August 25 found me back in Mombasa with leisure to sample the fleshpots. The weather was still delightful though now warming up a little, our hotel was on an arm of the sea, the cuisine and the company were alike excellent. And while we bathed and sailed and fished or basked in the sun or even lay late in bed of a morning it was borne in upon me that much pleasure, in our middle years anyway, lies in the retrospect.

Kenya is a land that welcomes the visitor and goes out of its way to make him return. To anyone of moderate means who contemplates a short leave there I would say: "Go! You won’t be disappointed." Should money be no particular consideration, the employment of a well-known agency will doubtless give the best results; but sport may be had without much expense by arranging small local safaris. Besides, the settler, best of fellows, is hospitality itself. I hesitate to speak of my debt to those kind people who put me up and gave up their time to provide me with sport lest they should be swamped by an invasion of other hungry hunters; but I believe their hospitality knows no limits. I look forward to meeting them again.

Echoes of the Past.

WAR EXPERIENCES OF A TERRITORIAL MEDICAL OFFICER.

By Major-General Sir Richard Luce, K.C.M.G., C.B., M.B., F.R.C.S.

(Continued from p. 134.)

CHAPTER XII.—THE IMPERIAL MOUNTED DIVISION.

By the end of January, 1917, a large portion of our Western Force troops had been shifted to the Eastern Frontier and more were soon to follow.

A new Mounted Division called the Imperial Mounted Division was being formed and in the first week of February I was given the post of Assistant Director of Medical Services in it.

The position of affairs on the Eastern Frontier had changed greatly since the beginning of the previous year. Most of the troops brought back from Gallipoli had been stationed along the Suez Canal in case the Turks might use the forces released from Gallipoli to repeat their attack on Egypt across the Sinai Desert.

In 1915, with his small forces and their complete lack of knowledge and equipment for desert warfare, Sir John Maxwell had been obliged to make the Canal itself his line of defence.
Sir Richard Luce

Sir Archibald Murray, who was appointed to the Command of the Eastern Defences in January, 1916, with greatly increased strength and with troops that had learned to fight in the hard school of Gallipoli, decided on a bolder course. Starting with the assumption that he had to defend the Canal and not allow the canal to defend Egypt, he constructed a strong line of defences on the east side of the Canal. It extended along the whole eighty-five miles of the Canal at a distance varying from two to ten miles from it, and this line was connected with a second line on the eastern bank of the Canal itself, by short railways. An immense amount of labour and material was put into these works which were fairly well complete by the middle of March, 1916.

Sir Archibald then began to stretch out feelers into the desert and to strengthen his own defences by denying to the enemy such posts on the main routes across the Sinai Peninsula as might be useful to them as watering places in an advance. Expeditions were sent out to these places and several large water stores were drained and destroyed, besides many wells.

There are three recognized routes across the Sinai Peninsula, but the only practical one for a large force is the northern one which leaves Palestine at Rafa and following the coast passes through the town of El Arish and then by a series of oases reaches the Canal at Kantara. This was not the route used by the main body of Turks in the expedition of the previous year. They came by a track which starts from Auja, almost due south of Beersheba, and reaches the Canal at Ismailia.

The nearest important watering place to the Canal on the northern route is the oasis of Katia, which contains a series of wells of varying salinity. Katia was now occupied by the 1st South Midland Mounted Yeomanry Brigade, and a party of engineers, escorted by two squadrons of the Worcesters, went forward to the further post of Oghratina to destroy the wells there.

The Turks did not allow this move to pass unchallenged. The Yeomanry soon found that they were in touch with a considerable force of the enemy, which was reported to be occupying an oasis called Mageibra, twelve miles to the south of Katia, and the Brigade Commander of the 1st South Midland Mounted Brigade went off with about half the brigade to attack them. This curiously was the very moment that the Turks had selected to attack Oghratina, Katia and the next post behind called Dueidar. The camp at Mageibra was found practically deserted, but the Turks had better luck in their venture. Oghratina was rushed in a mist and the garrison wiped out or captured. Katia, after a sharp struggle, was also overpowered with considerable losses to the garrison and Dueidar itself was only saved by the heroic defence of its garrison, a company of the Royal Scots belonging to the 52nd Division. The Turks were beaten off with considerable losses. In their retreat they passed the residue of the Mounted Brigade withdrawing from Katia and here was seen the remarkable
spectacle of two retreating and discomfited forces passing within sight of one another each too tired and too dispirited to attack or molest the other.

