

Cecil G Ames 1897-1977

Part 1 A campaign rediscovered



by

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1 Beginnings

My father, Cecil Ames, died in August 1977, ten days after his 80th birthday. Among his possessions we found four small photo albums, and papers which I had never seen and about which he had never spoken. He and my mother Jean had shed many of their possessions in their final years, but not these: I felt he wanted me to see them. They came out of context, unlabelled and unexplained, and it has taken me nearly forty years, the development of the computer and internet, and the centenary of World War I, to make a sustained effort to put together the pieces of the jigsaw and to show where they fitted in his life. Other material has come from a variety of sources, listed at the end, and the first of these is the memoir written towards the end of her life by his sister Désirée, my aunt Des.



The Ames children: Cecil, Hesper, Désirée, Joe.

Here are the four Ames children. The boy on the left, looking distinctly disgruntled, is my father, Cecil Geraint, 1897 – 1977. On the right is the much-loved eldest son, Herbert Russell, known as Joe, 1895 – 1912, and, in front, the baby of the family, Hesper Oenone, 1903 – 1987. Des, Louie Désirée, 1900 – 1991, sits between the boys, behind her sister. The photo must have been taken in the garden of the house in Frome, Somerset, where, according to Des, all four children were born. She remembered it as a ‘handsome old Georgian house with a walled garden and a wisteria climbing over the back of the house’.

When Cecil was born in 1897 the Ames family had been established for at least 150 years in and around Frome. The town had at the time a population of about 13,000, and for twenty years or so had enjoyed the benefits of piped water and a sewage system. Cecil’s father,

Herbert Ames, was a solicitor in the legal firm¹ founded in Frome by *his* father² and grandfather. Like his father before him, Herbert took an active part in the town's affairs, being Clerk to Frome Urban District Council from 1899 until his death in 1916.

Herbert's wife Louisa was an intelligent and creative woman, a good pianist, and an artist, who before her marriage had spent a year at the Slade School of Art in London. She seems to have yearned for wider horizons than Frome could provide and around 1905 Herbert made an attempt to satisfy these longings by renting a house for the family in Muswell Hill, North London. He himself remained in Frome to work, while in London the two boys attended the junior part of what later became Highgate School, where they continued for a while, Des says, even when Louisa and the girls had returned to Somerset. For in his wife's absence, it seems that Herbert had devised a means to tempt her back: he had acquired the house which occupied the end position in Somerset Road, number 35. It had been built a few years earlier by his father² on what was then the edge of the town, near the newly created Victoria Park. It was a comfortable semi-detached house in the style of the period, with plenty of room for the servants³ who formed part of the household. It was called 'Rosemorran' (right). Here the family made a fresh start, and here they remained, fairly happily it seems, for the next eleven years, in the home the children later remembered with much affection.



Cecil's grandfather, Edmond Gifford Ames 1836-98 (left) and his father, Herbert Edmond Ames 1864-1916 (right)



¹ The firm of E G Ames and Son lives on. After a period as Ames, Kent, Rathmell and Walters, it is now in King Street trading as Ames Kent Solicitors.

² Herbert's father, seen here, Edmund Gifford Ames, 1836-98, co-founder of the solicitors' firm, served two periods as Chair of the District Council, and built up a sizeable holding of property in Frome. He was a leading member of Zion Independent Chapel, where Des remembered sitting as a child in the family pew. On the occasion of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897 it was he who planted the commemorative tree in Victoria Park, assisted by his grandson Joe, then two years old.

³ According to the census records, in 1901 three servants lived with the Ames family, cook, housemaid and nurse, and in 1911 two, cook and 'children's maid'.



Louisa Ames (née Trotman) at home with daughter Des, 1914

2 School reports

As we have seen, Cecil attended school in London when he was about 9. And before that? Des remembered a succession of governesses who came to the house to teach the two girls, and then a tutor, shared with cousins, to whose house they went. I assume the boys had something at least as good, if not better. Joe's many talents had been apparent early.⁴

There is, however, good evidence for what happened soon after 1906, for at this point Des's memoir is joined by my own papers, by a roundabout route which requires us to jump forward fourteen years.

In May 1921, when he was 23, Cecil applied to join the administrative service of Britain's colonies in Africa. He kept the six testimonials written in support of his application and they have been the foundation stones of my research. Testimonials do not make for gripping reading, but I ask the reader to suppress the inevitable yawn; they did their job, and in their own way represent the period in which they were written. Two of them came from the headmasters of the schools he attended after Highgate, and they give us some idea of his life as he grew up.

Cecil was just 10 when he was sent in 1907 to join his brother Joe at Elstree Preparatory School, where they were boarders. The school was at that time in a substantial house in Elstree, itself a pleasant small country town to the north of London. The head of the school in 1907 was a clergyman, the Rev Franklyn de Winton Lushington. As head of a 'preparatory' school, for boys up to the age of thirteen, he 'prepared' boys to continue their education at a senior boarding school. At the end of 1910 Lushington himself moved on to the headship of one of these, Dover College, which took boys from thirteen to eighteen. Cecil's parents remained loyal to Lushington and in 1911 when Cecil was old enough, he too started at Dover.



Cecil (left) and his older brother Joe

But meanwhile, for the last year of his time there, Elstree gained a new head, E L Sanderson. Writing his 1921 testimonial, he was in a good position to judge Cecil's fitness for the Colonial

⁴ Joe had gone on from Elstree to Charterhouse school. Des says of him: 'I knew he was the bright light of the family, full of music, producing Greek plays in the summer house, always full of creative ideas. He and Mother and I played trios together.' Joe was 'a good cellist and...could bring any musical instrument to life'. Des herself went on to become a professional violinist. Cecil did not play an instrument.

Service, as he had himself had some ten years of experience in Britain's overseas territories. He looks back on the boy he had last known as a 12-year-old. He describes Cecil's character and conduct (first things first!) as excellent, and says he was a hard, conscientious worker and a scholar. 'He developed a sense of responsibility and duty and carried out his duties as head boy remarkably well, fully justifying the confidence I had in him. I always found him eminently trustworthy in school and out of school alike.' Cecil was a good football player, he says, a member of the football eleven, and he was much liked by boys and masters. Finally, 'he is just the stamp of man who is likely to do valuable service in an administrative post or in a position of trust and responsibility.'

The perfect pupil? Lushington, whose knowledge of Cecil was gained over a longer period, is more restrained, speaking of 'an entirely satisfactory pupil' whose 'conduct was excellent throughout', and 'a good scholar – distinctly above the average – and no mean athlete'. Lushington's signature is on the prize for French which Cecil won at Elstree in 1910, the 'Life of Napoleon Bonaparte' by John Gibson Lockhart. Beautifully bound but, I suspect, little read, even in this 'revised and abridged' edition it runs to 316 pages of dense prose, and the frontispiece is its only picture.⁵

The two headmasters comment on Cecil's achievements in sport, which will have played an important part at both schools. At Dover Cecil presumably added rugby, the game favoured at public schools, to the soccer he had learnt at Elstree, and no doubt cricket too, his preferred sport. A photo postcard bears witness to his sporting prowess. Sent from Dover in June 1914 to his mother - it reached her at 'Mrs H E Ames, Frome, Somerset' - it shows the start line for a race, six competitors in a variety of stances, with Cecil second from the left. Was that really the best starting position? Perhaps it was a hurdling race, for which he won a small silver cup.



Sports day at Elstree School

⁵ Joe had fared better with his prize for Latin the previous year, having been given Lamb's 'Tales from Shakespeare,' with illustrations; this is a book which feels to have been used.

At 16 he has the same light build he had all his life, which the often-poor nutrition⁶ at boarding schools will have done nothing to counter, but we know of no major health problems despite the frequent outbreaks of infection in public schools. It was an outbreak of measles at Charterhouse that had led two years previously to the cruelly early death, at the age of seventeen, of Joe, 'the bright light of the family,' as Des calls him.

Cecil, however, had continued to thrive on the Kent coast at Dover. How did he do academically? He took some public exams when he was seventeen. A certificate from the University of London dated 13 February 1915 states that at the January examination he satisfied the examiners in English and Mathematics, (these two being printed on the certificate, so I assume compulsory) with Latin, Greek and French written in beneath, 'being placed in the First Division'.⁷ There was no national school leaving examination until 1918, and a variety of qualifications was available. The London Matriculation, as this is called, originally entitled holders to apply for admission to degree courses at the University of London. It was widely used and respected, but taking public exams before leaving was far from the norm, and confirms Cecil's position among the school's abler boys.

He had qualified to study further, but did not do so; how could he? Britain had been at war since the previous August and a wave of patriotic fervour was sweeping the country. Cecil's contemporaries were enlisting thick and fast, and he seems to have waited only for his exam results before immediately volunteering to join the army, at just seventeen and a half years old.⁸

At Dover he would certainly have been in the Officers' Training Corps (OTC), a recent innovation within the British independent school system. OTCs had been widely established from 1907 onwards in such schools to fill the serious shortage of officers in the army.⁹ Dover College

⁶ But despite having grown up on a diet deficient by modern standards, public school recruits to the army in 1914 were on average five inches taller than other ranks. *'Public schools and the Great War, the generation lost,'* Anthony Seldon and David Walsh 2013

⁷ This may seem to us a minimal education and I do not know how typical it was of schooling at that time. I assume that Latin and Greek were considered basic, and also that some subjects such as religious education and English literature may have been thought unsuitable for examination. My own headmistress at Bath High School took this view even in 1955. But the apparent linguistic bias of the subjects taken by Cecil is interesting. He later learnt Hausa in Northern Nigeria, and knew enough Arabic to write a shopping list in Hausa using Arabic script, and when in the 1950's he found himself in the Gambia, a country surrounded by French speaking territory, he took steps to brush up his own French by buying French books and magazines to read. But he remained a hesitant speaker.

⁸ He took these public examinations in January, not June, the traditional exam season. It seems possible he took them six months early in order to be free to leave school and enlist at the first possible opportunity. Although he was underage for the regular army, he was able legally to join the territorials.

⁹ The length of time taken to subdue the Boer farmers in South Africa at the turn of the century had provoked a national debate about the state of military preparedness in Britain and in 1907 wide ranging reforms were

was, and is, proud of its OTC: even today, the school's World War 1 record features proudly on the history section of the school website. Of the old boys who fought in the war, 50 were awarded the DSO (Distinguished Service Order) 76 the Military Cross and there was one VC (Victoria Cross). A further 155 were mentioned in dispatches. Cecil had grown up within this tradition.

So when he volunteered for a territorial regiment in the spring of 1915, he was immediately commissioned as an officer. Young though he was, he had experienced a system of education quite rigorous in its physical demands, and he would also have had a very thorough training in the military virtues. But his education had given him other lifelong resources also. The school chapel played a large part in the lives of boys at public schools, and Cecil in later life was a loyal and devout member of the Church of England. He also took from his schools, and perhaps from the Rev. Lushington himself, a love of literature in general and poetry in particular. Lushington too left Dover in 1915, to serve as an army chaplain; he survived the war, and in later years became a successful lecturer in the US on literary and poetic subjects.



1914 recruitment poster showing Lord Kitchener

introduced aimed at creating a modern national army. Boys' schools took an active part in the general debate and OTCs were the result. (Seldon and Walsh, as above)

3 Officer in training, 1915-16

5th Battalion, Prince Albert's (Somerset Light Infantry).

Cecil Geraint Ames to be Second Lieutenant. Dated 15th April, 1915.

Cyril Bertram Tremayne Harrison to be Second Lieutenant. Dated 27th April, 1915.

Cecil's name was among those of the many newly commissioned officers listed in the supplement to the London Gazette of 26 April 1915, reproduced left. Still only seventeen, he had left school and 'had rushed', Des says, to enlist as a volunteer in a recently

formed territorial battalion of his local regiment, the Somerset Light Infantry. What did that mean?

An Act of Parliament of 1907 had made provision for a 'territorial' force, to be a defence at home during wartime. It was intended to act as a second line, a backup to a battalion of 'regular' soldiers, and not to serve in front line fighting.

At the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914, the Somerset Light Infantry (SLI), had created two of these 'territorial' battalions to be part of its fifth 'regular' battalion; they were the 1/5 (later to be Cecil's) and the 2/5, each consisting of up to a thousand men. All who joined were volunteers, and as such they could not be compelled to serve abroad, though those over eighteen were able to volunteer to do so. The newly assembled 1/5 did in fact volunteer, en bloc, and in October 1914 (while Cecil was still at school) they sailed from Southampton to India, the first time a territorial battalion had served abroad east of Suez. Their arrival would free regular soldiers stationed in India for transfer to the front line of the war in Europe.

Cecil must have received at Dover letters from his parents about such newsworthy events as these in his home area, and after taking his public exams in January 1915, he lost no time in joining up. At seventeen he was of age to join the territorials, even if not old enough yet to serve abroad, and the prospect of joining the 1/5 in India after his eighteenth birthday in four months' time must have been very attractive. The national mood plus the opportunity for adventure, even if for the moment only local, must have made it the obvious next step. Any thoughts of entering the family solicitors' firm in Frome, or indeed of being the first in his immediate family to go to university, were overtaken by the nation's need and put on hold until the war was won.

A Second Lieutenant (2nd Lieut.) was the most junior of the commissioned officers, whose ranks extended up via 'Lieutenant' and then 'Captain' to Majors, Colonels and Generals above. But it is hard to overestimate the importance of Cecil's status as a commissioned officer, no matter how junior, as announced in the London Gazette. In a battalion of one thousand men, about thirty at any one time were officers. Non-commissioned officers such as sergeants and corporals (NCOs) were lumped in with the 'men', and the distinction

between officers and men was observed in all aspects of army life other than sport.¹⁰ Even the most junior officer such as a 2nd Lieut., and one aged only 17, was a significant person, and, with a ratio of one officer to about thirty men, he had both importance and privilege, as well as responsibility. In the first of three portraits of him in uniform from this period (right) he seems still too young to have grown the obligatory moustache.



