MEDICAL TACTICS IN MOBILE WARFARE.

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LECTURE II.—LOCAL MOVEMENT.
JERICHO—JORDAN—MOAB.

Some days of intense local fighting followed the fall of Jerusalem. Then the Turks were beyond range of the Holy City. They counter-attacked hard and more than once. Their last assault was followed by a further advance on our part and the Egyptian Expeditionary Force then settled down to a period of stationary warfare which so far as the Army as a whole was concerned lasted until the following September (1918). During this period, however, there were certain local movements involving extreme mobility, in all of which the 60th Division was engaged.

I ended the last lecture by speaking of elasticity. To acquire and maintain elasticity should be the aim of every officer and of every formation from a squad to an army corps. It is an attainment that to my mind is as important in peace time as in war, and is as applicable to the conduct of a difficult case in medicine as it is to a military problem. Elasticity can be obtained and maintained only by constant training, and I want to put before you what I think are the most important things in the training of a field ambulance.

In the week before the War broke out the University of London O.T.C. was in camp. A regular combatant officer whose name I have forgotten, and who was killed in the retreat, was attached and brought down a book that was just published. It was "The Principles of War" in two volumes by Major-General Altham. I looked through it, never dreaming that it would be of use to me. Next week the War had broken out, and wanting to fit myself for it I got this book out from the library and read it. To many it will seem absurd that a young captain of the R.A.M.C. should read about the Principles of War. But Abe Lincoln read Clausewitz; and we of the O.T.C. had all read Henderson, both his "Stonewall Jackson" and his "Science of War." I believe that if you are going to do a job it is well to know something about it. Perhaps I did not understand much of Altham’s Principles, but at the end were two additional chapters, one on Training and one on Billeting. That on training impressed me very much. It told of a brigade of the Japanese Army, that had been more highly and more strenuously trained than any other in the Japanese Army. It performed feats of marching and of fighting that one would have thought unbelievable, until one had experienced similar feats oneself. The training of this brigade remained in my memory throughout the War,
and I tried to emulate it in a small way in my field ambulance. The lesson learnt from it was confirmed by watching other units. I noticed that those which began to creep ahead were those that trained hardest. I learnt from General Bulfin that the health of a unit depended primarily upon its administration, and I learnt from observation that efficiency for its purpose depended chiefly upon its training. This lesson was confirmed by General Shea, who trained the 60th Division with an extreme intensity in August, September, and October, 1917. He came to me and asked me whether I thought he was training too hard and whether the 179th Brigade was beginning to go stale. He knew that the first sign of this would be an increase in the sick parades and of numbers going down the line through the field ambulance. I told him the pitch was pretty high, but there was no sign of staleness at that moment; he told me to let him know at once if I saw any evidence of it.

Training must never end. After the most strenuous activity two days' rest may be given, after that it should begin again, gently at first, but it should begin even if it be known that movement and action are to start again next day. These then are the points upon which I would concentrate in addition to first aid which is part of the technical training and is analogous to musketry in infantry.

(1) The Carriage of Wounded.—This must be practised by all methods, but especially on stretchers. You must practise carrying them with any number of bearers in the squads from two to six and with each man in every position, and you must practise them over the most difficult obstacles you can find. There were some water-cress beds at Watford. There was a high iron paling with spikes in Audley End Park. There were walls, hedges and ditches wherever we were in England. In Salonika there was a hill outside our camp over which we used to scatter "wounded" when the infantry had done attacking it. But nowhere were there obstacles so formidable or ground so difficult as what we found on the Judæan hillsides.

(2) The Movement of Stretcher Squads.—Six to ten stretcher squads are about the most difficult formation to move rapidly that there is. The two men attached to the stretcher make them so. They are much more difficult to handle than a platoon or a company. To get them through a gate or an orchard, to get them over a bridge or a lock-gate, or rapidly to get them off a road or track to allow transport to pass requires a high degree of training and constant practice. The official stretcher drill can never be enough to cover every eventuality, you must make a drill of your own and practise it until your squads move spontaneously without bunching like a flock of sheep; and you must practise it with each man in a different position in the squad, and with different men in each squad. Specialization in this matter is the antithesis of elasticity.

