

The Hot Weather

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had cut away the ropes connecting the barge, called out to Barnsley to steam ahead. But it was impossible to cast off. The anchor was fixed to steel chain hawsers riveted to the barge, and had no slip wires. Captain Martin, the O.C. of the barges, who was working a mile upstream, arrived just in time to see the first hit on the hindmost barge, which caught fire. The damage was done now and the barges were doomed. MacIlwaine rushed to the nullah where he had left his horse, and crouching under the belly of the beast, escaped by a miracle.

There was some interval between each shot. The first round fell in the water a few yards ahead of the barge, deluging the crew, who were washing clothes on the bank. The second fell twenty yards off on the ground. The third and fourth fell behind. No doubt the Turkish gunners thought the barge would be moving off. The sixth and seventh round fell very close. The eighth was a direct hit on the hindmost barge, an inflammable, high-explosive 5.9 shell fired at 7,000 yards. The matting caught fire, and the barge burst into flames. There was a conveniently deep nullah close by in which the involuntary spectators on the bank had taken cover. In a few minutes the barge exploded, setting fire to the other two, and it rained ship and shell within a radius of half a mile. Eight hundred tons of ammunition were destroyed. Some shells burst in the air, some on the ground. One struck a monitor, pierced the deck, and fell into the magazine, but did not burst. The capstan was hurled 400 yards from the barge and buried itself flush with the ground. All through the night and the next morning shells were bursting on the ground as the flaring débris spread. A subaltern in the 13th Division told me that it was "the most magnificent pyrotechnical display ever seen." It provided a spectacle as far as Sheikh Saad. The ordnance of the 3rd and 13th Divisions was destroyed. The supply depot was ignited, but the fire was extinguished. In the