier, the fullest possible information of the march in front of him. He eventually arrived at Beisan on the morning of the 22nd. More surprising was the power of endurance shown by the mules. With only four mules to a limber and carrying two and a half tons of stores, the field ambulance proved itself capable of covering any distance that cavalry might be called upon to march. Not a single animal foundered or failed to do its bit, and the only casualties were half a dozen neck galls in the wheelers (a form of casualty particularly liable to occur with limbered wagons) and about seven sore backs among the riding horses; these were attributed to the long trot from Afule to Beisan, coming as it did after a seventy-five mile march, with the men tired and not riding their best. The rapid recovery of the mules on the afternoon of the 19th was striking. But perhaps the most remarkable performance was that of the donkeys. Not one of the twenty-four ever fell behind or showed signs of distress and they sustained not a single casualty of any kind. That they should have demonstrated their capacity to carry a man ninety miles in thirty-eight hours over mixed going appears to be a military discovery of some importance.

C. Keeping in Touch with the Brigade.—On the good going subsequent to Sumrah, the ambulance easily kept in direct touch with the rear of the column, but the pace on the first day raised special difficulties for a unit that consisted mainly of transport. The chief lessons to be learnt were:—

(a) The value of well-posted connecting files. The plain of Sharon is undulating, featureless and blind, and the connecting files halted on the summit of each swell and signalled with flags till the last one was answered by a signaller with the ambulance, when they crossed the valley to the next ridge and so on. This worked well till darkness fell, when of course connecting files so widely spaced ceased to be of service. (b) The need for sending messages back from the brigade. The operation orders contemplated the
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brigade watering at Kakon, but apparently these were changed on the march, though no notice came back to the ambulance. Fortunately no harm resulted as the connecting files maintained contact, and when this was lost after dark the decision to proceed to Kerkur resulted happily. But if the field ambulance had been reduced to marching by map and compass it would have gone to Kakon and lost touch with its brigade, probably for the rest of the march.

The five days spent at Beisan call for little comment. Until the arrival of the immobile section the ambulance was opened as a divisional collecting station, and all casualties of the division passed through it up to September 24, when the immobile section, which had arrived the night before, took over. Light ambulance wagons collected casualties from the regiments, most of them occurring within easy reach, and the evacuation to Sumrah arranged by the A.D.M.S. worked smoothly, the bad cases traveling in motor ambulances and the lighter cases in motor lorry; 141 cases in all were passed through the ambulance during the five days at Beisan.

The few days’ rest here enabled the animals to recover and the galls incurred on the march to heal; a captured Turkish travelling cooker was taken on with a team of three mules and proved of the very greatest value on subsequent operations. The strength of the bearer section was increased by another mounted squad of four men and a pack mule, the men being found from the surplus bearers of the immobile section on its arrival and mounted on captured ponies.

Mosquitoes were breeding freely at Beisan and the troops had no protection against their attacks. The field ambulance bivouac was kept as far away from water as possible, and to this is attributed the fact that in the subsequent epidemic of malaria it suffered less severely than the regiments.

SECTION III.

THE MARCH TO DAMASCUS.

UP TO IRBID.

September 25: At 16.00 hours on the afternoon of September 25, the ambulance marched in rear of the Brigade to Jisr el Mejami, and after a night in bivouac there started for Irbid. The march was uneventful till midday on September 26, when the dilapidated state of the bridge over the stream at Arab el Ramel hung up the ambulance for two hours while repairs were in progress; touch with the Brigade was thus lost and the ambulance marched by map and compass to Irbid. At the Wadi el Gharr it was met by orders from the staff captain to halt under cover and send forward an advanced dressing station. No particulars of casualties were given, so while the main body bivouacked for the night, Captain Bull, a detachment of bearers, and two light ambulances with some equipment were sent forward. The camels had fallen behind on the march, and being
overtaken by darkness a few miles short of the Wadi el Gharr had bivouacked for the night and did not join up till next morning.

