

Adventures of No. 10 Mountain Battery

Royal Garrison Artillery

As recorded by Gunner Arthur Wood No 126187 Royal Garrison Artillery



Elaine Greensmith has kindly transcribed and made available, for the MLFHS, her father's diary of his 'Adventures of No. 10 Mountain Battery'. It is evident from the transcript that the diary was written up as often as time allowed and placenames are recorded here as they appeared in the diary.

October 1917

When 10 Mountain Battery arrived at Tel el Fara from Kantara on October 17th, 1917, detailed orders were shortly issued for the Battery to proceed into action. The Battery was attached to the 60th Division and prior to leaving Tel el Fara was inspected by General Shea DSOⁱ who expressed the utmost satisfaction with the Battery.

Leaving Tel el Fara on Sat Oct 27th the Battery got into position by 12.30am on Oct 31st outside Beersheba and the guns were entrenched and ready for action before dawn.

These operations were carried out as silently as possible and the whizz and ping of bullets several hundred yards away from the positions, together with lights and frequent shell bursts, was the novel experience of going into action for the first time. The guns were brought off pack without a hitch and both men and mules reached the wagon lines without mishap.

The difficulty of reconnaissance preceding this engagement is well worthy of mention. Whilst lying off Tel el Fara our officers had some 48 miles to cover before reaching the positions and underwent

considerable risk in carrying out their duties, on several occasions being detected by the enemy with hairbreadth escapes.

The march from Tel el Fara was long and tiresome and the wire netting road, especially constructed for the Infantry, was often trespassed upon. The first shells that burst from our guns on the morning of October 31st must have been something of a shock in the Turkish trenches. In the first phase of attack which began at 6am, our guns battered the enemy trenches prior to the taking of hill 1070, whilst later under an intense bombardment in which 20 heavy guns and over 100 field guns and howitzers took part, the infantry attacked the main enemy positions and gained their objectives.

Towards evening the battery advanced to a position behind the infantry outpost line. Firing, however, was not needed and in the evening water was obtained for both men and animals at Beersheba - beyond which the Turks had retreated some 5 miles.

Our 'watering' parade into Beersheba was in itself an inspiring spectacle; all units entering en-masse, exhausted no doubt, but unable to suppress their joy at so neat a strike at the enemy. It can truthfully be said that the success achieved was beyond the most sanguine expectations and troops were congratulated on their good work and endurance by the Commander in Chief.

The Battery was next engaged at Tel es Sheria and as on the previous stint, marching was essentially slow owing to the dust and lack of water. So thick were the clouds of dust that, whilst marching in Battery Column, at close interval, one could only discuss one's own sub section. The strictest discipline had to be enforced in the use of water, and, to combat the dust, handkerchiefs or some other thin fabric were often worn over the mouth. After two days rest at Fara Hill the Battery marched on November 4th about nine miles over broken country to a shallow wadi called "Nallah" where orders were received to join the 74th Division. Good water for the animals was found at Irgeig and on the 6th inst. the Battery marched off at 3am and took up a position at Sheria. The Infantry action started at 5am and the Battery came into action over open ground at 7.15am by which time the infantry had advanced by artillery support. Forty-two shells dropped amongst us but there were no casualties. The Battery was ordered to come into action again at 10.30am, meanwhile the Infantry had advanced on either flank and taken all ground North without opposition. Imagine the surprise, however, when 16 prisoners taken by our O.P. party emerged over the brow of the hill into our gun position. This was another day of successes - considerable enemy territory being gained. Our men were exhausted for want of water owing to the water camels not having returned and leave was asked of Div-HdQrs to remain in the position.

On Friday, November 9th, the Battery marched 14 miles through terrible heat and dust with the 74th Div. of Artillery to Tel el Fara which was reached on November 15th. Both men and animals were exhausted. Two days afterwards orders were received to join the 60th Division at Sheria from whence we marched with the 301st Brigade on direct road to Gaza where heavy rains were encountered. Our guns were taken in draught most of the way, however. Beyond Gaza the journey was exceedingly heavy going, nevertheless the battery covered an average of 12 miles per day.

Latrun was made on Nov 23rd and on the following day we had orders to march with the 179th Brigade to Enab, from thence to proceed to Bidder to join the 52nd Division.

At this stage the Battery gained its first experience of hill climbing, making their first ascent from Latrun to Enab up the Jerusalem main road. From Enab we encountered a rough and narrow track which was totally impossible for wheels - after one and a half hours' rest at Enab the Battery went forward and found the 52nd Division engaged in attack on Eljeb and were ordered to occupy a position on the slopes of Betizzia (?) and assist if possible.

By this time we were getting somewhat apprehensive and fairly well guessed that stiff opposition lay in front of us. The outlook was not the least inviting and the incessant passing of camel ambulances spoke too obviously of bloody combat.

The position before Nebi Samwil was taken up in darkness but, being under enemy observation, a new position had to be found. At this juncture the Battery sustained its first casualties, one man being killed, two wounded and one horse killed by a "fluke" shell burst in the wagon lines.

