THE EXPERIENCES of a

YEOMAN

Philip Campion 1919

Philip Campion,
The Homestead
Bugbrooke
Northamptonshire 1919

THE EXPERIENCES OF A YEOMAN, 1914 - 1918

We will look back to the summer of 1914 when we were all peacefully carrying on at our various occupations. Practically all blissfully ignorant of circumstances which eventually brought about the war. We had been warned, notably by the late Field Marshall Lord Roberts, that there was danger in our country by the preparations for aggression by Germany, but not heeding these warnings and being more or less content with our own possessions, the Great War burst upon us. We relied on our Fleet for protection, and never was there a better investment, for after all it was the deciding factor in that game, and our army though small, was of first class fighting material. We can afford to smile now, at our ideas of that time, our absolute ignorance of modern military conditions, and the great question seemed to be, "would the war be over by Christmas?" - we are much wiser now.

Well, I suppose I was animated with the same spirit by which the first 100,000 joined Kitchener's Army, and decided that if the war continued, I would enlist, and, hearing from some friends in Rugby who were in a like frame of mind, I resolved to see the last load of corn of that harvest to the rick, and then join them. (If I remember rightly I first broached the subject to my father, as the last field was being carried, and received no opposition.)

On arriving at Rugby, I found that our party consisted of six; two of these being particular friends of mine, and the others, their cousins. On setting out for the recruiting depot at Rugby, our only idea was that we should join the cavalry. I suppose it seemed more exciting, and riding appealed to us more than walking. To our great disappointment recruiting for the regular cavalry regiments had ceased for the time being, so we turned our backs on Rugby, and set out for Warwick to join that county's Yeomanry Regiment. This venture was more successful. On our arrival at Warwick railway station, cars were waiting to take would-be soldiers to their quarters.

On reaching them with very little delay, we were taken before Col. Charteris and Lord Willoughby-de-Broke, who tested us in riding. The horse that had passed hundreds into the Warwickshire Yeomanry was fetched out of his stable, and in turn we mounted and rode up the road and back. The horse knew the spot where he was supposed to turn back, and as he did this rather quickly, it was at this period that would-be Yeomen of uncertain seat found themselves affectionately embracing the animal instead of sitting erect on its back. We succeeded on satisfying His Lordship in this respect, and after a few questions, such as, "What pack of hounds do you hunt with?" we passed on to the doctor for examination. I regret that on acquainting His Lordship with the fact that I hunted with the Grafton, I omitted to say it was on foot. The doctor passed us all and the next business was to be sworn in; this was done by each holding the edge of a Bible, and repeating a few words in which H.M. the King took over our services.

As you may know, Yeomanry is territorial cavalry, whose terms of service are Home Service unless volunteering for service abroad in time of war. At the outbreak of war Yeomanry en-masse volunteered, and recruits were needed to take the places of those, mostly married men, who did not feel it their duty at that time, to do so.

After a week's leave, on returning to Warwick, our party was billeted at a Public House called "The Black Horse", a filthy hole, of which the less said the better. We soon commenced training in earnest; today we would call it very amateur, but we were keen and took in all our instructors had to tell us, at that time. Khaki clothing was scace and most of us damaged a suit of clothes with greasy rifles and riding, but it arrived at last and great was our joy, but not half so great as the time when we put it by. Like most army clothing it fitted where it touched, many tunics resembling Eton jackets when worn, a somewhat short cut in the rear, and if anyone is desirous of wearing puttees I would advise that the first time he attempts to put them on, he should go to some quiet secluded spot and there wrestle. The regiment at this time were moving from one place to another, mostly in East Anglia, until they finally arrived at Newbury, and camped on the famous race course, but needing men to make them up to full strength, drafts were required from Warwick, and great was the competition to get on one. Men who had seen service before were chosen for the first draft, but by dint of special pleading in the right quarter, three of my friends and I were selected for the next.

If at any time the Germans could have landed in England, this was their opportunity, and the Warwickshire Yeomanry with several other Yeomanry regiments, took up their positions on the East Coast, our particular line being from Sheringham to Cromer. Now we were getting towards the end of 1914, and I well remember the bitterly cold nights spent on the edge of the cliffs, the spies we thought we saw; one fellow stuck his bayonet into a sandbox on the golf links. Our regiment next moved in December to three villages close to Norwich: our squadron being billeted in an old disused papermill at Taverham, such a billet afterwards was considered absolutely unfit for human habitation, but we were still keen, and did not consider such discomforts.

Before going further, I will give you a rough composition of a Cavalry Regiment. At full strength it is about 400, men and horses. It is made up of three squadrons of about 130, and each squadron consists of four troops, strength about 32, and each troop has four sections of 8 men and horses. Continuing training, we came to the first Christmas of the war, and if you will pardon the expression, there was a considerable "wind up" at the time, all Christmas Eve we slept on the straw by our horses which were saddled up and ready to move if necessary. As everyone knows, the Germans did not trouble us; I believe the difficulties and risks were far too great to ever permit a successful landing on our shores.

The next three months we spent in training, always amidst rumours of going to France or elsewhere, which never came off, until the beginning of April, when men and horses were brought up to full strength, every man fitted out for battle to the last button and toothbrush.

On April 8th we found ourselves mounted with full marching order, ready to march to Norwich, and entrain for where we did not know. I should like to say a word about "marching order". When a cavalry man is in that happy state, he feels like a trussed fowl, he is carrying a haversack with his rations, and 101 other things, a water bottle, about 150 rounds of ammunition, belt and bayonet, no gas masks in those days, and the horse is adorned with his own rations, a sword, rifle, water bucket, ropes, pegs, blankets, overcoats, pouches with grooming brushes, etc. We assembled at the crossroads at Taverham, the villagers and many other friends had come to bid us farewell. On our march to Norwich station to entrain, I remember feeling that we had made our first move into the great unknown. What did lie before us? We knew that we were going East, but that was all, our adventurous spirits were roused to great expectations.