(3) Loading Vehicles.—This again you must practise with all sorts of vehicles with any number of men. Here, however, specialization may add
to efficiency. You will always have a certain number of men, perhaps older than the rest, flat-footed or short of breath who are classed as bearers but cannot carry far. They cut up bacon or mend boots and see to the lamps. You cannot do without them and you get them along somehow. The convoy arrives, the whistle goes, they drop their bacon and their boots and shuffle along to the wagons from which they take the stretchers and hand them on to more agile bearers to carry in or out of the dressing station. And standing there by the tailboards of the wagons by long practice they acquire gentleness and remove the wounded more gently than the ordinary bearer. It is difficult not to jerk the stretcher as it comes out. This is most painful to the patient and requires special skill to avoid.

(4) Finding the Way.—This comes natural to some, and others are bad at it. The good, however, improve and the bad acquire some benefit by practice. Take out a body of men just before dark. They march at ease, but have to pay attention to the route. Beyond each defile or cross-roads halt them, turn them around and point out the characters of the spot as seen on the return journey. Bring them back after it has become dark and show them the same spots in the altered light. Then send them out another night in twos and threes to report at the point reached previously and again on return. It does not need much imagination to vary this from a few hundred yards to several miles, in daylight, moonlight, starlight and the dark. Lastly take them out before dawn and bring them back as it is getting light. The morning half-light is very tricky, more so I think than dusk, perhaps because we know it less. But it is very lovely, even at its worst. Officers and senior N.C.O.'s must be trained in finding their way at night by the stars or by compass. Have out also the cooks, the clerks and the men in the quartermaster's office. They may some day have to find their way in the dark, and it keeps them fit and alert.

(5) The Care of Equipment.—Please to remember this is done not by hoarding, it, but by getting it out and practising its use. You must have everything out of every pannier time and time again. You must do it by the way-side, in tents, in buildings, in an open field or on a broken bit of ground. You must start doing it slowly and by daylight. You must continue at dusk and by full moon; you must finish in the dark and in a hurry. The day after such training every pannier and piece of equipment must be checked and steps taken to replace anything that is lost.

This form of training will be very unpopular. Quartermasters are worthy fellows; but having got equipment complete they hate the idea of losing any. Serjeants in charge of panniers keep the keys in their pockets and will not let them out. Both these hang on especially to small things such as needles. Because these are easily lost they must all the more be had out. Your officers will not like sitting on the Boards necessary to replace things lost. Even Divisional Commanders will comment on such losses, and suggest that someone should pay for them. In spite of all this you must do it. If you do not you will lose all the important details of
equipment on the first day they are used in earnest; and on the next day
you will be valueless as a unit for tending the sick.

(6) Combined Training with Combatant Troops.—It is often difficult to
arrange this. A field ambulance is always in action looking after the sick
of the troops. It should, however, be possible to do this with one section.
Another should always be available for training. If you cannot get out
with a brigade get out with a battalion. When there is divisional training
you will be ordered out, but at other times you must find it. The general
staff tend to forget you, and commanders of units or small formations do
not want you and do not realize that you need to be trained. They are,
however, willing to have you so long as you do not get in the way. The
value of this training is chiefly for yourself and for your senior officers;
for the men it is more a day out and a picnic, unless it is raining.
Remember always to go to the pow-wow at the end. At first you will be
laughed at, then tolerated. Finally your presence will be appreciated. It
is well for you to know the meaning of what is going on, and it is well for
you to get to know the officers of the units with whom you have to work.
This personal touch is a great asset when they commit their men into your
charge.

Personally, I believe that from time to time there should be exercises
designed to study medical tactics, where one or two field ambulances form
the basis of a scheme and a battalion of infantry is used to represent a
division or brigade with a battery as divisional artillery. The whole
attention of the staff, as well as the A.D.M.S., would in such a field-day be
given to the disposal of the Medical Services, with perhaps supplies and
ammunition added. Until you can get this, however, you must do your
best by going out when others do. I might say, however, that issuing
labels and collecting imaginary wounded on such occasions is, in my
experience, of little or no value.

With these somewhat lengthy preliminary remarks let us return to the
2/4 London Field Ambulance in the Holy City, with the main dressing
station located in a good building, and see the purposes to which such a
unit can be put.