During the following eleven days we had but one slight casualty: the Sergeant Major receiving a slight bullet wound in the leg. The Turks shelled the position every day. On Thursday, November 29th (fifth day in position) a strong Turkish counter-attack was launched at mid-day. Our artillery replied with an instant bombardment doing considerable damage among the enemy infantry. During the afternoon, ammunition was taken up to our guns under very heavy fire and both men and mules had narrow escapes. It was stated at the time that out of 400 of the enemy's advancing infantry, only about 40 of them returned to their lines. On Friday shell burst were seen on enemy localities and bivouacs.

On Saturday December 1st there was little enemy activity in our sector and all unnecessary animals were sent back to the rear wagon lines at Enab. The day following, the wagon lines at Enab were heavily shelled, eleven mules being killed outright, two had to be shot and one man was slightly wounded.

On the evening of Wednesday, December 5th, the Battery left the position to join the 179th Brigade near Enab and bivouacked two miles down main Jerusalem road.

On Friday December 7th the Firing Battery and ammunitions marched to the N.W. slopes of Soba and bivouacked, the rain falling heavily all day. At 9pm the same evening the Battery marched via newly made tracks across Wadi (Lumarrin?) to Wadi Sura, to a position behind the infantry line of deployment passing alongside a stone wall near Watch Tower overlooking Ain Karim (?). The passage the battery was forced to take on this occasion was truly an example of the usefulness of Mountain Artillery in negotiating narrow tracks deemed almost impossible for a wheel barrow to pass through. Progress was very slow, especially down the steep slopes, where the track had to be made to render the journey possible. A drizzling rain which lasted the greater part of the night made the paths very slippery; in spite of that, our friends the mules kept their feet remarkably well and carried our guns safely across the wadi. Next morning saw us moving forward under heavy sniping fire and enfilade gun fire from the hills on the right flank. Our position was taken up 500 yards in rear of infantry line, the battery being heavily shelled whilst coming into action. Remarkable sangfroid, however, was shown by the men and fortunately only two men were wounded whilst considerable signalling stores were destroyed.

The Observation Party was under very heavy enfilade gunfire which cut the wires continually. Enemy guns on the right were out of range; our fire generally being concentrated on enemy parties in the valley thus repelling counter attacks. Our firing, however, was continually interrupted owing to the wires being cut and the OP showed great courage in repairing same. The enemy had evacuated the second objective during the night and orders were given to join the 181st Brigade and advance with them. Thus commenced our triumphal march into Jerusalem on the morning of Sunday December 9th.

This was a never to be forgotten day. Leaving the scene of our last encounter, we passed the enemy's guns which had opposed us and which had been captured by the 2/16th London Regt. The animals, gunners and drivers lay dead and mutilated, by the sight of them completely smashed up by our artillery. The whole populace lined the streets on our entry into the Holy City. The whole scene was one of 'jubilation' and bore ample testimony to the favour with which British troops were received. After passing through the streets we found the enemy in positions on high ground North of the Western Suburbs and the Battery came into action in front of houses, 20 minutes before any other artillery joined

in. Our guns were fired point blank into the enemy infantry who were driven back and the Heights occupied at about 3pm. Several hundred yards in front of us we could plainly see the Turkish soldiers falling back to the irresistible advance of our infantry. This episode was not confined to our view only, and several civilians (many from house windows) witnessed the last stand of the Turk outside one of the most cherished gems of the Turkish Empire.

After camping for two days just outside the City our position was taken up on the Mount of Olives ridge where considerable damage was done to the enemy in a persistent counter-attack.

On December 14th the Battery marched back through the scene of our recent attack on Jerusalem to a disused church in the village of St. Juan where we found rest and shelter from the rain.

One of the most notable aspects of this village was a beautiful Church signifying the birthplace of St. John the Baptist. At short notice, however, the Battery moved via Soba-Enab and bivouacked behind El.Kubeibah under the direction of the 70th Division, a distance of 9 miles, and received a further order next day to proceed at dusk to Lika, the road being under enemy observation. The Battery finally had to march to Latrun via Enab owing to the road by Nuba being unfitted for wheeled traffic. On arrival the Battery halted near water for the night. Thus commenced our short spell of rest near Latrun and from Dec 18th to 26th we bivouaced at a place called Amwas some two miles from Latrun. Orders were given to advance to operations against high ground North of Jerusalem and to anticipate projected Turkish attack on the 60th and 53rd Division on the Jerusalem Road. Immediately after the animals had returned from water on the evening of December 27th the Battery marched off on either side of Wadi Sad Namah Ridge. Proceeding via Wadi Ain Arik to the junction with Dublin Wadi, the Battery assisted in a further Infantry advance on our second objective via Abu Anein and Keer Skiyan. Very difficult climbing was experienced in this sector and heavily loaded animals often had to negotiate cliff-like lumps of rock a yard high. These obstacles were overcome without mishap however and on the morning of the 28th the Battery did excellent work on Machine Gun Hill on the northern side of Ain Arik Wadi, thus preventing a further Turkish advance along Machine Gun Hill on Southern slopes after the Patrol of the Munster Fusiliers had been driven back by a strong counter-attack. At 11am the Battery supported the 30th Infantry Brigade against second objectives concentrating fire on Archi Hill and on the slopes of Abuaincin advancing to a position at Ain Arik village at 3pm. The battery came into position again at 7pm and supported a further advance of the 30th Infantry Brigade, the forward line being occupied by our infantry without opposition. The following day the left section advanced under the Section Officer (Lt. Lees) and effectively shelled the slopes running North from Ram Allah.