The advanced dressing station on joining the brigade (about 21.00 hours) found nearly thirty casualties which had been collected by the regimental stretcher bearers and the personnel was up most of the night dressing these. The O.C. rode forward at dawn and hearing that Irbid had been (September 27) evacuated by the enemy, ordered the rest of the ambulance up and the casualties were all redressed and fed. Ambulance wagons were sent forward to collect other casualties reported to be lying out at Irbid, but no attempt was made to pitch canvas or open up the main dressing station as the brigade was moving on, and it was urgent to evacuate cases and move forward as soon as possible.

Three men died at the A.D.S. and were buried there, leaving thirty-four cases for evacuation. Most of these were lightly wounded or merely injured by falls from their horses during the charge, but four severe cases were sent in one light ambulance, and the remainder were loaded on to the fifteen cacolets. It was decided to send this convoy back as far as the wadi crossing at Arab el Ramel, and a wireless message was sent to the A.D.M.S., asking him to send motor ambulances forward to that point to meet them. This was done and the convoy having transferred its cases started back to catch the brigade the same evening (September 27). The motor convoy took the cases to Jisr el Mejamie where the divisional collecting station was now installed.

**At Remte.**

In the meantime the ambulance moved forward to Er Remte, where the brigade was in action, as soon as the casualties at Irbid were cleared. The late arrival of the camels had delayed the start till 11.00 hours, but good marching brought the unit to Remte by 14.30 hours. The action was over and most of the cases already collected by the regimental stretcher bearers. The field ambulance bearers collected the rest and the tent section was opened up, tents being pitched and the cases cleaned up, dressed and fed as soon as they came in. A dressing station for wounded prisoners was established in a house close by under the charge of a Turkish M.O.

**Remte to Damascus, September 28.**

The brigade moved forward to Deraa at dawn, and this made it necessary to divide the ambulance into two, the bearer section accompanying the brigade, while the tent section had to remain at Remte till it was evacuated. It will thus be convenient to describe the history of the next few days, until the two sections joined up at Damascus, under the three headings, the bearer section, the tent section, and the camel convoy, which was used to evacuate the latter.

(1) The bearer section arrived at Deraa in the morning with its brigade.
One light ambulance wagon had sustained a broken perch just before reaching Remte and had to be abandoned there, but the one used to evacuate from Irbid joined up to-day (a very fine performance considering the distance covered) so that the sole transport for casualties now available to the bearer section was four light ambulances. Orders were received from the A.D.M.S. that no more evacuation to the rear was possible, and that all casualties admitted from this point were to be taken forward to Damascus. In view of our exiguous carrying capacity this decision caused no small anxiety, but the situation was explained to regimental medical officers and it was decided that the use of light ambulances should be restricted to wounded and severely sick men, and that men unfit to ride with their regiments but able to sit a horse, e.g., fever cases, should ride with the field ambulance. If more cases than we could carry came for admission it was intended to distribute them amongst the transport wagons of "A" echelon, or a company of the divisional train which was now travelling with the brigade.

Two days' supplies were drawn at Deraa on the 28th, and on the morning of the 29th the bearer section followed its brigade on the march to Damascus. The march, tiring as it was, calls for little comment as the bearer section remained with its brigade throughout, and after three marches reached Damascus on the morning of October 1. The 140 miles from Beisan had been covered in six days, or in three long marches and four short ones. Fortunately the number of sick sent to the field ambulance was small, and the plan of taking the lighter cases on their own horses kept it well within our carrying capacity. The late arrivals in bivouacs and the early starts precluded any pitching of tents, and the sick spent the night in the ambulance wagons. An attempt was made to deal with some of the Turkish sick stragglers encountered, by carrying them forward to the nearest water and leaving them there. Two wounded prisoners picked up (one of them German) both died on the march.

(2) The tent section, under Captain Morris, remained at Remte, all the 28th receiving sick from the 11th and 12th Brigades and Divisional troops as they passed through, so that by the evening of that day there were fifty-four patients in the dressing station, about twenty of whom were wounded. Three days' rations were drawn from the divisional train as it passed through, and the next morning the divisional motor ambulance convoy arrived and took away twenty-four cases. The cacolet camels returning from Arab el Rahel arrived the same day, and early next morning (September 30) the remaining thirty patients were loaded into these, and the tent section struck camp and started for Damascus via Mezerib. The distance was covered uneventfully in two and a half days, and the section rejoined the brigade at Damascus on the morning of October 2. From September 28 till October 2, when it arrived at Damascus, the section had no guard or escort and no information about watering places on the road, and it speaks well for the cool and skilful handling of the section by
Captain Morris, both at Remte and on the march through uncivilized
country infested with armed Arabs and Turkish stragglers, that it rejoined
the brigade with so much expedition.

