

Echoes of the Past.

WAR EXPERIENCES OF A TERRITORIAL MEDICAL OFFICER.

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(Continued from p. 412, vol. lxvi.)

CHAPTER VIII.—AUTUMN DISCOMFORTS.

THOUGH no further serious effort was made to force the Turks out of their position on the hills, the autumn months were not wasted in idleness. The troops were constantly occupied to the full extent of their strength in improving their trenches and pushing them forward towards the Turkish lines, which at first were in some places as much as five to six hundred yards from our own. In this way a considerable amount of ground was gradually gained to the right of Chocolate Hill, the ground on which the 11th Division, as well as our own Division, had had such heavy losses on August 21, and which we found still strewn with large numbers of our dead whom it had not been possible to bury previously.

In addition to this work much was done to provide trenches for the supports and reserves on the plain between Chocolate Hill and Lala Baba. A strong second line of defence was made, also, halfway across the plain, and a third on Lala Baba itself, in order to be able to cover an embarkation should it at any time become impossible to hold our existing line.

A regular system of communication trenches between the reserve and front line trenches formed part of the scheme. When this was accomplished it was no longer necessary in our daily visits to the trenches to walk for a mile and a half in full view of the Turks, who rarely failed to pay heed when two or three were gathered together. It was early realized that the position of the troops would be very uncomfortable in bad weather, and careful schemes were worked out for improving their quarters by the provision of bath houses, drying rooms, kitchens, etc., in the trenches, all of which, had they been carried out, would have involved the provision of a good deal of engineering stores, such as roofing material, which did not show much signs of arriving. But it was not, perhaps, sufficiently foreseen that many of the trench works that we had made in our divisional area would be untenable after heavy rain, owing to their low-lying position.

Passing through the gap in the hills to the right of our line and between us and the Anzacs, was the dry bed of a stream known as the Azmak Dere, which had considerable potentialities for producing a flood after a heavy

storm; our trenches crossed it and communicated with it in many places.

On the evening of November 26, there was a very heavy thunderstorm. The Azmak Dere quickly came down in spate. It burst the barriers which had been put up between ourselves and the Turks, and soon overflowed its bed. The water, unable to make its way fast enough to the sea, poured out along the trenches and flooded the whole system over a considerable area. The flood came in the night and caught the troops unawares. They managed to scramble out of the trenches themselves, but their kit and stores were largely submerged and lost. The soil was soft and sandy, the walls of the trenches fell in and buried everything in mud and water.

Next day the rain turned to sleet and the temperature went down to freezing point with a bitter north-east wind off the hills. The condition of the men was pitiable. Wet through to the skin, without shelter or change of kit, standing up to their knees or higher in icy cold water, which they could not leave without exposing themselves to full view of such of the enemy as were themselves in a condition to observe them, and with little possibility of cooking anything to warm themselves, they were chilled to the bone and became exhausted. Their legs and feet, exposed continuously to cold water, were rapidly undergoing those changes which result in the paralysing and subsequently maiming condition known as trench feet, a condition which shows every gradation between severe chilblains and actual frostbite gangrene. The men in the front line stuck gallantly to their posts; on the right was the Highland Brigade—men of wonderful physique and endurance, enured to climatic hardships from childhood; the Scottish Horse on the left did not suffer quite so much, as they were generally on higher ground. In our own Division there was no failure of discipline. The men stuck it out for more than sixty hours, but the number that continually had to go sick was enormous. During the week from November 27 to December 3, 44 officers and 1,539 other ranks, out of an average strength of 4,336, i.e. 34·9 per cent, were admitted to hospital, more than one-third of our whole strength, and of these, 43 officers and 1,153 other ranks had to be evacuated from the Peninsula by hospital ship. This does not include the casualties of the brigade of the 53rd Division attached to us which were equally heavy.

Fortunately we had no death immediately traceable to exposure, though some of the other divisions had many from pure exhaustion.

The bitter north wind and sleet continued all through the 27th, 28th and 29th. The troops in the reserve trenches were collected together as soon as possible into some of the drier areas, but during the first rush of the flood they had suffered badly, especially the brigade of the 53rd Division attached to us. Eighteen per cent of our admission cases were for trench feet, twenty-seven per cent for shock from exposure and twenty-five per cent for rheumatism.