(a) It was some time before evacuation was possible, and when possible
the nearest hospital was so far away that it was death to a serious case to
send it down. Our dressing station had therefore also to become a hospital
complete with an operating theatre, fit for Colonel Wade, the consulting
surgeon who came up. (b) The various Turkish hospitals were allotted to
the different field ambulances. Within the old city were two that came
under our care. One was a quarantine hospital containing tetanus cases.
It afforded a terrible sight. We had to staff it completely, for the personnel
left behind by the Turks had disappeared and merged with the civilian
population. The other was staffed by the members of the American
Colony in Jerusalem. We had but to supervise and after it was emptied
to dispose of the equipment, much of which we used. This had been done
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by Christmas. (c) We could not evacuate the slightly sick. A huge empty convent was therefore converted into a convalescent home. This was equipped and staffed by one section of the ambulance. (d) The louse problem was upon us. At the back of our hospital was a laundry. This also we had to run. The difficulty was fuel. At this time the problem of fuel in Jerusalem was as difficult as the water problem had been at Sheria. Of course it was not so vital. We ran this laundry largely with dried orange peel. The oranges of Jaffa were just in season and the local population did a roaring trade with the hungry troops. (e) Nothing was coming up the line except bully beef and biscuits, and ammunition. Boots were becoming a difficulty both for my own men and for those we were returning to the units. When we began to evacuate we took the boots of every lying case for re-issue; thereby incurring the wrath of sundry base details as there was a regulation against this. In addition our cobbler mended over one hundred pairs with leather stripped from some Turkish pack-saddles that the Brigadier had discovered in a barn near Huj and had told me about. (f) We were responsible for the sick of all the scattered details and small units on the road between Jerusalem and Hebron, a distance of twenty miles.

These multitudinous activities show a high degree of elasticity upon the part of the field ambulance. I have always been very proud that the men that I had trained rose to these emergencies which had never entered our minds until we encountered them. But you must also remember that it was the organization laid down as the result of experience in the South African War which enabled us to do all this. I think sometimes we are not grateful enough to those of the generation before us who laboured quietly out of the limelight between the years 1902 and 1914. They provided a unit capable of the highest elasticity, that stood the strain when there came the need for it, and therein is their reward.

You may ask what all these activities have to do with tactics. The answer is that firstly they exemplify the period of cessation of movement after an advance. The greater the pace the greater the stasis, and our pace had been pretty hot, although nothing compared with what Allenby did a year later. Secondly I was immobilized. To retain the power to manoeuvre is the aim of every commander. The more he can do this the greater his chance of success. Now I do not say that a field ambulance that has developed into something like a stationary hospital will immobilize a division, but it will certainly limit the power of the Divisional Commander to manoeuvre. It was on a day early in February, 1918, that the A.D.M.S. said to me, “It looks as though we shall be on the move again soon. I suppose you can move at forty-eight hours’ notice.” “Good God, no!” I replied, or words to that effect, “I am dug in and it will take me a fortnight to get myself out again.”

During this time we had to carry on with our ordinary duties of dealing with the sick of the brigade group and of providing bearers and an advanced
dressing station when the Turks attacked. General Headquarters always knew when this was going to happen and when it was to be put off so we did not have to waste personnel by keeping these in permanent readiness. Two episodes may be mentioned. The first was the garrison of a monastery to the south-east of Jerusalem called Ibn Obeid. An officer, a serjeant, and some half-dozen orderlies were included in the garrison. Rations went out under escort on alternate days and the sick were brought back under the same escort. The men loved it, and "As good a war as Ibn Obeid" became a term of approval.

The other was a reconnaissance in force towards Ali El Muntar and the Mar Saba gorge. This brings me to the tactical problem of protection, and we may summarize this as a medical problem here. Of the services that have to be protected—supplies, ammunition columns and medical units—we are the only one that cannot protect ourselves at a pinch. It is up to us to see that we do not unduly expose ourselves. I have told you how on one occasion—owing to finding a road across a wady—I bivouacked in no-man's-land. I was proud of it at the time and resented having to move at dawn, but I ought to have been ashamed of myself. I have told you how at Ain Karim my A.D.S. was far out on the right flank, so that had the Turks got around that flank they would have been on us in the dark and our red cross brassards would have been no protection. For though the red cross protects us from bayonets, it does not protect us from being mopped up as prisoners. At Ain Karim I do not think we could have avoided being in an exposed position. The advanced dressing station made itself and being made could not be moved. We may cite these as negative instances of protection.