(3) The camel convoy left Remte on the morning of September 29 for
Irbid; it passed through that place, but six miles west of it met the
divisional motor ambulance convoy and transferred its patients, returning
to Irbid to water and bivouac for the night. The next day it left for Remte,
picked up some sick Turkish prisoners there and conveyed them to Deraa
station, and on the following day (October 2) left for Damascus, rejoining
the ambulance there on October 4. Private R. A. 'Gibbs, R.A.M.C., was
the only British rank with the convoy, which otherwise consisted of C.T.C.
Egyptians. The party was totally unarmed, and Private Gibbs had neither
map nor compass (Beirut maps were only received on September 28).
That he should have pushed on and successfully conducted his party to
Damascus through country made dangerous by marauding Arabs, showed
the greatest possible courage and resource. Including the journeys to and
fro, his convoy travelled unescorted over 150 miles, and for days on end
saw no British troops. On one occasion he took a Turkish rifle and beat
off a raiding party of Arabs and, finding supplies running short he picked
up on the road Turkish equipment, such as boots, and bartered them in
Hauran villages for tibbin, milk and eggs. He was awarded the Military
 Medal for his service.

LESSONS OF THE MARCH.

This completes the narrative of the ambulance as far as Damascus and
it only remains to point the moral and adorn the tale with a brief considera-
tion of the lessons to be learnt from it. These were:

A. Early Information of Casualties.—The importance of this was shown
at Irbid, where a less lightly equipped dressing station would have been
sent forward had it been known that so many, or even that any, casualties,
had occurred. It is well to send back a rough estimate of casualties even
if it means waiting a short time.

B. Collection of Casualties.—The small number of mounted bearers
with a field ambulance, the fact that most of these were required at the
advanced dressing station as loading parties, etc., and the wide scattering
of cavalry casualties places the main work of collecting wounded on to the
regimental stretcher bearers first of all, and after that on to light ambulance
wagons which bring them to the dressing station. The latter wagons are
therefore used for collection rather than evacuation of casualties, and their
faulty design and the absence of spare parts was illustrated by the total
loss of one of them at Remte from such a common accident as a broken
perch.

C. Difficulties of Evacuation.—The division on this march was in reality
a flying column, and there was no supply transport returning empty which
might ease the problem of evacuation. Consequently, the ambulance was
thrown entirely on its own resources, and the course of events taken was a
typical example of the difficulties besetting a field ambulance serving a
cavalry advance on which successive daily actions are fought. The evacu­
tation by slow moving camels threw them a day’s march behind after Irbid,
and finally immobilized the tent section for two days after Remte, showing
clearly that the form of ambulance transport most suitable for cavalry is
one that can evacuate quickly and catch them up, in other words, motors.
When there is no supply transport to assist in the evacuation of lighter
cases, these are required in much greater numbers than when lines of
communication are developed.

D. The necessity of sending back single wagons on long journeys, as
from Irbid, or R.A.M.C. privates in charge of convoys, as with the camels,
shows how much responsibility may devolve on the private soldier when
working with a field ambulance, and the vital importance of using Class A
British personnel for this work. The small number of N.C.O.’s renders
them indispensable for work at the dressing station, where they all have
special duties, and small convoys have to be conducted by privates.

SECTION IV.

DAMASCUS TO BAALBEK AND THE EPIDEMIC.