His training in the duties of an officer in the real army must have been a very different experience to that of being in the OTC at Dover College. Des remembered his having been based at Cheddar, but he wrote home from various addresses across the south of England, often sending, or keeping for himself, photos printed as postcards, as was the fashion at the time. One of these (below) he posted to his mother on 1 October 1915. In what is now a purplish pencil or crayon, he tells her he has arrived safely - the postmark is Bournemouth! - and will write tomorrow. He continues, 'Great News. Couldn't write today as I am busy as I am acting as second in command to no 2 Company while Trenchard¹¹ is away. Love Cecil.' The picture on the front of the card has sixteen young men in poses of studied nonchalance against the backdrop of a rough stone wall and hillside, all somewhat incongruously carrying the swagger sticks that marked their status as officers.¹² Cecil does not appear to be among them. The scene has the feel of a graduation snap: perhaps it marked the completion of a stage of their training. Or it may have just been one he had to hand when he wanted to share his excitement with his mother.



A group of young officers

¹⁰ In a 1915/16 plan for the construction of training trenches on Salisbury Plain (shown on the BBC's 'Digging for Britain' December 2016) there was provision for separate latrines for officers even in the trenches. Territorial battalions, however, had a reputation for greater friendliness across the ranks than was found in regular units.

¹¹ The Trenchards were a Taunton family and seem to have been family friends. Hugh Trenchard (1873-1956) was instrumental in founding the Royal Air force.

¹² Exactly who carried a swagger stick and when is debated and depended also on local custom.

Sporting activities were as important a part of army life as they had been at Dover College; they fostered fitness and, since all ranks were involved together, if not quite equal, esprit de corps. Cecil features on a card of the Somersets' rugby football team (below); he would have been a useful back. Another card of April 1916 (shown at the end of this chapter) is of a gymnastics squad. It has five seated men in white sports sweaters in front of fifteen who wear dark tops and trousers. This looks to me like an 'officers and men' situation, but if Cecil had indeed been one of those training the battalion gymnasts, he would have been more than an advisor from the side-lines. 'No mean athlete,' according to his Dover College testimonial, he would have brought to the 1/5 SLI competence and more in a wide variety of sports and he remained to the end of his life an energetic walker, sure on his feet and agile, if no heavyweight. The battalion as a whole, we learn later, was noted for its all-round sporting prowess and I would expect him to have been entirely comfortable with this, as at school, and to have joined in with gusto. The very fact that he retained these two cards suggests their sentimental value to him.



The Somersets' rugby team, Cecil seated second from left in striped sweater.

He had reason to keep in frequent touch with his parents at home, for Herbert was suffering from emphysema, a chronic lung condition usually associated with smoking. I have two items written by his father in return. One is a postcard sent on 26 May 1916 to 2nd Lt C G Ames at 5th Somerset LI, Hurley Park Camp, Winchester. It shows Marine Place, at Seaton, with arrows pointing to bedroom and sitting room of the house or hotel where the Ames parents were staying on the coast between Lyme Regis and Sidmouth. They were perhaps hoping that the sea air would relieve Herbert's symptoms, by then serious. Clearly Cecil has time to read and has run out of material, for the card is part of a correspondence about good reads. Herbert recommends 'The Happy Warrior,' 'The Broad Highway,' 'The Gentleman Adventurer,' 'Belton the Smith' and 'The Rocks of Valpré.' The first of these was probably the 1912 novel written by A S M Hutchinson and the last another recent adventure story; both were later made into films. 'The Broad Highway,' by Jeffery Farnol, published in 1910, is still obtainable by

enthusiasts of swashbuckling exploits. John Buchan's adventure stories were big sellers too; the previous year had seen the publication of 'The Thirty-Nine Steps.' But perhaps father and son had already read that.¹³

The other letter from his father is undated, but could well have been written later in 1916. By the autumn, Cecil had been in the territorials, and in England, for a year and a half, which must have seemed an age to a young man just nineteen years old and itching to join the rest of his battalion abroad.¹⁴ Working by then to train new recruits, Cecil seems to have expressed to his father his impatience for some 'real' action. Herbert writes to keep his spirits up: 'The war isn't finished yet, and you will get there before the end comes. Meanwhile if you are helping to shape up the new men, I should say you were doing very excellent work, and you all appear to be doing it very well.' He asks if Cecil has been reading a series of articles in the Times by an American visiting Germany on behalf of Lord Northcliffe, the paper's owner. 'Three columns of it nearly every day and it is really interesting.' Then follows a comment on the weather, 'rough but very mild....today it is colder' before 'I don't think I have any more to say. So Goodbye,' and he signs off 'Love and best wishes from Dad.' A postscript says they had all been interested in a letter from Trenchard ¹² which they had received. Herbert Ames died on 3 December 1916 aged 52 and this letter is perhaps the last contact Cecil had with his father.

Later, in another of the testimonials written in 1921, Colonel Harry Amory comments that from 'the beginning of 1915 for nearly two years' when Cecil served under his command, 'he was a most trustworthy and hard-working officer and did well with the men, and his personal behaviour was everything that you would expect from an English gentleman.' In the terms of that time, Cecil met every requirement.

In August 1916 he had turned nineteen. He seems to have remained in the UK for longer than was strictly necessary before joining the main body of his battalion in India and I assume his father's illness was a factor here. He must have been very conscious that he was the sole remaining male member of the family, with two younger sisters and an emotionally volatile mother.¹⁵ However, having seen his father laid to rest in the churchyard of Christ Church, Frome, he felt he could and should go.

¹³ Herbert's selection of books, definitely in the 'light reading' category, needs to be set alongside the two (at least) Shakespeare texts Cecil inherited from his grandfather Edmund Gifford Ames.

¹⁴ Cecil may well have seen the official film of the first stages of the Battle of the Somme, released in August 1916. It swept the country, being seen 'more than 20,000,000 times in the first six weeks.' (BBC) The total population at the time is estimated as about 46 million. The film was intended to inspire patriotism, though it may now be regarded as propaganda.

¹⁵ Early in 1917, Louisa moved from Frome to Bath, to her first flat at 35 The Paragon, one of several homes she occupied during her years in Bath. Money was tight after Herbert's death and it may be wondered if the family had also suffered loss of income during his years of illness. Des implies that as the illness progressed he had been unable to play a full part in E G Ames and Son, where he had been senior partner, a role now taken over by his younger brother Percy. The latter was also Herbert's sole executor but there was no love lost between him and



The badge of the Somerset Light Infantry

Cecil's battalion was one of several which together formed his regiment, the Somerset Light Infantry. In this portrait (he now has the moustache) the regimental badge can be seen on his collar. He kept a spare fabric version among his papers.



The badge records one of the regiment's proudest battle honours. In 1842 the British had been engaged for three years in the disastrous first Anglo-Afghan war and the 13th Regiment of Foot, later renamed the Somerset Light Infantry, had ended 1841 besieged in Jellalabad (modern Jalalabad). On 7 April 1842 they succeeded in breaking out, an action which the regiment later commemorated every year as 'Jellalabad Day'. The raising of the siege attracted wide attention in Britain, and as a result Prince Albert, Prince Consort, put the regiment under his patronage. He appears in the letters 'P A' on the badge, under a battlement representing Jellalabad. Before the prince's involvement, the Roman numerals XIII appeared in that position, preserving the regiment's original title. A bugle, which also featured in the Afghan story, completes the design.

'No 6 Class-Head Quarter Gymnasium Aldershot – April 1916', Cecil front row, second left



Louisa. Des remembered the upheavals of this period, with 'ugly scenes' between Percy and her mother, and for her, the triple loss of father, home and now older brother too was 'the end of the world.'

4 Photographic

Before he left England at the beginning of 1917, Cecil bought a camera, almost certainly a Vest Pocket Kodak, and possibly the model below. It was the latest thing in technology.



Huge advances had been made in the functionality of the camera in the twenty years before WW1. The first flexible roll films, more adaptable than the photographic plates which preceded them, were developed in the 1890's. In 1900 came the first camera for the mass market, the Kodak Box Brownie, originally marketed in the US for \$1. In the years running up to the war more compact and folding cameras were developed, with the Vest Pocket Kodak (VPK) of 1912 establishing itself as the biggest seller, 30,000 in its first year. The example shown is dated c 1914. At thirty shillings, it was not cheap - thirty shillings was four times the weekly pay of a private in the army - but with folded measurements of 12 x 6 x 2 ½ cm it was easy to fit inside the pocket of a jacket or an army tunic. It

even had some simple settings for different distances and lights. What is more, even if its pictures were tiny, it was reliable; working models are still available on eBay. Kodak saw the outbreak of war as a marketing opportunity, advertising it as 'the soldier's camera.'

And many soldiers who could afford the new technology did indeed take a VPK with them when they were sent abroad. This was, after all, a big adventure which they wanted to record for friends and family at home. Before long the army authorities clamped down on their free use, preferring 'official' photographs only, with the result that in 1915 there was a ban on cameras on the Western Front. But it seems that not everyone sent their cameras home as instructed, and photos continued to be taken. It is even possible that some officers in some places turned a blind eye to this. There were perhaps also circumstances within the regular rotation between front line and reserve duties when photography was not forbidden. In the event, however, as the war on the Western Front went on, the problem solved itself, for the horrors of the fighting meant that most amateur photographers no longer wanted to record the scenes they were witnessing daily, let alone send them home.

Where was the processing of the films done? The developing of a roll of celluloid film so that the negative can be printed needs a darkened room and a bath of chemicals. I have been unable to find any information on how the process was managed, but except in cases where the undeveloped films were sent home, which did occasionally happen, there must have been people available in the wake of the army to take care of it. And how were replacement rolls

of film acquired?¹⁶ Did the quartermaster's stores include new rolls of film in areas where photography was legal? A 2014 BBC programme on soldiers' photography in the war found one instance of new film being sent from home but it seems we really don't know.

By January 1917, Cecil, soon to set off to join the rest of the 1/5 battalion in India, had bought his camera. He would not have flouted an official regulation, but there can have been none in force for men going to what was an area outside that of the war. For the job in India of his territorial battalion was to free regular soldiers serving there for an active role in the fighting nearer home, while continuing to maintain the British presence in the subcontinent.

It must all have seemed a wonderful opportunity for adventure, and during most of 1917 and some of 1918 he took photos on his VPK and sent them home, about 180 of them.¹ They are tiny, 4 x 6 cm, faded and, infuriatingly, unlabelled. The majority are stuck into four small albums, of which two seem organised in a rough chronological order by whichever family member stuck them in. Photos which have come loose, or were never stuck in, frequently have a number written on their backs in Cecil's purplish pencil. Clearly, he had organised them so that their sequence, and that of their subject matter, should be clear to his family at home. He seems to have sent them back in batches and if they ended up in a muddled sequence, as has happened in two of the albums, it was not for want of trying on his part. Some larger format prints have remained loose, and a few of the small ones he perhaps chose not to send home. These are among the most interesting.



What did he choose to photograph? Like so many of the amateur photographers of the war, there are lots taken of (and some by) friends and comrades; the rest show him noticing and recording what was new, strange, exotic. But before leaving, he tried out the camera at home and took a couple of unremarkable local cottages and a group of four women in what looks like winter sunshine. They must be his family, his mother Louisa, sisters Désirée and Hesper, and a fourth unidentified, perhaps one of their Frome cousins. Despite the sadness of this time for them, they are smiling at the photographer.

Shortly afterwards, Cecil embarked for India.

The women he left behind.

¹⁶ I have failed to discover exactly how many rolls of film are represented by 180 prints. The best guess I can arrive at is about 10. They were not bulky; he might even have left England with that number in his kitbag. I am open to further information on this.

5 On board the 'Empress of Britain' January-February 1917

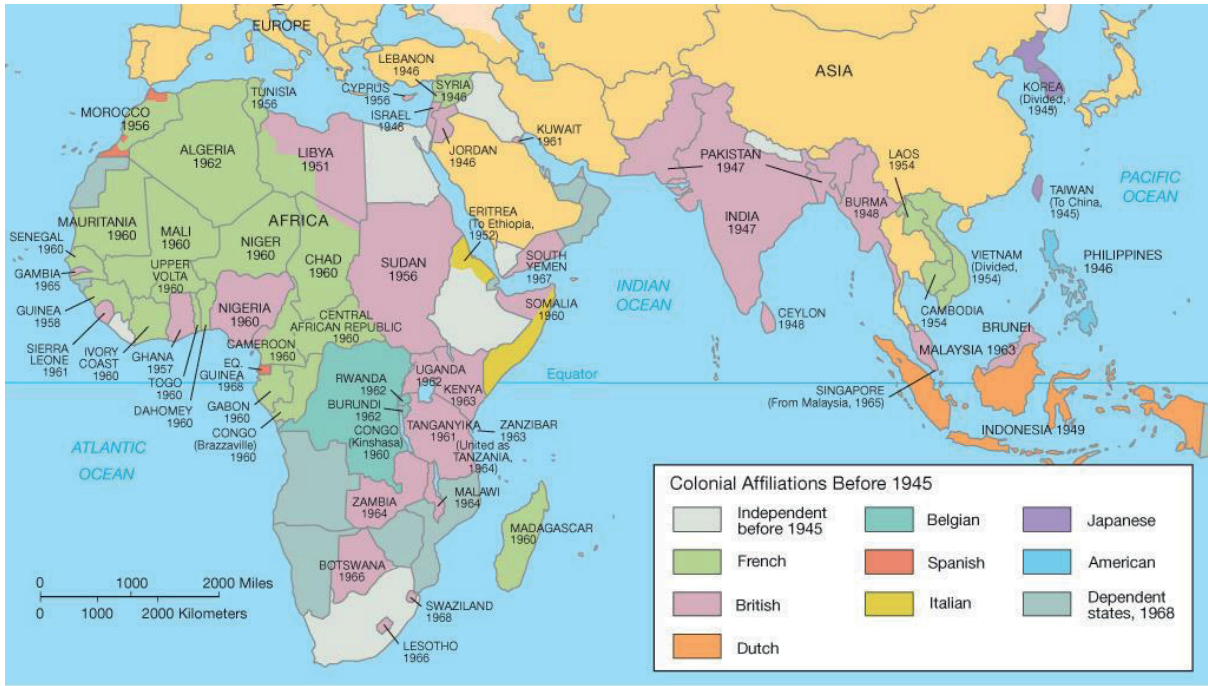
The most surprising item among my father's papers is a formal card, now a dirty cream colour, issued by H M T "Empress of Britain" and signed by Father Neptune. It records Cecil's crossing of the equator on 26 January 1917.