Entraining a cavalry regiment is no sinecure, boxing horses and stowing accoutrements and equipment, but it was eventually accomplished and in the evening we glided out of the station. We travelled all night by a roundabout route to Avonmouth Docks. It was rather a striking incidence of the journey that I should happen to wake during a stop of the train at no less a place than Northamptob station, so my thoughts had not then far to travel. The next business at the docks was to load the horses onto the transport ship. This is done by leading the horses into an enclosed gangway leading to the top deck of the ship, a touch of the whip and up they go by themselves. Someone at the top catches hold of them, and leads them to their alloted standing. The horses are packed close together all round the sides of each deck: they can never move many inches during the whole voyage, and of course lying down is out of the question.

Before leaving Taverham each man had been allotted his task for the voyage. I was one of those whose duty it was to go on the horse boat and help attend to the horses, six each, so the majority of the regiment went free from care on another vessel - the 'Saturnia'. Ours was a Wilson liner - the 'Wayfarer'. The rest of our division were doing likewise on other vessels. All this was very novel, most of us having never seen a liner before, so we were somewhat awed by their hugeness. One by one our ships set sail, not in convoys as afterwards obtained, but singly. The 'Wayfarer' was one of the first, and I remember feeling very impressed as we glided out of the docks and down the estuary of the river Severn, waving farewells to England's shores. We had not gone far when the sea became very rough, and several of our fellows began to look decidedly unhappy, caused by that troublous malady known as sea-sickness. Then the work began in earnest, some of the fellows were so ill that they could not work, those of us who could had to pitch into it, about a dozen horses each to feed with bran, oats, hay, water, besides cleaing out. This was about the time that the German submarines were making their entrance into the war, so we had to squeeze in one boat drill to have some idea what to do in case of emergency. My boat was No. 6 port-side and

we were shown how to adjust our life-belts and where they were kept. We had reached a spot about 70 miles south of the Scilly Isles, the sea was rough, and I had gone below to try to get some sleep. I had about managed it when an explosion struck the ship. We all made haste on to the deck and got hold of a life belt.

The explosion completely wrecked our wireless set, but most fortunately for us, two other ships were in sight, which 'Wayfarer' called up with her siren, a deep throated appeal for help thrown across the sea. How anxiously we watched those ships to see if they had heard, and what a relief when we saw them turn and put on full speed in our direction.

Although our party for No. 6 boat quickly got into position on deck we were not quick enough for some of the crew - they, with their first thought for their own skins had lowered the boat and got in and were pulling away, leaving us high and dry on the top deck, and the vessel rapidly settling down in the water.

We quickly divided ourselves amongst the remaining boats, one by one were lowered, and pulled for the nearer of the two vessels racing to the rescue. This was the tramp steamer "Framfield". How a life boat on a rough sea is very much at the mercy of the waves, but by dint of hard work in rowing and baling out water, and much cheery optimism, we safely reached its side and hauled ourselves up.

All but those who were drowned by a boat capsizing, or killed by the explosion, were now on board, the Captain and his officers had also left the "Wayfarer", when it appeared that it was no longer sinking. The Captain turned his boat and went on board again to re-examine the damage. After a while we saw his boat again making for the "Framfield", but without the Captain. I had missed one of my friends and given him up for lost, but it was he they were bringing, having found him unconscious under a lot of trusses of hay, with only his hand sticking out. We took him below and attended to his injuries. He had had a terrible time, periodically regaining consciousness, and realising his awful predicament, then swooning again. The second ship, the "Newlyn", had now come up and the "Wayfarer" having decided not to go down, had to be towed to harbour at Queenstown. The "Framfield" being the first on the scene, claimed that job and of course the reward attached, so we all had to get into the life-boats again and board the "Newlyn". Pte Brooks p13

What about the horses all this time? Some I believe were drowned on the lower decks, but most of them were alright and wanted feeding, so we all lined up on the deck of the "Newlyn" and seven men taken from the end of each rank to go back to the "Wayfarer" and look after the horses on her journey to Queenstown. The "Newlyn" now turned her bow towards Falmouth; we had very little clothing on, but a good cook soon produced something hot, which we much enjoyed. I would like to record the fact that at exactly the same time that this incident was happening, our friends in Rugby, knowing we were on the sea, at the Sunday School sang the well-known hymn "Eternal Father, strong to save" perhaps we owe our presence here today to the answering of that prayer.

Next morning found us in sight of the Cornish Coast, and a small boat took us ashore. The 7th Royal Fusiliers took us in charge gave us a billet, and after a meal we set out just as we were, very scantily attired to parade the town. The people were very kind and newspapers wanted reports of the affair. Unfortunately the papers that evening reported the "Wayfarer" as sunk, and as I did not wire home until next morning, it appeared that my period of service had been cut short. I do not know to this day whether a torpedo or an infernal machine secreted in the hay caused the explosion, evidently the hay and bran swelling stopped up the hole made, sufficiently to beach her at Queenstown, south of Ireland. We stayed at Falmouth for three weeks, during which time we were again clothed, but received no leave. Entrained for Devonport, and again after a few days there we boarded the "Lake Manitoba" to try our luck on the ocean again.

This time some destroyers of the L Class escorted us several miles from land and then returned. Our voyage out to Alexandria was uneventful, but very interesting to us. After going through the Bay of Biscay and rounding the Portugese coast, our first stop was at Gibraltar, we were not allowed to land of course, but we had a magnificient view of the wonderful rock resembling a huge lion commanding the straits to the Algerian coast, which we could see with its white houses shimmering in the sun. Three more days sail, and we reached Malta; here our ship took in coal, great barges came alongside and scores of natives with baskets soon transferred it. I believe it was here that we heard of the sinking of the "Lusitania" and the first Gallipoli landing of the 25th April. I remember that the day spent in the harbour was a Sunday and at the Service our Padre mentioned the landing of Paul on Melita, which was of course Malta, and his experience with the serpents.

Three or four more days brought us within sight of Alexandria, the second largest town of Egypt, and where we were to land. One does not forget the first impression of the long flat coastline shining in the sun, the great town nestling among the palms, a wonderful galaxy of brilliant colours. After steaming about waiting outside for orders to proceed to harbour, during which time it was usual for ships to become the prey of submarines, we slowly went forward to the land of the Pharoahs. When still closer a sailing vessel brought out a pilot, the first Egyptian we had seen, with his fez, the curious red headgear shaped like a saucepan.

