

transport lines there was a stampede. Those of the men that did not break loose had to be released. Boosa was burning; carts were destroyed; smouldering packing cases, tarpaulins, matting, were strewn on the ground as kindling for unexploded ammunition. The next morning the crew of the barge, aided by a fatigue party, cleaned up. It was creepy work collecting live shell from the extinguished ashes, but the total casualties, from the first round fired to the last round picked up, only amounted to two mules and one man.

There was significance in the sensation caused by the blowing up of the barges. That an event which would have been forgotten in a week in any other theatre of war, or in Mesopotamia during the crowded days of the advance on Baghdad, should be the subject of discussion for months afterwards only points to the dead level of monotony to which we had fallen. Little happened beyond the incidents of mortality and disease to occupy the mind of the troops during the hot weather. And there was a monotony that killed. The lot of the British soldier is a hard one when he has nothing to fall back upon. It was easier to greet the lark or wake with a song in France or Greece, where there was always some kind of food for the mind. Shops, farms, crops, cattle, ships, houses, flowers, trees, womankind, faces in the streets, cafés, markets—the rank and file may not have been conscious of mental refreshment in these things, but collectively they made up an atmosphere and dispelled gloom. In Mesopotamia there was nothing in the way of everyday sights or in the people of the country to stimulate the imagination. There was neither tree nor stone. The Arab—not that we missed him—was never seen in the camp. Monotony reigned incarnate on the mud bank of the Tigris. Yet the spirit of the soldier, or his pride, or his sense of humour, discovered some sort of lenitive by which he was able to survive.