But there is a positive aspect as well. We have to get in any casualties from the protecting troops. This may be a ticklish job if they are driven rapidly in and careful preparations should always be made for any reconnaissance. At the Beersheba reconnaissances these were made. The Desert Mounted Corps always had out a whole cavalry field ambulance with the covering troops. On this occasion we had no medical personnel out at all. I had received no copy of the orders dealing with it, but I knew about it unofficially and went out myself with the brigade staff. Two battalions were taking part—half the brigade. The screen was some ten thousand yards away from Jerusalem when there was a burst of firing from a hill opposite and some enemy were seen rapidly to retire. One person only was hit, the Brigade Major with a serious wound in the thigh. He was carried nearly into Jerusalem. It was possible to put a whole company of infantry on to stretcher-bearing and his life was saved. But that is a question of minor importance. Suppose that that sudden burst of firing had resulted in twenty casualties instead of one. There would not have been stretchers or personnel to carry them away. The screen could not have retired. Suppose then the Turks had been more numerous or more adventurous, more casualties might have occurred. The
commander of the battalion would have had to hold on longer than he should have done on tactical grounds. He might thus have lost most of his battalion and involved the other battalion. Other battalions would have been hurried up and perhaps a large engagement would have developed resulting in movements of troops over the whole front and serious disturbance of the plans of the Commander-in-Chief, and all because preparations had not been made to have present a few R.A.M.C. personnel and a camel load of stretchers and splints. You may think I am making a mountain out of a molehill. I do not think so. I can see the scene to-day and it needs no imagination to envisage the development of a serious situation. I suspect that every disaster of small bodies of troops from Cremera to Isandula arose, if only we knew enough details, from a similar mistake upon the part of a minor subordinate. It has been said that the commander who wins is the one who makes the fewest mistakes. But if neither makes a mistake victory will go to the one in whose Army fewest mistakes are made by those in subordinate positions down to the junior lance-corporal. Everybody of my generation made mistakes in those four and a half years; but on looking back I believe that this was the biggest that I made, and I was fortunate not to have lost my command.

You may say that I was not responsible. That having had no orders, I should have been exonerated from the consequences. I hold it as an article of faith that no man can absolve himself of responsibility. One came across attempts to do so under two circumstances. The one is before an event, when someone finding a difficult job to be done goes to those above him and demands all sorts of things, perhaps unobtainable, and if he cannot get them, say, “Well then, I cannot be responsible for the result.” Such a one is almost sure to fail. He is right to make his demands, but they must be reasonable. If he cannot obtain them he must do his best under the circumstances. If he fail it is for others, not for him, to assess responsibility. He can be sure that all factors will be considered. The other circumstance is such as this might have become, when after the event one finds one has not done something that one should have done; one cannot deny responsibility on the grounds of those above having failed to give some order. The Brigadier and Brigade Major were busily employed. I knew what was going on. I ought to have gone to the Brigade Major and asked what medical personnel the Brigadier wanted, and talked over what was needed.

It was in February that we began to move again. The first operation was the two or three days’ fighting that pushed the Turks finally off the hill country and into the Jordan Valley. We call it the fall of Jericho for the historic association of the name rather than for any strategic importance of the place.

The main dressing station remained in Jerusalem. The stupendous nature of the ground gave the character to the operations. Transport could not be got far, and having got where it could, had to be brought all
the way back to Jerusalem before it could be used at another spot not far away. Fortunately we had no casualties in two out of the three engagements—the taking of Ali Muntar and the capture of Nebi Musa.

The first is a high hill some ten miles south-east of Jerusalem, from which the Jews used to set loose the scape-goat at the great Day of Atonement (Lev. xvi. 10). The other is a Muslim monastery in an open plain near to the Jordan Valley and above it at the north end of the Dead Sea. There was no cover for the attacking troops for half a mile around. Had it been occupied by Turkish troops with machine guns it would have been a ticklish job to capture it, and with the modern machine-gun casualties must be very high. Fortunately the Turks had evacuated it; and the London Scottish were in it before the artillery arrived. How these ever arrived at all to this day I do not understand. There were places across which the gunners must have carried both the guns and their horses so far as I could see. It is the supreme example that I have met of man's determination in the face of Nature.