It was seen that nothing further could be done in the way of active operations against the Turks until the railway and water supply were brought up to the posts now occupied. It had been decided to make a standard gauge railway line out into the desert from Kantara along the northern route and at the same time to lay side by side with it a six inch water pipe. The water was obtained from the sweet water canal which, supplied by a canal from the Nile, runs along the east side of the Suez Canal from Ismailia to Port Said. The water was pumped across the Suez Canal into reservoirs where after sedimentation it was filtered and purified by the addition of chloride of lime. The pipeline was eventually prolonged right up to Gaza, one of the most wonderful engineering feats of the War.

By July, 1916, the railway and pipe line had reached Romani, a few miles west of Katia, and by this time Sir Archibald Murray was definitely committed to a forward policy. The Turks, however, determined to make one more effort to stay his progress by delivering an attack in force on our railhead.

They employed a force of about five thousand and their plan was to move past or level with our railhead at Romani and then by turning north to attack our defensive positions from the south and south-west. The attack was delivered on the morning of August 3. Our southern flank was held by the mounted troops, the Australian Light Horse and the Yeomanry. The brunt of the attack fell on them and at one time it looked as if they would be driven in on to the railway. However, the force of the attack was broken and after the arrival of infantry reinforcements the scales were turned and the Turks retreated with heavy losses, pursued by the mounted troops. This was the last attempt the Turks made to stay our advance on Palestine by any definite offensive effort. During the remaining months of the year the railway and pipe line pushed on steadily across the desert at the rate of about a mile per day and as it advanced the cavalry pushed on in front, fighting a series of gallant actions at Mazar, Maghdaba and finally at Rafa. Often the day was only won by the determination of the troops after the Commander thought it had been lost. Magruntein Hill, commanding the frontier village of Rafa, was captured on January 9 and now the desert was crossed and the Promised Land in sight.

The leading infantry division, the 52nd, marched the whole weary way from Kantara to Gaza, but after Romani never came up in time to take part in any of the battles of the advance.

The force at the disposal of Sir Archibald Murray in February, 1917, for the advance into Palestine, consisted of two mounted divisions, the Anzac and the Imperial Mounted, the Imperial Camel Corps Brigade, and three Territorial Infantry Divisions—the 52nd (Lowlands), the 53rd (Welsh) and the 54th (East Anglian). It was known as the East Force and was commanded by Lieutenant-General Sir Charles Dobell. The two
cavalry divisions, the Imperial Camel Corps and the 53rd Division, formed a subordinate command under Lieutenant-General Sir Philip Chetwode, known as the Desert Column. The Anzac Division was made up of the 1st and 2nd Australian Light Horse Brigade, the New Zealand Mounted Brigade and the North Midland Mounted Brigade. It was commanded by Major-General Chauvel. Our own division, the Imperial Mounted, contained the 3rd and 4th Australian Light Horse Brigades and the 5th and 6th Mounted Brigades of Yeomanry, formerly part of the 2nd Mounted Division and then known as the 1st and 2nd South Midland Mounted Brigades.

We were commanded by Major-General Hodgson who had recently commanded the successful motor car expedition to Siwa which had ended the Senussi Campaign on the Western Frontier of Egypt. His staff consisted partly of old members of the Western Frontier Force, like myself, and partly of Australians.

It was a mixed team, the elements of which belonged to very different schools. Not unnaturally, it took a good deal of shaking down to form a homogeneous and smoothly working staff.

The 3rd Light Horse Brigade was commanded by Brigadier-General Royston, a fine old South African who had taken part in all the fighting in South Africa since the Zulu war. He was known to his men as "Galloping Jack" and beloved by them as a hard rider and a hard fighter.

The 4th Light Horse was still in process of formation. It was commanded by an Australian doctor, Brigadier-General Meredith.

The 5th Mounted and the 3rd Light Horse Brigades were already up at the front. Our Divisional Headquarters and the other two brigades assembled at Ferry Post on the east side of the Canal, about three miles from Ismailia, on February 18, 1917.