Very very slowly the propellers of our vessel turned as we entered the actual harbour, one of the finest in the world, and took our place alongside the quay where hundreds of other vessels of all descriptions were moored. The rest of our Division had arrived quite safely about three weeks before, so a few of the troops were allowed to come down to welcome us. After staying the night on board we unloaded and joined the regiment at Chatley's a suburb of Alexandria. All were anxious to hear of our experiences on the "Wayfarer", and took us down town for a downright good feed, etc., to celebrate the occasion. Being situated by the sea, Alexandria is more Europeanised than Cairo, the capital of Egypt, its best quarters are quite Parisian, it has magnificient gardens, but its

lower quarters are, to say the least, among the filthiest places under the sun. Mothers of soldier sons would have far greater dread of these places than of shell swept trenches, if aware of them. One meets people of all nationalities, indeed it must rank among the most cosmopolitan cities of the world.

I must refrain from much description of Egypt, and keep to that which directly concerns our movements during the time out there. There we were, a cavalry regiment with no horses. These were soon provided by drafts from Australia, and our duty now was to train them as soon as possible in the way they should go. They were the rawest of raw material, and great was the fun and great was the fall of many of us, from the backs of these lean quadrupeds which afterwards proved such good and reliable mounts. They were better able to stand a gruelling days work on the desert than the English horses.

All this time the Gallipoli campaign was going on, and many were the rumours of our moving in that direction. In these days we were still keen to get at 'em: in fact several of our fellows tried to get transfers to other regiments engaged there. Our brigade of three regiments consisted of the Warwicks., Worcesters and Gloucesters. I remember the General Commander, Brig. General Wiggin delivering a speech to us, in which he urged us to stick to the ship, and we would have our chance soon. The first three weeks in Egypt is a trying time for Europeans, besides being sore on face and hands, one's organs become somewhat disorganised, and many of us lost a stone or two in weight before becoming fully acclimatised. As we were part of the Egyptian Army of Occupation, we had many and various other duties to perform other than train horses, in the way of "guards" and "fatigues". Every soldier knows the meaning of going on "Fatigue". Perhaps you have heard the story of the Sergeant who, one morning on calling the roll of a squad of recruits, kept calling for one "Montage", with no answer until a small voice in the rear was heard to say, "Do you mean me, Sergeant?" "Yes", he said, "Of course I do, and you can now go on fatigue!"

Our guards consisted of Government property in general. One I used to like to get on was the residence of the High Commissioner, General Sir J. Maxwell. One of the posts was done in company with a native policeman and we whiled away the hot hours by him trying to teach me the Arabic language.

Very suddenly one day we were issued with infantry equipment and generally decked out for Gallipoli with the rest of our division. Horses were left in charge of the shoeing smiths and a number of natives, while we donned "marching order", and in the boiling sun with the temperature at 110° in the shade, marched to the docks and boarded the Cunard liner "Ascania". Three days sailing brought us to the base of operations at Lemnos, the harbour of the island of Mudros, the last part of this voyage through the Grecian Archipelago which is very enchanting with small islands dotted here and there with their green slopes, clusters of white houses, this with the setting of Mediterranean blue made a fine picture. That great disaster of the sinking of the "Royal Edward", when so many lives were lost, happened just in front of us, which

rather spoiled the picture. In Lemnos harbour all was bustle, great ships by the score were there lading or unloading. After one night on board we transferred to the battleship "Doris" which was to take us to the peninsular.

We have now come to the beginning of August 1915, the Suvla Bay landing had just been made: we were the reinforcements to help push the Turk finally off his perch on the Pen. Late that night our ship weighed anchor and started on the forty mile trip. We were packed like sardines, hardly a nook or cranny where a soldier had not laid himself down to try to sleep. This was our first close contact with the men of the British Navy and we rated them very good fellows. The heat became stifling and they made us gallons of tea. I managed to sleep most of the way I remember, and did not wake until early next morning, when on looking round I saw Cape Hellas to starboard, the southernmost point of the Pen. where our gallant 29th Division made such a glorious landing. Continuing our course N.E. and passing Anzac Cove, the landing place of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corp., as the name implies, we spied farther along the coast a small bay with battleships at anchor. This we were soon to know was the famous Suvla Bay where we were to land and have our first taste of the Turk, in addition to the various missiles he threw about.

The Pen. does not look very inviting from the sea. I should describe it as having a certain rough magnificience, in some places flat from the sea for several miles, then rising to those great hills, our unobtained objective in many a hard-fought battle, to slope suddenly down to the waters of the Straits on the other side. The Pen. at its widest part is only about twelve miles across, so you will now have an idea, if somewhat vague, of the country we found ourselves in. When it was quite daylight we drew into the Bay and prepared to disembark. Armoured barges came alongside, into which we jumped and then made for the shore. At this time the Turk's front line of trenches was about three or four miles inland, which doesn't count for much in present day warfare, and although we were fortunate enough to land without being shelled, we were not ashore many minutes before we received our baptism of fire. This is where one's keeness for battle receives its death blow, but where a grim determination sets in, to see the thing through come what may.

Of course, if the Turks had any artillery worth speaking of, the various landings on the Pen. could never have been made; what they had made things sufficiently uncomfortable. Next we were marched on to a slope of a hill near by, and finding no cover, we set to and dug ourselves in. What hard digging it was! but having good cause to get out of sight we stuck at it until some sort of covering was made. We stayed there three or four days, during which we assisted in the making of roads, and joined in the general scramble for precious water. I hope never again to experience that craving for water, which many times was ours in this and the succeeding years of the war, when the lips swell and the tongue clings to the roof of the mouth, when the one object in life seems to be "a cup of cold water". When we found time, we went down to the shore for a bathe, and incidentally got mixed up in the barbed wire placed under the water to prevent the landing. We had a few casualties here, then received orders to move two miles further along the coast to a hill called "Lala Baba"; this of course was done at night. This was August 20th, and the next day was to be our first experience of action, the words Shakespeare puts

into the mouth of Henry V before the battle of Agincourt occurred to me:-

"And now sits expectation in the air,
And silken dalliance in the wardrobe lies,
In peace there's nothing so becomes a man
As honest stillness and humility,
But when the blast of war blows in his ear, etc."