Most of the foot trouble did not show much at the time, but the subsequent results were in many cases very serious. Several secondary cases of tetanus occurred and many subsequent amputations had to be performed for gangrene, some of which were double. The rheumatism was mostly muscular, slow in developing and slow in clearing up. The shock cases for the most part improved rapidly with warmth, dry clothing and hot food.

The Turks were in no position to take advantage of our discomfiture for their condition was as bad as our own. Large numbers of them bolted to the hills, others were shot sitting on the edges of their trenches.

There was, apparently, a movement to surrender on the part of quite a number at one point on the extreme right of our line, but they were fired on by the Gurkhas on our right who did not understand the movement and the Turks were seen flying back up the hills from their trenches on the low ground.

It will be readily understood that there was a tremendous strain thrown on the medical services.

Early in September it had been realized by those on the spot that there was not sufficient accommodation for patients on the Peninsula if a spell of bad weather should interfere with the regular evacuation from the Casualty Clearing Stations to the hospital ships. Urgent representations were made of the need for increased accommodation in the field ambulances; hospital marquees were asked for but never came. Then an effort was made to get shelters built in which patients could be housed temporarily. The engineers had the greatest difficulty in obtaining the wherewithal to make these but at last a certain amount of timber was provided and some more was available from wreckage washed up on the beach, but no proper roofing of any kind could be obtained. Such timber as was forthcoming was handed over to the field ambulances to make the best use of it they could, but the lack of skilled labour proved another example of the misfortune of having no engineer unit of our own. Fortunately our field ambulances had some handy men among them and with the assistance of a serjeant of the 2nd South Midland, who was a builder by trade, they managed to erect some serviceable shelter huts, roofed with Service blankets and with sides partly of timber and partly of blankets, but open at the front to the south-west. Under great pressure a certain number of bell tents were gleaned from other divisions.

Fortunately these preparations were finished before the storm came and it was possible to find cover and dry clothing and medical comforts for every one of the fifteen hundred patients who were admitted. The blanket roofs kept the wet and wind out wonderfully well and the crowding helped to supply the necessary warmth in the absence of artificial heat.

At one time our then remaining field ambulances, nominally equipped for one hundred and fifty, had over eight hundred patients.

The condition of those who were not maimed by trench feet or crippled by rheumatism rapidly improved, but the storm and its results had shaken us badly and the fear of another spell of bad weather hung over us like a

nightmare. Luckily during the next three weeks the weather was beautifully mild and bright.

The Scottish Horse Field Ambulances had proved themselves exceedingly skilful at improvisation. One of their officers, Captain Wade, afterwards Consulting Surgeon to the Egyptian Expeditionary Force in Palestine, built a first-rate operating hut entirely out of empty cartridge boxes which he found on the beach. This unit possessed a motor operating van which had been presented to them before they left Scotland and which they had managed to keep with them after they had been compelled to shed every other particle of transport. When it was landed it was the only motor vehicle at Suvla. With considerable difficulty it was run round from Suvla to C Beach and ranged up alongside the ammunition-box hut to which it formed an annexe where instruments could be stored, dressings sterilized and electricity manufactured to light the operating hut.

To the Scottish Horse Field Ambulance, thus equipped, were sent all the more serious surgical cases of the Division, and many a man owed his life to the skilled surgical attention he received there.

On October 13 we received a visit from Sir Victor Horsley, who came round as Consulting Surgeon to inspect the surgical arrangements made for the Force.¹ One afternoon he gave us a lecture on "The Immediate Treatment of Head Injuries." Next day I took him round our trenches. He was an untiring walker and an inveterate sightseer; he had three and a half miles to walk from Corps Headquarters, where he was staying, to Lala Baba, and the same back after we had walked steadily all over our area for three and a half hours, so that he must have done seventeen miles, before he got back to his quarters, and the weather was very hot.

