

a lotion of 1 grain of hydrarg. perchlor. in one ounce of spirit vini rect. A coat of the ointment is applied on a piece of gauze and the whole covered with an occlusive dressing of adhesive plaster. The dressing should be changed twice daily.

The second prescription was given me by a Captain of the Indian Medical Department, who was Assistant Surgeon in Kohat in 1919, whose name I have, unfortunately, forgotten.

The ointment consists of :—

Zinc oxide	..	..	..	1 drachm
Starch	..	..	..	1 drachm
Pure carbolic acid	..	..	..	10 minims
Liq. extract of ergot	..	..	..	1 drachm
Vaseline	..	..	..	1 ounce

This ointment will often abort a boil if applied early under an occlusive plaster dressing, but its chief use is for the painful furuncles which are met with inside the nose, and in the external auditory meatus. It should be applied fairly thickly.

For boils which are too far advanced for abortive treatment I have had good results with the ether dressing described by Dr. J. J. O'Keefe in the *British Medical Journal* of July 20, 1936, the great advantage of this treatment being the simplicity of application.

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## Echoes of the Past.

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### 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. 409, vol. lxxvii.)

#### CHAPTER XVII.—THE CAPTURE OF BEERSHEBA.

THE time fixed for the commencement of the operation, which was kept carefully secret till the last moment, was at dawn on October 31.

The plan of action to be carried out by the 20th Corps consisted of two parts, as follows : First, the capture of Beersheba. Secondly, an attack on the strong Turkish positions at Kauwukah and Sheria. When these latter were taken the Turkish line of defence would be turned and the Turkish line of communication with Gaza threatened.

The assault was to be made by two divisions, the 60th on the right and the 74th on the left., The 53rd Division was to cover their left flank by holding the high ground facing the Turkish positions to the West of Beersheba. The 10th Division was in corps reserve behind the left flank of the 53rd Division.

The Anzac and Australian Divisions of the Desert Mounted Corps were

to make a wide detour eastwards and, passing round east of the town to deliver an attack from the north-east simultaneously with our own.

The Imperial Camel Corps filled the gap between the 53rd and 74th Divisions. The Yeomanry Division was in Army reserve covering the interval between the 20th and 21st Corps. The 53rd Division moved out to its position the day before to cover the approach march of the 60th and 74th Divisions.

In the scheme of medical arrangements the Desert Corps were to be accompanied by their own motor ambulances and, unless the attack was a failure, were not to attempt to send their wounded back by the same route they used in coming, but were to retain them until Beersheba fell and then evacuate them through the town.

On October 27, in preparation for the operation, the administrative part of 20th Corps Headquarters moved forward to Shellal and camped in the bed of the Wadi close to the pumping station. A first taste of the wet season came that night in the form of a heavy thunderstorm. Fortunately it did not affect the stream of the Wadi Ghuzzeh.

October 30 was a busy day at Shellal. Troops were pouring continuously across by the various roads that had been prepared for them. All day and all night the long strings of camels of the Water Convoy filed backwards and forwards to the filling points. The railway was kept busy carrying supplies to the new depot which was being formed at Imara.

In the afternoon we moved our administrative headquarters three miles out on the Beersheba road and General Chetwode took up his fighting headquarters some seven miles from Beersheba.

The morning of the great day, October 31, so anxiously expected for more than six months, came at last—the day on which we were to blot out the memories of the former Gaza failures.

To the administrative staff of a big formation like a corps, the early hours of an operation are a period of curious inaction. All one's plans are completed and the finishing touches have been put to the arrangements. It only remains to wait patiently to see how they work out. It is some considerable time before new or unforeseen circumstances can arise and the interval produces a sort of blank feeling, full of tense anxiety, which cannot be relieved by action.

News came in from the front from time to time.

The first objective, a hill in front of the 60th Division known as 1070, was taken by 8 a.m. The main attack followed and after severe fighting all the defences of the town were in our possession by evening and the Turks in full retreat to the north-west.