Then we settled down again for a bit. The winter rains were not past; and to give you some idea what rain means in a wild country you may note that it took two days to get in a slightly sick man from a post twenty miles away. This post was on the Jebel Kuruntal, the traditional site of the Temptation. It is a hill that overlooks the Jordan Valley, from which you can see to your right the plain beneath you to the far end of the Dead Sea, while to your left the snow-capped peak of Mount Hermon juts up into the sky 120 miles away. The best way back was to descend into the valley and return by the Jericho road; but the Turks were not yet driven right on to the Bridgehead of the Jordan and we could not do that. The sick had to come over innumerable little knobs of limestone hills, on which any path that was made disappeared with the next rain. At the best it was a slippery glissade, along which man and camel had to walk straining their muscles not to slither down the side of the hill, first to the left, and then as they turned a corner down to the right. An advanced dressing station had to be opened at Makhmas—the ancient "passage of Michmash" (1 Sam. xiv. 4, 5)—where the sick man spent a night but little more comfortable than in his own bivouac.

A bit later the western margin of the valley was relatively safe for non-combatants. I recognized, from the mysterious behaviour of everyone at Divisional Headquarters, that there was something in the air. One day the A.D.M.S. came to me and said "We are going to cross the Jordan. We shall have to have a main dressing station on this side of the valley and I want you to select a site and send down all those beds and other equipment that came out of the Turkish Hospital." I replied "They are already there." I had loaded up all my wagons and sent them off with three days' rations and a party of men. They took two days to go down, and brought the empty wagons back the twenty-two miles on the third day. The site selected was the Jericho of the time of
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Herod. There were on it masses of old walls of the palace in which he had entertained Cleopatra when she was returning to Egypt from across the Jordan Valley (Josephus-Wars 19-5).

The operations were in four stages. (1) Crossing of the Jordan. (2) Driving the enemy off the hill El Haud that overlooked the road at Shunet Nimrin and the track in the Wady Arseniyat up into Moab. (3) Taking the town of Es Salt. All these were successful. Distances are as follows: Jericho (our main dressing station) to the Jordan about 8 miles; Jordan to Tel Nimrin 7 miles and on to Es Salt about 15. (4) Cutting the railway at Amman. This was another 18 miles further on. The distance was therefore nearly 50 miles to get the wounded man into the main dressing station and 70 to the casualty clearing station which had now been brought up to Jerusalem. The development of the main dressing station into an operating centre is not a part of medical tactics and I do not propose to discuss it. This first trans-Jordan raid I would use as a text for impressing on you the importance of information and inter-communication, especially when things begin to go wrong.

Our brigade had left Es Salt and been brought half-way back to the Jordan Valley when we were hurriedly pushed back there again. Things were not going well at Amman. At Es Salt there is an acute angled bend on the road, and it was thought that the Turks were getting round this bend to cut the communications of those up at Amman. My advanced dressing station became a stage in the line of evacuation for all the sick and wounded. The decision as to the time at which he would retire depended largely on the Brigadier learning from me that all the wounded had passed this point. The number was quite unknown to me. They were coming from a mixed force of infantry of our division and of a considerable body of cavalry. Now in the old Field Service Regulations there is no statement as to informing the medical services of the number of casualties to be expected or any instruction as to how this should be carried out. Nor was there any organization or equipment for keeping the field ambulances in touch with Brigade or Divisional Headquarters. I understand that with the new organization of the Royal Corps of Signals there is still no equipment for linking a field ambulance with either. And yet you see from these operations in Moab the knowledge of the number of casualties still not passed a certain point, and the communication of that knowledge to the General Staff may be of extreme tactical importance. Communication on this occasion was not difficult as Brigade Headquarters was in the next field to the advanced dressing station; but had the same need arisen in any of the other engagements that we have been considering the fact that there was neither equipment nor organization to keep me in touch with Brigade Headquarters would have made the transmission of news impossible without untold delay. During an engagement the strain on the signal service is great. We were supposed to hand any message we wanted conveyed to the nearest member of the signal service. How efficient this
was may be shown by the fact that a message that I handed to a dispatch rider going back to Divisional Headquarters at 9.0 a.m. on December 9 reached the A.D.M.S. to whom it was addressed at Divisional Headquarters after forty-eight hours. This question of linking up the medical services in the field units as a tactical problem needs thinking out in peace time. It cannot be improvised once a war has started. Remember that with the internal combustion engine dominating mobility you must be prepared for greater mobility, not less, and a subject such as this will become more important and more difficult.