An amusing episode had occurred in connexion with Sir Victor Horsley a few months earlier in Cairo. He was then attached to No. 21 General Hospital at Alexandria and had come up to Cairo to see an old friend and pupil, an Australian officer who was seriously ill in the Heliopolis Hospital, suffering from meningitis. He had seen the patient overnight and was going down next morning to see him again before he returned to Alexandria. Everyone knows that Horsley's views on the use of alcohol were uncompromising. While we were breakfasting together at the Continental Hotel a waiter came in and told him he was wanted on the telephone. He came back a minute or two later with a very long face.

"What do you think they want?" he said. "They want me to take two bottles of champagne from the hotel for the patient at Heliopolis. What am I to do?"

I could only suggest that there was no alternative. So he took them. I did not give him away, nor did I take the opportunity of getting a snapshot of him leaving the hotel with the bottles.

¹ The photographs on pp. 404, 407, 409, 410, vol. lxvi and on p. 63, vol. lxvii were taken by Sir Victor Horsley on the occasion of this visit and are reproduced by kind permission of Lady Horsley.

CHAPTER IX.—THE EVACUATION.

The question of the evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula was raised by the Government at home early in October 1915.

On the 11th a wire was sent out to Sir Ian Hamilton, asking him for an estimate of the losses which would occur in an evacuation of the Peninsula. His reply stated that he considered such a step was unthinkable, owing to the terribly high casualties it would involve. Shortly after, Sir Ian was recalled to England and Sir Charles Munro was sent out to report on the situation generally, and particularly as to whether the Peninsula should be evacuated, or another attempt made to carry it.

Sir Charles arrived at Imbros and took over the command of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force on October 29, 1915.

After investigation he wired to the Secretary of State for War that in his opinion the evacuation of the Peninsula should be taken in hand.

Lord Kitchener, on receipt of this opinion, decided to make a personal visit to the Peninsula. Very quietly and secretly he made a careful inspection of the whole line. His conclusion coincided with that of Sir Charles Munro, but for some reason nothing was done immediately. It was not until the end of November that directions to prepare a scheme of evacuation were given to General Sir W. Birdwood, then in command of the Dardanelles Army (for Sir Charles Munro's command included Salonica also).

The actual orders to carry out the evacuation of Suvla and Anzac arrived from home on December 9.

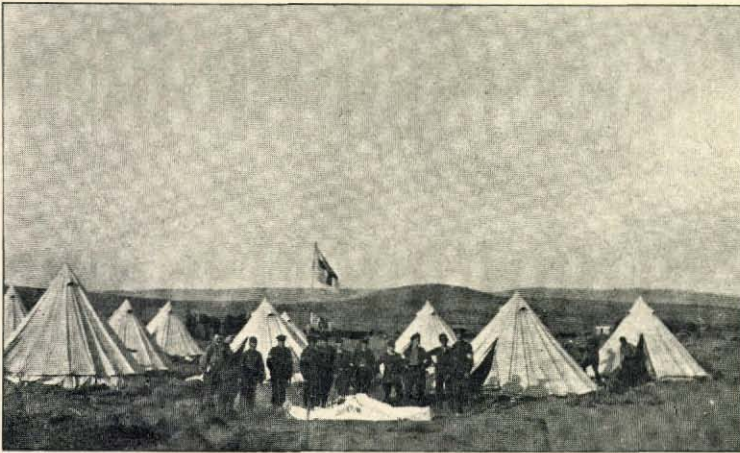
The plan devised by Sir William Birdwood for the evacuation is well known. It was a masterly conception and contrary to all precedents of war. It involved a gigantic bluff of the Turks, who were to be kept in ignorance of our intentions until we were gone. As the whole of our position was in full view of the Turks they could observe every movement made in daylight, all embarkation therefore would have to take place at night. The shipping and boats available were only enough to embark a small proportion of the Force on any one night. It was necessary, therefore, to thin the troops down gradually, spending a whole week over the operation, and at the same time, by careful distribution and employment of the remainder to make it appear to the eye of the enemy that no reduction of numbers had taken place. This applied equally to guns and transport if they were also to be embarked.

