

A short description from the firing line in Egypt  
and Palestine,

By Clement Ranford,  
Semaphore,

SOUTH AUSTRALIA.

[1917]

P R E F A C E.

Some account of the Battles during December 1916 and January 1917 on the borders of Egypt and Palestine by Clement Ranford, 3rd Australian Light Horse, and son of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Ranford, Semaphore, South Australia. Clem Ranford is not yet 19, but served in Egypt, then at Gallipoli, and again in Egypt where he now, March 1917, still is.

His elder brother Joseph Marmion Ranford was killed at the Battle of ROMANI, Egypt, 4th August 1916, after serving in Egypt, through Gallipoli and again in Egypt. He was shot through the breast and died in about forty minutes, his brother Clement being with him when he died.

A.T.S.

1

Our boys have been doing some of the greatest work mounted troops have ever taken on and the best part of it on their own.

Well we took El-arish it was a very important position of the Turks and I think it will change their minds a bit of ever attacking the Canal again. El-arish was also their gate or stronghold to Egypt, they have held the place for two years.

It is not a very large town, population of about seven thousands, Egyptians and Arabs mostly. It was a great victory though it did not take much taking, for our advance was that quick and great they could not get ready for us, so they had to go for their lives or be captured by the great Australian Light Horse, so they went and we only captured a few, and of course the town and position, which was a great loss to them in military value, for as I said, it was their gate to Egypt and the end of the desert for us.

It was a grand sight to see the greatest part of the Anzac Mounted Division with their wonderful horses and horsemanship moving at night over the great SINIA desert, and great steep white sand dunes, which only great horsemanship could move over at night, because some of the sand hills' sides are almost perpendicular and it takes a bit of manoeuvring to descend their sides.

Well after riding all night through the sand, at the break of dawn we over-looked a great stretch of flat hard country and also could see the beautiful blue sea, and best of all we could see green trees, palms, and crops, and on the side of a small slope stood the town of EL-ARISH.

We advanced straight on over the flat and past the town taking a few prisoners till we came to another ridge of hills, then we made our position stronger on account of Johnny Turk, if changing his mind and trying to get back, but he soon gave it up and we never saw anything of him for four or five days, bar his aeroplanes, which always visit us and drop a few bombs, which make a chap feel very uncomfortable while he is over-head, but he does not do a great deal of damage, and goes for his very life when our planes come on the scene.

Well after we had been here a while we went back to the green crops looking for water for our poor horses and selves, of which we found ample supply and of excellent quality to our great joy for it was the best water we had had all along the track. We went back a little further



and found that all the vegetation around about was watered from a small creek which used to come down now and again from a large WADY further up.

The green of the crops did our eyesight good, for some of the chaps that did not generally notice anything, stood and gazed at it and drank all the beauty of nature in and said "thank God we have got over the sand and hope we never see any more of it.

Well then we had a look at the town, it was just like every Egyptian town, built of mud and one very high steeple standing out upon its own, which was the mosque of the town. All the people had stayed there for they knew we had to protect them.

After all that we went back to our camp, which was on the side of the ridge we advanced on, and we had a well earned sleep after our long ride.

The Light Horse must not rest at this, so two or three days later, we found out from our aeroplanes that the large body of Turks and Square-heads had split up into small bodies and posts of a little over 2,000 lots, some made off one night in a southerly direction towards a place called HAGEDARA.

After getting out of EL-ARISH we entered a very large WADY which was a stretch of hard country between two high lines of ridges, it looks as though at some part of the year it was a water course.

It was a length of about 40 miles, lovely going for our good old horses though rather dusty. We advanced about 30 miles up this WADY that night, and it was a grand sight when it broke day for we found we were not the only part of the division then advancing, but nearly three quarters of the division was moving up the WADY with our Australian Camel Corps on the flank, as well as Artillery, and I tell you my eyes have never witnessed such a wonderful sight before.

Though our horses had heavy going they were prancing about and jumping out of their lives with spirit and seemed as eager as the boys to have a go at the Turk and Square-head. Well when we got near the end of the WADY we found — Jacko was there, so we prepared for action and spread out and galloped into positions and when the word was given to go we galloped into their gun and machine gun fire, straight at them, over ground as flat as a table, no cover whatever, and to prove what a magnificent sight it was it terrified the Turks that much that they turned and tried to fly but

they found that our troops had surrounded them, fortifications and all.