But Father Neptune got it wrong; Cecil's twenty months' army service in the south of England had not seen him promoted to lieutenant. Even more unexpected is the fact that he had crossed the equator (the Line) at all. The direct route from Southampton to Bombay (Mumbai) goes through the Suez Canal, nowhere near the equator, as the map below shows. For a long time, I returned to this card with disbelief, until browsing through the notes my father made many years later for a talk on Sierra Leone, I found 'I first saw it in January 1917, at the age of 19, my first foreign country.' He says he thought it lovely, and looked at it for a week from a troopship. So, Cecil's route to Bombay went not via Suez but down the west coast of Africa, over the equator and round the Cape of Good Hope. Why?



Although the Suez Canal was under British control after being successfully defended earlier in the war, operations continued in the Sinai Peninsula into January 1917, and it remained a sensitive area. But more importantly it seems there was a serious risk from German submarines in the Mediterranean, where in the previous year alone 415 vessels had been lost. Ships from Australia bringing supplies to Britain were now avoiding Suez and taking the Cape route. The world was at war, and Cecil used his new camera to take a blurred photo of a cannon pointing out to sea.



Decolonization

The peacetime business of His Majesty's Troopship 'Empress of Britain' was as a carrier of emigrants between Liverpool and Canada, but in 1914 she had been requisitioned for war work as a troop carrier and in the course of the war she carried more than 110,000 soldiers to the Dardanelles, Egypt and India. Cecil was one of these. She was a large ship, launched in 1905, with capacity for 1530 passengers, 310 of them in first class, so that she will have provided comfortable accommodation, at least as far as the officers were concerned.

Someone took a photo (below) of 24 officers travelling to India together. They came from a variety of regiments, as can be seen from their differing headgear; the SLI was just one of the regiments represented in India and all will have needed replenishment from time to time.



Cecil is squatting second from the left in the front row, with, on the end of the line, a man who appears with him in other pictures. They presumably all received a card from Father Neptune. Did

Officers on board the Empress of Britain, Cecil in front row above arrow.

they experience any of the other rites of passage, often riotous and messy, customary for those crossing the equator for the first time? It is hard to imagine how such ceremonies could have been staged in a military context and in wartime. And one may doubt too if anyone other than the officers received the souvenir card.



In order to have reached the equator on 29 January, and allowing for a week anchored off Freetown enjoying the view, they must have left Southampton near the beginning of the month, and I estimate they could not have arrived in Bombay before the end of February at the earliest. But the leisurely progress of the ship on its very long route perhaps makes understandable the impression given by some of Cecil's photos that this was an enjoyable adventure for all concerned, as, for example, in

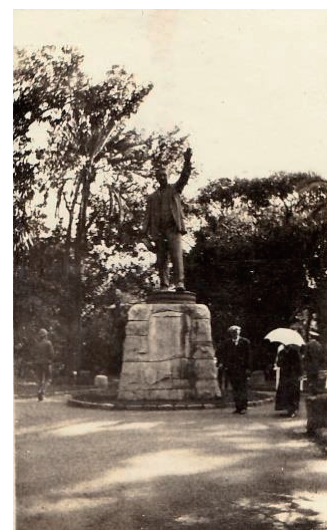


that of a group of officers (right) in their sun helmets. Meanwhile, below deck, men with their sleeves rolled up (left) seem to be taking part in a PE session in the training that continued on board.

Did they stop off anywhere en route? When the main body of the battalion had travelled to India in October 1914, their ship and its accompanying convoy had anchored at Suez for four days, and officers and NCOs were given permission to land. The next page in my main album



has two puzzling photos, which suggest that Cecil also went ashore during his longer voyage in 1917. One (left) is of a man wearing an elaborate headdress and pulling a rickshaw, and the other (right) shows the statue of a European. Both were clearly taken on dry land but neither seems to fit with what follows. Where was he? The first photo when viewed via the scanner proved to be that of an African, so he was somewhere in Africa, but it was



the statue that finally provided the exact location: it is of my father's namesake, Cecil Rhodes, and stands in Company's Garden, Cape Town.¹⁷ As to the rickshaw, a photo online shows Australian soldiers taking a ride in a similar vehicle in Durban; perhaps Cecil did that too.

¹⁷ But see my 2022 Postscript.

6 India and an unexpected move, spring 1917

Cecil must have arrived in India in late February or early March 1917. Like any nineteen-year-old going abroad for the first time, he got out his camera. He recorded the docks of Bombay (Mumbai) on arrival, with kit bags being unloaded and carried up steps on Indian heads and shoulders, to be piled high onto the back of a motorised open wagon. He also took pictures of some of the great buildings of what seems a strangely empty city.



Arrival in Bombay

Then we appear to move to another city, possibly Poona (Pune), where Cecil may well have gone on arrival. Poona was conveniently placed ninety miles inland from Bombay and had a large army base. He took a photo of a Bank of Bombay War Loan office, impressive buildings, a rickshaw.

At this point a reminder of previous events may be useful. The 1/5 Territorial Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry, to which Cecil belonged, had been formed in Taunton in August 1914. All its members were volunteers, and as a territorial battalion they were, strictly speaking, second line troops who could not be ordered abroad. It was, however, possible for those over eighteen, or an entire unit, to volunteer to go abroad, and thus it was that in October 1914, when Cecil was still at school, the main body of men had found themselves, after a couple of months' training, sailing from Southampton to Bombay. It was a month's journey, even using the shorter route via the Suez Canal.

They were sent to India to release the regular troops there for service on the Western Front, and because there was concern in London, fully justified by German intentions, that there might be 'trouble' in the subcontinent while Britain focused on the war in Europe. So, this first ever posting of a territorial battalion east of Suez could be seen as garrison duty, a suitable first deployment abroad for such a unit.

Since their arrival in India in November 1914 the battalion had seen service in various places and by early 1917 it was maintaining a British presence on the northwest frontier, a 'long and

tedious sojourn'¹⁸ according to regimental historian Everard Wyrall.¹⁹ From time to time a draft of men was requested for duties elsewhere in the war and new men from home were needed to bring the battalion up to strength. Cecil was one of those coming to fill such a gap, and it must have been originally intended that he would join them in the north.

But it seems this may never have happened.

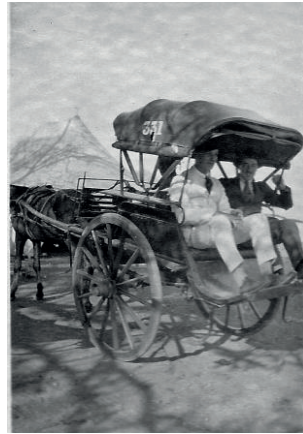


Sightseeing in India

For the album continues with what must count as the snaps of a sightseer, in this case a newly arrived young army officer with time to explore the new environment, along with at least one fellow officer. He visited a temple and photographed his companion standing on its steps in the commanding attitude of the Imperial Raj. Or perhaps the friend snapped him. In another picture (next page) two Englishmen in civilian dress take a ride in a rickshaw. A couple of photos show statues of Hindu gods, but Cecil seems to have been more interested in people: two Indians side by side (Sikhs, to judge by their turbans) one of them in British military dress, a water seller with a skin of water under his arm, a boy watering a garden with a hose, a woman carrying twigs for fire lighting on her head, and another with a large bundle tied up in a cloth. Two show Indian army employees, one in Indian army uniform, another a clerk seated on the floor and working at a low portable desk, calendars on the wall behind him for reference. There are scenes in a country environment, with two of naked boys doing acrobatics. In others, there are groups of Indians doing nothing much, it seems, but in the background a tent may suggest an exercise away from base. We are left to imagine the ordinary, the routine of the Poona army base, with its repetitive drill going on in the background. Cecil did not waste film on that during the few weeks that he spent in India.

¹⁸ Monotony was sometimes enlivened, and training checked, by the fearsome 'Kitchener test,' in which a battalion was sent off to fend for itself for three 'very strenuous' days. These might include 15-mile marches before dawn, a mock battle and night operations. The test was, it seems, somewhat modified for territorial troops. Wyrall (see note below) has a full account of one such test on p.93. It is worth reading.

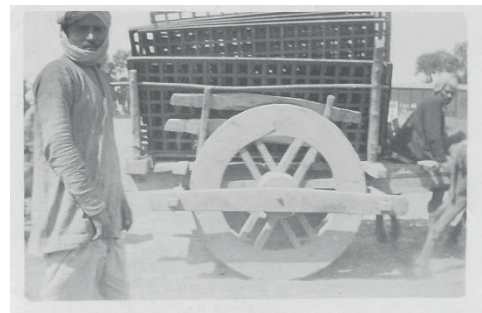
¹⁹ From this point in the story, I am following the events as described in '*The Somerset Light Infantry 1914-1919*,' the regimental history by Everard Wyrall, 1927, and '*The History and Book of Remembrance of the 1/5 Battalion (Prince Albert's) Somerset Light Infantry*,' by Major E S Goodland, M.C., and Captain H L Milsom, 1930. The latter two authors were also members of the battalion. Both books draw on the battalion's daily diary which recorded events as they happened, often with the names of the officers involved, and to my very great surprise I have found my father's name appearing several times in the narrative. When referring to their account, I use Goodland's name alone for brevity.



More sightseeing photos.

There is no clear indication in these pictures that he ever joined his colleagues in the north-west frontier area, now northern Pakistan. Perhaps it was just not worth sending this new young officer on the long journey to the frontier, for change was afoot. Preparations for a move of some sort are in evidence on the subsequent album pages. No motor cars this time however, but open carts (as below) waiting to be loaded up, drawn by hump backed bullocks. What was going on?

The Military Service Act, 1916, which introduced conscription in the UK, also released second line territorial battalions such as the 1/5 for active war service. This news had been well received by the main body of the 1/5 SLI in India. Major E S Goodland, writing the battalion's official history, comments that when during the previous months small groups of men had been siphoned off for active service elsewhere, those left behind experienced considerable frustration. He says the men 'very naturally yearned' to go 'on service as a whole'. Their wish was to be granted, for on 6 March 1917 orders were received for preparations to move overseas at short notice. 'Those who were present on that memorable occasion can never forget the tremendous enthusiasm this glad news aroused', he says.



Preparations for the main body of the battalion to move back to Poona were immediately put in hand and carried out with such speed and efficiency that they had to mark time until 26 March before they could travel by train the considerable distance south, to the army base where Cecil and the other newcomers from Britain awaited them. Then there was much to organise, such as the handing in of weapons used in India, and medical procedures too, with 'all ranks' receiving inoculations against typhoid and paratyphoid. The preparations were being conducted under secret orders, so speculation within the battalion as to their destination must have been rife. Where were they being sent?

Earlier in the war there had been conflict in the Sinai area between the Allied forces²⁰ protecting the Suez Canal and the Ottoman Turks²¹, and during 1916 the Allies had been moving to a more pro-active policy to prevent further incursions by the Turks, who were German allies. In particular, a railway and a fresh water supply were being constructed from the immediate canal zone, north-east across Sinai towards Palestine, (Israel), which was at that time part of the Ottoman Empire. The intention, with the full backing of Lloyd George, Secretary for War from June 1916 and Prime Minister from December, was to put the Turkish army in Palestine, and through them their German allies, under such pressure as to weaken the continuing German resistance on the Western Front in Europe. For their part, the Ottomans had withdrawn within Palestine's southern border to reinforce and defend a line from the sea at Gaza inland to Beersheba (Be'er Sheva.) (See map at end of next chapter.)

²⁰ The Allies, in this context, refers to the group of countries which fought in WW1 against the Germans and Turks. They were led by Britain and France.

²¹ At the outbreak of the war in 1914, the Ottoman (Turkish) empire, though much reduced from its greatest extent, was still the governing authority in what is now Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel (then called Palestine) and Saudi Arabia, as can be seen in the 1914 map below.



The Ottoman Empire in 1914

The beginning of 1917 had seen the War Office in London decide that a 'spring offensive' was to operate on all fronts of the war, and the Allies in Egypt had taken the war into Palestine. On 26-27 March and again 17-19 April, in the first and second battles of Gaza, the Allies had attempted unsuccessfully to break through the Ottoman defensive line. It was decided to bring fresh troops into play, and following the Act of 1916, territorials such as the 1/5 SLI were available.

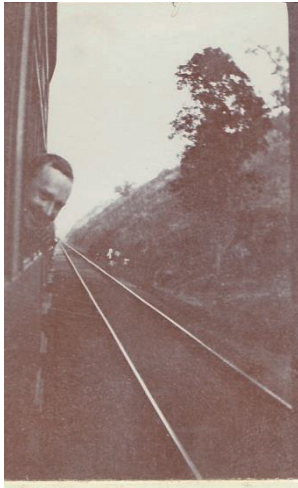
So it was that on 26 April 1917, having transferred the ninety miles from Poona to Bombay, most of the battalion set sail in an army transport ship on the 15-day voyage to Suez, west across the Arabian Sea to Aden on the Arabian Peninsula, and then north through the Red Sea to Suez. It was a proud occasion, says Major Goodland, and the Embarcation Officer was heard to remark, 'There goes the best and cheeriest crowd we have yet sent off.' He gives us the exact number of those on board, 17 of the 28 officers and the 838 'other ranks.'