We had a few advantages. Our position was a very narrow one, and as a complete line of trenches extended from sea to sea it was almost impossible for the Turks to have any spies in the area occupied by us. Also we had such absolute command of the sea that no Turkish vessel of any sort except an occasional submarine at the entrance to the Straits of the Dardanelles ever showed itself on the coast during our occupation. The distance the troops had to move down to the point of embarkation

nowhere exceeded three miles. The plans for the withdrawal were worked out to the minutest detail by the Army and Divisional Staffs.

The deception to be practised by the medical units was an important one. As has already been described, the casualty clearing stations and all the field ambulances on the right of the Suvla position were concentrated on the beach to the south of Nebruniessi Point. They made a line of tents and huts nearly a mile in length on the sea margin and consisted of eight units in all, each of which had been flying a Red Cross flag for many weeks.

Our own four field ambulances were there, the three field ambulances of the 53rd Division and No. 24 Casualty Clearing Station.



Field Ambulance Camp, "C" Beach.

The 53rd Division with its field ambulances left more than a week before the end. One of our field ambulances had gone before this with the two brigades of Yeomanry, and another, the 2nd South Midland, left on December 12. Each field ambulance left its camp standing and its flag flying as if it were still there. The two remaining field ambulances had to spread themselves over the whole line of camps, and by lighting fires in the various kitchens, and putting lights in the tents at night made it appear that that they were all still occupied.

The final evacuation took place on the night of December 19. As time drew on the tension became greater and greater. Three weeks had elapsed since the great storm, and by all previous records another was due. With anything like a strong wind from the west or south, embarkation was impossible, and should a storm come on during the evacuation period, after the numbers had become seriously depleted, the position would be most grave. However, the fates were kind and the weather remained perfect until the evacuation was completed.

In our divisional scheme, which was published on December 16, though much preparatory work had been done before that date, the Division, the strength of which, on December 12, had been 3,125, was to be reduced by dispatch of details before the penultimate night, December 18, to just over 2,000.

On the night of the 18th, the South Western Brigade (from the reserve trenches) and further details from the rest of the Division were to leave, reducing the total strength to 500 men in each brigade in the trenches—the Scottish Horse and the Highland—and to 135 in the rest of the Division, including the Royal Engineers, Headquarters Staff and Bearer Sub-Division.

It was more convenient for the 4th Gurkhas, Anzac Force, who held the extreme left of their line, to evacuate by our route; 400 of them, therefore, embarked with the remnant of our Division.

On the last day, December 19, the troops were to leave the trenches after dark in three parties: the first, consisting of half their number, just after dusk at 5.45 p.m.; the second, comprising two-thirds of the remainder, at 10 p.m., and the rearguard, sixty men of each brigade, at 1.30 a.m. on the 20th.

Every man had to carry his arms and all that was left of his kit. The heavier baggage had been sent away before, but the machine guns had to be carried by hand the whole two and a half miles.

An elaborate system of trip mines had been prepared in front of our first line trenches and also across the open parts of the plain between our trenches and the embarkation points. Almost at the last moment it was decided not to charge those behind our trenches, lest they should be set off by stragglers inadvertently leaving the regular tracks.

A great deal of ingenuity had been exercised in devising automatic rifles to go off at intervals during the night in the trenches after the troops had left, by means of burning candles, falling sand, etc.

The medical arrangements for evacuation were most carefully worked out. Every hospital unit was kept completely cleared of patients for some days before the end.

It was arranged that if casualties occurred during the withdrawal they were to be taken to the Casualty Clearing Stations, and if these could not be cleared by the Navy before the Turks came down, detachments were to be left behind at the last moment to take charge of the patients who fell into the hands of the Turks.

A small detachment of each of the two remaining field ambulances was posted about half way up the roads down which the parties came and was to withdraw with the rearguard and embark with them. A dressing station was to be formed if necessary near the embarkation point.

The one point in our Divisional scheme which was left open was the embarkation point itself. If the weather remained fine it was to be on the beach to the south of Nebruniessi Point, between the Point and the

casualty clearing station. If the sea was rough, it was to be at the pier to the north of the Point, which was more or less sheltered from the south and south-west, otherwise this pier was reserved for the embarkation of our next neighbours on the left, the 13th Division.