Well when we got close enough we dismounted and our horses were taken to cover and we tackled them on foot with the bayonet and with the aid of the artillery, we advanced and they surrendered in hundreds as we came on them, but they made things pretty hot while we advanced, because they were like the fox cornered and had to fight or die. So before dark we had captured the whole force and guns, camp and a large Camel transport. It was a hard day for us all but it was a complete success and best of all our losses were very light under the conditions. There were two French officers there to see our work and they said they had never seen such a great and grand sight in all their travels through the fronts, for they go right around, and they said the same as the Turkish officer we captured on the post, he said, the Australians beat "Hell" for they have no fear of gun fire whatever and charge straight ahead till they can get a dig with the bayonet and then of course Johnnie gives in.

But while I am blowing my boys out I must not forget our brave and splendid airmen who help us so. They were over and over us all the time and using their machine gun and flying very low which terrified the Turk for just the day before they were dropping a few bombs on them to cheer them up a little to meet us, so you can imagine how miserable Johns felt, and of course the German planes do not dare to come in sight of our planes, the dirty dogs.

I might mention that the planes that are with us now are all manned by Australians and they are great chaps, they come with us wherever we go like a guarding angel, and of course go a hundred miles further ahead over enemy country and give him a few bombs.

Well after our day's fighting we mounted and leaving a small force to clean up and hold the place we started back for EL-ARISH with our booty and prisoners, and I tell you it was the worst ride I have gone through.

We had not had a sleep for 3 nights and not any food for two days and our water had spun out and the air was choking with dust. So in spite of it all I went to sleep in my saddle the same as I had done many times before, for my old horse is a good one and quiet.

Well we met our food transport just before daylight, so we got our rations and water and horse feed, and after about an hour's rest we continued our journey back and got back and watered our horses, who were nearly mad for water and food.

4

So we fed up and got our gear off our aching and sore bones, had a wash which refreshed us a little, but we wanted sleep so we fell down on our blankets into a dead sleep on Christmas morning. But one of my mates managed to wake us up to have Christmas dinner, but we were still very sore all over and were for three days after. Well we had dinner out of the good things we managed to carry with us that you sent me in the tins from home and from D. & J. Fowlers. We enjoyed them I tell you after being some time with an empty stomach, though we were half asleep

Then much did not happen for two or three days bar outpost and short patrols, where we once went along the beach and found that there were steamers lying at anchor unloading already and small mine sweepers at work and a man-of-war protecting us, it reminded me of that awful hole Gallipoli very much; and we also found the railway not far behind us for they lay it very rapidly.

Well then we went out in an easterly direction along the coast of lovely country we had never seen before.

There were niggers camps everywhere, they do all the farming about here.

We pushed on to a village called SHIEKH-ZOWIET which was in a large plantation of Palms, with a huge swamp.

We were lucky for we were in the advance screen, spread all over the country so we saw everything and as we approached the village we could see lots of white flags flying, and when we got closer the villagers got on the highest points waving the white flags and welcoming us in their Arabic which most of us understand, but they looked very frightened poor beggars, for I suppose the Turks had knocked them about, but when they found we were not going to hurt them they were as pleased as Punch. So I got down off my horse and took a photo of some of them and I had not touched the ground before two of them held my horse and helped me off it. When I thanked them in Arabic they were still more pleased, so I asked them some questions in Arabic and they thought it great, then they helped me on again and we pushed on till we came in sight of Jacko.

We then had a good look at him to see where he was and how he was but we did not hurt him that night, but we returned right back to our camp again at EL-ARISH and found everything alright, bar that the Square-heads had been over with his plane and dropped a few bombs but did no damage. There had been some very rough weather and



our artillery started to bombard the Turks while our good old planes watched the effect it had on them, then word was sent to us to charge up to the foot of the first hill on our horses then dismount and finish on foot with the bayonet.

Well we started and so did the Turks artillery and machine guns, but not horse or man care much about their artillery but dashed straight on.