For there had turned out to be not enough room, or perhaps not enough suitable room, on the transport ship for all the officers, so the remaining eleven embarked the next day on a P&O vessel making the same journey. I suspect Cecil was among these, for there is a curious discrepancy over the day of his arrival in Suez. The official account gives the date as 11 May 1917, but in correspondence after the war with the Army Medal Office, Cecil gives the day he arrived in Egypt as 7 May. This could, of course, be a trick of memory, given that he was writing five years after the event and from the heart of Nigeria, but this little detail may record a more comfortable and a speedier voyage for him and his ten fellow officers, and at some point on their journey Cecil took a photograph of a fellow officer dining in some style, with a white tablecloth and a flower vase on the dining table.



An officer dines in style

Perhaps the eleven speculated on how the troops would react when the details of their destination became public during the voyage. The officers had presumably already been told, and those on the P&O ship would have been able to chew over what they knew of the situation ahead at their leisure. For the 1/5 Somerset Light Infantry was to become part of a renewed effort, the third, to drive the Turks north and, if possible, out of Palestine altogether.



The battalion travels to Egypt

Cecil's photos follow the SLI's move to Suez. Bullock carts are loaded up in India, a friend leans out of a train window, there's a ship in harbour, and then a glimpse of land. Is this a goodbye to India? Or a first glimpse of Egypt?

Once arrived in Suez, and after a short time in isolation because of a case of smallpox which had arisen on the transport ship, their first destination was the army training school at Zeitoun, (now El Zeitun), to the north-east of Cairo. We can imagine the arrival of the battalion through the words of Brigadier General E M Colston, who witnessed this memorable moment and recalls it at the start of his forward to the battalion's history:

'A typical Egyptian night, two officers, the Commandant of the Imperial School of Instruction, Zeitoun, and his Adjutant, were standing at the quiet siding at Helmieh waiting for the arrival of the 1/5 Battalion of the SLI. Punctual to the moment, like a snake the huge troop train glided in; one whistle, and the war strength Battalion detrained, and in ten minutes, headed by their bugles and band, they marched off. The Adjutant turned and said: "As good as a Regular Battalion. You are lucky Sir." I echoed his sentiments.'



For that would now be the issue: were the members of this untried territorial battalion, such as those above, up to a job in which regular soldiers had so far been unsuccessful?

7 Three weeks in Egypt, May 1917

The hut encampment at Zeitoun where the newly arrived battalion found themselves quartered had at one stage held prisoners of war. The officers must have had the staff quarters at the very least, for a photo shows a pleasant looking long open veranda with two camp beds, each with its mosquito net attached to the roof above, and an easy chair. Beyond are trees in what could be a garden.



At Zeitoun, everyone was vaccinated against smallpox, as there had been a case on the ship coming over. More importantly for Cecil's photographic record, Major Goodland tells us that 'all ranks were given an opportunity to visit Cairo and the Pyramids and other places of interest in the neighbourhood.' Cecil went to Cairo Zoo, as shown below, which was a noted attraction at the time.



Sightseeing in Cairo

There he snapped a camel feeding, a giraffe and a hippopotamus, the latter head on and with jaws open, lots of palm trees and other exotic plants. Further photos show a dhow on the Nile, a camel with its young, an ox drawn plough in action, and a shop apparently selling the bases for hookah pipes. Two officers (above) stand smiling under the very non-military sign of a French 'parfumerie' offering hair colouring treatments.

He did of course visit the Pyramids and the Sphinx, which at that time was partly submerged in sand. An undated (and unposted) photo postcard (below) to a friend in the navy (address: GD Potter RN, HMS. c/o GPO London, England!) shows a group of five young officers on camels with the Sphinx and the Pyramids behind them. He writes 'I wonder if you can

recognise me in the centre of the group. Am writing.' Above in capitals, 'On Active Service.'²² He must have decided to keep the card as a souvenir.²³

Zeitoun was the home of the Imperial School of Instruction, and here the men were issued with up-to-date equipment and taught how to use it. All 855 members of the battalion had to fire twenty practice rounds each at various ranges to become familiar with the use of the new ammunition. There were also new packs to get used to and of course different horses and mules, better than those they had had in India, says Goodland.



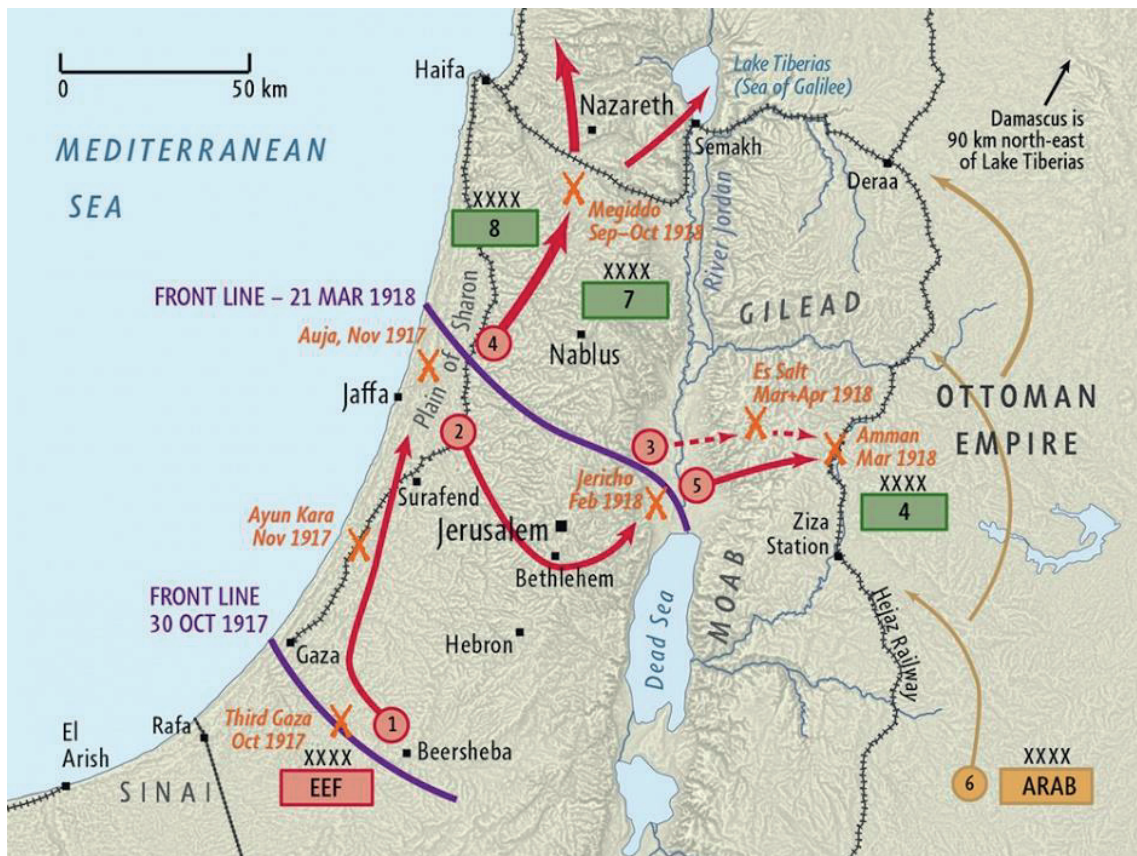
Cecil (centre) and fellow officers visit the Pyramids and the Sphinx

Clearly fewer than a thousand men were not going to be an adequate fighting force on their own, so the next part of the preparations would be a move north to become a small section of a much bigger formation. The 1/5 SLI was to be one of eleven battalions forming the 75th

²² The phrase 'on active service' marks the transition from the battalion's activities in India to those now being undertaken in a war zone. But the activities did not all involve fighting. In Cecil's case, a great deal of time, from May to September 1917 overall, was spent in preparation for the front line. www.1914-18.net estimates that over the war as a whole the men of an average battalion 'on active service' spent in any one year 5 to 10 days in intensive action, 60-100 days in front line trench activities short of being caught up in the main action, and the rest of the time in reserve or resting, though still of course keeping up regular drill and exercises.

²³ The same unexplained line running horizontally across the picture appears in other photos of the period, such as the 1921 shot of Gertrude Bell with Winston Churchill and T E Lawrence. Sand, perhaps? It is not a sign that the picture has been tweaked.

Division.²⁴ The 75th, and the other two divisions also moving north, were from June 1917 under the overall command of General Edmund Allenby who had been appointed to oversee a more successful campaign against the Turks than had previously been achieved. He would put in hand preparations for a third attempt to break the Turkish line of defence at Gaza, a line which stretched from Gaza in the west to Beersheba in the east, and which had twice already that year proved unexpectedly resistant.²⁵



Map to show the 1917 and 1918 military manoeuvres in Palestine

²⁴ To avoid losing readers at this point I have simplified the army organisation. Over the coming months, the 1/5 Somersets were to join five other battalions, including men from Wiltshire and Dorset, within the 233rd Brigade, which was under the command of Brigadier Colston, a Devizes man, and the one who witnessed the battalion's arrival at Suez quoted above. To form the 75th Division, the 233rd Brigade was joined by two other brigades, and included artillery, machine gunners, engineers, medical and transport staff, vets, (the division still had cavalry, and mules and camels were used in transport) and I don't expect this list is exhaustive. When smaller units were needed, a battalion was subdivided into companies, of varying size but each normally led by two junior officers, or 'subalterns.' If you are wondering where the regiment, in this case the Somerset Light Infantry, fits in, it acted as the parent body, whose battalions operated separately but never lost their strong relationship to their body of origin.

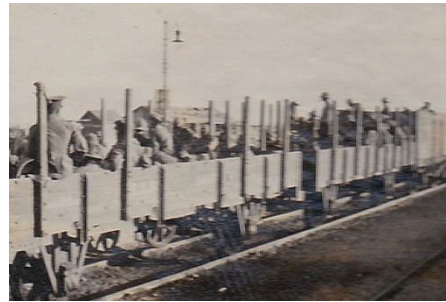
²⁵ The map illustrates events in Palestine right up to the end of the war in 1918, but it shows clearly the October 1917 line from Gaza to Beersheba, and also (bottom left) El Arish and Rafa in Northern Sinai, where the Somersets stopped as they moved north. The end of new railway (important in the next chapter) can also be seen on the map just west of El Arish. EEF: the British forces operating in Egypt, Sinai and Palestine were known collectively as the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (bottom left on map). Green rectangles show Ottoman forces.

8 North into Palestine, summer 1917

On 3 June Cecil and most of the 1/5 SLI left the quarters at Zeitoun where they had been stationed since mid-May, and began their gradual move north, while a few remained behind for further training in the use of Lewis guns and bombs. Those going north were able to use the military railway that had been extended during the previous months. It followed the old caravan route and ran at that stage of its construction (the map below is from earlier in the war) from Kantara on the Suez Canal to a point a little short of Gaza, in all 388 miles. Almost equally important, a water pipeline was being built alongside.

The railway spared them some long, hot marches but as the train itself consisted of open goods wagons into which the men and their kit were crowded, thirty to a wagon, (they look fewer in Cecil's photo) it was an uncomfortable journey. The officers probably fared better.

Over the next few weeks as they moved north towards the front line, he continued to take pictures of the railway and its vehicles.



One photo (below) shows a steam engine with the proud but incongruous letters L S W R proclaiming its former ownership by the London and South Western Railway. The Somersets must have sent up a cheer, for this line would have been familiar to many of them, running as it did through the towns of southern Somerset. Back home, the process of electrification of the line was underway, and some of its steam engines had ended up in unexpected places. On a more sombre note, there is also what must be a long hospital or ambulance train, with alternate carriages painted white and bearing what I assume to be red crosses.



In the early hours of 4 June, they reached El Arish on the north-eastern coast of Sinai, to the south-west of Rafa (modern Rafah). Their camp was on sand dunes, whose soft sand was, according to Goodland, initially found to be 'very trying; the First Line Transport was constantly in difficulties, ten mules in some instances being required for even light loads.' Training continued, with route marches, practice in the use of the mounted guns and the digging of trenches, difficult in the sandy ground and needing sandbags for reinforcement.

But El Arish had its attractions too. The web has a description from earlier in the war of Australian troops spending a couple of months' rest period among its sand-dunes and enjoying the opportunities it provided for bathing, football and boxing, and Goodland

comments on the 'excellent sea bathing' enjoyed by 'all ranks.' Cecil's photos record this aspect of the Somersets' activities during their two weeks' stay:



Bathing at El Arish

Three officers face the camera, bare (but very white) chested, with towels round their waists and the obligatory sun helmets firmly in place. The one on the right could well be Cecil. In another snap we see the rear view of a naked figure (is he smiling as he turns round to face the camera?) drying himself, with others similarly engaged behind. Someone has made some rudimentary sandcastles nearby.



The battalion's route by rail from Kantara, on Suez canal, went north-east to El Arish and Rafa on the coast.

All too soon, one imagines, they were moved on, thirty miles up the railway to Rafa, where they spent the next two months. This was a substantial base, shortly to be chosen by Allenby as the new GHQ instead of Cairo. The photos show a place of barren but firm desert, rather than the soft sand that had caused problems for both men and transport animals at El Arish.

The new arrivals shared the base's general guard duties, but their main job was still to increase the battalion's efficiency and to this end there was 'a constant stream' of men commuting to and from the training HQ at Zeitoun. It was a period of intensive preparation during the hottest part of the year. Wyrall speaks of 'long route marches in the burning desert.'