The brigade was bivouacked in orchards outside Damascus from
October 1 to 6, but during these days the tent section remained closed
under orders of the A.D.M.S., and all casualties admitted were evacuated at
once to the 11th or 12th Brigade Field Ambulances. The epidemic of
fever that finally reduced the division to impotence began suddenly and
with great violence at this time, over 200 cases of sickness from the
brigade being passed through in the last three days at Damascus. The
immediate evacuation precluded any prolonged observation of cases, and
there were no facilities for microscopic diagnosis, but malaria was expected
to break out now, a fortnight after the free infection at Beisan, so all cases
of fever were given quinine. On October 6 the brigade left Damascus on
its march north, and reached Baalbek on October 15, remaining there till
the armistice with Turkey was declared. These ten days are not likely to be
forgotten by anyone in the ambulance, and were a period of continuous and
almost intolerable strain. As the ambulance kept with its brigade through­
out, the details of the march call for no comment, and the salient points of
the medical arrangements are all that need be considered. There were six
days of marching and four days of rest (?) between Damascus and Baalbek,
and as they all possessed a close similarity it seems best to describe them
categorically rather than in sequence. They all,
possessed the same feature
in the overwhelming numbers of sick
admitted, evacuations from the
ambulance during the month totalling
1,307, and on several occasions on
this march rising to over 100 in a single day. The march diary was as
follows:—
October 6, Damascus to El Rame.

7, El Rame to Khan Meizebun.

8, Khan Meizebun to Zebdani.

12, Zebdani to Tekkie.

13, Tekkie to Stthora.

15, Stthora to Baalbek.

A. The Collection of Casualties—Many men were struck down with fever on the march and were picked up by the ambulance wagons travelling in the rear of the brigade. In bivouac the units were all close at hand and most of the cases walked in; those that could not walk were collected by the cacolet camels.

B. The Reception of Casualties.—Every night all canvas available was pitched for the reception of cases, the overflow being accommodated in light ambulance wagons. A space between two of the latter was roofed with a wagon cover and served as a dispensary. This work had to be done immediately on arrival in camp, while the animals were being off-saddled, watered and fed and the lines laid out, and the small number of men available for such duties in a mounted unit was a severe handicap. Twelve men were evacuated sick in the first ten days of the month, and half a dozen others remaining with the unit were more or less incapacitated by fever; so that when one man per three horses and one per six donkeys had been told off for off-saddling, stables, etc., and special men such as cooks and sweepers released for their duties, a working party of less than twenty men all told was available for immediate use on tent pitching, loading parties, etc. (The advantages possessed by donkeys over horses may be remarked in parenthesis: requiring less attention they enable five men out of six to be released for general duty on arrival in camp, instead of two out of three.)

The bulk of this party were Indians and their lack of training, entailing as it did minute supervision and the difficulty experienced by the British N.C.O.’s in communicating with them, threw a great strain on the latter.

Accurate clerking and filling up of the medical cards was a very important feature of the reception of patients, and here again the fact that none of the Indian personnel could read or write English, and none of the British personnel speak Hindustani hampered the work. The clerk, too, was down with fever most of the march, though he never failed to enter every case admitted.

At Zebdani, where evacuation was stopped by the A.D.M.S. for two days, the number of patients received soon overflowed the tents, and accommodation was increased by erecting a large shelter made of the bivouac sheets brought in by patients and a framework of saplings put up in a few hours by the R.E.

C. The Nature of the Sickness and its Treatment.—Over ninety per cent of the cases admitted were fever, and the few days at Zebdani afforded opportunities for observation of its course, reaction to quinine, etc. These confirmed the opinion that the overwhelming proportion of it, say nine
cases out of ten, were malaria, and this view was corroborated later when the history of relapsing cases and the facilities for microscopic diagnosis shed more light on the epidemic. The view of some that the majority of cases were influenza was certainly not true of this brigade.

D. Evacuation.—This was the chief problem before us, failing in which we failed in all. Had evacuation broken down on any single day when the brigade was moving the tent section would inevitably have been immobilized, as a consequence of which it would have been beset with all the supply difficulties that arise when a unit becomes separated from its brigade.1 Evacuation up to October 12 was back to Damascus, and after that forward to Beirut. The great distance rendered evacuation by other than motor transport out of the question, and the motor transport available was motor lorries and motor ambulances.