As it turned out, the first alternative was adopted for the sea was perfectly calm.

The last day was one of great anxiety for the remnant that was left. To our eyes the whole area looked so bare and deserted that it seemed impossible that it did not appear so to the enemy also. The weather looked threatening in the morning, but cleared up later in the day. During the morning the Turks shelled our embarkation place and the roads approaching it as if they were registering on them and they actually dropped a shell on the pier which the 13th Division were going to use. Fortunately it dropped between two supports and the damage was quickly repaired. As dusk approached the excitement became intense. There was nothing to do but to wait as patiently as we could. Our reduced staff, without servants except one cook, sat out the evening in our old quarters on Lala Baba, trying to pretend we were calm and unmoved. The silence outside was unbroken. No shot audible to us was fired all the evening. It was not the custom of the Turks to fire with artillery after dark and they did not break their rule on this occasion. A little after ten the telephone from the Brigade Headquarters announced the second party had left the trenches. This was the signal for our own departure.

Every officer carrying his own kit, or all that was left of it, we sauntered slowly down to the beach for all the world as if we were off for a holiday. The night was perfect, the moon nearly full and the air was soft and mild. A slight haze covered the sea so that the ships could come quite close in without risk of being observed. On the beach we found the first party already well on the way with embarkation. We waited quietly on the shore until the second party had arrived, about 11.30 p.m., and then got on board ourselves. The last party arrived about 3 a.m., and then up anchor and away we went. The casualty clearing station party had no patients to deal with and were taken off in a naval boat. Just as we were leaving, fire was put to the large hollow stacks of supplies near our embarkation point and as we left the flames mounted to the sky as a farewell bonfire. No apparent notice was taken of it by the Turks while we were there.

The feelings that filled us as we left the shore are more easily imagined than described. After one of devout thankfulness for our almost miraculous escape, came the feeling of astonishment at the extraordinary failure of observation on the part of the Turks, then the relief, after four weary months, of being out of reach of the everlasting bombardment from which no spot in the area occupied by us was completely safe, and lastly the feeling of joy in the comforts of the ship to those of us who had never set foot off the Peninsula since we landed.

There were unkind people at Home who suggested that the Turks had

been paid to let us go, or at any rate had let us go voluntarily. There were no grounds for this statement. A letter from a German artillery officer serving with the Turks, published in the Press some time afterwards, showed what an absolute surprise it was to them all on the morning of the 20th to find that we had gone. He described how he had looked down on our position from the hills behind Anafarta the evening before, while planning some new gun positions. To his eyes everything in our lines appeared as usual and it was with the utmost astonishment that he learned next morning that his plans of the previous evening were no longer required as the English had gone.

The evacuation of Anzac had been carried out simultaneously with that of Suvla and with equal success. The force at Cape Helles remained for another three weeks and then got away with little more difficulty than we had had.

Our immediate destination was the Island of Imbros, fifteen miles away, on which General Headquarters had been stationed for so long. It was daylight when we reached there, and we were welcomed by those who had come over before us.

After two days' rest at Imbros, which gave us little time to explore our new quarters, the Division embarked for Mudros and without landing there we changed ship and went straight to Egypt. Christmas Day was spent at sea, and Alexandria reached on December 27 without any adventure.

Thus ended, as far as we were concerned, one of the most interesting expeditions ever undertaken by British Arms. It was a failure, a complete failure in its main object, but the event and the successful operation of withdrawal entirely wiped out any feeling of despondency that we had at the unsatisfactory result. The *morale* of the men who remained to the last was quite unshaken. Their health had greatly improved during the last weeks and never for one moment had they lost their sense of fighting superiority over the enemy who, though too much for us in the defence when backed by superiority in numbers and position, never gave us a moment's real anxiety in the attack.

(To be continued.)

Current Literature.

STROMQUIST. *Malaria Control in the Tennessee Valley. Civil Engineering.* December, 1935, Vol. v, No. 12.

The Tennessee Valley Scheme is an effort on the part of the Federal Government of the United States to provide cheap electric power in the South-Eastern States. The right of the Central Government to engage in