The photos show cavalry in training, ridden it seems by one of the Indian units, and an Indian column marching past.²⁶ Below is one of the album pages: there are men practising loading cannons, others fastening packs onto a kneeling camel, others in classic low two-man tents, pitched on a flat and no doubt very hot plain. On a lighter note, and reminiscent of a school sports day, other snaps show men lining up for a running race, but as Goodland notes, 'an occasional visit from enemy aircraft served as a reminder that hostile forces were not far off.'



A page from one of Cecil's albums, showing tents and weapons training in the desert

It was at Rafa on 5 August that Cecil turned twenty. One week earlier General Allenby had learnt of the death of his own nineteen-year-old son on the Western Front. As he made his plans, he must have weighed carefully the costs of the coming campaign.

In mid-August they moved again, to Sheik Shabasi, just south of Gaza, and, like El Arish, by the sea. Major Goodland records that the march north of eleven miles 'in the heat of a particularly trying day' would be 'remembered by all ranks as one of their most unhappy experiences in

²⁶ The 75th Division was among the first of the divisions in WW1 to have a substantial number of Indian units within it, with Gurkha and Punjabi battalions from the outset. India's army of 1.5 million men was the world's largest volunteer force, and her soldiers were increasingly important as the war continued.

Palestine.’ Was there a shortage of drinking water, perhaps? The railway had not then advanced this far, so the water pipeline would not have done so either.

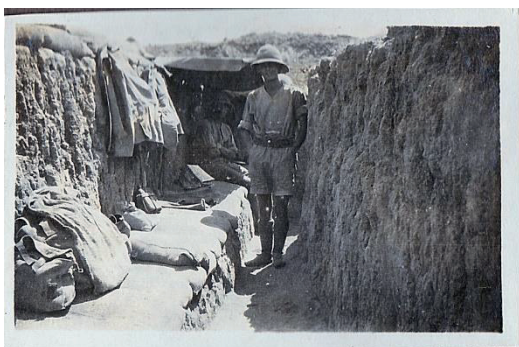
On arrival, however, they found themselves only 500 yards from the sea again and being able to bathe was particularly appreciated, even though ‘The first bathing parade was enlivened by coming under the notice of the enemy, who opened fire with a long-range naval gun.’ All ran for cover, and no one was hurt.

But they were not there long, receiving orders in less than a week to move to an area known as Apsley House. Goodland comments ‘The area in no way complied with the residential comfort such a palatial cognomen might infer; on the contrary it was a particularly desolate and cheerless neighbourhood devoid of any amenities.’



As elsewhere in WW1, it was common for places or geographical features to be given a name that reminded the troops of home, with, no doubt in cases such as this, a touch of irony. Another example is seen in this photo (left), where two officers stand by a signpost made the trunk of a decapitated palm tree, in the middle of a desolate nowhere, with arrows pointing in three directions, one to ‘Railway Station.’ The whole is topped by a board saying ‘Piccadilly Circus.’

It was at this point that trench training took on an increased reality. First the officers (including on this occasion, let it be noted, the non-commissioned officers) spent time with a unit from a different battalion which had had experience of trenches, then the men took turns by companies. A company in this instance consisted of twenty to thirty men, an NCO and two officers.



Trench training, and a dugout

One photo (above left) shows a soldier standing in a trench, wearing shorts above his knee-length puttees, hands in pockets, rolled up tunic sleeves and a relaxed expression under his sun helmet. On the trench walls are hung various items of equipment, and there is a kit bag on the ground. Just visible behind is a seated figure sheltering from the sun under some sort of roofing. Three other pictures show the heavily sand bagged entrances to what I take to be

dugouts. They look as if they have been there for some time, probably left from the previous two battles for Gaza. And it was here during the trench training that the Somersets had their first casualties, with two of No. 4 Company killed and twelve wounded by a stray shell.

A run of six loose photos in a slightly larger format may date from this period. There are two of tanks abandoned in the desert, with men who have climbed up onto them to have their photos taken. Tanks were new to Palestine in 1917, having made their first appearance on the Somme in September 1916. Six had been used four months before in the second battle of Gaza, but one had been disabled at an early stage of the proceedings and remained in the sand, where it had been partly overturned. It was known as 'Sir Archibald' and was popular with soldier photographers.



'Sir Archibald', one of the first tanks

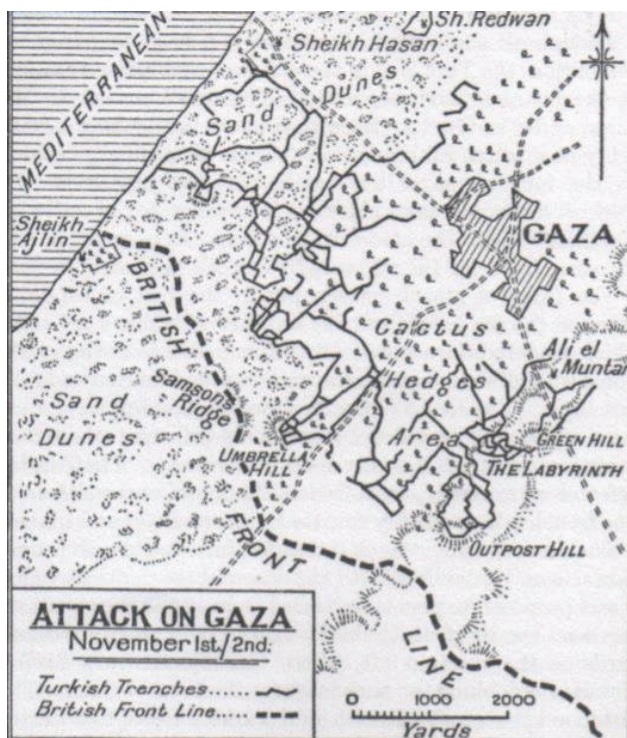
In another picture, there is an explosion in a patch of barren landscape; on the back in pencil Cecil has written 'Notice the other shell holes on the ground.' Finally, there are two of newly piled up mounds, surmounted by simple wooden crosses, perhaps the graves of the two men from No 4 Company.



9 Into the front line, autumn 1917

Up to this point, the sequence of photos in the most 'organised' album seems to confirm Major Goodland's battalion narrative, but now it jumps to pictures dateable to February 1918. What happened? In all probability, and in common with the amateur photographers on the Western Front, Cecil recoiled from recording the active hostilities in which he was now involved; the adventure he had started out on, to be shared with family at home, had become something far more serious and men's lives were at risk.

After completing their trench training, the Somersets moved in mid-September into the front line at Gaza, separated from the sea to the west by sand dunes. They were in trenches about 1500 yards from the enemy, and were responsible for covering 2000 yards of the Allies' front line. Cecil's company, no 2, was allocated a position towards the sea. A daily routine developed: in the morning the Turks, with the sun behind them, bombarded the Allies, and in the afternoon when the sun had moved the roles were reversed. But the significant operations took place at night, when patrols were sent out.

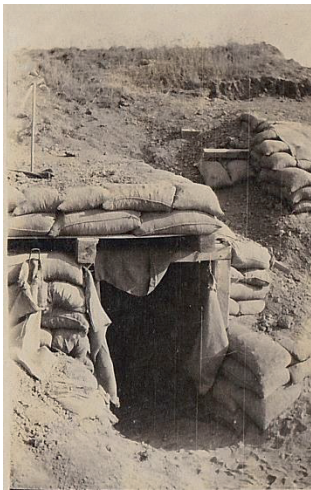


The night patrols, often dangerous, aimed at raiding specific small targets among the enemy trenches, taking prisoners where possible and gathering information. The utmost secrecy was essential, and they relied heavily for success on the leadership of the junior officers, young second lieutenants like Cecil. Theirs was the responsibility of checking that the patrol was as anonymous as possible, with maps, papers, badges and other marks of rank left behind. Rubber shoes were worn, Goodland says. (Were these improvised, like the sand shoes made of chicken wire and webbing that had been useful on the soft dunes at El Arish?) There was barbed wire to negotiate, and a telephone line

somehow to be kept intact, though this latter had a useful second function on occasion as a guide back to base, especially if white tape had been tied to it at intervals. Frequently the patrol was forced to withdraw as the Turks got wind of their approach and opened fire. The junior officers led the patrol in the literal sense of the word and if it ran into trouble, it was their job to get their men out of it with minimum casualties. Their numbers were below

strength at this point, so it was a period of very hard work for those available, and they found themselves leading such operations as often as alternate nights.²⁷

Goodland gives a full account of a night patrol in which he himself took part, a larger and more ambitious one than usual. It had instructions to kill or capture a particular enemy garrison, to collect its arms, equipment and papers, and to bring back prisoners with useful information. To achieve these goals 12 officers were needed, leading 140 'other ranks,' 12 'moppers-up,' (a word used only here), 8 stretchers with 16 stretcher bearers. The troops were then divided into an assault section and a support party. The attack was such a surprise that all the goals were achieved before the enemy got their own fire power going. Casualties were a sergeant killed and two men wounded but the exercise was considered a success and the battalion received congratulations from high up the army hierarchy.



Operations like this continued for four weeks and at the end of September the battalion diary recorded that 'the health of the battalion was not quite as good as the previous month.' Septic sores were very prevalent, and sixteen cases of dysentery had occurred but 'eighteen new dug-outs' (like that shown here?) 'have been constructed and additional trenches are being dug in our right sub-sector.' There were at this point 24 officers and 884 other ranks, and with them a similar number from other battalions.

In October, the Somersets went into reserve a little behind the front line. But not for long. Everyone knew that a big offensive was due soon, and as usual it was preceded by a lengthy and intensive bombardment of the enemy lines. By coincidence but like a portent of things to come, on the day the bombardment began, 27 October 1917, a great thunderstorm caused the collapse of many of the dugouts and flooded the trenches on both sides. In addition, a huge explosion occurred unexpectedly when a mosque near Gaza was hit; as a place of worship, it had previously been avoided in the bombing, but its use as an ammunition dump was now revealed. However, at least the arrival of the warships went according to plan, and these were able to join in the bombardment from their positions out to sea.

On 30 October came the news of the fall of Beersheba²⁸ and orders for the attack on Gaza were issued. The 1/5 Somersets were moved forward again to the front line; they were to attack 'Middlesex Hill' and 'The Maze' in the wake of a successful previous assault in the same area by the 1/4 Wiltshire battalion. Detailed planning took place in which the role of each

²⁷ Most of the junior officers like Cecil came from independent, or 'public', schools and as they were required to lead, i.e. go first, into situations of high risk, their mortality rate was even greater than that of the armed forces as a whole. Seldon and Walsh ('Public Schools and the Great War') calculate it as over 18% compared with 11% for the army overall.

²⁸ It had been part of Allenby's strategy to give the Turks the impression that the next attack would come, as before, at the Gaza end of their defensive line, which stretched inland southeast to Beersheba. (See map at end of chapter 7.) They were therefore unprepared when Beersheba became the first target.

company was assigned: numbers 3 and 4 were the assault party, no 2, Cecil's, the reserve, and no 1 the carrying party, who duly collected a supply of ammunition, water, and stores to be carried forward as soon as the assault began. The enemy trenches earmarked for capture were given British place names and no 2 company's target trench was named 'Bath and Dover.' Surely Dover was Cecil's suggestion?²⁹

Major Goodland writes: 'All preparations completed, the battalion waited in enthusiastic anticipation for the word to go'. But they had to contain their excitement over four tense days, on each of which the attack seemed imminent but was then postponed. Finally, zero hour was fixed for 11.30 pm on 6 November. Nos 3 and 4 companies were ordered to meet at the rendezvous point by 9.30 p.m. with no 2 following at 10.00, for the issue of ammunition and a tot of rum to each man. Unfortunately, no 3 company, misled by their guide, did not turn up and so no 2, the reserve, with Cecil one of its two officers, took their place in the assault party. They were to strike the southern end of Middlesex Hill at 11.54 p.m. exactly.

The targets were achieved with relative ease,³⁰ since the Turks, discouraged by the Allied success at Beersheba and elsewhere along the line, had already begun a withdrawal from Gaza. In addition, the fearsome looking barbed wire was found to have been cut to pieces by the preliminary bombardment. But within the immense operation, involving huge numbers of men and extending for several miles, there were pockets of fierce fighting. Of the SLI, Cecil and two 'other ranks' were wounded, and saw no more fighting for a while.³¹

Later, in 1921, Lt Colonel Urwick, Battalion Commander in the battle, wrote in support of Cecil's application to the Colonial Office: 'He was wounded in November 1917 at the Battle of Gaza, and the gallantry and efficiency which he displayed on this occasion caused me to recommend him for the Military Cross. He received no reward as I heard from subsequent information that my recommendations on this occasion were lost but I always found him a thoroughly efficient officer, with no knowledge of fear, conscientious and trustworthy, combining all the characteristics of an English Gentleman.'³²


²⁹ The psychology behind these names is puzzling. The names chosen by the two other companies for their target trenches were 'Rugby and Basingstoke' and 'Aberdeen'!

³⁰ The history books are unanimous in saying the third battle of Gaza was an easy victory. Such things are, of course, relative. Wikipedia gives 2696 as the number of casualties, (the term does not distinguish between killed and wounded) out of a force variously estimated to be between 10,000 and 35,913 strong. 35,913?!

³¹ Goodland follows the battalion diary, in which the names of officers were generally given in operational instructions, or as casualties. In more confused circumstances later in the campaign, it seems names were sometimes lost and went unrecorded. 'Other ranks' usually needed to die to get a mention by name, and did not always do so even then.

³² From October 1922, like many others who had not received the war decorations they were due, Cecil tried to turn his MC into reality. From the position he then held as an administrative officer in northern Nigeria he applied to the Army Medal Office in Droitwich. And he persisted, later sending at different times two further


Was he unlucky to be wounded at this stage? Yes, but on the other hand his wounds (Major Goodland uses the plural) kept him out of the action for at least the rest of November, a period during which the Somersets took part in fierce fighting in arduous terrain as the army moved towards Jerusalem, and in which they suffered very heavy casualties.