Our headquarters was a stone's throw from the swing pontoon bridge which crossed the Canal close to the point where the latter opens into Lake Timsah, the first of the salt water lakes. On the west shore of the lake lies Ismailia, the beautiful little town which is the headquarters of the Suez Canal Company. It was there that Sir Garnet Wolseley disembarked his army in 1882 for the advance on Cairo which resulted in the battle of Tel-el-Kebir.

On the high ground on the opposite side of the Canal was the French hospital which had been used as Sir Archibald Murray's Headquarters until he moved to Cairo in October, 1916. It was now occupied by Sir Charles Dobell and the staff of East Force. At the time of our arrival they were just packing up to move up the line to El Arish.

The medical arrangements of the new division were on similar lines to those of the old 2nd Mounted Division. Each brigade had a mounted brigade field ambulance. The establishment of an Australian mounted brigade field ambulance differed in some particulars from a British one, chiefly in that all their bearers were mounted. This was an enormous
advantage to them for their work in this campaign. The field ambulance of the 4th Light Horse Brigade was not yet in being and at first, owing to shortage of medical officers and personnel, had to be content with one section instead of two.

For work in the desert considerable changes had been made in the organization and equipment of the field ambulances, though their establishment of personnel remained as before. Motor ambulances were quite useless on the Sinai Peninsula as the surface of the Sinai desert is different from that of the Libyan desert on the West Frontier where motors had proved so invaluable. The regulation pattern horsed ambulances, light and heavy, were also unusable in the deep sand. To take their place, the sand cart had been devised and issued to all units. But the great majority of the wounded had to be carried on camels by means of one of the various forms of litter or cacolet. Many patterns of litter were tried, but none was ever found that could make travelling on a camel anything but misery to a seriously wounded man. The original pattern, called a kajavi, consisted of a couple of canvas coffin-like troughs slung one on either side of the camel. It was said to have been designed by Larrey, Napoleon’s famous medical officer, for their march across the desert during the invasion of Palestine in 1800. Then a folding iron litter with a canvas bottom lashed to the iron frame, like the old-fashioned military hospital bed, was tried. Next, an attempt was made to utilize the regulation military stretcher by fixing a pair of them to the saddle of the camel with iron clamps. A great many of this pattern were made but they proved a hopeless failure. The iron framework was always getting bent so that it would not take the stretcher and even when it did, the patient, who had to be strapped on, was as often as not found with his
head a foot or so below the level of his legs, owing to the fact that the stretcher was not held rigidly enough in the horizontal position. The object of this design was to enable the patient to be loaded on the camel without having to make the camel lie down. To a wounded man the motion of a camel in rising produces extreme torture.

The final pattern was cribbed from the Turks. It consisted of a light wooden frame with a canvas bottom and a rail round it to keep the patient in. It was constructed so that the back part was set at an obtuse angle to the front part, the patient, therefore, lay in a half reclining position instead of flat. This was a disadvantage for fractures of the thigh and serious abdominal or head injuries, but it ensured that however much the litter shifted the patient’s head was at least as high as the rest of him. A half awning was fitted to protect the patient’s head from the sun. The sitting cacolets of the old folding pattern were much used as we had a great many of them and they were comparatively light, but they were tiring and uncomfortable and only suited for lightly wounded cases.

The sand cart proved a great success. It consisted of an iron frame supported on two wheels, with light sides. The floor of the cart was simply an iron woven spring mattress divided into two parts by a central board which could be taken out. The cart was covered with a canvas hood.
Camel nets arranged for carrying patients.

Carrying patients in camel nets.
supported on wooden bales. For desert work the wheels were fitted with an additional iron tyre, six inches broad, to prevent the wheels from sinking into the sand, and it was found a great additional advantage to fit two canvas drum heads into the inner and outer rims of the tyres so that the sand could not ride over the edge of the rim. This contrivance, if made sand tight, greatly lightened the draught of the vehicle. The cart was fitted with a pole and was drawn by four or even six mules when the sand was very soft. With such a team it could go anywhere and the mules could do their long journeys without getting knocked up. Another method of carrying wounded of which much was expected and something effected was the sand sleigh. Various patterns were designed and used by different field ambulances. The simplest form consisted of a sheet of corrugated iron with the front end bent up and kept in position by wires. As regards motion this proved a very comfortable means of progression for the wounded man. The chief drawbacks were that the patient became smothered with dust and that they were very heavy in draught for the mules; but, most serious of all, they cut the ground telephone wires of the Signal Service as they passed over them. This fault brought them into evil repute with the higher powers and finally led to their condemnation.