The Desert Corps troops were a little late in getting to their position, and met with considerable opposition especially at a strongly held isolated hill near the Wadi to the north of the town known as Tel el Saba.

The motor ambulances at my disposal, which now included part of the 35th Motor Ambulance Convoy usually under direct control of the D.M.S.,

were dispatched to their rendezvous in the early hours of the morning, the D.A.D.M.S. of the Corps, Major Lelean, being responsible for their distribution. Casualties did not begin to reach the casualty clearing station until 1.30. p.m. A corps Bureau had been established at the entrance to the casualty clearing stations where record of all casualties arriving was registered so that we knew exactly what was going on as regards evacuation from hour to hour.

The first batch consisted of eighty sitting cases from the 74th Division. The 10th Division motor ambulances which had been held in reserve were distributed to the 60th and 74th Divisions in the course of the day. By 10 p.m. about 900 casualties were reported as having reached the casualty clearing stations.

After the engagement was over the 60th Division bivouacked south of the town and the 74th inside the lines of defence between the Wadi Saba and the main road into Beersheba.

On the following morning the Desert Corps entered and took possession of the town.

In their retreat the Turks had managed to withdraw all rolling stock from the town except four trucks and one passenger coach. These were found standing in the station each containing a charge of dynamite wired ready for explosion. The Turk to whom was entrusted the duty of firing the charge was caught in the act of carrying it out and dispatched before he could accomplish his purpose. They had also managed to blow up a bridge about three miles out so that the railway was of little use to us in the subsequent operations.

The Desert Corps was charged with the duty of taking over the town so that to the D.D.M.S. of that Corps, Colonel Downes, fell the responsibility of the Turkish hospitals. These were found to contain about two hundred wounded and two hundred sick. Some of the latter were convalescent from typhus, but none were in the infectious stage.

Five or six medical officers were captured, mostly Syrian Christians. Some of these made themselves useful in looking after the Turkish patients. Two places had been in use as hospitals, both good modern buildings, one a civilian hospital, the other a town hall. The first of these was allotted to 20th Corps and the latter to the Desert Corps.

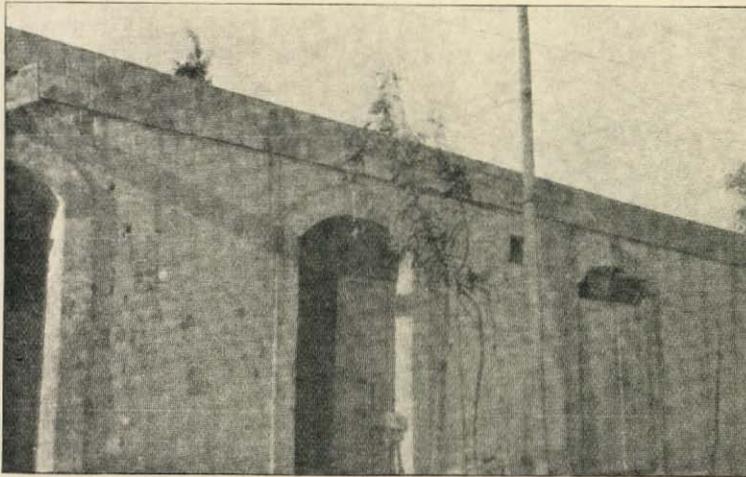
Arrangements were at once made to send up the Immobile Section Groups of the 60th and 74th Divisions from Imara, to take charge of our hospital.

At the same time the 60th Division sanitary section was sent up to take charge of the sanitation of the town. It was in a most filthy condition. The civil inhabitants had been removed some time before, and the place had become horribly insanitary. Filth and flies were everywhere. A thorough house-to-house cleansing of the place was quickly organized; all existing privies were closed down and sealed and a regular system of bucket latrines installed in their place.

I took over responsibility for the town from D.D.M.S., Desert Corps, on the morning of November 2 and at once started the work of evacuating the sick and wounded prisoners, under instructions from the D.M.S. The main dressing stations of the 60th and 74th Divisions outside the defences were practically cleared by the evening of November 1.