Machine gun emplacements on the hills were smashed and the Turks were seen to hurriedly evacuate. The Right Section of the Battery remained behind to give covering fire at night to forward infantry line. From day to day somewhat precarious encounters ensued but the Turks were observed to be losing heavily, their position being very stubbornly held.

Meanwhile, the Left Section were entrusted to engage a battery firing at our position which was duly silenced. Several of our shells fell directly on an enemy gun emplacement and the detachment were scattered. On Dec 30th the Battery retired to the village of Ain Arik for 36 hours rest.

This rest was much needed as both men and animals were very short of rations. Rain fell heavily all next day and a projected operation against Batn and Harasheh and Sheik Aisa in the early morning of the New Year was cancelled. This was a great relief to all of us for we were wet, cold, hungry and thoroughly exhausted. To add to this discomfort we received but scanty rations owing to the bad road for transport. The mules suffered very much too, a number of them being very lame.

On January 3rd 1918, the Battery marched back to Latrun and a few days later the headquarters of the 9th British Mountain Artillery Brigade arrived.

On February 15th (Friday) the battery left Latrun for Enab and on the following day marched to Jerusalem prior to the first Jericho stint. Leaving our camp on the Bethlehem Road on February 18th the battery joined the 2/14th London Regt in Wadi Elnar and took up a position near Bir Es Sur to cover an infantry attack on El Mumtar. This position was captured with little opposition, however, on the 19th and the next day the battery fired on Jebel Kuhmah in support of the Anzac and later arrived below Jebel Ekteif near Pilgrim Road. This march was very tedious owing to the extreme narrowness of the Wadi and in places the track was barely wide enough and on occasions the side loads had to be taken off the mules in order to pass through. The march (essentially slow) was continued the following day with the 2/14th London to take Neb I Musa. The night march was most uncanny, and this continued echo of tramping feet plainly spoke of three deep and dangerous caverns which yawned in the dense blackness right and left of us, as we traversed the sides of the mountains. (The track very slippery and treacherous ... and the fortitudinous of the Mule brought out).

Daybreak, however, revealed the Turkish evacuation from nearby Ne bi Musa and the approach of the Anzac cavalry from the South. After two hours halt at Ne bi Musa we joined the Anzac mounted division near Jericho and came into position to cover the Turkish Evacuation near exit of Main Wadi from the hills.

Nablus Rummon and Pear Hill. The next few days saw the Battery back in a "rest" at Mar Elias. On Wednesday March 6th the Battery embarked on another stint in the Nablus Sector. Marching back through Jerusalem and arriving at Birch, on the 7th, we marched on the following day to a bivouac and then again on the next day to a bivouac area at Rummon village and later moved off under the escort of the 1st Squadron Australian Light Horse to south of Ta I Yebeh when orders were received to move to the vicinity of Pear Hill and Munster. The Right Section commander (Capt. Wyke?) was sent forward as F.O.O. with the 1/4th Cheshires about to attack the hill in front. Owing to the unsatisfactory view of the Observation Party the F.O.O. had to register and conduct a barrage under which the Infantry advanced and gained their objectives with very few casualties. On this particular instance the F.O.O. was under very heavy machine gun fire and the 1/14th Cheshires expressed great appreciation of the F.O.O.'s work and the consequent effective fire of the Battery. During this encounter one mule was killed by rifle fire and one horse was wounded. Remaining in this position during the night, the battery moved to a forward position at daybreak and put up a very heavy barrage on Rookery Hill whilst the 1/7th Cheshires assaulted and gained considerable ground. The Infantry again thanked the Battery for most effective barrage in silencing the enemy's machine guns.

Sunday March 10th was a day of narrow escapes and not a little confusion. The Battery was ordered to move westward to supply the protection of our Right and accordingly the Battery began to move under Lt. Lees whilst the OC reconnoitered for a more exact position.

Whilst crossing, however, an exposed portion of ground came under the enemy's artillery fire and considerable confusion was created among the animals which scattered down the hillside. Five men and 12 animals were hit. Fortunately, nobody was very seriously injured. Despite this decidedly unpleasant time one of our guns was got into position and registered night lines while the remainder were forced to make a detour and came up in oddments until dark. Next day our guns fired on hills beyond the Wadi El Kola where parties of the enemy were seen to be moving about. The same day (March 11th) the OCs of the 1/4th and 1/7th Cheshires sent forward a recommendation for an immediate award to Lt. Wykes for his very brave conduct whilst acting as F.O.O. Three days later the Battery came out of action, marched back to Birch and from thence to camp at Mar Elias, Ed-Salt-Amman.