The divisional motor ambulance convoy was broken up at Damascus and four cars rejoined the ambulance. These were used only for the evacuation of serious cases and the bulk of the patients were cleared by motor lorries. The difficulties attendant upon the use of these may now be described. The motor-lorry convoy is a capricious creature on Syrian roads and no one in the division was able to give more than an approximate forecast of its probable movements. Lorries would arrive suddenly, dump their loads and be off again by the time information of their advent had filtered through official channels. On the other hand if a convoy of patients was sent to the divisional refilling point to wait there they might be lying about for hours, without shelter, food or treatment, owing to the late arrival of the lorries. Moreover, it was of great importance to the supply service that lorries should not be kept waiting. These difficulties were met by the following means:

(a) Obtaining early information of their arrival by keeping a couple of gallopers at the divisional refilling point. At El Rame and Khan Meizebun, where this was some distance away, we were able to keep patients under shelter and proper treatment till the last moment, and yet be in time to catch the lorries by the prompt information these gallopers supplied.

(b) Siting the Field Ambulance near the Divisional Refilling Point. —This is far the best plan when a large number of cases have to be cleared. At Sthora and Baalbek it was found a simple matter to evacuate over 100 cases in the day as lorries were loaded up with patients as soon as they had dumped their stores. On the other hand, at Zebdani, where the point was six miles away, great difficulty was experienced. The stoppage of evacuation for two days had allowed patients to accumulate when the division was suddenly ordered to move, and over 200 patients had to be carried back to the point at Tekkie on the camels, light ambulances and four motor ambulances.

1 This fate befell the two other field ambulances of the division.
ambulances in a little more than twenty-four hours, in time to catch the lorry convoys. Only prompt action and devoted work on the part of all ranks saved us from being immobilized at Zebdani, a fate which overtook the other field ambulance there.

The disadvantages of evacuation by motor-lorry convoy need not be dwelt on. It is impossible to send back orderlies, medical equipment, or stretchers with the patients, as there is no probability of their return. All that could be done when the journey was long, as to Beirut, was to hand over supplies of medical comforts to the lorry drivers so that the patients could receive some food on the way.

E. Supplies both of rations and medical comforts were excellent throughout this period. On the other hand supplies of medical stores were distinctly bad. Quinine and other drugs began to run short at Damascus, and the situation was only saved by requisitioning independently at local drug stores. From Sthora a motor ambulance was sent into Beirut and procured further supplies from the 32nd C.C.S., but it was not till the end of October that it was possible to obtain supplies in the regular way from an advanced depot of medical stores at Beirut. This raises the suggestion whether on active operations medical stores could not travel up with ordinary supplies under the aegis of the A.S.C. This bald analysis of the medical arrangements can give no idea of the strain on the unit during this march. Take a typical day, such as October 12. The unit was up and at work in the dark at 04.30 hours, feeding patients, administering the general dose of quinine, and at dawn seventy patients were loaded up on to camels, ambulance wagons and four motors, and sent off six miles to catch the motor lorries. They made the journey, were back by 08.00 hours, loaded up another fifty patients and started off again. In the meantime tents had to be struck and the stores loaded, animals watered and fed and harnessed up, and at 08.30 hours the unit marched out in rear of its brigade to Tekkie. On arrival there tents were pitched again and very soon upwards of fifty more patients were admitted and receiving attention. And so it went on day after day. Considering that the work of handling patients fell on to two or three British N.C.O's and men, assisted by a handful of willing but untrained and unintelligent Indian bearers, and that most of these had intermittent fever themselves, their devotion, and that of the transport personnel who had to turn out at all hours cannot be too highly praised; the more so as the system of confining immediate awards to actions performed under fire, and the small chance of field ambulance personnel being noticed in dispatches, robs them of all hope of the recognition which such devoted service deserves.

After arrival at Baalbek the division remained stationary till the armistice with Turkey was signed. The sick-rate remained high for a few days, and the ambulance was now receiving all sick from the entire division, but no difficulty was experienced in dealing with them as the unit was camped next to the divisional refilling point and could avail itself of motor lorries
as they arrived. After October 21, the rate of sickness fell rather rapidly and the epidemic might be considered to be over. It had lasted three weeks with a death-rate of twelve per cent amongst those admitted from the 10th Cavalry Brigade.

SECTION V.
THE IMMObILE SECTION.

The organization of the immobile section has been described in Chapter I. Its rôle was to act under the direct control of the A.D.M.S. as divisional collecting station, that is a unit which could receive casualties from the three mobile field ambulances of the division, hold them if necessary for a few days, and as soon as possible evacuate them either to one of the receiving stations under the control of D.D.M.S. Desert Mounted Corps, or direct to a C.C.S. The term immobile is therefore only relative, as it was able to transport all its stores by general service wagon while the personnel marched. Its history is divisible into three phases.