It was a magnificent sight to see line after line, without a bend, of prancing horses and horsemen going at a hand gallop over the lovely green lawn country into shell and machine gun fire, but they reached there and dismounted for a go with the bayonet, and the horses were taken back out of reach of the artillery and they start to advance over country as flat as a table yet on a gradual slope of a hill where the Turks were blazing away at us for their lives and there was not a three pence worth of cover so we ran till we were blown out with our heavy load and still a good way from the Turks but their machine guns were hitting a few of our boys, but, however, we lay down and had to dig the top off the ground with our sheath knives, for the roots of the grass would not let our fingers go through, but anyhow we got cover by digging and the Turks Machine Guns got hot and the air was thick with bullets, so we stayed there for some time while our guns gave them what for.

You could not see the hills for black and white smoke, between their fire and ours, and our faces got as black as niggers.

Well we were in a position that we could not go forward for the fire was too thick, and to advance would be too large expence of life, so we stayed there till late in the afternoon when we thought we would have to retire and just then our boys showed up on the other side of the ridge charging and yelling for their lives with the bayonet flashing in the sun, so we made a dash for the last lap and got in the trench with Jacko and the square-heads, and they surrendered guns and all just before dark, so we collected them up and their gear and started them off back to EL-ARISH, while we reformed up and got our wounded away, which was a good few, but not many for the hot-corner we got into.

Just then the German plane showed up and came over some of the Bedouins camp and dropped bombs for our planes had gone, after their splendid days work, so the German thought he would take his chance to do some damage, but the bombs he dropped fell in among the poor Bedouins and



7

we could see Bedouin women and kids with a goat or sheep under one arm and donkey under the other going for their lives poor beggars, so the square-heads nicked off and we started back for EL-ARISH, leaving a small force to protect the party clearing up.

We did not go right back that night but camped for a few hours at SHIEKH-ZOURIT and then got back to EL-ARISH next morning feeling very tired, and hungry, but very thankful to God for sparing us through it, though he took a few men out of our number and it made a chap feel pretty sad to see the empty saddles and the lead horses whose owners had been killed or wounded doing their bit.

It was a wonderful experience, but again it was an awful one.

Well we had a sleep for the rest of the day and next morning I managed to get over and see Lieutenant Jack McDonald who was wounded through the upper leg, not very bad but bad enough and also saw a lot of my own comrades who were there in the field hospital wounded. They were all bearing their pain like brave Australians do.

The next day we were lined up and had a lecture from our old General and he explained everything to us about the fight, and finished by saying he was perfectly satisfied with our work and that he was very very proud of his old Brigade. He is now Major General of our Division and he thanked us for doing our work so well over and over again and our own Brigadier General said just the same, that he was proud of us and to be an Australian.

Then before that the General over all the desert forces, who was an old English Cavalry General came and thanked us and said he had served many years in the British Army and he had never read, seen, or heard of mounted men to ever take on such a bit of work, let alone make such a complete success of it. He said he had the greatest confidence in us and thanked us and left.

So things are going along quietly for a fair while and in the old style, so I hope to have a little more time to myself, though I hope we push on for I feel interested in this old little country.

We are not allowed to say about certain things and it makes it a very hard job to write at all.

I am sending a snap of my dear old brother Joe's resting place.

They are going to erect a large monument on the banks of the Canal in memory of the boys who fell fighting for

their country out of the Anzac Mounted Division so as it can be seen by the ships that go through.

NOTE:-

Bedouins are a Bad Lot;- The "New Zealand Times" remarks:- The Bedouin, one of the desert tribes of Egypt, is evidently a poor specimen of humanity according to Trooper P. W. Burges of Rongotea. The trooper says that the Bedouins are a wild race and a bad lot, and do a lot of spying for the Turks.

"The Bedouin is the worst type of man I have ever seen", asserts the writer. "He is worse-looking than the Australian black. It is a mystery how he lives. Of course when the dates are ripe he is well fed, but when the dates are finished I think he must live on the sand. To give some idea of what they are like, I need only say that these devils have been known to come along at night, dig up the dead, strip them of their clothing and leave them on the sand. We were never lucky enough to catch any of these inhuman creatures, or they would not disturb another soldier in his grave."

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