The Nile Expeditionary Force, 1894-1895.

The Suakin Force was withdrawn in the spring of 1884. As a result the Mahdi's troops under Osman Digna again dominated the Soudan. General Charles Gordon, the Egyptian Governor of the country, was isolated with one other British officer in Khartoum and there was grave anxiety for his future.

After delay on the part of the Government which proved fatal to success, Lord Wolseley was dispatched with orders to relieve Khartoum by the Nile route. The far shorter approach from the Red Sea by way of Berber was rejected on account of the waterless desert which would have to be crossed. Whale-boats were constructed capable of being dragged up the cataracts of the river, and the first detachment of troops embarked at Gemai, 870 miles from Khartoum, on November 5, 1884. The mounted troops, including a Camel Corps, proceeded up the banks. By December 25, with immense labour 2,200 men had reached Korti, and in a desperate attempt to reach the town Sir Herbert Stewart had started out from this point with 1,100 men and 2,200 camels across the desert. He was heavily attacked on January 17 at Abu Klea, losing seventy-four killed and ninety-four wounded. The enemy burst into the square and got among the wounded in the dressing station, many of whom were speared as they lay helpless on their stretchers. After further losses, including that of the General, the Nile was reached near El Gubat, from whence a handful of men reached Khartoum in one of Gordon's steamers two days after the town had fallen. After some fighting, the river column reached a point 350 miles from Khartoum when orders were received for its withdrawal.

During the advance up the Nile the Medical Staff Corps was distributed in a number of hospitals formed in grass huts at various points along the river. At Abu Fatmeh, the headquarters of the most advanced section of L. of C. was a 200-bedded field hospital under Surgeon Major L. Corban. The sick and wounded were sent down stream either in nuggars fitted with charpoys, or in whale-boats, being carried by hand or on cacolets where the river passage was impracticable. After various stages, a railway was reached at Akasha, which took them to Wady Halfa, a point still 750 miles

1 The medical history of this expedition is in A.M.D. Report, 1884.
from Cairo. Here there was a stationary hospital, whose staff included four nurses. The P.M.O. of the force was Deputy Surgeon-General John O’Nial, C.B.

The expeditionary force was in being from March 18, 1884, to July 31, 1885. In all some 11,000 troops were employed. Of the M.S.C., 54 men were absorbed by the bearer company, 43 by the movable field hospital, 7 were on convoy duty, and the remainder in 17 stationary field hospitals or rest posts; total, 392. There are said to have been five medical officers for every 1,000 men. Though the health of the troops, as judged by existing standards, was good, there were 760 cases of enteric and 277 deaths. Four of the surgeons died of this disease, and the deaths of seven men of the M.S.C. were recorded in the Abu Fatmeh section.

The medical personnel which accompanied the desert column were five medical officers and seventy-two other ranks. Describing the fighting near El Gubat, the author of "The War in Egypt and the Soudan" wrote: "The doctors showed splendid qualities of courage, endurance and professional experience. This was the fourth night that they had been without sleep, and they had been through two sharp fights and yet were at work until every wounded man had been attended. One fainted from exhaustion before he would give up. Surgeon McGill had distinguished himself by his work among the wounded until shot through the thigh. The bearer company also behaved with the utmost coolness. Every wounded man was at once picked up and placed on a cacolet, on a camel or upon a stretcher and removed."

**The Suakin Expeditionary Force, 1885.**

In February, 1885, Lord Wolseley urged the necessity for immediate action against the forces of Osman Digna from Suakin, and with this object, a force, including a brigade from India, was concentrated there towards the end of March. The medical arrangements made were extremely complete. The P. and O. ship "Ganges," provided a floating hospital of 200 beds, a hutted general base hospital for 300 beds with four nursing sisters was sent out from home, and a stationary field hospital, divisible into staging sections, for use on L. of C. There were four field hospitals on the new 100-bedded scale, and two bearer companies, one with cacolets, the other with wheeled transport. Five hundred dooley bearers with Lushai dandies were sent from India. The P.M.O. was Deputy Surgeon-General Oliver Barnet. The strength of the force was about 13,000.