Tomorrow arrived, there was to be another great effort of Sir Ian Hamilton to drive back the Turk and that morning we spent in getting hold of some water rations, and each man carried a pick or shovel, many of these shovels had holes through them at the end of the day. I do not remember the time our front line commenced their advance, but it was our duty to march from the coast to a part in the line in front of Chocolate Hill; to get there the route lay across a dry salt lake, absolutely open country, we were indeed meant to draw the enemy's artillery fire from the front line advance. At 3.00 o'clock we set off, the whole Warwicks. Yeoman Division leading the way in "line of troop columns", a splendid target. Their guns let us get about half a mile across before dropping their range-finding shells. Then the fun began; a terrific barrage of shrapnel was put up, which seemed impossible to get through alive, but Sir Ian Hamilton was good enough to write in his dispatch that "the march was as if on parade". p.32.

Brig. General Wiggan marched in front with his walking stick, and set a fine example. Our comrades were falling all round us. Two miles of this, then those who remained gained the first shelter, Chocolate Hill, the roll called and breathing time before the next advance.

The roar of guns and musketry was intense; we now pressed on to assist more closely in the real push, but the day had gone badly for England, lack of men and munitions and unprecedented difficulties of the country had told their tale. When we reached what had been the front line, we were ordered to stay there, as our men had only advanced a few hundred yards, and prepare to meet the Turks' counter attack. This never came, they were as exhausted as our men, so after waiting most of the night, which seemed a rather long nightmare, the cries of the wounded, many lay in burning gorse bushes, their ammunition exploding, and not being allowed to leave the trench to go to their assistance, we then returned to Lala Baba, and our front line men retired to the trenches we left.

After a few days we marched by night, this time to Chocolate Hill, and there dug ourselves in for three weeks before relieving the Dublin and Munster Fusiliers in the front line to the right of Chocolate Hill. Our first spell of this was three weeks, three or four hundred yards from the Turks' line. Nothing very exciting happened, except losing a few men shot by snipers who made themselves nests in trees, but with some systematic straffing these were got rid of. But what was most unfortunate, our numbers began to dwindle through sickness, mostly dysentry, owing to the dirty conditions, lack of water, jaundice, enteric fever and absolute exhaustion through digging to improve the trenches. Continuous periods of sentry duty, having very little sleep at all, this with the killed and wounded, before long brought our regiment to a mere skeleton of its' former self. No such thing as reinforcements now, as men were wanted in France. Thus, as was done in more than one Eastern campaign, the War Office underestimated the strength of the Turk, and the difficulties of the country on which he had to be attacked.

I had managed to keep fit so far, but on going back to rest trenches for a supposed rest, was compelled to give in to dysentry. Very clearly I remember our Medical Officer directing me to the clearing station on the beach and my farewells to the few who were left. Never have two miles seemed so far. I wished I had told the M.O. that I could not walk. However, by going a few yards, then resting, I eventually reached the beach. There I was allowed some tinned milk, and then travelled to one of the hospital ships which always laid close in.

Thus I left Gallipoli after seven weeks of it, a short time before the actual evacuation. What a ghastly failure the campaign had been, with more men and munitions the war might have been shorter by years. However, the Russian front was relieved somewhat by our pressure. This is a meagre outline of our life on Gallipoli, but time is not sufficient for more detail as regards the part taken by the Navy and Air Force.

On board the hospital ship we found real English nurses, had a real bath, and got into a real bed. Our vessel was the Castle liner, "Glenart Castle". Our first thought was our destination, but we soon discovered that our general course was S.W. and hopes ran high for England. It was too much to expect, and after three days uneventful voyage, steamed into the Grand Harbour of Malta. Soon conveyances took us to various hospitals all over the island, myself at St David's, not a great distance from Valetta, the principle town of the island. My ward was a large marquee with twelve beds, one of these I was thankful to get into. Doctor came round and examined us. My face fell when put onto "no diet", which means plain milk and nothing to eat, the stronger patients had chicken and other delicacies. Three weeks of this, during which I resolved to fight shy of dysentery again, for it was rather a close thing whether I pulled through or not.

After five weeks I was considered strong enough to travel, and taken with others onto the Indian boat "Karapara". We were told we should go back to Lemnos to get on the "Aquitania" which was going to England, like going to Heyford to get to Kislingbury. The doctor on the boat was an Indian Baptist and we became good friends, finding something in common. Eventually arriving at Lemnos we transferred to the "Aquitania", this vessel being one of the largest afloat, a huge leviathan, with four funnels, each of which a whole railway carriage could go inside, her speed being over twenty miles an hour.

We were bound for England, but at that time the Germans accused us of carrying troops under the protection of the Red Cross, so we had to proceed to Naples, Italy, to be examined by neutral consuls there. I believe someone wrote "Gaze on Naples and die". We arrived in its beautiful harbour in daylight, in the background Vesuvius rears itself high up to the clouds, and the town stands on a green slope down to the sea. Naples at night is very fine to see, its thousands of twinkling lights and the red glow from Vesuvius showing in the sky, made us reluctant to go to bed. Continuing homewards, only allowed a small space of deck for the daytime, and from this the burying of the dead took up a good part of the day. About eighty bodies were committed to the deep on this voyage, a few words and a hymn in which we all joined between each.

On through the Straits of Gibraltar, Bay of Biscay, and at last we came in sight of England and although I had only been away about eight months, you who have served abroad will know my feelings at this time. Southampton was our destination, and after slowly steaming up the Solent, we came to rest alongside a huge shed in which several trains were drawn up ready to take us to various hospitals. I found myself after a short train journey, at Portsmouth, and in bed again. Three weeks was my stay there, during which I was regaining strength and allowed to go out. People were very kind, gifts of fruit and cigarettes, and much advice as regards my spiritual welfare. Having now reached the convalescent stage, I took boat with a small party to Quars Abbey, Isle of Wight, about five miles from Ryde. This is a fine modern building, kept by the fugitive French monks of St Benedict - rich and titled men many of them, but most kind to us. We had to stop the gramophone at such times as they paraded the cloisters, carrying long lighted candles and other accoutrements. These were the Fathers who wore black cloaks and hoods and the Brothers wore brown, the latter did the work on the farm; it was strange to see a man in brown robes cutting a hedge or milking the cows.