The transmission of information to the medical unit must form part of such a study. It will always be difficult for rumour will come drifting by. On this occasion rumour was all that I had to go by. We had been going pretty hard since we had moved off on March 21 and on Saturday, March 30, we had had a fairly hard day. I was just turning into my bivouac when I had a message to go and see the Brigadier. He told me that he proposed to retire as soon as he heard from me that all the sick and wounded from Amman had passed Es Salt. It was about 10 p.m. on Easter Saturday that I took up my position at the roadside to attend to this. It was at about 10 a.m. on Easter Monday that I left it to tell him that I was now confident the last man had left. It is nineteen years ago and I cannot be certain as to details, nor whether some of the memories belong to the first night or the second. The dressing station was by the roadside. There were a few yards of level ground and then the ground began to rise in tiers of limestone like steps up the hillside. There was just room on the level for a row of camels to "barrack" and to move in and out. Behind the row of cacolets thus unloaded we could pitch just the few tents we had with us. The road was narrow. There was just room for two vehicles to pass. When we had transport being loaded two-way traffic was held up. A convoy came down from Amman. We took the cacolets off the camels. Fed and wrapped up in the cacolets, the wounded were covered with the cacolet covers. It rained all night, but these kept them fairly dry. They seemed to sleep soundly. The camels were grunting on a neighbouring area of moderately flat ground. At dawn we fed the patients again, loaded up the camels and sent off the convoy with a few of our bearers in charge. Some reached the valley fifteen miles away that night, the road was in the slimy mess that limestone takes on after rain. The camels slithered and slipped on it and some had to stay out all night. It was over twenty-four hours before these had gone the fifteen miles, and the two or three bearers had to unload and load again every one of these cacolets on to the camels. I think there were twenty or thirty of them. To do it properly takes six men to a camel.

Some time in that first night a convoy of supply camels had come up with rations. They were turning in to the same bit of ground as our ambulance camels had already partly occupied. It was just by the dressing station, and as they were turning off the road a battery of
artillery came down the other way. The retreat from Amman had begun. Artillery do not like being stopped and the leading gun tried to push in between two camels. The "chemozzle" was intense. I stood by the road trying to sort it out, and felt my right arm firmly held. First my humerus, then the muscles and skin, and finally my trench coat slipped from the grip. I turned and found it had been the jaws of a camel that had held me seemingly in so friendly a grasp. They say a camel's bite will break a man's arm. If so, it must have been the trench coat that saved me.

The camels being off the road the battery was halted opposite the dressing station, and we asked them to take some wounded on. They did not want to, but being told the men might otherwise fall into Turkish hands agreed; and we put a couple of slightly damaged men on to each limber and so got a dozen away. Next morning there came up a staff car. We pressed that also into our service, and persuaded the staff officer to take two wounded lieutenants down with him. Towards afternoon these two returned to us when a convoy of Ford ambulances came up. The car had broken down—or partly so—and the staff officer had handed them over to the leading driver: What a waste of transport when every seat was like untold gold. One of the boys had a broken arm splinted by being tied to his chest. It was on the second night that the 6th Field Ambulance came down. They were whacked and looking for a rest; but I could not let them have it and insisted on their going on without unloading the men they had in their desert sand-carts. I feared the delay of a single man for a single minute. At dawn on Easter Sunday the people of Es Salt had begun to get wind of our retirement and some who had welcomed us unduly began to flee. First in twos and threes with a donkey overloaded and a cow. Then more of them and by this second night in numbers great enough to block the road and seriously to interfere with our work. This was but a small retreat but gave me some idea of what those early ones in France and Belgium had been. And all this time I could get no news of how many more there were to come. Several times I was told these were the last; and every time this news was followed by a rumour of some great number lying out untended. Sometimes it was one hundred; more than once it was five hundred and I began to fear some great disaster had befallen us. I do not think it was raining on this second night, but it was cold and I remember just at dawn the Brigadier coming over to my camp I think for company's sake for he was the only one awake at Brigade Headquarters except the signal men on duty. He sat down before the glowing embers of a fire, a hunched figure with his face haggard and drawn. We stirred up the fire and got him some hot coffee.