A light double bicycle-wheeled carrier to take one stretcher and drawn
by one mule was much fancied by some units and for a time became official, but it was liable to upset and the wheels easily buckled.

Modifications to meet the special transport difficulties had been made in the organization of both the infantry and mounted field ambulances. Of the three sections of the former and two of the latter, one was deprived of its transport and was termed Immobile. The immobile sections thus rendered incapable of accompanying their brigades were practically tied to the railway where they were able to form dressing stations or lightly equipped clearing stations. Camel transport took the place of all wheeled vehicles for carrying the equipment of the field ambulances. This organization held good until the beginning of 1917 and on the whole proved very satisfactory.

El Arish.

The regulation water carts were withdrawn and water was carried in twelve-gallon copper-plated tanks called fanattis. A pair of these slung one on either side formed a load for a camel.

I brought two clerks from the Western Force who had been with me from the start of the 2nd Mounted Division and knew the routine office work so that I was able to devote all my time to getting in touch with the medical units and regimental medical officers of the Division assembling at Ferry Post.

On March 1 our Divisional Headquarters moved up by train to El Arish. The 6th Mounted Brigade with the artillery was already on its way marching across the desert. The 4th Australian Light Horse Brigade and its one section field ambulance were not yet ready and did not join the Division until more than a month later.

At El Arish we found the headquarters of the East Force. That of the Desert Column, to which we now belonged, was just moving one step
further forward to Rafa. We found the 3rd Light Horse Brigade encamped by the sea at Masaid, about three miles south-west of El Arish. Our own camp was on the edge of the sea a mile to the north of the town.

El Arish is a little town near the mouth of the river which in the Bible is referred to as the “River of Egypt.” This is not a flowing river all the year round but its bed and the ground near it furnish many wells which enable a successful cultivation of fruit trees and other crops to be carried on. Prior to the War El Arish was the centre of the Egyptian Government in Sinai. At this time the railway had reached a point twenty miles north of El Arish and was within a few miles of Rafa, the frontier village.

The 5th South Midland, our other brigade, was encamped at El Burj, ten miles beyond El Arish. I at once paid a visit to their field ambulance and renewed my old association with them which had been broken on the day we started for Gallipoli, eighteen months before. When we returned from the Peninsula, separated from their brigade, they were operating with the Western Force against the Senussi on the coast, west of Alexandria. There they did most excellent work and gained great credit. Before the Western and Southern Forces were amalgamated they had been sent to the Canal to join their own brigade. They were present with the Brigade at the time of the surprise at Katia and a small detachment with a medical officer was captured by the Turks.

The 3rd Australian Light Horse Field Ambulance I met now for the first time. It had been through all the operations across the Sinai desert and was an experienced and thoroughly efficient unit.

The Australian medical officer is well adapted for work with a medical unit in the field, especially with mounted troops. He is resourceful and self reliant, and from first to last in dealing with Australian troops I could always be certain that they would never fail to get their casualties away, however great the difficulties of transport might be. The same was true of our own Territorial Mounted Brigade field ambulances which were exceedingly well officered and commanded and had now become thoroughly experienced in war.

On March 9 our Divisional Headquarters moved ten miles further up the line to El Burj. We left our heavy kit behind at El Arish and henceforward we lived under strictly field conditions in bivouac tents, though I was still allowed a bell tent for an office. The assembly of the three brigades was now almost complete as units of the 6th Mounted Brigade were arriving one by one after their long march across the desert.