After three weeks I was considered fit and sent home for ten days leave, so luckily I spent the Christmas of 1915 at Bugbrooke. It turned out to be nearly three years before I was there again. I spent a short time in cavalry barracks at Tidworth on Salisbury Plain before getting on a draft to join the regiment again, which was now reorganising at the foot of the Pyramids in Cairo. The voyage on the "Saturnia" was uneventful, but for a terrific storm in the Bay of Biscay. For three days huge waves swept right over the ship, and we never thought of food, life boats had to be continually baled out, and we completely forgot submarines. Before our draft joined the regiment it moved to Salhia, a town of Eastern Egypt, now with horses and as cavalry once more, and it was good to see old friends again and recount our various experiences.

Later we moved to Bala on the Suez Canal and I was one of a party sent out to prepare the camp the day before the regiment was to arrive. The Sergeant in charge was supposed to know the way, but got us hopelessly lost, and we wandered for miles over the desert with no landmarks. Night came on so we tied up our horses and got down to sleep. In the morning we saw some natives in the distance from whom we found our direction and managed to get a few tents up before the regiment arrived. This was in the fifty days during which what are known as the Khamsin winds are prevalent. One came on while we were at work and made things very difficult.

Time here was spent in training, cleaning saddlery, guarding government property and bathing in the Suez. It was considered to be a good feat to be able to swim across the canal and back. We all understood the immense importance of this waterway to England, our link with India and Mesopotamia, and the Turks' anxiety to take it from us. Previous to the time we found ourselves there they had already made one unsuccessful attack on it, and actually got as far as its banks, only to be driven back. Now we composed part of a force to guard the canal and to do this it was of no use staying on its banks, as before long our Brigade were ordered to cross at Kantara and take up positions some forty miles east.

Since my arrival from England I had been without a horse, so to my disappointment was one of those left behind to attend to the camp. The various regiments of the brigade marched to the very isolated posts allotted to them with no infantry or artillery support whatsoever. The Turk saw his chance, as well he might, and under cover of dense fog attacked some of our positions with greatly superior forces so far as numbers were concerned. One squadron of Worcestershire Yeomanry was practically annihilated with Captain Leslie Cheape, the famous polo player in command. But the Turk was stopped and fled, the Australians were summoned to our assistance and pursued them for a while. The brigade returned to camp but later crossed again and this time camped seven miles across at Hill 70.

Kantara, on the banks of the canal, formerly only a few old houses, was rapidly growing into a huge city of canvas tents. Training and patrols out east were our duties there, our troop officer commonly called "Lloydy", now Sir George Lloyd, Governor of Bombay, left us for duty with the Secret Service, his horse was to spare so I got one at last, and a good one too, she and I stuck together throughout all the campaign until we left for France. Nothing out of the ordinary occurred while there, the temperature rose to 125° in the shade for two days. We were finding out even on its edge, what a desolate place the Sinai desert is, hundreds of miles of undulating sand, with here and there a larger depression in which a few palm trees grew.

A railway was now started and would be built from Kantara to Romani, a point twenty miles out. I don't know whether you are aware of the really important part played by Bugbrooke in the construction of this line which ultimately reached Jerusalem. I visited the company of Engineers working on the railhead one day and there saw Messrs. Fred Saunders, Bert Robbins, Oliver Mead and Bert Eales; we had a word or two about Bugbrooke!

We experienced our first air raid of that country on Whit Sunday 1916. Their objective was to smash up the pontoon bridge across the canal, but did not succeed. The Turk was now advancing on us in force, the railway had reached Romani and infantry were stationed there every day. We were acquainted with the enemy's position and were ready to spring at him at any point required. The Turks attacked Romani and commenced pressing round its right flank to cut the railway. This is where we came in. We rapidly got into position against this flank attack and after hard fighting and a few losses, managed to stem the tide. The enemy had made a great effort but the redoubts of Romani and the redoubtable English men who manned them, proved too much for him. Under cover of darkness the Turkish General withdrew his army to Katia, a large oasis about a day's march back: here he made a stand. Now our cavalry came into its real sphere.

The Yeomanry and Australian Light Horse saddled up about 2 o'clock next morning to pursue. Each regiment took up its allotted position on front of Katia and commenced to advance, but the Turk had the best of us this time. We on horses were too good a target for him in his trenches and after losing several men killed and made prisoners, we had to retire. We had a great enemy in lack of water. I don't think it is possible in England to realise the thirst created by a gruelling day's fighting in

scorching heat, salt bully beef, and hard biscuits the only food, and one quart of water per twenty four hours; it needed a truly British spirit to carry one through these agonies. That night the Turk retired to Ogratina. Next day we were after him again. I was in the advance guard on this occasion and I remember well how they allowed us to get near them before opening fire, one of the first shots shaved my helmet, so I thought it advisable to take cover without further loss of time: that day we continued firing at each other till dusk. For several days in this way we continued chasing the enemy back, he would move at night, and we would attack him at dawn, until we had to stop or could not have obtained rations and ammunition.

The Warwickshire Yeomanry retired to Oasis Guidar with the Scottish Horse. I believe it was about this time that Sir A. Murray relieved Sir G. Maxwell, and now our programme was to advance our army across the desert of Sinai and Attack Palestine. Accordingly the railway was constructed forward as rapidly as possible about a mile a day, redoubts were built to guard it, and it was the duty of we Cavalry to form a huge screen of outposts in front of the railhead for its protection. Of course, this took a long time. We spent monotonous months on this everlasting sand, patrolling by day, sentry duty at night with an occasional short leave to Egypt. Dates were plentiful in season, and very nice they are too, fresh from the trees. What we didn't like was that our Air Force seemed to be inferior to our enemy's; he came and bombed us when he wished.