Twentieth Corps Headquarters moved into Beersheba on the evening of the 2nd, and occupied the Turkish Governor's house and neighbouring buildings.

Twenty-five years before this, Beersheba was little more than a collection of mud huts. About twelve or thirteen years before the War the Turkish Government in a spasmodic fit of energy had set about developing the place as a centre of government and commerce. Some good buildings had been erected including the hospital and town hall, a post



A.D.M.S.' Office, Beersheba.

office, a governor's house, and a fairly decent hotel under German management. The streets were methodically laid out and there was even a small public garden with a fountain, and a monument erected to commemorate their victories up to date.

During the Turkish advance against the Canal in 1915, Beersheba had been an important centre for the concentration of troops. A metre-gauge railway was constructed, joining it with the Jaffa-Jerusalem line at a place known as Junction Station, about ten miles from Ramleh. The line was subsequently continued south to Auja which had been the starting point for the venture across the desert in 1915 and railhead for all the advances into Sinai during the summer of 1916.

After their defeat at Rafa in January, 1917, and the subsequent abandonment of the Shellal position referred to above, the Turks were in considerable doubt about holding Beersheba; the civil population was

withdrawn, and the town became merely a defensive position. During the summer of 1917 the rails south of Beersheba were removed and used for the construction of a new branch line to Deir Sineid, a few miles north of Gaza.

The real importance of the town now, as in the time of its first mention in history, is its water supply, which is both abundant and of good quality; unlike that found lower in the Wadi the water is quite sweet to taste. One of the wells here is doubtless the very one for which Abraham bargained with Abimelech (Gen. xxi. 31), but there is now quite a group of them and there is nothing to identify the particular one which saved the life of Ishmail nearly four thousand years ago. Some of the wells had been fitted by the Turks with gas engine pumps, others retained the older methods of raising water. Before retreating the Turks had damaged some of the pumps but by no means all, and our engineers were soon in a position to supply from them a large proportion of the big army now in and around the town.

The water supply itself seemed inexhaustible, it was merely the facilities for raising which were inadequate and this made it difficult to supply the whole body of troops and their animals.

Here, as elsewhere, every drop of water was chlorinated before being issued to the troops, a precautionary measure more to avoid contamination in the issue than because of any fear of risk at the source.

In their hasty retreat whether by carelessness or of malice prepense the Turks had left large numbers of hand grenades scattered about the town. These seemed to have an irresistible attraction for some of the Egyptian camel drivers and Labour Corps men. For the first few days of our occupation explosions were constantly taking place and resulted in a considerable number of casualties. In riding about one had to be quite careful to avoid the danger of one's horse treading on a live bomb.

In the original scheme it had been intended to enter upon the next phase of the operation the second or third day after the occupation of Beersheba, but owing to the necessity of building up a sufficient forward reserve of ammunition and supplies and to the fact that a bad *Khamsin* blew steadily for three days, the second stage could not be entered upon until six days after the town had been taken.

In the meantime the 21st Corps had captured the whole of the enemy's first line of trenches at Gaza, from Umbrella Hill on the east edge of the sand dunes, to the sea, and was inflicting heavy casualties on the garrison by a continuous bombardment of the town.

The main objective of the second part of our operation was the water supply at Sheria. This place is on the line from Beersheba to Ramleh and about fifteen miles from Beersheba. It was covered from attack from the South by a strong trench system above Kauwukah.

The defences consisted of the strongly fortified position on high ground close to the Gaza-Beersheba road looking out over the plain between it

and Shellal, and a series of interrupted trenches extending for about a mile and a half on the east side of the railway in continuation of the Kauwukah lines.

In the interval, between the capture of Beersheba and the attack on Kauwukah eventually fixed for November 6, the movements of the various Divisions of the Corps had been as follows:—

The 53rd, on November 1, moved forward to the hills to the East of the Beersheba-Hebron road where they came into touch with the enemy in force and had some severe fighting near Koleh to maintain their position. In this they were assisted by a part of the Desert Mounted Corps who held the Hebron Road.