While we were stationed at El Burj it fell to my lot to have to go down to Cairo to lecture on Medical Organization in the Field, at the Staff College which had been opened in the hotel at Mena. It was a long journey to take for an hour’s lecture, but a pleasant change. The railway journey down to Kantara in a hospital train which ought to have taken eight hours, this time took thirty hours. There was a severe dust storm blowing which completely buried the rails in some places in a few hours.
We were derailed twice and several times held up for many hours while other trains in front of us had to be dug out of the drift sand. The delay made me twenty-four hours late for my lecture, but fortunately it could be postponed to the following day. The preparation for the lecture in the field was a difficult business. The only paper available for diagrams was sheets of foolscap which had to be gummed together. After I had got these ready they were laid aside in the office tent. Next day they were nowhere to be found. A very strong wind was blowing and eventually one of the three was found resting against a fig tree more than a hundred yards away to leeward. The others were never found and had to be hurriedly prepared again.

When I got back from Cairo I found we had moved forward a stage to Sheik Zaweid. Here we were camped once more by the sea, separated from the railway by the high sand dunes which all up the coast form a barrier between the cultivated plain and the beach. These dunes, often 100 feet high, consist of soft drift sand and are difficult to cross either on foot or mounted. In some places they are two miles across but generally less. One of the peculiarities of this coast is that on the beach between the sea and the dunes fresh soft water can be found almost anywhere by digging a few feet into the sand and this right up to the margin of the sea. It was quite common for the shallow wells we dug and from which we obtained beautifully soft fresh water, to be inundated by the sea in rough weather and filled in. A few hours later, when the sea had calmed down, a new well could be dug in the same spot and would give water as fresh as ever. On the other hand wells on the plain, inland from the dunes, had to be dug quite deep before water was reached at all, and then it was sometimes quite brackish and always of high salinity.

The explanation given by the geologists is that the dunes, acting as a sponge, hold a large amount of rain water taken up in the rain season. This gradually percolates to the base of the dunes on the shore side and moving steadily forward beneath the surface of the ground towards the sea, holds back the sea water. This fact was an inestimable boon to troops moving, as mounted troops often did, along the beach.

The shore sand wetted by the waves makes excellent going for horses though the rest of the beach, where the sand was dry, was very heavy. Bodies of mounted troops could be sure of finding plenty of water both for themselves and their horses at almost any point they liked to halt on the beach, however great their numbers.

We moved on to Rafa on March 22 and were now on the frontier of Palestine itself. The headquarters of the Desert Column was already established there and the Headquarters of the East Force moved in a day or two later.

The Turks, after their defeat at Rafa on January 9, withdrew across the Wadi Ghuzzeh, which runs into the sea about four miles south of Gaza, and began fortifying the town and its surroundings.
Some time before they had prepared a very strong line of defence at Shelal, about a mile to the south of the Wadi and about eight miles from the sea. Much labour must have been expended on it, but after the battle of Rafa they decided not to hold it.

On March 3 our Division was ordered out from Rafa to make a reconnaissance in force towards Gaza and to explore the Wadi Ghuzzeh and find out its capabilities for producing water for the troops.

After a long ride out our Headquarters took up position on a hill about half a mile south of the Wadi, whence we had a view across it to the outskirts of Gaza. Except the minaret of the mosque and a few houses on the top slopes of the hill, the town cannot be seen from the south. Lying about two miles from the sea, it is guarded on the south by low hills which stretch across to the sea. The ground is covered with cultivation broken up into small fields by almost impenetrable cactus hedges. To the south-east it is overshadowed by a prominent conical hill known as Ali Muntar, which forms the main defence of the town on the land side. This hill had been carefully trenched. It was a formidable fortress and played a most important part in the subsequent attacks.

On this day our covering troops were fired on from the defences but no definite engagement took place. During our withdrawal the Turks closely followed us up with aeroplanes and caused some casualties with machine gun fire to the Yeomanry of the 5th Brigade. By evening we were all back in our camp at Rafa.

(To be continued).

Current Literature.


Amongst school children in the New Jersey State Home for Boys cases of skin disease were constantly coming for treatment. New boys were not usually infected on arrival and the disease was probably contracted by contact or indiscriminate use of towels or clothing. Over a period of four years skin lesions were treated with various ointments, including ammoniated mercury, and antiseptics such as gentian violet and tincture of iodine in varying percentages. With persistent daily treatment the lesions, which were in a fairly early state, i.e., from one-half to three inches in diameter, would clear up in one or two weeks.