Gradually through 1917 we crept across, fortifying and building little stations, until it appeared that we should be about ready to attack El Arish on the far side about Christmas Day. Accordingly we found ourselves massed with several other divisions on Christmas Eve about ten miles away ready to attack in the morning, when the news came through that the Turk had evacuated. Cavalry and Infantry at once occupied the town, and thus we had at last crossed the barren waste, and hoped in the near future, to enter into that land "flowing with milk and honey" as the Israelites had done centuries before us. Before the war the population of El Arish was about 14,000: they lived in the usual mud huts of that country, and in the centre of the town stood a Mosque where the people worshipped.

I should mention that our Navy had played a considerable part in these operations, and in fact throughout all these campaigns bombarding the coast and bringing up supplies. Round El Arish are numerous date and fig trees: our camp was pitched among the latter, but we found figs to be nicer as we have them in England, than fresh from the trees.

Before many days the railway reached us and our brigade was allotted the task of taking up the next forward position at El Burg, this was accomplished without opposition. From here it was our duty to patrol further forward, and to our great delight we came across a plot of barley growing; it wouldn't be called a crop in this country, but this was some sign of civilisation. What spare time we had was spent bathing in the sea the conditions being excellent along this coast. On the border line which separates Sinair from Palestine is Rafa, twenty seven miles from El Arish. Here the enemy had fortified a hill and occupied it with about 2,000 men. The Yeomanry Div. Camel Corp. and Australian Light Horse under General Sir Philip Chetwode, were ordered to effect its capture: this proved a tough proposition.

One evening the Cavalry was massed on a plain outside El Arish and then started the first twenty seven miles march. All night we travelled at walking pace until the early hours of the morning, when each regiment took up its position from which it was to advance to the attack, at a given signal. The Colonials went round the back of the hill, the Camel Corp to the south and the Yeomanry West. No one enjoys the waiting part of these adventures; we were glad when the order came along to get mounted. We advanced in two extended lines fifty yards apart. All went very nicely for a while, then we came within range of the Turks' guns, machine guns and rifles, and the bullets started whistling an unpleasant tune in our ears. Any further attempt to advance on horse back would have been useless, so we were ordered to dismount. One man is left in charge of four horses, which were taken behind a hill for cover.

The serious business now began in earnest, our line of advance lay across a grassy plain, with absolutely no cover. We lay down and let them have it for all we were worth, then advanced by fifty yards rushes and started pelting them again. Our artillery had got into position and were sending over salvo after salvo into the Turks' position. But the Turk is a very good fighter in trenches and all the time we were paying heavily in killed and wounded. One couldn't see one's neighbour in the line for dust and smoke, the lead came down in showers. It is truly miraculous how so many do come through unscathed on these occasions. As the day wore on, those who were left gradually got nearer to the enemy, but we had had to slow down the firing, as ammunition was getting short. We saved about five rounds each for the final assault, then at about 3 or 4 o'clock we suddenly had the order to retire to our horses and ride to the Gloucestershire Yeomanry's assistance on our left, as from there the Turks' trenches were more accessible. But it seemed the task would be too much, and at 5 o'clock Sir Philip had actually given the order to retire all along the line, when the Colonials with a final rush got amongst the Turks with the bayonets and soon the white flag was flying from the hill.

The total lot were taken prisoners. Now we had to return to El Arish and on going to my horse found she had been shot through the leg, but not in a vital spot, so was able to ride. Tired out, no sleep for thirty six hours, a gruelling day and twenty seven miles ride through the night ahead of us. I don't remember many yards of that journey back, but woke up once or twice to find myself right at the head of the column, my mare being a fast walker, and I having ceased to have control on her movements.

On arriving back at camp and unsaddling a horse that carried ammunition, I discovered five wounds in her, the bullets still in some of them. Our next two camps were El Burg and Sheik Yuseivd; it was from this latter that we moved to take part in that disastrous first battle of Gaza. The turkish army proper occupied Gaza and Beersheba, with their reserves in between, but several miles back. For this battle our main infantry and artillery attack was directed against Gaza. It was the duty of the cavalry to penetrate their line and prevent those reserves from coming up. So the night before the battle found us marching north, passing Gaza on our left, and still on until in the early morning we faced the enemy's reserves. Our duty was not to attack; it would have been useless, as he far outnumbered us. It was to keep a watchful eye and if possible check him if he attempted to move. We could hear the din of the fight behind us, and thought we had got a soft job, until they started shelling us. The rest of the day was spent in moving from where the shells fell thickest. Late in the afternoon the Turks on our front

commenced to move, there was nothing for it but to retire, fighting a rear guard action, which is done by part of the line retiring, while the other let the enemy have it as hot as they could. This went on for some time, a rear guard action is a difficult operation, especially against a force superior in numbers, but we were gradually retiring in perfect order. Dark came, column was formed and we marched back for some time, until again we had the order to dismount, form line and fix bayonets. After some hours we could hear the enemy's officers shouting orders through megaphones, it being about the middle of the night, and I've always thought that we could have given them a good reception then, but no, once more we had to mount and retire and allow the reserve to enter Gaza.

Some weeks after, when the English papers reached us, we read in the official communique a great victory to British Arms. The fact remained that having set out to capture Gaza and advance north, we had been repulsed all along the line with heavy casualties. A few weeks later a second effort was to be made, during this time we had twelve Hotchkiss Automatic Rifles issued per regiment, a light machine gun capable of firing six hundred rounds per minute, and we had been busy learning its mysteries. Each gun had a team of four men, one of which I became. Tanks also made their debut out here, but were soon put out of action by the Turkish guns.

The middle of April 1917 found us taking up our position for the second battle of Gaza, further west this time. As day broke we left our horses under cover in a village and advanced on foot to engage the enemy. He was on the alert and soon found us with shells, but gaining cover came to within a hundred yards of him. The main attack, of course, was on Gaza by our infantry, our duty was to keep him occupied so that he would not spare any more men for its defence. I will not dwell on the details of this day, all these fights seem very bad nightmares now, but one part I shall never forget, we were far outnumbered, hard pressed, losing many men, amongst whom my friend Mr Fred Cox of Rugby, our left wing was what is called "in the air".