Three of the field hospitals were attached to brigades, the Guards Brigade had also one of the two bearer companies, the other one, under Surgeon Major G. J. H. Evatt, co-operated with the cavalry. At the battle of Hashin on March 20, No. 1 Field Hospital, under Surgeon Major J. Shaw, did good service, one of its officers, Surgeon I. R. Lane, falling...
mortally wounded at the head of his men. No. 2 Field Hospital, under Surgeon Major S. M. Fleming, was with the 2nd Brigade square at the same battle. On the 22nd a force under General MacNeil, which included half No. 2 Field Hospital, was attacked while forming its zariba near Tofrik. The enemy broke in, and hand to hand fighting ensued, in the course of which the Medical Staff Corps with their sword bayonets were at a great disadvantage, losing two killed and four wounded.

The force was withdrawn on May 17 after a campaign of seventy-five days. During the operations 203 of the Medical Staff Corps served in the hospital ships and base hospitals and 275 with the field units.

By this date the fighting dress of the soldier in hot climates had become more or less standardized. The British troops of the Indian contingent at Tel el Kebir in 1882 wore khaki drill with gaiters, those from home, undress serge. All had sun helmets. In 1884 the British troops from Egypt are described as wearing grey clothing. In 1885 both serge and khaki drill were provided; putties were worn by some of the troops in 1882.

Between November 27, 1885, and January 27, 1886, two brigades and a cavalry brigade with Egyptian troops operated from Wady Halfa on the Nile under Lieutentant-General Sir F. Stephenson. A 200-bedded hospital was established at Assouan, under Brigade Surgeon Markey, and a chain of small hospitals between that place and Kosheh. A mobile field hospital of fifty beds in charge of Surgeon Major H. J. W. Barrow accompanied the force. The enemy was routed on December 30 at the battle of Giniss, the bearer company taking part in the action and following up the pursuit. Their sick transport consisted of camels with litters and cacolets and riding camels. Meanwhile, native troops were in frequent contact with the forces of Osman Digna in the Eastern Soudan. In the course of fighting, Colonel Herbert Kitchener, then Governor of the Red Sea littoral, was severely wounded in the jaw. A letter he wrote to Lord Wolseley in February, 1888, testified to the good treatment and nursing he received at the Citadel hospital at Cairo, and he described the hospital as "wonderfully well managed."

The Nile Frontier Force of 1889, for which a field hospital and a camel-bearer company were mobilized, with 14 medical officers and 105 M.S.C. drawn from Egypt, Malta and England, had a nearly bloodless campaign, as the forces of the Khalifa were dealt with by the Egyptian troops and a squadron of the 20th Hussars under General Wingate during the passage of the remaining British troops up the river. Surgeon J. J. C. Donnett was in action with the cavalry.

The officers of the A.M.S. saw service in the Zhob Valley (1890), in Burma (1891-92), and in the Chitral Force (1895). In 1895-96 the expedition to Ashanti under Sir F. Scott took place. The British troops consisted of the 2nd West Yorks and a Special Service Corps made up of

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1 A.M.D. Report, 1885.  
2 A.M.D. Report, 1888.
drafts from various regiments at home. To these were added the 2nd West India Regiment and some Hausas. The men were carefully selected for service, all being over the age of 23. The P.M.O. was Surgeon-General W. Taylor, and there were twenty-four medical officers and eighty-five M.S.C. Kumasi was occupied without opposition on January 27, and there were no casualties in action. The length of marches in the 150 miles from Cape Coast Castle averaged ten miles a day. A high testimony was paid to the work of the medical orderlies, whose duties were very arduous. ¹