On the morning of March 20th, the Battery moved from Mar Elias (the camp on the Bethlehem Road) Tabat-Ed-Dumn (?), via Bethany. Next day we continued the journey to Jericho and at dusk we found ourselves on the great Plain.

After passing through Jericho we marched along in silence, a silence weird and uncanny, rendered all the more so by the insistent croaking of frogs etc. Winding our way along a narrow track we came at last to Wadi Nimrin, our halting place. Here we received order of attachment to the 179th Mounted Brigade.

Next day there was a mail which brought good cheer to most of us and at 11am we accompanied the 179th Brigade to the Wadi Kalt(?) through which ran a wide stream. Here we bivouacked until 10.30am next day.

Saturday the 23rd March saw us crossing the Jordan at Hajlip(?) over the Anzac Bridge. This was very cautiously carried out and we landed across in the nick of time to assist the 179th Brigade to enlarge a bridgehead. Meanwhile the 181st Brigade had succeeded in making a crossing there, so after passing through spasmodic shelling, we found welcome rest for the night two miles south of the New Bridge. On Sunday March 24th the Brigade moved to Wadi Nimrin being detached to support the 2/14th London Regt. in attack. This was accomplished when nearing the foot of the hills where one section of the Battery did excellent work against the retreating enemy. Towards evening we bivouaced in Wadi Arseniget(?) and enjoyed a well-earned rest. At this stage we commenced a long and wearisome march toward Ea Salt all through the day and greater part of the night of the 25th inst. The early morning was fine but towards midday rain commenced to fall. The animals were watered once in the early morning and the loads were taken off but once during the whole march. The steep and dangerous slopes just before making Ea Salt would never be forgotten. In the early hours of the morning we bivouacked just outside Ea Salt. Rain fell in torrents, everyone getting soaked. Next morning heralded a 'Red Letter Day' in the history of Es Salt. Continuous rifle shots sounded ominously near and our entry into the town to "water" was at first fraught with misgivings. Within the town a batch of Turkish Prisoners and several German officers met our gaze. The day previous some 30 German soldiers and four guns, together with miscellaneous pack animals, were captured near the Wadi Arsignet by the London Scottish. On Wednesday March 27th we had a somewhat rude reveille; an enemy plane came quite low and turned his machine guns on the Camp. The machine gunners, however, promptly replied and the plane was driven off without inflicting any casualties. The same day the Battery marched off at 1.30pm to join the 181st Mounted Brigade moving on Amman in support of the Australian Cavalry Division. This was another tiresome march, partly across heavy, marshy land which spoke plainly of the enemy's discomfiture. Some 23 motor transport wagons, over 5 staff motor cars and various other vehicles besides war material fell into our hands. Dead Turks were lying all over the place, some slaughtered by our armoured cars in the very act of retreat through the mud. Others, perchance, were shot down by German officers. Having reached the forward column at dusk, we camped for the night just beyond the village of Swilch(?) and marched off the following morning to the vicinity of Amman which was the scene of a precarious and furious encounter. The 10th Mountain Battery advanced to take up a position north west of the village. ...stopped 1,000 yards down ... beyond the valley in which lay Amman whilst, above the Heights, all observation of the valley was only possible by the F.O.O.

The 22nd and 23rd Regts were ordered to attack from line in front of guns, the two battalions deploying 1,000 yards on our left and right respectively. The main progress of attack was made on Wadi immediately in front on machine guns and trench targets. A Turkish mule corps and Langars were severely drubbed, the infantry attacks being well supported. The day following, March 29th, the enemy's machine guns and trenches suffered badly and our shells were seen to do great damage among the scattered men and animals that fled in disorder. Later in the day our firing was unfortunately limited as

much as possible owing to lack of ammunition and some of our men and mules were sent back some 20 miles to meet the Battery Column. A strong Turkish counter-attack launched the next day caused some anxiety; general expectations were anything but cheerful. However, the Battery heavily bombarded the Citadel spur, but our infantry was unable to proceed owing to the heavy enfilading machine gun fire. Further advance being impossible, orders were issued for the 9th Mountain Artillery Brigade to evacuate the positions. Several batteries of Turkish and German prisoners passed the positions and our objective of cutting the Hedjaz railway was accomplished with some satisfaction. In case of emergency our mules were saddled up ready to move off at 8.30pm and during the small hours of next morning we retired to a position in rear. From this stage began the rearguard fighting with no rations and across dangerous and difficult country, and Easter Morning of 1918 in the cold and drizzly rain was far from pleasant. On Easter Monday the retirement continued under protection of cavalry rearguards down Wadi Es Sir(?). Camels and all superfluous animals were sent on ahead the previous night, and both pack and transports were seriously delayed. Intermittent firing was heard in the direction of the rearguard but the enemy failed to press and finally both 10 and 16 Batteries took up position to cover the final retirement of the whole body. The rear infantry line was somewhat delayed in coming in, owing to the darkness and bad roads, and our guns did not limber up until after 8pm when both Batteries took their places in the rearguard columns. At dusk the enemy's column was seen 10,000 yards to the east but they were apparently unable to move across country in the darkness. From this last position the battery marched undisturbed to Shuriet Nihrin (?), a distance of 25 miles.