The reserve brigade, Bucks., Berks., and Dorset Yeomanry were called up to fill the breach. On they came at the gallop with shells falling amongst them, and in magnificient style dismounted and formed line in conjunction with ours. The sun set that night on another severe defeat, and as we retired, leaving many of our comrades in the field, our spirits were very low.

But the next six months were to see a wonderful change over things in this sphere of operations. Sir A. Murray was recalled, and that great soldier General Sir Edmund Allenby, took his place as Governor of Egypt and Commander in Chief. Huge dumps of ammunition and rations were formed, many extra divisions came out, until we had a very large army, the artillery and the air force brought up to scratch, and a very efficient machine for war created. Leave to Egypt was given, and beside our work of patrolling and sentry duty, put in some hard training. I took my leave in Cairo and had a good time; on returning with a train load of others through Tel-el-Kebir in Eastern Egypt, a fellow in our carriage was shot in the head by some native in the bushes on the side of the railway; it was about the time of the feast of Ramadan, and I suspect he was out to have a shot at the infidels as the Mohammedans call us sometimes.

During this time the Turk was making every effort to make his trenches impregnable and now at the end of October 1917 all was ready for the fray. On the 30th of that month, in conjunction with another Australian Division we made a huge encircling movement round the enemy's left flank, finding ourselves on the morning of the 31st attacking Beersheba from the north. This morning General Allenby attacked along the whole line from Gaza to Beersheba. All day long our artillery poured shells into the Turks' redoubts and trenches: then as the infantry, by a brilliant assault captured their trenches on the Beersheba front, a magnificient mounted charge by the Australians from the north completed the work and the ancient town from which the Bible tells us a Queen went to visit Solomon, was in the hands of the British.

The last Turkish aeroplane to rise from their aerodrome in the town finding us in rather close formation, bid us a nasty farewell, came down within a few yards of our heads and dropped six bombs, then peppered us with his machine gun. A great friend of mine, Vic Perry, riding next but one was killed instantly by a fragment of bomb taking away half his face. Thus the Turks left wing was reeling under the blow, but Gaza on the right was holding out yet. Our daily duty was now to press him back for all we were worth.

We stayed in Beersheba a day and buried our dead in huge graves. Gaza fell and the whole line pressed north, attacking a stubborn retreating enemy. Jaffa and Jerusalem were about fifty miles ahead. These days were so crowded with incident that I find them difficult to describe in the time at my disposal. One day two squadrons of Warwickshire and one of Worcestershire Yeomanry, charged eleven Austrian guns firing at point blank range and captured the lot, the gunners getting under the guns were poked out with swords. I remember slithering down the faces of huge rocks on horseback, and many things which in times of peace we should consider impossible. Every fibre in horse and man was utilised in this pursuit. We fought on the old battlefields of Bible history, camped in towns whose names were familiar to us from childhood, we fought on the plains of Megiddoes from which Armageddon is, and even travelled the ground on which Jesus Himself talked and acted those things by which we try to live our lives aright today, in this far country. p129

We received no serious check until within a few miles of Jerusalem, well in the Judean hill, but another encircling movement soon caused them to hand over the keys and the Holy City passed into our hands on December 9th. p157

We found these hills bitterly cold at night, this being the rainy season, but we put up our "bivi" sheets against the rocks and made the best of it. A week or two of minor scraps followed before we were ordered back to the base, handed over our horses to Indians who took our place in the line, and entrained for Egypt, our ultimate destination being France.

We shall all remember the brilliant successes that afterwards followed the army in Palestine. After a few days at Alexandria we went on board the vessel of the Castle Line named "Leasome Castle". Organisation of sea transport had been considerably altered for safety since we last travelled. We set sail in the morning with six other liners.

I will try to describe that which was a most majestic and impressive sight. The six big ships, all carrying troops in line abreast with intervals of a mile or so between; in front four Japanese destroyers ranged themselves, then two on each side on the convoy and another four along the rear. With these was an English "sloop of war" for rescuing purposes. Most of the day we were also escorted by aeroplanes and captive balloons. With all this display of force round us we felt tolerably secure from attacks of submarines. That night was a beautiful moonlight one, in fact we were loath to go to bed. However, at last we went and had got some sleep, when at midnight a torpedo hit our ship fairly, the explosion shook her from stem to stern. We were soon on our feet with lifebelts on. I went to the side and looked over. It was only too plain to see that she had received her death blow for all engines had been stopped, and we could see the dark hulls of the other ships against the moon, quickly moving away from us. So we paraded at our allotted boats, then the Captain gave the order to get in and away. This was done as quickly as possible, but without panic, every minute we could tell she was settling down.

Of course, we were not left entirely on our own, almost immediately two destroyers started tearing round the ship throwing out black smoke to act as a screen in case of a second attack: the "sloop of war" also remained. It was to this latter that the lifeboat I got into, made way and safely reached. Others were doing the same and some on to the destroyers.

The Captain of the sloop now pushed her nose up against that of the "Leasome Castle", so that there was another means of escape for those who were not already off. It required a few boats to return to bring those that remained. She was all the while getting lower and lower in the water: her stern seemed to be going first, so we anxiously watched the boats returning for the others. But there were many still on when there were two or three explosions, probably her boilers bursting. Down went her stern, we watched horribly fascinated, men jumping and falling off in all directions the ship being absolutely vertical for some seconds. We saw the Captain, our own Colonel Leslie Grey Cheape and Adjutant, remain calmly on the bridge and go down with her. When she had gone, there remained a seething vortex, screams of dying men, all that was possible was done to rescue them, but a hundred and one brave fellows were lost with her. They landed us back in Alexandria next morning, cabled home as soon as possible, the charge being one shilling a word. We stayed there for a week or so, during which time we were clothed and received training on the Vickers gun.

Our next venture on the sea was more successful, our convoy was not attacked till we were entering the Bay of Taranto, between the heel and toe of Southern Italy; our escort this time sank two submarines. Needless to say, we watched the fight with our lifebelts on and standing by the boats. We then landed at Taranto and stayed a night, then boarded a train and if somewhat cramped in a truck, we really had a most enjoyable eight days journey from there through Italy and France to Etaples. In a camp near there we started training to be machine gunners, but you can imagine that our thoughts now turned as we were now so near to some leave to England, but none was allowed.