A. The March to Beisan.—The section was formed and detached from the remainder of the ambulance on September 17; it thus had no time for any sectional training or revision of organization in the light of knowledge of the march before it, which was explained for the first time at the A.D.M.S.'s conference that morning. The same evening it marched with the transport echelons of the division to Selme, remaining in bivouac there next day, and at dawn, on September 19, marched out in front of “B” echelon to the position of readiness, watering at the Nahr Auja en route. Leaving the position of readiness in rear of the 20th Brigade Ammunition Column at 10.00 hours, it soon began to get into difficulties in the sandy track which had been badly cut up by the division moving on ahead. No spare animals being available wagons had constantly to be halted, while lead pairs were detached from other wagons and the transport taken half at a time over the more difficult places; while some of the less important stores had to be dumped to lighten the load. The same difficulties were encountered and measures taken to meet them by the rest of the divisional transport, and by evening the section had only reached a point three miles north of the 'marshes at Ayun el Basse, where it bivouacked with the divisional train.

September 20.—A start was made at dawn but the going was still heavy and the mules, which had not been watered for twenty-four hours, began to flag. It was therefore decided to leave some wagons in charge of a guard and put an extra pair of mules to each remaining wagon and the water cart. After this better progress was made: the animals were watered at the Nahr Iskanderun at 15.00 hours, by dark Litktera was reached, and the section went into bivouac. The going had been much better in the afternoon, so the next morning teams were sent back for the abandoned wagons and the section marched to Sumrah with four mules to the team, arriving at noon and halting there for orders. These were received the next morn-
ing, and the same day the section marched to El Afule, halting at Lejjun to water and feed, and arriving at El Afule two hours after dark. At Lejjun a few captured Turkish ponies were annexed, and these proved a great help in carrying on some of the footsore personnel.

September 23.—Under orders from the A.D.M.S. the section marched to Beisan, arriving at 17.30 hours, and the next day it opened up as a divisional collecting station, taking over from the mobile section of the 10th Cavalry Brigade Cavalry Field Ambulance, which had carried on this work till its arrival. The small number of casualties in the division on the march to Beisan enabled the section to proceed there direct without opening. The lessons to be learnt were: (1) The ability of the Indian personnel to march the distance (eighty-five miles in five days) without much previous training; two men were left behind sick at Sumrah, but otherwise there were no casualties. The lack of training, in view of the distances to be covered, the heat and the absence of roads made it necessary to carry the kit of the personnel on the wagons most of the way. Allowance had been made for this in working out the wagon loads, but to lighten the wagons over the worst parts of the track (the average load had been worked out at 1,200 pounds) men carried their kits. (2) The inability of the four mules to pull a general service wagon through the heavy going. When, however, any sort of road surface was available four mules were quite adequate, and the two wagons left behind rejoined a few days later.

B. Beisan to Damascus.—(1) At Beisan the section was open for three days, receiving casualties from the division, 102 cases in all being admitted. These were evacuated at first by lorry and divisional motor ambulance convoy to the Australian division receiving station at Lejjun, and on the last day by motor ambulance and train to the Australian division receiving station at Afule. On the afternoon of September 26 the section marched to Jisr el Mejame in rear of the divisional train, arriving after a bad march with frequent halts on the morning of September 27.

At Jisr el Mejame the section opened a dressing station in the station buildings, increasing the accommodation by tents. It was opened here for five days, receiving casualties by motor ambulance convoy from the 4th Cavalry Division in addition to a few sick troops passing through. No evacuation was possible for several days and the section was not now in communication with the A.D.M.S. of the division; but on October 1 all cases (less two dead and eight discharged) were evacuated by train to Haifa under arrangements made by the D.D.M.S. Desert Mounted Corps, and the next day the section moved under his orders to Semakh. From this point on the section passed out of the control of the A.D.M.S. and became for all practical purposes a corps unit, being used by the D.D.M.S. as an additional section to the 4th Cavalry Receiving Station.

