

A Detachment Egyptian Army Military Works Department (no Royal Engineers being available).

Divisional Train, 1st Australian Division.

The 2nd Battalion New Zealand Rifle Brigade, one Company 15th Sikhs, a detachment of 150 Bikanir Camel Corps with an attached Egyptian Army Machine Gun Section, and one armoured train garrisoned by the 1/10th Gurkha Rifles with two 12½ pdr. guns of the Egyptian Army Artillery, were despatched on the 21st instant to make good the Alexandria-Dabaa Railway and patrol to Moghara Oasis.

The 1/1st North Midland Mounted Brigade, with the Berks Battery Royal Horse Artillery, were sent on the 29th November to preserve order in the Fayum, and on the same date a Squadron of Egyptian Army Cavalry and a detachment of 50 Bikanir Camel Corps occupied the Wadi Natrun.

Finally, to provide for possible contingencies among the Arab population of the Western Behera Province, a Composite Battalion was made up from details of the 29th Division at Alexandria, detachments being despatched to Hosh Isa and Damanhur on December 7th.

By November 23rd concentration was completed, and on the night of the 23rd/24th the first detachments of the 15th Sikhs, under Lieutenant-Colonel J. L. R. Gordon, sailed from Alexandria, arriving at Mersa Matruh the following morning.

The presence of enemy submarines necessitated the sea journey being performed by night only. Moreover, the depth of water over the bar in Matruh Harbour limited the ships immediately available for transporting troops and supplies to six trawlers and two small Coastguard Cruisers. Four additional small steamers were obtained as soon as possible, and a third cruiser was fitted up as a hospital ship.

The mounted troops and transport were assembled at railhead at Dabaa, and an advanced force was sent forward to make good and develop the wells at Abu Gerab, Baggush and Jerawla, which constitute the only watering places on the 85 miles of desert which separate Dabaa from Mersa Matruh. The condition of the wells at the extreme end of the dry season only permitted of two squadrons being passed across at a time.

The concentration of the force at Mersa Matruh, less five squadrons left at railhead on account of insufficiency of water, was completed on December 7th, and on the same date Major-General Wallace moved his headquarters to Matruh.

Meanwhile Sollum post had been evacuated by sea on the afternoon of the 23rd November, such motor cars of the Royal Naval Armoured Car Squadron as could be moved having been dispatched by land previously.

In the evacuation it was unfortunately found necessary to disable and abandon three light Ford cars and the two Egyptian Army 9 c/m Krupp guns, and to abandon an outlying post of one Egyptian officer and fourteen other ranks which failed to reach the beach in time to embark, and were made prisoners.

The garrison of Sollum—strength, British, five officers and twelve other ranks, Egyptian, two officers and ninety other ranks—reached Matruh safely on November 24th.

The evacuation of the posts at Bagbag and Sidi Barrani was effected by land on November

23rd, everything of value being removed, except four light cars at the latter post, which were disabled before abandonment. During the march, and after arrival at Matruh, a number of desertions took place among the Egyptian Coastguard Camel Corps. These desertions amounted in all to twelve native officers, two cadets, and 120 other ranks, the deserters taking with them their arms, equipment, and 176 camels.

A detailed distribution of the Western Frontier Force on the 10th December, and of troops garrisoning districts in the West of Egypt, in which the population was mainly Arab, and therefore likely to be affected by the invasion, is given in Appendix "A" (not printed).

It must be acknowledged that this force, although the best available in Egypt at the moment, was by no means well adapted for the task which lay before it. Regiments and Staffs had been somewhat hastily collected, and were not well known to one another. The Composite Yeomanry Brigade, to give an instance, contained men from twenty or more different regiments. Before a really efficient fighting force could be collected much rearrangement was necessary, with the result that the composition was constantly changing; and it was, in fact, not until the middle of February that the conditions of the Western Frontier Force could be considered really satisfactory.

Moreover, the lack of sufficient and suitable transport made it necessary for General Wallace to withdraw his troops to Matruh after each engagement.

I mention these facts because it should be realised that General Wallace had to overcome many difficulties beyond those caused by the enemy.

On the 11th December the undermentioned force moved out from Mersa Matruh, with orders to disperse a hostile gathering reported in the neighbourhood of Beit Hussein and Ras Um Rakhum, and to reconnoitre towards Unjeila:—

Commander, Lieut.-Colonel J. L. R. Gordon, 15th Sikhs (350 men).

2nd Composite Yeomanry Regiment (three squadrons with three machine-guns).

One section Nottinghamshire Battery, Royal Horse Artillery (Territorial Force).

Detachment Royal Naval Armoured Car Division (six armoured cars, one wireless car).

One section South Midland Field Ambulance, Royal Army Medical Corps (Territorial Force).

Marching at 7 a.m., the force moved westwards by the Coast road, and on reaching Wadi Senaab the cavalry, pushed forward in advance of the column, became engaged with the enemy holding the southern side of the Wadi in considerable strength.

Owing to the bad going marching was difficult, and the infantry were unable to cooperate, but, on the arrival of a reinforcement of a squadron of Australian Light Horse in the afternoon, the enemy were finally driven out of the Wadi with loss estimated at not less than 100 killed and wounded.

Our casualties on this day were one officer and thirteen other ranks killed, and two officers and sixteen other ranks wounded. Among the former I regret to report the death of Lieutenant-Colonel Snow, killed late in the