The last big push was soon to commence, and we had come to help. Some thought the only means of paying England a visit was to apply for aCommission; I was one of these. However, we heard nothing, finished training and moved up the line on the Somme by Albert. After some time here we heard we were moving to the front line in the next week.

A most fortunate thing now happened to me. Two others and myself had orders to proceed to England, preparatory to training for a commission. I should not be honest if I do not say I was greatly relieved.

We three found our way to Bologne, crossed the channel, and got ten days leave home, and went to Grantham to wait for orders, and there instead of participating in, we read of the last great successful push in the papers, and finally the Armistice was signed. As demobilisation is necessarily a very slow process, I joined the Labour Corp, and got work on a farm in Bugbrooke, until finally dismissed from His Majesty's Service in April 1919.

Philip Campion

1919

I N D E X

			Page
DATES			
August	1915		7
August 20th	1915		7
October 10th	1915		9
December 25th	1915		10
WhitSunday	1916		11
December 25th	1917		12
April	1917		14
October 30th	1917		15
October 31st	1917		15
December 9th	1917		15
ARMY OFFICERS and LEADERS			
Allenby	Sir Edmund		14,15
Broke	Lord Willoughby de		1
Charteris	Col.		1
Cheape	Lt. Leslie Grey (Adjutant)		16
Chetwode	Gen. Sir Philip		12,13
Hamilton	Sir Ian		8
Kitchener			1
Lloyd (Lloydy)	Sir George, Troop Officer now Governor of Bombay		11
Maxwell	Gen. Sir J. High Commissioner		6
Murray	Sir A.		14
Turkish Generals			11
Wiggin	Gen. Commander Brig. Gen.		6,8
PEOPLE			
Cox	Fred	Rugby	14
Eales	Bert	Bugbrooke	11
Indians			15
Mead	Oliver	Bugbrooke	11
Perry	Vic	Friend	15
Robbins	Bert	Bugbrooke	11
Saunders	Fred	Bugbrooke	11
PLACES			
Albert, France			17
Alexandria, Egypt			5
Algerian Coast			9
Anzac Cove, Gallipoli			7
Arish. El			12,13
Australia			5
Bala, Suez Canal			10
Bay of Biscay			5,10
Beach, Gallipoli			9
Beersheba			13,15
"Black Horse. The", Warwick			2
Bugbrooke, Northants			11,17
Burg. El			12,13
Bologne, France			17
Cairo, Egypt			5,14
Cape Hellas			7
Chalfey, Alexandria, Egypt (Chatby?)			5
Chocolate Hill, Gallipoli			8
Cornish Coast, England			5
Cromer, Nr Sheringham, England			2
Dowid's St. Hospital, Malta			9
Devonport, England			2

Places continued:

Inst Anglia	2
Egypt	10,12,14
England	16,17
Hayles, France	16
Falmouth, England	4,5
France	8,11,16
Gallipoli	5,6,9
Gaza	13,15
Gibraltar, Straits of	10
Grecian Archipelago	6
Guidar Oasis	12
Hill 70	11
Hill "Lala Baba", Gallipoli	7
India	10
Isle of Wight, England (Quars Abbey)	10
Italy. Southern	16
Jaffa	15
Jerusalem	11,15
Kantara	10,11
Katia	11
Lala Baba., Hill, Gallipoli	7
Lemnos	6,7,9
Malta, Harbour	5,9
Mediterranean	6
Megiddoes	15
Mesopotamia	10
Mudros, Greece	6
Naples, Italy	9
Newbury, Race Course	2
Norwich, England	2,3
Ogratine	12
Oasis Guidar	12
Palestine	12
Pen. The	7
Portsmouth, England	10
Portuguese Coast	15
Pyramids, Cairo	10
Quars Abbey, Isle of Wight	10
Queenstown, South Ireland	4,5
Rafa	12
River Severn Estuary, England	3
Romani	11
Rugby, England	1,4
Russian front	9
Ryde, Isle of Wight	10
Salhia, Egypt	10
Salisbury Plain, England	10
Scilly Isles (70 miles away)	4
Severn River Estuary	3
Sheik Yuseiud	13
Sheringham, Cromer	2
Sinia desert	11,12
Somme, France	17
Southampton, England	10
Straits. The	7
Suez Canal	10
Suvla Bay, Gallipoli	7

continued overleaf:

Places continued....

Taverham, England (paper mill)	2,3
Tel-el-kebir, E. Egypt	14
Tidworth, Salisbury Plain, England	10
Valetta, Malta	9
Vesuvius	9
Warwick	1

SHIPS

Ascania	Cunard Liner	6
Aquitania		9
Battleship "Doris"		7
Castle Liner "Glenart Castle"	(hospital ship)	9
Castle Liner "Leasome Castle"	(hospital ship)	15,16
Destroyers "L2 Class		5
Doris	Battleship	7
Framfield	Tramp Steamer	4
Glenart Castle	Castle Liner (hospital ship)	9
Indian boat "Karapara"		9
Japanese Destroyer-		16
Karapara	Indian Boat	9
Lake Manitoba		5
Leasome Castle	Castle Liner (hospital ship)	15,16
Lusitania		4
Newlyn		6
Royal Edward		3
Saturnia		
Wayfarer	Wilson Liner (No 6 Port side)	3,4,5

SERVICES, Regiments etc.

Australian Army Corp	7
Division	15
Light Horse	11,12
Brigade. Our	10
British Med. Expeditionary Force	7
Camel Corp.	13
Cavalry	1,12
Cavalry Regiment	2,3
Colonials	13
Division 29th	7
Dublin and Munster Fusiliers	8
Egyptian Army of Occupation	6
Gloucestershire Regiment	6
Gloucestershire Yeomanry	13
Infantry	12
Labour Corps	13
Navy	7
New Zealand Army Corp	7
Royal Fusiliers 7th	4t
Warwickshire Yeomanry	1,12,15
Warwickshire Yeomanry Division	8
Warwickshire Regiments	6
Worcestershire Regiments	6
Worcestershire Yeomanry (1 squadron)	11,15
Yeomanry	1,11,13
Yeomanry Division Camel Corps	12