A steady march through the night brought us to our destination on the plain. Both men and animals were very exhausted but there were no stragglers. The most difficult thing was to avoid dropping off to sleep whenever the battery halted en route. However, by 6am we were snugly bivouaced on the plain. Later the same day we re-crossed the Jordan with an inexpressible feeling of thankfulness and a fervent hope that we would never need to cross the Jordan again. There were no casualties among our men but four mules were lost. We bade a last farewell to Jericho but alas - some three weeks later we were destined to make yet another raid East of the Jordan. Prior to leaving the Plain however, on the first occasion, our camp was bombed by enemy aeroplanes and only one man was injured (12 Battery badly hit). After trekking from Jericho to Jerusalem in an exhausted condition we reached Mar Elias on April 7th. Here Lieut. M. Lees was recommended for M.C. for his good work as F.O.O. at Amman. Lt. M. Lees was awarded the honour as, also, was Cpl. McLeod awarded the D.C.M.

The following few days were spent in Nablus Sector where each section alternately did good work.

Arthur Wood's records show that he was admitted to hospital on 12.4.18.

April 1918

Reaching Mar Elias again on April 20th one day was spent in "Rest" area as the Brigade marched to Jericho via Bethany and Talist ed Dun, arriving at the plain at 4am on Monday April 29th. We crossed the Jordan to the tune of "One More River to Cross" marching with the 5th Mounted Brigade via Ghoranigh Ford to a concentration area North of Bridgehead. After slight opposition at the foot of the hills, where our cavalry charges were observed to be well carried out, we again marched to Es Salt by a track opposite Aum es Shert and arrived one mile North of the village by 5pm where we halted for the night. The 2nd Mounted Brigade took the hill and reached Es Salt as the column arrived. The Shunit Nimrin position was attacked by the infantry the following morning and 10 Battery marched through Es

Salt to the position to prevent possible Turkish retirement by the main road. Batches of Turks and German prisoners were seen in the town. The inhabitants were not in the least impressed by the entry of British troops on this occasion, most of them have a very sullen, dejected appearance caused, no doubt, by the uncertainty prevailing as to whether the British would be able to hold their ancient city of Moab or not.

The enemy had occupied a position covering bridges near El Howeij and after reconnaissance with the GOC the Battery came into action in a defensive position. The Turks had occupied a very strong position in this sector and the advance of the Worcesters and Sherwood Rangers was unsuccessful owing to the difficulty of the ground. It was well nigh impossible for the cavalry to get a grip on the enemy albeit the Battery shelled every section of the enemy's 4/2 guns on the road and forced a slight retirement.

After shelling the Turks again on Friday May 3rd orders were received to be prepared for immediate retirement.

Apparently, our forces operating on the Right Flank from the Plain failed to make any appreciable advance whilst the Turk was giving considerable trouble in our rear. A night march across country was inevitable and under cover of darkness the hazardous journey was commenced. Up to a certain point it became doubtful whether the Battery would be able to extricate itself and, in actual fact, it was doubted by Unit Commanders whether they would be able to evade capture. The position was positively critical. We were unable to return by way of Es Salt and also unable to advance, being practically surrounded by the enemy. Kind fortune came to the rescue and through the blackness of the night we trekked through the hills until a point of comparative safety was reached. We were terribly short of rations at this time. The Battery marched between the Turkish Forces over trackless and difficult country until the small hours of the morning when the loads were taken off the animals for a couple of hours. Both men and mules were thankful for this brief respite and dawn revealed our original track leading direct to the Plain. The Cavalry were engaged in covering our retreat and, no sound being heard, we thought we were safe from further trouble. However, we had not gone more than a couple of miles when enemy machine guns spat ominously across an open cornfield and, but for the prompt action of the Worcester Yeomanry, the Battery must have suffered injury. Whilst descending the steep and dusty slope on to the Plain the column was shelled in several places where it was exposed to ground some 2,000 to 3,000 yards distant. The last few miles of descent was very bad and the clouds of dust made an excellent target for the enemy. Luckily, we had no casualties though the shelling was incessant. Thus at 9am on Saturday May 4th we reached the foot of the hills in an exhausted condition and reported to the Anzac Division prior to proceeding to a bivouac area near the Jordan Bank. Before leaving the foot of the hills an enemy plane bore down upon us in threatening attitude. We fired a few rifle shots and he retired without retaliating. Later we re-crossed the Jordan and time was found on which to reflect on recent events. Our bivouac area on the Plain, however, was quitted after a brief rest, orders being received for the Battery to be detached from the 9th British Mountain Artillery Brigade and come under the Australian Division for use in the Auja Defenses. The Battery moved several miles up the Plain into a position in front of Auja to cover exit from the hills by Wadis Auja and Bakr, the OC of the Battery assuming command of the Left Section artillery with the 301st Field Artillery Brigade HQ staff. About three weeks were thus spent in the sultry plain, albeit in an excellent spot for a wide stream of good water ran between the gun positions and the wagon lines. Nearly every morning enemy aeroplanes came over and dropped bombs over large areas. On one occasion nine planes passed over the vicinity of our camp and bombs fell very near our bivouacs and mule lines but luckily no damage was done. On May 16th the Right Section of 10 Battery was relieved by a section of 11 Mountain Battery and the following morning the Left Section was relieved in like manner and the Battery marched to Jericho and from thence via Tallast ad Dun to Mar Elias on May 18th.