The 74th moved to a position near Kuweilfeh to the North of the town, where they, too, came into touch with the enemy.

The 60th remained concentrated about two miles North of the town.

The 10th, after the move forward of the 53rd, had taken up a line across the Gaza-Beersheba Road with its right in touch with the 74th and its centre about Irgeig.

The week was a busy one medically. The sick rate was high and the casualties from the 53rd Division, both sick and wounded, were heavy. The route of evacuation from this Division was a bad one. The tracks to Koleh were over loose ground and soon became impassable for motor ambulances. Meanwhile the road from Beersheba to Imara was daily getting worse, though fortunately it never had to be quite abandoned for motor traffic.

The Immobile Sections of the 60th and 74th Division field ambulances arrived at Beersheba on November 2 and took over the Turkish civil hospital as arranged, setting free the other sections of the field ambulances to move forward with their divisions. This hospital received all the 20th Corps casualties and passed them on to the casualty clearing stations at Imara.

For the evacuation at this period, as the motor ambulances were only able to make one journey to Imara and back in the day, it was necessary to make use of motor lorries and even of horse-drawn supply wagons returning empty to the railhead depot. Both the Artillery and the Army Service Corps were called in to help in this matter. For walking cases it proved fairly satisfactory, but an attempt to take stretcher cases slung in the lorries by an improvised method was not a success and had to be abandoned. The columns were too long on the road and the collection and loading of the patients delayed them.

As the supply and ammunition depots had been moved by this time a few miles further forward with the railhead to Karm, it was necessary to transfer patients going by these convoys to train at this point. A detachment of the 10th Division Immobile section was stationed at Karm to feed the convoys and to superintend their transference. For slightly wounded cases the arrangement worked well enough, but the lying down cases arrived cold and exhausted.

On November 4, the 53rd Division was involved in heavy fighting at Kuweilfeh, a high hill on the lower slopes of the Judean range looking out over the plain towards the sea. The Turks, after their withdrawal from Beersheba, had not gone far. They made a big effort to prevent our pushing on by a concentration on these hills, thus threatening our right flank.

The 53rd Division nobly bore the brunt of this counter-attack, and by their stiff resistance and subsequent successful forward movement, enabled the Corps Commander to carry on his preparations for the second stage of the operation without diverting any of the other divisions from the rôles which had been allotted to them.

The hill of Kuweilfeh itself dominated an important group of wells and the effort of the 53rd culminated in a stiff fight for this hill. The battle ebbed and flowed on the crest several times.

When I visited the hill a few days later, the lines of shelter trenches often back to back and the surface of the hill sprinkled with the cartridges of two different pattern rifles, showed clearly how the fortune of war had varied, first one side gaining ground and then the other, during the struggle.

Eventually the hill remained safely in our hands and the commencement of the forward movement of the other divisions relieved the pressure on the 53rd Division who had suffered heavy casualties.

(To be continued.)

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## Current Literature.

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WALLACE, H. L., and SMITH, A. B. *The Effect of Early Tonsillectomy on the Incidence of Acute Rheumatism.* *Edinburgh M. J.* 1936, v. 43, 452-57.

The authors have initiated an investigation into the effect of early tonsillectomy on the subsequent incidence of acute rheumatic infection. The relationship between the faucial tonsils and rheumatic fever has been the subject of much discussion and controversy, since some observers believe them to be the principal source of infection in such cases, and go so far as to regard tonsillitis and recurrent sore throats as actual manifestations of the rheumatic process.

For the purpose of this investigation the authors secured the names of all children subjected to tonsillectomy before the age of 5 years in three hospitals who had no evidence of rheumatic infection. These children, who numbered 403, were carefully followed up and visited. A further series of 574 children, who had been operated upon at a later age, were similarly investigated.

They found that removal of the tonsils in early life failed to prevent the