 WEST PARK,
 YEovil,
 SOMERSET.
 13.5.21.

To the Colonial Secretary,

Sir,

Mr. Cecil G. Ames served under me as a Subaltern when I was a Company Commander during the War and later when I commanded a Batt. in 1917 in Palestine. He was wounded in November 1917 at the Battle of Gaza and the gallantry and efficiency which he displayed on this occasion caused me to recommend him for the Military Cross. He received no reward as I heard from subsequent information that my recommendations on this occasion were lost but I


 WEST PARK,
 YEovil,
 SOMERSET.
 -2- 13.5.21

always found him a thoroughly efficient officer with no knowledge of fear, conscientious and trustworthy, combining all the characteristics of an English Gentleman.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your most obedient servant,
J. D. Urwick D.S.O.
late o.c. 1/5 Bn. Somerset R.F.

Above, Lt Colonel Urwick's letter, and below, some of Cecil's fellow officers



³² contact points in Bath, one the latest address of his mother at 45 Englishcombe Lane, and the other his bank. The card recording his application has on it dates on which it passed through someone's hands, the latest being 19/1/23; but the enigmatic 'Etqret d/10-12-22' remains a mystery. It seems that every man who had seen active service in the war was entitled to at least one medal, but if Cecil's reached him in Nigeria it/they had disappeared by the time of his death. A single photo from 1948 shows him wearing three medals with his judge's robes, but they do not include a Military Cross.

10 Out of action, late autumn 1917

In the third battle of Gaza, Cecil was wounded. What happened to a man wounded in action?



Every soldier carried a small personal first aid kit like this one.³³ It has a waterproof cover, to be torn apart if needed, and contains ‘two dressings in waterproof covers, each consisting of a gauze pad stitched to a bandage, and a safety pin.’ The directions for use aim at the avoidance of infection and in capitals underneath is ‘Do not handle the gauze or wound.’

WW1 Personal first aid kit

For anything more than a minor hurt, there were further medical resources available, structured in a system that, theoretically at least and in circumstances where there was not an overwhelming number of wounded to be taken care of, stood a good chance of providing an appropriate treatment, though only, of course, with the medical tools available in 1917. But the Royal Army Medical corps (RAMC), formed in 1898, which had begun to develop its specialist skills in the Boer wars, played an important part in the Palestine campaign. There were also significant advances in general medical practice during the war, including the use of blood transfusions and intravenous saline to treat shock, and improved surgical cleaning of wounds.

The man who was wounded and needed more help than his medical pack could provide



turned first to the stretcher bearers, working under a medical officer just behind the line of fighting; their job was to help casualties to the regimental aid post, on a stretcher if needed. From the aid post, the wounded were evacuated to an ‘advanced dressing station,’ not far away but out of range of the immediate fighting. It might be in a dugout or a disused trench; later that November someone else took this photo of a monastery on the way to Jerusalem being used for the wounded of the 1/5 battalion. Here a system of triage came into play: what was do-able was done, including emergency operations, and those needing further treatment were got into a condition in which they could be evacuated to a ‘casualty clearing station’. Cecil seems to have been in this last category.

³³ My photo shows a rare, genuine WW1 example from Whitgift School’s ‘Remembering 1916’ exhibition. First Aid was included in every soldier’s basic training. (‘When I join the Army’)



The casualty clearing station had considerably more medical facilities and was sited where possible in a pre-existing building of some sort, though they were also to be found in tented camps or in converted trains. Perhaps the carriages with the red crosses that Cecil had photographed further south earlier in the year (left) were part of such a train. Or that might have been a train adapted to carry casualties to a clearing station further away. The wounded in this part of the Palestine were fortunate to have rail transport available to them; they escaped being moved on camels, said to be a very unpleasant experience.³⁴

The role of the casualty clearing station was threefold. It retained serious cases that were unfit for further travel, it treated and returned others to their units, and it evacuated the rest to hospitals back at base. Cecil seems to have had a long journey, being sent 270 miles southwest from Gaza to the Egyptian port of Alexandria, northwest of Cairo on the map of the Ottoman Empire at the end of chapter 6.³⁵

For it is from Alexandria that on 15 December 1917, about five weeks after he had been wounded, he sent a picture postcard home to his mother in Bath, 'with love to all,' and just the date and place from which he is sending it.



A Christmas greeting? At the top he has written 'On Active Service' and it has been stamped by the censor and post marked '2 Base Army Post Office'. And that's it. Presumably the censor

³⁴ In the Middle East, camel 'cacolets' were sometimes used, in which a two seated wooden structure, a bit like a double buggy, was mounted onto a camel's hump, thus enabling it to carry two casualties in considerable discomfort, to the animal probably as well as to the wounded. Mule cacolets were occasionally used in Europe on the Western Front.

³⁵ Cairo would seem the obvious place to call 'base' and Goodland mentions at one point the return of a senior officer from hospital there. Perhaps Alexandria was an 'overflow' point when there were more casualties than could be accommodated in the capital. Or perhaps it had better medical facilities, as well as the convenience of being easily accessible by sea.

ruled out any news from a war zone. The picture too (below) says very little; it is an enlarged reprint of one taken earlier, and shows him (on the right) sitting happily outside a tent with the friend who features in other pictures.³⁶



Cecil, right, and friend, picture side of card shown above

The narrative above is one possible course of events between his wounding at Gaza and his sending this post card, but we cannot now be sure what happened. And did Louisa know that her one remaining son had been wounded? Almost certainly she did, for his name appeared on 15 November in the casualty lists published regularly by the War Office and carried by *The Times*, the daily reading material of the Ames household at least in Herbert's lifetime. But if she was anxious about him, she learnt little more from this card.

We do have, however, some information on the principal hospital in Alexandria, the No 15 General Hospital.³⁷ The 'Abbasia Government School' had just before the war been rebuilt to a high standard, but in 1915 it was taken over for war use as a hospital and was subsequently able to offer up to a thousand beds for the sick and wounded. A nurse from New Zealand describes its early days as a hospital:

'The large classrooms, dormitories and kitchen made it easily adaptable as a hospital. A great deal had been done in fitting up operating theatres, X-ray rooms and administration offices. A separate building is used for officers and a large number of patients were in tents or marquees.'

³⁶ The same man appears in several of Cecil's photos, including that of the group of officers on board H M T *Empress of Britain*. He may be 2nd Lieut G F Bunning, who joined the battalion in India at the same time as Cecil.

³⁷ The numeral 15 comes from the RAMC system; it seems they already operated notional hospital teams, numbered, which could 'land' wherever required and, to use a 21st century phrase, hit the ground running

By the end of 1917 it had been in use for two and a half years, serving the sick as well as the wounded, the former increasing in number as the war went on and exhaustion, heat stroke, poor quality water supplies and insects all took their toll.

For those well enough to manage the stairs up to the roof, there was a view to enjoy. An Australian doctor writes:

'In the main, No. 15 General is comprised of three separate brick edifices, rectangular in shape, and standing one behind the other... Each of these three buildings rises three storeys high, is broad passaged, well ventilated and floored, and roofed flat in concrete. Out on the roof you reach spaciousness and balm, with Alexander's ancient city and congested underworld spread beneath, and to be got for five minutes' climb from your cot. Of course, if strength and virility for the ascent of three flights of marble stairs be wanting, one must perforce await recuperation to convalescence for such as this...'



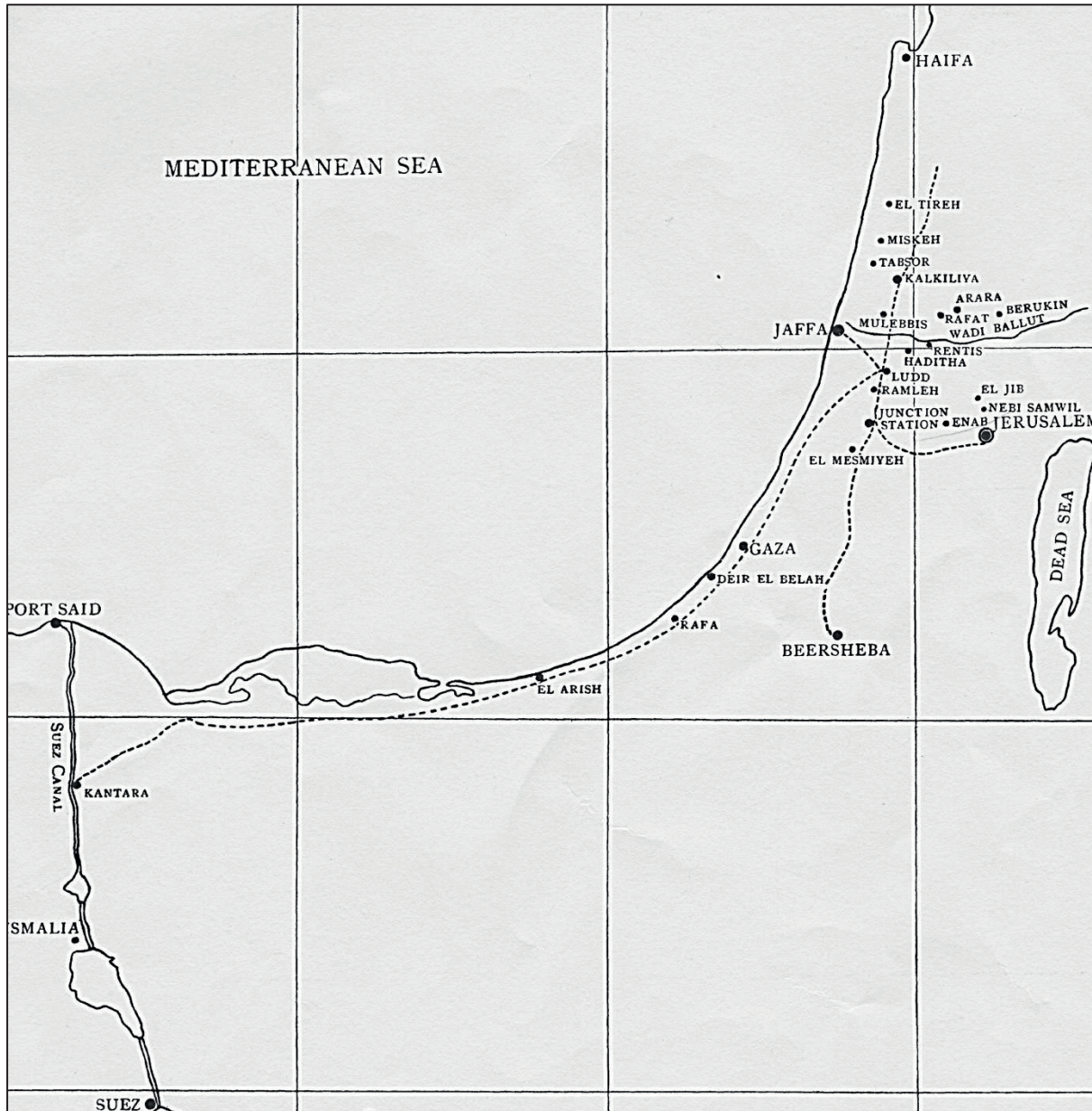
No. 15 General Hospital, Egypt.

Such may have been the setting of Cecil's recovery. And if his postcard was the first Louisa knew of his being in Alexandria, she need not have worried, for by now, five weeks after he had been wounded at Gaza, he was ready to take the train north to re-join his unit.



11 Back to work and special occasions, early 1918

Below is Major Goodland's only map; it's the best I can do as a guide to the approximate location of the places to the east of Jaffa mentioned in what follows.



Major Goodland's map of Palestine

We learn that in December 1917 many officers and men joined or re-joined the battalion, either as reinforcements or on discharge from hospital. I shall assume that Cecil was among the latter. All will have been warmly welcomed, as the battalion was well below strength following heavy casualties suffered in the second half of November. Two particularly costly days in the rocky hill country to the west of Jerusalem were November 23 and 24, when there had been 221 casualties to the body of 450 men and officers, every one of the latter being either killed or wounded. As a result, from 26th November they were moved out of the front

line, first to Junction Station to be fitted with new boots and no doubt a great deal else, and then by stages north in the direction of Jaffa. They had played their part in the army's successful push eastwards and had earned a rest.

On 9th December the Allied forces had entered Jerusalem. The Turks surrendered, so there was no fighting as such in so sacred a place, something Allenby had been particularly keen to avoid. By then the Somersets were in reserve near Ramleh, in a wet and muddy encampment. Goodland comments that they were all greatly cheered by the news from Jerusalem, though he admits also to 'a little disappointment' that the battalion had not been there to witness this important moment in the campaign.

It continued wet. On Christmas Day special rations for the festival arrived from Cairo, and parcels of clothing and games from the Somerset Voluntary Help Association. Cecil would have enjoyed the games. After Christmas there were further moves within the same area, mainly in reserve. But movement was not easy: the rain had made quagmires of such tracks and improvised roads as there were, the camels were immobilised and eight mules were needed to pull each cart, whose axles were often submerged in the sticky mud.

January 1918 arrived. What was to be the Somersets' role now? Allenby's strategy remained that of driving the Ottomans north out of Palestine and since the previous summer he had made much progress, breaking their Beersheba to Gaza line of defence, and then occupying Jerusalem. At the turn of the year the line of demarcation between the two forces ran on the map roughly diagonally northwest from Jerusalem to Jaffa (see also map at end of chapter 7) and during the early months of 1918 'local operations' continued all along this very extended front line. But there was no general engagement, as both sides consolidated their forces.

What this meant for 1/5 Battalion SLI, then in the hills north of Ludd, (modern Lod), was continuing movement between camps in and out of the front line. When near the enemy, there were reconnaissance patrols and weapon practice to organise, when in reserve it was mostly road making.