From June to September the Battery remained in a standing Camp and for the latter half of the time our guns were placed in forward garrison positions, firstly in the position of Rick Hill and secondly in the vicinity of Tel el Sur. The olive trees in our camp at Jufna proved an excellent shelter from the sun as well as cover from the enemy aircraft. The hottest of days thus being spent in comparative comfort. The guns being brought out of their positions on September 13th, the Battery marched off at 6pm to Zerka Wadi where two days were spent prior to being conducted to Wilhelma, utterly oblivious to the magnitude of events which were to follow the first British onset leaving Wilhelma on the evening of Wednesday September 18th, we marched all night, making a detour across the Jaffa Plain until once more we reached the hills. After marching several miles up - Wadi was lined on either side with infantry waiting to get into action - the Battery got into position under cover of darkness. The enemy shelled the positions heavily just before we got in. At daybreak a very heavy bombardment commenced and some 800 prisoners were taken by 10am. Our main fire was concentrated on Kh-Duweir and Observation Hill. At 0'.40 am the Battery advanced down forward slope in full view of the enemy through very intense barrage by 5.9 Howitzers and a number of guns of smaller calibre. Our advance was carried out over exposed ground by two or three mules at a time and but for this precaution the Battery would have fared badly. However, fortune favoured us once more and it was most remarkable that not a man fell to the enemy's gunfire. A dud 5.9 which failed to explode saved several men one of whom had his foot buried by the dirt about two feet from where the shell fell. On this occasion one of our drivers (Proctor) was awarded the MM for remarkable coolness in catching two of his mules which sprang loose from a shell burst whilst Sgt. Major Wilson was also recommended by the CO in assisting to direct the advance of the men and animals. Coming into action again at Mer Kesfa the Battery remained in action until 7am and co-operated with the 1/4th Norfolks in the capture of Oghlu Tepe, and the 1/6th Norfolks in taking Serisa. The Battery then marched to Ras Elain, took off loads and were watered and fed, being joined by rear wagon lines. We then marched to Kalilleh where on the following day (Sep 20th) the Battery joined the 9th Infantry Brigade and marched East all day. The Right Section came into action at Baka and engaged enemy guns and transport being abandoned on the road which fell into our hands. Our next engagement took place at Wadi Es Sunniley, the Battery then having fought and marched for 48 hours without a man falling out. Continuing eastward, "Actions" was again given at Es Suretin and Hill (name in Arabic?) on which the Infantry were held up by machine gun fire and rifle fire which was cleared by our shells. Again successfully engaging the enemy on Saturday Sep 21st, the Cavalry were enabled by our shell fire to occupy Nablus. The next day the Battery moved to a bivouac area near Beitiba which graces the hilltop above the Nablus Road. On the 23rd the GOC of the 9th Infantry Brigade inspected the 9th Mountain Artillery Brigade and congratulated all ranks on their difficult work and endurance on the long and trying marches. The statement was made at the time that some 20,000 prisoners and over 200 guns had been captured during the last few days.

On Tuesday September 24th the Battery marched off at 1pm, watered and fed at Fendakuniyeh and continued the night march arriving at Jenin at 6am. (This was the record march of the Battery). Here we enjoyed a few hours rest together with tea and rum and continued the march via El Afule to Nazareth a distance of 50 miles from the scene of our last encounter. El Afule is situated in the centre of the plain of Armageddon through which the main Turkish railway runs to the port of Haifa. Looking northwards Nazareth is found nestling among the hills some nine miles away. So swift was the advance of the British Cavalry and onwards towards Damascus that a Turkish aeroplane alighted near the aerodrome quite unaware that the place had been captured hours ago. The steep and winding road up to Nazareth was covered with enemy transport wagons, staff motor cars and all manner of vehicles which had been bombed to pieces by our aeroplanes. There can be no doubt that our aircraft completely shattered the enemy's retreat to such an extent that practically all his material was abandoned on the road.