From March to October, 1896, a field hospital under Surgeon Major A. T. Sloggett, with two officers, a quartermaster and twenty-five other ranks M.S.C. were attached to the 1st Battalion N. Staffordshire Regiment, representing the British troops of the Dongola Expeditionary Force. There were no casualties in action, but the amount of sickness was great, including twenty-five cases of cholera and twenty-two deaths. One of the M.S.C. was among the victims, and another died from enteric fever. The same year cavalry and mounted infantry detachments co-operated with local forces in the suppression of risings in Matabeleland. Surgeon Lieutenant-Colonel J. A. Gormley with Surgeon Captains S. Hickson and N. C. Ferguson, and twenty of the M.S.C., served with this force, and a similar number of men under Surgeon Captain F. A. Saw were attached to a column operating in Mashonaland.

During these years there was considerable dissatisfaction among the medical officers at the conditions under which they served, due among other causes to the large amount of foreign service, the inadequacy of the Indian pay, and a general feeling that their status in the Army was unsatisfactory. In spite of various committees and inquiries no steps had been taken to carry out the recommendations of the Morley commission, and the abolition of "relative rank" by Royal Warrant in 1887 appeared a retrograde step. Candidates failed to present themselves for examination for commissions, and the service was banned by the medical schools. In January, 1891, a parliamentary paper was printed containing correspondence between Sir Andrew Clarke, President of the Royal College of Physicians, and the Secretary of State for War, setting out the main causes of complaint. The only immediate result was an improvement in the regulations for the grant of sick leave and the institution of composite titles for medical officers.

The announcement that the Army Medical Staff and the Medical Staff Corps were to be amalgamated into a Royal Corps was made by Lord Lansdowne at a banquet given at the Guildhall to the medical profession on May 4, 1898, and, as the Royal Army Medical Corps, they served under Sir Herbert Kitchener in the final stages of the Egyptian campaign that year.

¹ A.M.D. Report, 1895.
The Nile Expeditionary Force, 1898.

The campaign of 1898, resulting in the occupation of Khartoum and the restoration of Egyptian rule in the Soudan, lasted ten months. During the first period, terminating with the assault and capture of the Dervish position on the Atbara, one British and three Egyptian brigades were employed. Brigade Surgeon Lieutenant-Colonel W. H. Macnamara (P.M.O.) and thirteen officers formed the medical staff with the British troops. The advanced medical units consisted of a number of 25-bedded field hospitals, each calculated as one-sixth of a bearer company or one-quarter of a field hospital, an arrangement which proved much less satisfactory than a 100-bedded hospital divisible into sections. Five were allotted to an infantry brigade, and a proportionate number to other formations. There was, as usual, a difficulty about transport, and, as in 1882, the unfounded rumour that chloroform had to be left behind got started.

After a trying march, in the course of which most of the men's boots fell to pieces, the brigade joined up with the Egyptian troops on March 12, and, on April 8, the Dervishes were attacked at Neicha, after a heavy artillery bombardment, and routed. During the action the field hospital equipment was left with the reserve brigade about a mile from the firing line, while the M.O.'s and most of the personnel followed the troops in bearer company formation with stretchers and cacolets. Our casualties were 17 killed and 100 wounded.

After the battle there was rest for everyone except the doctors, and leave was freely granted. In July the British troops were increased by the arrival of a second infantry brigade and the 21st Lancers. Surgeon-General W. Taylor became P.M.O. of the force, Brigade Surgeon Lieutenant-Colonel Macnamara the divisional P.M.O., and Lieutenant-Colonel A. T. Sloggett and G. A. Hughes, P.M.O.'s of brigades. The medical personnel, now R.A.M.C., were increased to about 60 officers and 139 other ranks. Lieutenant-Colonel T. J. Gallwey was P.M.O., Egyptian troops.