A few hours later it all seemed a dream, the sun came out and warmed us through. By 10 o'clock the news that all had passed seemed reliable. Our own bearers that had been on to Amman had rejoined us. We sent off the tent subdivision early, and kept the ambulance carts with some of those
of the 6th Field Ambulance that the A.D.M.S. had sent back to us. That evening the Brigade retired and by Tuesday night everyone was back across the Jordan; back as we were on March 20, except that the Bridgehead was no longer west of the Jordan in Turkish hands, but east of it in British. As we had recrossed the Jordan we heard the news of the March retreat in France.

So much for Information and Inter-communication. It is interesting to note that the Brigadier of this period (now Lieutenant-General Sir E. T. Humphreys) always insisted on his signal officer connecting me with Brigade Headquarters as were the other units of the Brigade Group. In France he had been G.S.O.I. to the Division and when the A.D.M.S. had asked him for this very connection he had refused it. When I taxed him with inconsistency he answered “No! he had always wanted it; but the equipment allowed did not provide for it; and in France he had needed every bit of signal equipment for keeping touch between the infantry and gunners. By the time we had been overseas everyone had ‘made’ a bit of extra equipment, and it was this that he used to keep touch between Brigade Headquarters and the corresponding field ambulance.” I say again that this is a question that must be thrashed out in peace time. The want of it may result in the loss of a brigade if ever there is another great war.

Of the second trans-Jordan raid there is nothing tactical to say. It was an unsuccessful attack with considerable loss on the same hill—El Haud—that had previously been taken with some fifteen casualties. It illustrated, however, the use of the Red Cross. We had had orders that this was not to be flown at the advanced dressing station as it had been learnt that the enemy were in the habit of calculating the number of troops engaged by the number of Red Cross Flags flying. In open country such as the Jordan Valley the absence of the flag was a great loss in the collection of wounded. It could be seen from afar and the bearers made straight for it. But its absence had another disadvantage. The advanced dressing station was pitched on the same spot as in the first trans-Jordan raid when the Red Cross had been flown and no shell had come near it. On the second trans-Jordan raid shells were bursting around the advanced dressing station for four days seriously interfering with the work. On this fourth day the A.D.M.S. visited the advanced dressing station and seeing the situation ordered the flagstaff to be erected and the flags flown. Not another shell fell anywhere near its vicinity.

The main dressing station was in the same place, in Herod’s ancient palace. It was enlarged to act as the main dressing station of the whole force—viz., the Desert Mounted Corps and the 60th Division. On the ground was spread a large Red Cross flag belonging, I believe, to the Australian operating unit that was attached to us.

Every morning soon after dawn enemy planes flew down the valley bombing the huge Camel Corps camps that could not be hid. Arrived at
the north end of the Dead Sea they turned west to the Hills and flew back north searching the edge of the valley beneath these hills with bombs. As they came to the mouth of the Wady Kelt where our camp with its Red Cross lay they ceased dropping bombs, swerved out into the middle of the valley and back to its hillside margin north of our camp. Then they started bombing again.

In all Allenby’s campaign in Palestine these two Trans-Jordan raids were the only operations or engagements that were not completely successful. It has always seemed to me a measure of his greatness that he used his two failures for his final success by making the enemy believe that he still intended to make his main attack by this route once more. Whereas he broke the Turkish line on the other flank on the sea-coast. Again he used the 60th Division; but it was no longer the same. It had been converted from a second line Territorial Division into a British and Indian one. In the conversion my field ambulance had, alas, been broken up and I had become a M.O. in the wards of a base hospital. I fear, therefore, I have no tactical lessons to tell you from the campaign of the autumn of 1918.