On Friday the 27th the Battery continued the march through Kefr Kama to Senaka on the southern shores of the Sea of Galilee. It must be remembered that through this very trying period from September 13th to the 28th the Battery was very short handed. Not a man fell out, however, and a number of men who were excused duty through sickness plodded along with the Battery until the ultimate objective of cutting off the retreating enemy was achieved. On arrival at Senaka the OC of the Battery congratulated the men on the splendid spirit they had shown during the whole of the advance.

Thus a few days rest near the Jordan where it emerges from the Sea of Galilee proved very refreshing, bathing in the Holy River being very popular. On October 2nd the Battery marched back to Kefr Kama and from thence to El Afule via Mount Tabor which was reached on October 4th. Two days later we marched back to Nazareth.

The Brigade occupied an orphanage building where BSM Wilson was awarded the DCM. At Nazareth the Battery had the misfortune to lose a number of men through fever and consequently on October 24th the Battery embarked on the long trek back to Ludd, each man having to take charge of from three to five animals. The guns were conveyed by motor lorry it being impossible to move otherwise. Large numbers of men were also taken down by motor lorry and Ludd was reached on November 3rd. Here a decent camp was provided. Late in the afternoon of November 11th the news reached us that Germany had signed the Armistice. To celebrate the occasion every man got a bottle of beer "Backshush". Blank charges were fired from the guns and Capt. Jeffereys delivered a short speech. Three cheers were given for Major Campbell, the officers, and the boys who stuck it.

Army records show that Arthur Wood was again admitted to hospital 28/11/18 and appears to have rejoined "GBD" at Kantara 18/12/18. This would tally with a note he put in the margin of a picture in a cedarwood covered book of pictures of Jerusalem stating "this is where I was in hospital for three weeks".

After the Armistice

From Medjilaya to Rayak

Monday June 9th (1919), Reveille 3.30am, loading up of Camels etc. Sixty camels engaged. Breakfast 5.30am. Move off 7.30. Gunners marching with full pack and Rifle, in spite of the fact the General had said to take things easy. After trying march, reach Cybil 12.30 noon. Visit to the village at night (natives' revelations about the Turks).

Tuesday June 10th Reveille 3.30am. Breakfast 5am. Move off 6.15am. Terrible trying march. Climbing the steep rugged paths of the Lebanons. No rifle today Thank God. After interminable marching reach Becharri, march of 20 miles at least. A disgrace to the Army of Occupation and reflects very little to the credit of Colonel Tancock who is leading us. He never seems to think the men may be tired. No sooner in Camp than warned for Guard. This is how they treat Tommy after doing his bit. It is now 5.30pm and we have had absolutely nothing to eat since 5am. The officers are all right of course, plenty sandwiches in their capacious pockets. We are encamped on the road just a little beyond Becharri.

Wednesday June 11th. Reveille 5am. Considerable delay in moving off today. Camels precede us up the precarious mountain track overlooking Becharri. Strenuous climbing experienced. We reach the

Cedars of Lebanon. Only a clump of trees about 200 yds square, with a wall surrounding it. All that is left of these. We halt here for a drink of tea. Leaving the camels behind we proceed to climb one of the highest peaks. Bitterly cold. Great banks of snow. Actually snowballing one another with Sun Helmets on. Right down the other side to a village, called "Inatta" at 6pm. (Just after climbing the heights overlooking Becharri, the view obtained is very memorable indeed. Far below the great gorge or ravine can be seen. While on the slopes of the mountains little villages with their red tiled houses are dotted here and there.)

Awkward situation arises here. Men's kit is on the camels. We get word that there is no possible chance of the camels getting through tonight. Sleep in the village Church. Bitterly cold night. No rations again and no prospect of any until tomorrow. Camels stuck on the mountains. Arrangements altogether deplorable. Officers with the wind up. They fetch a bottle of whisky for each sub-section.

Thursday June 12th. Forced to stay here today. Camels get into the camp about 11am today. Bread, milk and cheese very plentiful in this village - a good thing for the men. We had actually nothing for breakfast this morning. The men with the camels spent a very trying night up on the mountains. Luckily, they had plenty of blankets at their disposal, having all our kits beside them. Despite this they could not sleep for cold. One camel perished, while several of the native drivers were in a state of partial collapse. Numbers 13 and 17 Batteries arrived about 4pm today, some of their mules being in a very exhausted condition. These Batteries succeeded in getting their camels into camp the same night. This was due to the fact that they had left Becchari much earlier in the morning than what we did. We went into the village again tonight where wine, hot milk, bread and cheese could be obtained very plentifully. We were quite astonished to come across a Singer sewing machine in one of the houses in excellent condition. We slept outside tonight, our kit having come in on the camels, bitterly cold however.