The advance began late in August, and on September 2 the battle of Omdurman was fought. The advanced dressing stations were sited immediately behind the firing line, and the main dressing stations only 200 yards further to the rear. The casualty list included the names of twenty-four killed and 138 wounded, to which the famous charge of the 21st Lancers contributed heavily. Lieutenant-Colonel Sloggett was shot through the chest and two other ranks R.A.M.C. were wounded. The subsequent evacuation of the wounded to the stationary hospitals at Atbara, Abadia, Wady Halfa, and Shellel, was comfortably carried out by means of specially fitted barges.

The conduct of the medical service in this campaign was not unrecognized. At a general parade at Cairo, General Sir F. Grenfell bore generous
testimony to the work of the Corps both in the hospitals and the field. Lord Kitchener said, "The general medical arrangements were all that could be desired, and I believe that the minimum of pain and the maximum of comfort procurable on active service in this country were attained by the unremitting energy, untiring zeal, and devotion to their duty by the entire medical staff." The honours included C.B.'s for the two senior officers, four D.S.O.'s and six brevets. Most satisfactory of all was the bestowal of the D.C.M. on six N.C.O.'s and men of the R.A.M.C.

During this and the preceding year officers of the Army Medical Staff took part in the operations at Sierra Leone and on the North-West Frontier.

One other event of the year must be referred to, in which the newly-formed Corps played a prominent and highly creditable part. The share of the R.M.L.I. and the infantry battalion in garrison in the Moslem outbreak at Candia on September 6 has been graphically described by Colonel Drury in "The Shadow on the Quarterdeck," that of the R.A.M.C. in the A.M.D. Report for 1898, under the modest heading, "Sanitary Conditions in Crete." It will be remembered that the trouble started with an attempt to collect an unpopular tax from an excited population with an inadequate display of military force. As a result, the garrison of some 400 men was for several hours on the defensive in an extremely precarious position with their backs to the sea.

The Greek hospital, which had been taken over, lay in an isolated and unprotected situation close to the town, some 800 yards from the nearest armed body of troops—a company of the Highland Light Infantry on the Canea bastion. In view of the popular feeling in the city the S.M.O., Lieutenant-Colonel M. R. Ryan, asked for the normal hospital guard of a sergeant and six men to be increased. On September 5, however, the garrison was again cut down to normal, and, being still anxious for the protection of his patients, he obtained permission to draw rifles and ammunition with which to arm the patients and orderlies. The precaution turned out to be fully justified, and in all probability averted an indiscriminate massacre of the sick and their attendants.

When the outbreak occurred the following day, the hospital was the first point of attack. The S.M.O. happened to be at headquarters, where the infantry were surprised playing football, and he soon had his hands full dealing with casualties. At the hospital the R.A.M.C. were brought in from their tents, the doors were barricaded, and Lieutenant Addams Williams, the senior of the two young medical officers in the building, took over command. His force consisted of the hospital guard, 41 more or less able-bodied patients, and 5 N.C.O.'s and 11 men R.A.M.C. The attack lasted four hours, the assailants occupying the roofs and windows of the neighbouring buildings overlooking the defenders. In the evening the Turkish troops, who had up to then remained passive spectators, intervened, and the garrison was able to withdraw, having lost 3 H.L.I.
killed, 3 wounded, and 1 R.A.M.C., Private Biddiscombe, severely wounded. Most of the casualties occurred during a plucky and successful sortie led by Lieutenant Clarke, R.A.M.C., to bring in a private soldier who had been shot on his way to report sick. The other members of the party were an A.S.C. serjeant, five infantrymen, and Privates Philemon, Lowden, Leggatt and Biddiscombe, R.A.M.C. Lieutenant Clarke was slightly wounded.

DIRECTOR-GENERALS, 1853-1898.

Andrew Smith ... ... ... 1853
Thomas Alexander ... ... ... 1858
James Brown Gibson ... ... ... 1860
Thomas Galbraith Logan ... ... ... 1867
William Mure Muir ... ... ... 1874
Thomas Crawford ... ... ... 1882
William Alexander Mackinnon ... ... 1889
James Jameson ... ... ... 1896

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