But in February, there was exciting news: they were to have a visit from H.R.H. the Duke of Connaught (right) as part of his tour of the British forces in Egypt and Palestine. Inspection preparations were added to the troops' activities. The prince was the youngest son of Queen Victoria and so uncle of King George V, then on the throne. He had made a career for himself in the army and served as Governor-General of Canada from 1911-16. By 1918 he was 68, but still able and willing to take on an active role as a minor royal. He was due to arrive the following month.



Also in February, Cecil visited Jerusalem. He had been promoted to Lieutenant, and, together with a Captain Wright and probably at least two others,³⁸ stayed at the Hotel Fast. He ended up with Captain Wright's bill as well as his own. It is dated 15/2/18 for '2 days ration,' 35 Turkish lira a day plus a lunch on 13th and 14th Feb. He clearly felt the occasion called for a celebration and bought a bottle of wine for their dinner on the evening of the 13th at 10 lira. On the 14th he had a bath, also 10 lira! The bath must have been a wonderfully self-indulgent experience for a man living in camp conditions. Captain Wright did without a bath, it seems, though he too had the luxury of a single room.

Cecil's Jerusalem hotel bill

1884 HOTEL FAST
 Room No 85 JERUSALEM
St Amos. Ration for 2 days.

P. T. m/m

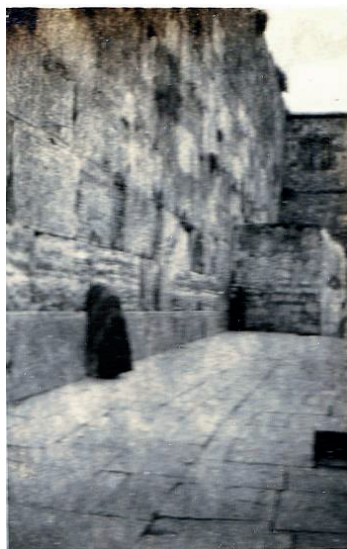
Pension		<i>2 days at 35</i>	70
		<i>lunch.</i>	13
			<hr/> 83
Drinks :			
Date	<i>13/2</i>	<i>14/2</i>	
Wine	<i>10</i>		10
Beer			
Liquor			
Water			
Limon. etc.			
Meal			
Coffee, Tea			
Laundry			
Bath	<i>10</i>		10
Fire			<hr/> 103
Carr :			
Cash			
Cigarettes			

HOTEL FAST
 * 15/2 18
 JERUSALEM
Wm. Collins

³⁸ The serial numbers of the hotel receipts are 1181 and 1184, which suggests that 1182 and 1183 were given to two other members of a small group.

Cecil's camera reappears. Where had it been during the preceding four months while its owner, wounded at Gaza, had found himself unexpectedly back in Egypt and while the Somersets had been constantly on the move in central Palestine? Kodak may have envisaged their VPK's being lodged, literally, in the soldier's vest pocket, but this was hardly possible during active engagement; soldiers going into battle were already encumbered with many haversacks carrying necessary items. But every soldier did have a lockable box for precious and personal items, to be kept under or near his bed; examples of these are to be seen in several museums alongside models of WW1 soldiers in uniform. I assume, therefore, that when the battalion moved, someone had the job of organising the secure conveyance of all the boxes, one of these containing Cecil's camera, along with the rest of the unit's paraphernalia.³⁹

In Jerusalem Cecil used his VPK freely. Among many hurried snaps, we see (below) the entrance to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, one of Christianity's most important shrines, the Wailing Wall and the Garden of Gethsemane with its ancient olive trees.



Jerusalem: Church of Holy Sepulchre, the Wailing Wall and the Garden of Gethsemane

³⁹ In late 1917 Earnest Hemingway was serving as a volunteer officer with the Italian ambulance corps in northeast Italy, the setting for 'A Farewell to Arms.' In chapter 3 the narrator returns from a period of leave to re-join his unit within the war zone, not knowing exactly where he will find either the unit or his belongings. 'I foundit was all as I had left it.....At the foot of my bed was my flat trunk, ...and my rifle hung over the beds. The telescope that fitted it was, I remembered, locked in the trunk.'

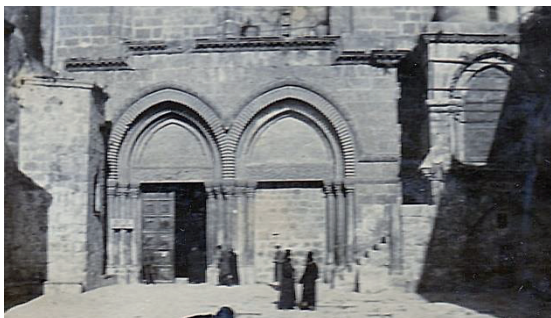
He visited the Al-Aqsa Mosque (below left) and photographed a scene (below right) in which people kneel in a Christian attitude of prayer in front of an arched exterior wall. I have not identified the exact location, probably another part of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, but in the back row are two figures who look like British soldiers, their caps removed.



Jerusalem: Al-Aqsa Mosque and soldiers kneeling to join others in prayer

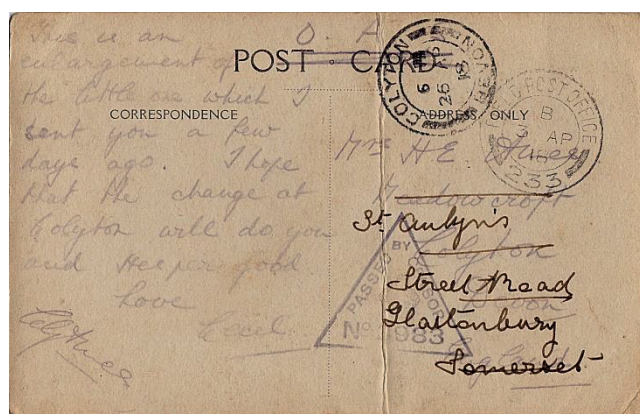
Back at camp, the visit of Prince Arthur approached. 16 March 1918 was the day of his inspection of the 1/5 SLI and of other battalions within the 233rd Brigade. Cecil was chosen together with another lieutenant and Captain (as he then was) Goodland himself to head up the 100 strong guard of honour. His selection was a major personal privilege, and he would have seen it as such. He was no doubt relieved when the guard's appearance was highly commended by their visitor. The letter later received by the battalion commented on 'the smartness, turn-out and precision of the fine Guard of Honour.' Similar praise came in ripples from such senior and normally distant officers as the general in command of the 233rd Brigade and the major-general commanding the 75th Division, very important people.

Below: the entrance to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and a street scene in Jerusalem:



12 The hill of Arara, April 1918

Two days after the inspection they were on the move again, as the front line of their division successfully inched its way north. Their period in reserve had come to an end and in the next push at the beginning of April they were allocated two local landmarks to take. Goodland comments on the excitement in the camp. As was usual in such periods of tense build up, Cecil wrote home, sending another photo post-card to his mother. As he says, it is, like the one he sent from Alexandria, an enlargement of a small photo he had sent her a few days previously. It shows him looking well-groomed and cheerful.



When and where had it been taken? How had he achieved the enlarged version? One can imagine a facility in Alexandria to enlarge a previous snap, but this time the post-mark is 'Field Post Office' 3 April 1918! ⁴⁰ Clearly here, as elsewhere during the war, the postal service functioned magnificently; he is impressively up to date with what was happening at home, knows his mother and Hesper have gone to Colyton in Devon for a change of scene and hopes it will do them good. Then 'Love, Cecil'. Nothing to cause the censor concern, correct behaviour as always. The card missed them at Colyton and on 26 April was redirected to an address in Glastonbury. A long, long way from the rigours of the Palestine campaign.

When a few days later the moment came to issue orders for the operation, Colonel E F Cooke-Hurle, in command, drew attention to the fact that by happy coincidence the next day would be the anniversary of the Somerset Light Infantry's hour of glory in Afghanistan in 1842 when they had raised the siege of Jellalabad, a day of annual celebration.⁴¹ Building on this, he then

⁴⁰ In a 2016 article in the Daily Telegraph, a soldier who had fought alongside Kurdish troops in Iraq recalls an ice-cream truck drawing up in the middle of an engagement, ten yards from a heavy machine gun firing at Islamic State positions, and proceeding to sell refreshments to those fighting. As he says, 'Entrepreneurs never give up!'

⁴¹ Jellalabad: see note on the SLI badge at the end of chapter 3.

gave them their orders for the following day: the battalion was to advance to a geographical line imagined running from Rafat to Arara. (See map chapter 11.) There were to be two phases in the advance, in the first of which, at 0510 hours, no 2 company and no 4 company were to 'rush the village of Rafat and seize it'. The second phase would begin at 0700, at which point 'No 1 Company (Lieut. C. G. Ames)' was to move to the nearby dry riverbed, or wadi, and 'when ordered, to advance on the southeast peak of Arara'.

Arara was in 1918 a rocky, barren hill, strewn with boulders and stones; it stood out as a naturally strong position, as is evident in this 2007 picture.



pictureWikipedia

The hill of Arara

The first phase of the operation went initially as planned, but Nos 2 and 4 companies then had to cope with a Turkish counterattack, so Cecil and his men received no orders to begin phase 2 for another day and had to remain in the wadi.⁴² But at dawn on 10 April he led his company forward and succeeded, despite heavy machine gun fire, in getting to within 100 yards of the summit. At this point, however, they came under fire from a different direction, where the Turks were still in control. Wyrall describes their predicament: 'Throughout the day, though exposed to enfilade⁴³ fire as well, No 1 clung with fine tenacity to the upper slopes of Arara, though shelled and machine gunned mercilessly.' With the help of reinforcements, they had sufficient success for a further 'heroic effort' to be made after dark to 'rush' the hill. But the Turks too had been heavily reinforced, with the result that 'although the men in the leading attacking lines reached the summit, it was found to be untenable, and the project was abandoned.' Before dawn on 11 April, after 24 hours of continuous fighting, no 1 company was ordered to withdraw to the wadi below.

Wyrall tells us that on 10 and 11 April, in addition to the 9 deaths, 6 officers (unnamed – Wyrall and Goodland agree that the battalion diary is confused at this point) and 75 men were wounded. Cecil was one of the wounded officers, his name appearing in the War Office weekly casualty list for 25 April. As the officer leading the advance, he would have been as exposed as any. His sister Des knew that the second time he was wounded, the man next to him had been killed outright. Cooke-Hurle, who served with the 1/5 battalion from its formation, had known Cecil since 1917 and wrote warmly of him in 1921: 'He proved himself

⁴² In later life too Cecil could fall asleep anywhere, a skill perhaps learnt at boarding school and most useful in circumstances such as those at Arara.

⁴³ Enfilade: fire directed at the side of a fighting unit rather than at its front line.

to be a very capable young officer, hardworking, energetic and a leader of men. He was twice wounded in action in Palestine and was fearless under fire.'



Above: Col. E F Cooke-Hurle.

For the next eight days the battalion hung on with difficulty to the positions they had gained, while being heavily shelled from the slopes above, but they were then relieved, that is, replaced, by a battalion of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry. The SLI records included a letter from the brigade commander: 'Will you please convey to all ranks my admiration of the dash and endurance shown by the unit under your command in the recent most trying operations. I can best describe the work of the battalion as worthy of the finest traditions of the famous 13th Light Infantry.'⁴⁴

A year after their arrival from India, the volunteers of the 1/5 battalion had proved themselves, on this occasion as on others, the equals of their professional colleagues.

⁴⁴ In Goodland and Wyrall, to show 'dash' is to do something with style, or, as the French say, with 'panache' or 'élan.' 'Endurance,' of course, is what you need when things get tough and circumstances are 'trying,' another favoured word. The 13th Light Infantry had been the regiment's title before it became Prince Albert's Light Infantry.

13 The end of the war, April to October 1918

Within the big picture, the fighting at Arara was a small but perhaps typical example of the 'local operations' conducted during the spring of 1918, well short of any general engagement but nevertheless capable of causing significant casualties when things went badly. It marked a change in tactics. Allenby had had to release two of his British divisions to serve on the hard-pressed Western Front, a huge number of men, and they were replaced by Indian infantry from Mesopotamia. On the Ottoman side, the newly arrived German battalions being integrated into their army were better organised and better equipped than the Turks alone had been. The result was that Allenby issued orders for a 'Defence Scheme,' designed to retain gains already made rather than to continue the push northwards. There was a lull in the war, with no major engagements for a while.



Roadmaking?

The 1/5 SLI continued in and out of front-line positions, and Goodland complains of 'filthy fly and flea infested villages perched on the summits of hills'. The night patrols continued too, despite Turkish shelling, and there was a new feature, the distribution of propaganda in no-man's-land. There was more roadmaking, as in the picture above, more training, 'working parties' and 'salvage work.' Two officers and 22 men were wounded between May and July, and 13 officers and 136 'other ranks' became sick and had to be evacuated as fever and dysentery took their toll in the summer heat. But there were periods of rest and recuperation too. Some of the spells in reserve were spent in pleasant shady wadis among fig and olive trees, with the luxury of a good water supply for washing and disinfecting. These last two activities seem to be what is happening in two of Cecil's photos below, where men are shown standing under an ad hoc row of showers slung over a river (left) and bathing in what looks like a portable pool, too small for swimming but perhaps useful for a medicated bath (right).



Showering and a bathe

Opportunities were now given to all ranks to visit Jerusalem, and for some there was a period beside the sea back at 'Rest Camp' at El Arish, now also the site of a large medical facility, the No 45 Stationary Hospital.

We do not know how much of this Cecil experienced, nor how long he took to recover from the wound received at Arara. Was he perhaps among those treated at El Arish? What sort of wound was it? For the rest of his life his right arm ached when he was tired or had done a lot of writing, and he would write with his left hand, a different script learnt, I assume, in 1918. That his wound on this occasion was serious may also be indicated by the fact that his name now drops out of Goodland's narrative.