Friday June 13th. Reveille at 3.30am. Move off 6am. Reach village at foot of hills at 9.15. Here we have a cup of tea prior to trekking across the Plain. Move off again 11am. Very trying march cross the Plain to Badbik, which we reach at 3.30 in the afternoon. We have marched at least 18 miles today. One thing we Gunners in 11th Battery particularly noticed today was this: the Gunners in 13 and 17 Batteries marched in shirt sleeves with absolutely nothing [no kit] on, while we marched with tunics on, also carrying haversack, water bottle, mess tin, rifle and bandolier. This, we were told, was Colonel Tancock's orders. Too tired to go into Badbik tonight.

Saturday June 14th. Out on pass today. Visit ruins (one of the Seven Wonders). Before doing so we had several up-to-date Ice creams and lemon served to us at shop in the village at 6d a time. This ice cream vendor shows great enterprise fetching quantities of snow from the Lebanon mountains wrapped up in grass and sacking.

The Historical Ruins

These famous ruins are all that is left of what must have been, at one time, one of the finest structures in the world. Our guide informed us that they were built shortly after time of Christ, but we very much doubt this statement. This huge building was partly built by Romans and Arabs.? have been clustered together. Three huge Temples, called Temple of Jupiter, God of, Temple of Venus, God of Love, Temple of Bacchus God of Badbik must have been at one time the seat of Idolatory. Our guide having unlocked the Gate, we proceed up stone steps which the guide informed us were built by the Kaiser 15 years ago. They are built right upon the original steps which gave entrance to the Amphitheatre Arena in the centre of the Amphitheatre. Court of altars: in this court of altars there are

250 niches, each of which at one time contained an idol representing a different god, for example fire, water, etc. The Germans 15 years ago took away all the statues and altars and they are now in Berlin. Inside the Court of Altars there are broken columns and stonework lying all over the place. Some of the carving is very beautiful indeed, and one doubts whether our sculptors of today could equal their ancient predecessors in skill and finish. The workmanship is absolutely beyond all reproach and perfect in very detail. A column of solid granite was lying in the court at least 25ft long unbroken. Remains of a fountain in centre of court, also basins where intending worshippers washed their hands. We came across one column (stone) 7ft in diameter belonging to Temple of Jupiter (where they killed the beast, channel where the blood flowed). [Also,] the type of catapult used in destroying the Buildings, about 2ft in diameter.

In the Temple of Jupiter there were 58 pillars altogether (diagram illustrating position. 17.12.17.12). Six Pillars remain standing (not granite). German excavations. In front of Temple of Jupiter are Gardens of Badbik, in the distance stand the Turkish Barracks, staircase leading down to the Gardens. Quarries in the distance where they obtained the stone. The Railway Station is in the Garden of Badbik. Columns that remain standing about 60ft high most of them in three parts. Although granite column mentioned already was in one solid piece. We came across another stone here 30ft long 14ft wide. The Temple of Bacchus is in a better state of preservation than Jupiter. It has 44 columns, stonework very fine and smooth. The work on underside of roof marvellous. Mother of Bacchus with Son cut out in solid rock. Germans pay 6,000 Francs to replace centre stone which had slipped down about 6ft. Carving representing wheat, clusters of flowers, leaves of all kind. The staircase of Temple of Bacchus 90 steps took us up to the top. Standing on the top of the stone that the Germans replaced. We did not enter Temple of Venus.

The Large Stone

In the South West of Badbik there is a very large stone weighing 1,000 tons. The story is told that when they were building the Badbid Temple it was intended that this stone should be one of the main foundations of the buildings, but they were unable to remove it.

Sunday June 10th. Still at Badbik. Badbik seems to be a very well provisioned place. Bread, Milk, eggs, tomatoes (Mish Mish) Apricots etc. being very plentiful. Hot Milk served to us at Reveille by one of the natives. Piastra a time. 5/- for a bivouac sheet, (several go west).

Monday June 16th. Reveille 3am. Move off 5.30am. Guns in draft. Cover 12 miles, arrive camp 9.30. Very smart march. Easy day.

Tuesday June 17th Reveille 3.30. Move off 6am. Easy march to Rayak. Reach this railway centre at 9.30. Encamp on what used to be one of Johnnie Turk's "Dumps". Two hours after arrival disaster overtook us. One of 13 Battery mules trod on a live bomb. Two Indians severely wounded and 7 mules, one of which had to be shot. Next few days spent in searching for bombs, hand grenades etc.

Cybal

One of the natives told us, while not forcing the Lebanon men to participate in the fighting, [the enemy] kept all foodstuff from entering the villages, and at the Port of Beirut everything addressed to the Lebanonitis was subjected to a strict search, all firearms being appropriated while anything in the nature

of foodstuffs, two thirds or more was invariably kept for their own men. It was a common thing for 5,000 Turks to desert in a single day. Before the war, 9lbs sugar for 1/-. During the war same for over 40/- (200 piastra). Emperor of Germany would not consent(?) to the Turk forcing them to fight.

This is where the diary appears to end although some pages had been torn out of the notebook. At some stage during his service his number changed to 3301895 – it is not clear exactly when this happened.

Arthur Wood

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Please direct any queries or communications to MLFHS.

ⁱ Major General J.S.M. Shea