(3) At Semakh the section was opened from October 2 to 8 as a dressing station for British casualties evacuated down the Damascus road, Indian
and Turkish casualties being dealt with by a section of the 4th Cavalry
Receiving Station. It admitted here 137 British (chiefly from Australian
Mounted Division) and twelve German prisoners of war. No evacuation
was possible at first owing to the congested state of the hospitals at Haifa,
but on October 7 fifty-one cases were evacuated to Haifa by rail and thirty
discharged. On October 8 the remainder were transferred to the 4th Cavalry
Receiving Station, and the section moved under D.D.M.S. orders to Rosh
Pinna.

(4) At Rosh Pinna the section opened as a relay station for sick coming
down the Damascus road, its duties being to feed convoys passing through
and admit such cases as were unfit to proceed further. Little could
be done, however, as at this point the section was decimated by an
epidemic of fever. The personnel had been fiercely attacked by the
mosquitoes at Beisan, Jisr el Mejame and Semakh, and subsequent
experience and the diagnosis of relapsing cases showed that most of this
fever was malaria. British personnel suffered more severely than the
Indians, and out of a total strength of twenty-one in the former, ten were
evacuated, while all the remainder except two suffered from fever, the
officer, Captain Thomson, included. On October 9 the section was ordered
to Damascus, but being immobilized by the sickness amongst its drivers was
unable to proceed till October 15, when the number of British remaining
with the unit and recovered from fever was sufficient to drive the teams.

(5) Rosh Pinna to Damascus. On October 15 the section joined the
4th Cavalry Receiving Station as it passed through and started on the march
to Damascus, which was successfully covered in four stages, halts for the
night being made at Deir es Sawas, Kuneitra and Sasa. The long pull
out of the Jordan Valley from Jisr Benat Yakub severely tried the mules,
but otherwise they stood the march well, and watering was good. The
march was marked by great devotion on the part of the British personnel:
upwards of half the drivers had been lost from sickness, and few of the
Indians proved capable of driving, so R.A.M.C. N.C.O.'s and privates, and
Captain Thomson himself, though nearly all weak from fever, drove the
teams and brought the section safely to Damascus.

C. At Moallaka.—The section was not opened at Damascus, and on
October 20 moved by rail to Moallaka with part of the 4th Cavalry
Receiving Station, the remainder travelling by road and arriving at
Moallaka on October 22. Here buildings were taken over from 5th Cavalry
Receiving Station, and all canvas was pitched in addition, the section
working in conjunction with the 4th Cavalry Receiving Station. All sick
from the 4th Cavalry Division now came to Moallaka by motor ambulance
or motor lorry, but the great majority of the cases admitted here came in
convoys by rail from Damascus, chiefly men of the Australian Mounted
Division. A section of a field ambulance was thus by a strange inversion
dealing with the evacuation of a casualty clearing station, the 66th Casualty
Clearing Station being now stationed at Damascus, and convoys sometimes
reached 200 in one day. Evacuation was by motor lorry, supplemented by nine heavy motor ambulances of the 35th M.A.C., to the 32nd C.C.S. at Beirut, but it was not regularly maintained, being stopped for two days by order of the D.M.S. owing to the congested state of the hospitals at Beirut, and later being hampered by lack of sufficient lorries. Congestion thus occurred; the number of cases held up by the combined sections of Moallaka rising on one occasion to 540. Adequate feeding of these was, however, made possible by skilful organization and by the excellence of the supply arrangements of the 4th Cavalry Division, especially in medical comforts. From October 21 to 31 648 cases were admitted to this section of the 10th Cavalry Brigade Cavalry Field Ambulance alone, and considerably over 1,000 to the combined sections at Moallaka. The treatment, attention and feeding of these reached an exceptionally high standard for field conditions, to which testimony was borne by many officers and men who experienced it.

The casualties occurring to this section of the 10th Cavalry Brigade Cavalry Field Ambulance (i.e., cases evacuated) during the month of October were 14 British, 9 Indian and one mule, and 1,314 cases in all were admitted to it from September 24 to October 31. In November the number of cases admitted both from Damascus and the 4th Cavalry Division fell considerably, and on November 9 the section marched to Baalbek and rejoined the mobile section of the field ambulance there.