His sister Des remembered his letters home as 'all about the beautiful wild anemones covering the bare hills, with not a word about what was happening to him' in the context of the war. Did he mark his 21st birthday in any way on 5 August? Did he play an active part in the September build-up in which the battalion was involved before the vast battle of Megiddo on the Sharon plain, the offensive which ensured the Allies' ultimate victory in the Sinai and Palestine campaign? I suspect not; as an officer who had in all probability been recently wounded in his operational arm, he was not a suitable choice for front line responsibility. He was, however, promoted to Captain following the Arara engagement and perhaps, when

he had sufficiently recovered, he was given one of the very many organisational or administrative roles within the battalion, behind the front line.

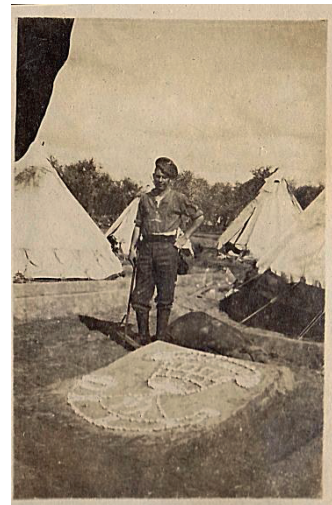
We know of his promotion from two small, yellowed pieces of poor-quality paper held together by a now rusty clip, with a date of 13 March 1919. This is Cecil's 'confidential report,' at the conclusion of the campaign, from the brigade commander still in Egypt. It is signed by Goodland himself and addressed to Cecil's mother's home in Bath. It says simply 'A most useful officer and an excellent company commander.'

19 September 1918 was the last day on which the 1/5 Somerset Light Infantry had any involvement in the military part of the campaign, and on 31 October Cooke-Hurle signed off the final day's entry in the battalion diary with its news of the armistice.

My selection of Cecil's photos has been made to illustrate the narrative line and has omitted a large number. Some of the latter are spur of the moment snaps taken with an unsteady hand and do not bear reproduction. Among these are many pictures of local people: Indian boys doing acrobatics, women in Jerusalem enveloped in long white veils, their backs turned to the camera, a queue of Palestinian men by a notice not quite legible even on maximum zoom, with a group of sun helmeted officers behind them in the background. Others are simply not very good pictures of the great variety of things that interested him in his

surroundings. In some cases, the scanner has enabled me to see what the eye could not: what I had taken to be an area of cactus type plants turned out to be a company of men sitting cross legged by their erected tent poles, apparently awaiting the order to proceed further in putting up their tents. In other pictures the subject matter remains a mystery.

But I end with three stuck into one of the albums after his February pictures of Jerusalem. They are all of people, all in a state of relaxation. One shows a trio of what could be 'other ranks,' one of them interrupted in the act of drying his face (left) another someone having an outdoor haircut among the tents (centre) and in the third (right) a man wearing his cap at a jaunty angle stands by a large replica of the Somerset Light Infantry regimental crest, created on the ground from pebbles and sand. One can just read the scroll along the top: 'Jellalabad.'



The 1/5 SLI in camp, a facewash, a haircut, the regimental badge reproduced in pebbles

and Cecil at ease:



14 Return to Frome, 1919-1921

Captain Ames was demobilised and returned home. Not immediately to Frome, but to the home represented by the flat at 32 The Paragon, Bath, to which his mother Louisa (left) had now moved, and where she lived with his younger sister Hesper. Louisa remained restless, and frequently moved house within Bath, with the expert help of Pickford's removal services.⁴⁵ Hesper, now 15, was a pupil at Bath High School.⁴⁶



It must have been a difficult return to civilian life for Cecil after his momentous experiences abroad. But one way ahead was obvious: he could return to Frome to join Messrs E G Ames and Son as articled clerk to his uncle, Percy Ames. This he did. The document of his articles is my largest and best-preserved item, with four red stamps at the top to mark the payment of £80, and two sides of the typewritten agreement, unpunctuated, in true legal manner. In it Cecil binds himself to good behaviour (hardly necessary), also 'to keep the secrets of the said Alfred Percy Ames and readily and cheerfully obey and execute his lawful and reasonable commands' and not, when qualified, to set up a rival practice within eight miles of Frome.⁴⁷ Percy for his part is to teach and train his nephew so that he may be admitted 'as a Solicitor of the Supreme Court of Judicature or any other Court of Law or Equity.' It is dated 28 March 1919, signed by Percy and was to run for four years.

There are various stamps on the back of the articles. One, itself undated, reads 'Reduced to two (2) years under Solicitors' act 1919, Articles expire 27-3-1921'. This act shortened the usual four-year stint to two for those who had served in the war. Another stamp notes that his school examination results included the then obligatory (for lawyers) Latin. Two more record Cecil's having passed the Intermediate examinations in Law, and in Accounts and Bookkeeping. He took the Final Examination of the Law Society in London in March 1921 and the certificate which records his success is dated 24-3-21, exactly three days before his articles expired.

A letter preserved among Des's papers sheds a more personal light on this period. Cecil writes to his mother on paper of the students' common room at the Law Society in Chancery Lane, London. There is no date, only 'Wednesday', but it seems reasonable to guess that he is there on study leave before his final exams. He says he has just joined the students' part of the Law

⁴⁵According to Cecil, Pickford's Removals on one occasion even moved the boiled egg she had left on the breakfast table from one flat to the next, and did so without breaking it. Louisa's restlessness was just one aspect of her problems. She also suffered from debilitating migraine headaches, as did Cecil, and for him they continued into his later years.

⁴⁶ The same school that I attended in the 1950's

⁴⁷ The notice in the London Gazette at the time of Edmund Gifford Ames' retirement in 1898, when Herbert and Percy became sole partners in the family firm, mentions branches in Radstock and Midsomer Norton as well as the one in Frome.

Society 'as it is very suitable for doing one's reading, and there are nice quiet rooms with all the books of reference which one requires.' There are other advantages too, as 'one can eat here very inexpensively.' The obvious cheap eating places in the London of the time, Lyons and the ABC, 'have quite disgusted me,' being dirty and crowded, while the rest were too expensive.

He is unfamiliar with London, it seems, and tells his mother about the preceding Saturday afternoon when he went sightseeing but succeeded only in being just too late for one thing after another: the Houses of Parliament were closing, a large Trade Union meeting was getting going in Trafalgar Square and he was turned out of Westminster Abbey as visiting hours came to an end.

But the main item of news is his Sunday morning visit to the Congregational Church at Kings Weigh House in Mayfair where a certain Dr W E Orchard was sending ripples through the nonconformist churches by his attempts to bring elements of catholic, 'high' church ritual into their simple form of worship. Dr Orchard had published his own prayer book in 1919, which Cecil says was used at the service he attended. He comments, '...Dr Orchard, who looks about 35 though he is really 43... is not very prepossessing to look at, fair with eyeglasses. I am told that his father was an engine driver or something like that, but I cannot believe it because he has such perfect speech and intonation. He of course preached a wonderful sermon, and has a splendid delivery, although a rather squeaky voice.'

He has been in touch in London with several people known to his mother and the following Sunday has been invited for a walk on Hampstead Heath and tea at her house by a Miss E M Bell, 'all of which will be very jolly, I think.' There are also references to people mentioned in Louisa's previous letter, a request to Des to fetch, if she can, his remaining 'Pelman books' from Frome (Pelmanism was a popular memory training system) and good wishes to Hesper for the coming term. It is an affectionate letter and such as to please his mother.

Des remembered a different narrative for this period, in which Cecil did his articles at Blue Anchor, a small seaside town on the north Somerset coast near Minehead, not far from the edge of Exmoor. This is clearly not what happened, but perhaps he went there for a holiday during the period of his articles. At only sixty miles' distance from Frome but at the end of a journey which even today takes nearly two hours, it would have made an excellent modest holiday spot. She remembered how much he loved roaming about the beautiful quiet countryside, and the seaside holidays they had enjoyed together as children were the obvious model for him to copy, now he was a grown man. He must also have wanted space in which to think about what he had experienced and perhaps to begin questioning whether his expected future as a Frome solicitor was what he really wanted.

We don't know where he lived during his articles, but presumably in Frome with his uncle or some other friend or relative. I have one picture that seems to belong to this period, a glossy reprint of a press photo, I think, for the occasion is one for which a sizeable crowd is gathered.

Cecil, in white jacket and shorts, is being presented by a beaming gentleman with what looks like a brown paper parcel, with a smaller white wrapped packet or envelope on top. What was in the parcel? A book perhaps? The scene takes place in a field or park, and there is a small marquee in the background. There are lots of smiles among the onlookers, and it has the feel of a happy occasion, presumably sporting, among people who were pleased to see Cecil receive whatever it is. My guess is that we are looking at a Frome occasion, during the period of his articles.



Back home in Frome, Cecil receives a prize or presentation

But he had made his decision and had done so, Des says, with Louisa's encouragement: he was not going to settle down as a country solicitor under his uncle Percy's direction in the comfortable family firm. Within six weeks of qualifying at the end of March 1921, he had written to his two headmasters and his three army superiors for their support for his application to the Colonial Office to work 'in the administrative services in East or West Africa.' He had tasted a different life and wanted more of it.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Percy's 1921 testimonial, the sixth in Cecil's collection, commends his nephew's diligence, adaptability and trustworthiness. He 'took a great interest in the work of the office,' he says. But not, it seems, to the point of making E G Ames and Son his career.

Acknowledgements

I began my research with my own small archive, to which I have added material from the family papers held by my cousin Judith Taylor, daughter of Désirée, Cecil's sister. Further information on the Ames family in Frome was researched by local historian Derek Gill.

I have of course consulted very many open access websites. Particularly useful have been:

<http://www.1914-1918-online.net/>

<http://www1.somerset.gov.uk/archives/sli/>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history>

I have used Wikipedia widely, but I hope judiciously. With the exception of that from Goodland's book, the maps are all from Wikipedia. The 'Ancestry' and 'Genealogist' websites have provided official confirmation and detail on some of the facts and dates.

The archive of the Somerset Light Infantry drew me in 2013 to Taunton, and I found there the two books without which I could not have written this account. Everard Wyrall's *'The Somerset Light Infantry 1914–1919,'* published in 1927, is a history of the entire regiment, whose battalions served in many different areas of the war. But the book which has put flesh on the bare bones of Cecil's war experience has been *'The History and Book of Remembrance of the 1/5th Battalion (Prince Albert's) Somerset Light Infantry,'* published 1930, by Major E S Goodland and Captain H L Milsom. They have the enormous advantage of having taken part in the events they describe as members of the battalion and are therefore able to inject some personal memories into the official record. Milsom, whom I have not otherwise mentioned, was the lead officer with Cecil in no 2 Company at Gaza, left to carry on alone when Cecil was wounded.

Two other books have been useful: *'Public Schools and the Great War, the Generation Lost,'* by Anthony Seldon and David Walsh, published 2013, and the small *'When I join the Ranks, what to do and how to do it,'* by The Major, reproduced from a handbook of the period.

Other helpful visits were to the National Army Museum at Chelsea and the exhibition 'Remembering 1916' at Whitgift School. The Imperial War Museum I first visited in 2012, when I learnt a lot from a small but informative section of their WW1 display devoted to the Palestine campaign. Returning in 2016 to check some details I found no trace of it and was told that in 2014 some 'subsidiary' displays had been taken down and put into store. I could find no reference in their current WW1 coverage to any area further from London than Gallipoli. Is the campaign in the Middle East being written out of our WW1 tradition, Lawrence of Arabia and all?

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Postscript

When I wrote the first part of my father's story, I had not reread the letters he sent me from West Africa in 1962, which contain occasional memories of his war experiences, such as his enjoyment of the outdoor film shows put on for the troops. At one point in 1962 he found himself unexpectedly travelling on a Comet of United Arab Airlines between Lagos and Accra, and was given a copy of the 'Egyptian Gazette' to read, an English language paper which, he says, he had last seen in 1919 when on his way home from Palestine at the end of the war. I had assumed he returned to Britain soon after the Armistice in November 1918, but not so, it seems, and Major Goodland's history of the battalion does indeed continue well into the following year. Since I clearly underestimated the time needed to demobilise a battalion, I'll summarise what happened next.

In early December, the 1/5 Somersets took the train south to Kantara, where there was a major military base on the east side of the Suez Canal. There the soldiers enjoyed 'ample rations and water' and ate turkey (frozen) and plum pudding on Christmas Day. It was January before the serious demobilisation process began, and that was complicated by the move to a different standing camp, 'beside the blue waters' on the Egyptian side of the canal. There were compensations for the delay, however, with those not needed for official duties having 'ample time for football, fishing and bathing' and enjoyment of the constant stream of shipping on the canal, 'a source of perpetual interest'. When required to work, men not processing the demobilisation found themselves helping to set up a Divisional Education School, to ease re-entry into the workplace when the men arrived home.

I would imagine that Cecil was not one of those with 'ample time' for recreation, but he will have passed a pleasant enough period until he was finally able to travel home. Major Goodland signed his 'confidential report' on 13 March 1919. He got out just in time, for on 16 March there were serious anti-British nationalist riots across Egypt, which delayed the return home of the remaining members of the battalion.

That was not, however, the end of his association with the army, for in the recently published 1921 census we see he listed himself not only as 'solicitor', (he had just qualified) but also as 'lieutenant in defence force', a body presumably similar to the volunteer territorial force to which he had originally signed up in 1915.

One further correction: on his outward journey to India in 1917, Cecil took a photo in Cape Town of a statue of Cecil Rhodes. When I wrote in 2016, I believed the statue to be still standing, but it had in fact been pulled down in 2015, after it had become the focus of campaigns by students against colonial era leaders. The head of Rhodes on another larger monument nearby, vandalised in 2001, was removed altogether in 2021, during the worldwide protests against racism which followed the killing of George Floyd in the US.



Cecil G Ames 1897-1977
Palestine, 1918, World War 1

Jennifer Ridley (née Ames) 2022