

C. E.'s in the Mesopotamia Expeditionary Force.

Now that the Government have published the lengthy despatch of Lieut.-Gen. Marshall, Commanding the Mesopotamia Expeditionary Force, on the operations extending from April 1st, 1918, to September 30th, 1918, we are very happy to be able to publish the short personal narrative of Sergts. Clarke and Gatti, of the Canadian Engineers, who served with the Caspian Column of this Expedition.

It will be remembered that the main object of this expedition was to join forces with the Russians, but this object had to be abandoned on the arrival of the Column in Persia, owing to the revolution, and propaganda work was carried out instead.

The Dunsterville Mission, under Major-General L. C. Dunsterville, C.B., was largely engaged in relief work and diplomatic handling of the wilder tribes of Transcaucasian Persia.

The Kurds, the Jingalis, and numerous other tribes of a more or less nomadic nature, combine all the child-like qualities of the savage with the fighting instincts of races that have been compelled from time immemorial to defend themselves against stronger races, and at the same time to wrest a livelihood from a reluctant country.

Opposed to work on general principles, they are cunning, suspicious, and at the same time kindly in many aspects of life.

The Persians, who had suffered greatly from both Turks and Russians, were naturally averse to yet another belligerent entering the country, and this point of view was carefully fostered by enemy agents and propagandists.

The expedition was undertaken over the worst roads in the world, over the most difficult country, and under general conditions that might well appal less determined troops.

The following narrative is from notes supplied by Sergts. Clarke and Gatti:—

We left France on the 13th of January, 1918, and after the usual humorous episodes connected with a passage from the theatre of war to the seat of Government, we reported at Argyll House and were sent to that historic fortress the Tower of London, and remained there for twelve days.

During our sojourn in the Tower we were thoroughly outfitted for our trip to Persia, and our work while there. The equipments issued were, in most respects, the same as those supplied for service on the Indian Frontier.

There were 26 Canadian N.C.O.s and a similar number of South Africans and Anzacs, making our party up to about 250 N.C.O.s and about 50 officers in all.

During our stay in London, all plans as to our movements and objective were kept strictly secret and, although speculation was rife, none of us had any actual idea of our destination and the work to be done.

After all the delays, and rumours, and secrecy of the outfitting period, we finally left London on the 29th January, 1918, and travelled by way of Southampton, Cherbourg, and Nice to Taranto, where we arrived after a journey of eight days, not remarkable in any way for action or incident. At Taranto we rested for five days, and embarked for Alexandria, where we arrived on the 9th of February, and proceeded by train to Suez.

The great drawback to travelling with expeditions in war time is that one has not the time or opportunity

(and frequently, not the energy) to explore and enjoy the historical and interesting places one passes *en route*.

From Suez we travelled down the Red Sea to Basra, and arrived there on March 1st. While there we were accommodated at the old Turkish quarters known as Ashari Barracks.

At this point we were joined by parties of Imperials and Australians from Palestine and Salonica.

During our stay in these barracks we devoted ourselves to mastering a little of the Persian and Russian languages, in order to carry on drill with levees of natives in the countries we were heading for.

Even at this point we were still in ignorance of our ultimate destination, and all plans and procedure were kept strictly secret.

Advanced parties were sent up the Tigris to Bagdad, stopping off at Amarna and Kut la Marma, where General Townsend was captured.

The service of boats on the Tigris was largely maintained by men of great experience in river navigation with stern wheelers in Canada and America, as the Tigris is a very variable and sulky river, with very treacherous shoals and sandbars.

We arrived at Bagdad on April 2nd, and our experience of that town was very disappointing in the matter of amusements and sightseeing. The time was taken up in learning how to pack camels and mules, as transportation was confined solely to these time-honoured means.

You all know the Army mule; as a friend he is impossible, as a companion he is unbearable, and as a servant he is capricious. To this add that the mule in France is an ambling palfrey, compared to his brother mule, who has been translated to the eastern theatres of war.

And the camel is the double distilled essence of all that is bad in the mule, without any of his good points.

Camels—but Kipling has written of camels.

We took with us one car, which was used for staff transport. Later in the season M.T. was established, when the roads permitted.

We left Bagdad on April 15th on the narrow gauge which runs as far as Bakuba, and from that point rode to Khanikin, which was a collecting point for the main body to start on the march to the Caspian Sea.

We marched from Khanikin to Kermanshah, the capital of Kurdistan, in nine days.

When we arrived health conditions were very bad, and famine was very prevalent.

Mr. and Mrs. Stead, American missionaries stationed at Kermanshah, entertained the Canadian troops at tea while in the city. We left Kermanshah next day for Hamadan, which was then General Dunsterville's headquarters.

On arrival there a parade was called, and the General gave us a general summary of the situation at the time the Force arrived.

It appeared that on account of the Russian revolution breaking out, and as we were dependent upon the help of the Russians to take us through to Tiflis, the whole plan had to be abandoned, on account of the Bolsheviks.

Most of our time in Hamadan was spent in drilling levies raised in the district, consisting of Armenians, Persians, Turks, Kurds, and other odd tribesmen. The Kurds are marvellous horsemen, and every man had to supply his own rifle and ammunition.

The whole country was overrun by parties of pillaging Kurds and other tribes, which made our operations and lines of communication very insecure.

That has always been the trouble with the exuberant child of the near East. His instinct makes