



RELATIONS BETWEEN EGYPTIAN CIVILIANS AND THE MEN  
OF THE A.I.F., 1914-1919

by

Suzanne Mary Brugger, B.A.(Hons.), (London, 1964)

Department of History

University of Adelaide

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

This thesis contains no material previously accepted for the award of any degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, neither does it contain any material previously published or written by any other person, except in those instances to which due reference has been made in the text.

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SYNOPSIS

The following thesis falls into three parts of unequal length, corresponding to the three phases of A.I.F. involvement with Egyptians between 1914 and 1919.

Part I covers the period from December 1914, when the first contingents landed, to the departure for France of the infantry and other units in 1916, and it embraces training, the Gallipoli campaign and the process of regrouping after the evacuation of the Peninsula. It saw the heaviest concentration of Australians in Egypt. My concern is to show how the reactions of the troops to an alien environment not only illustrates racial attitudes and the development of a sense of national identity, but also how they brought into the open conflicting ideas of morality, discipline and social conduct existing within Australian society. In addition, I discuss, with particular reference to the A.I.F., how civilians of all races within Egypt adjusted to the presence of a large armed force in their midst, its political, commercial and social impact. The cooperation of both civil and military personnel through the voluntary agencies to ameliorate conditions for the troops is also dealt with.

Part II constitutes an interlude, covering the period of Light Horse involvement in the Sinai and Palestine campaigns. Australian troops now visited Egypt only on the occasion of their rare leaves, for special military instruction, or when sent back wounded to the Stationary Hospitals, though they came into frequent contact with native Egyptians in the field, where the fallaheen were serving in considerable numbers in the Labour and Transport Corps.

The significance to my thesis as a whole of this period lies not so much in these contacts, however, as in the development of certain attitudes throughout the Light Horse which were to effect their actions later during the suppression of the 1919 rising in Egypt.

Part III is concerned with the 1919 revolutionary disturbances. It discusses the causes for the outbreak and makes an appraisal of the Australian role in heightening the disaffection that led to it. There is a description of Australian operations during the pacification of rural areas which has been based largely on actual patrol reports, and an examination of the activities of those A.I.F. troops who were left in Cairo, which assesses the ways in which their presence may have actively contributed to the increase of tension. Certain accusations of atrocities which were levelled against some Australians are discussed, with reference to contemporary opinion thereon.

There is a conclusion, or rather some concluding remarks on the way the events of 1914-1919 continue to effect the views which Australians and Egyptians still have of each other.

PREFACE

Before I came to the study of history and considered the possibilities of undertaking some historical research, my early academic training and subsequent continuing interest had been in Arabic and the Arabic-speaking countries. I hoped to find a research topic which would make use of the special skills I had acquired, but which at the same time could feasibly be carried out from the University of Adelaide which had no special resources for work in this area. The interaction between different cultures had recently begun to attract my attention and it was while I was considering some topic which might reflect this interest that Professor Austin Gough of the Department of History made the initial suggestion out of which this thesis has developed. When the A.I.F. were sent to Egypt at the end of 1914, it was, he observed, the first occasion when a sizeable section of the Australian population was exposed to an alien civilisation, and I was possibly uniquely placed to observe this confrontation from both sides, besides having shown a preference for some area of study involving relations between diverse cultural groups.

It is to Professor Gough, then, that the first acknowledgement is due for providing my initial inspiration, however different the end product may be from what he, or I for that matter, envisaged when it was first considered. Subsequently I have been most ably and patiently assisted by my supervisors within the Department of History, firstly by Dr. John Tregenza, and then, during his study leave and after his departure to another post, by Professor Trevor

Wilson, both of whom unfailingly provided me with a sympathetic audience and some necessary restraint. Dr. Walid Kassihai of the American University, Cairo, fulfilled a similar office during a trip I made to Egypt, through the generosity of the University of Adelaide. My thanks are due to those who granted the funds which made such a trip possible, to Miss Stichnoth of the Commonwealth Department of Education who made arrangements for me to receive my grant while I was away, and to Dr. Kassihai for undertaking to supervise me.

The list of people who have contributed their help, either with advice or in the production of materials might be extended indefinitely, and with a few exceptions, I am forced reluctantly to acknowledge that help and my gratitude for it to institutions rather than individuals. Within Australia I would particularly like to thank the staffs of the Australian War Memorial, the National Library, the Commonwealth Archives, the State Libraries of Victoria and South Australia, notably the La Trobe Library and South Australian Archives, and of the Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, which accomplished so much through the machinery of inter-library loans. At all these places staff have cheerfully pursued my hunches in time-consuming searches through obscure places. I am grateful too, for the interest I have encountered among the secretaries of local R.S.L. branches and regimental associations I approached for introductions to surviving old soldiers with memories of Egypt in the Great War. In almost every instance where they could offer me assistance they did so, frequently suggesting other lines of approach. The old soldiers themselves have been one of the great

unlooked for bonuses of my research and a special thanks is due to men, none of whom was below 77 when interviewed and the oldest being 97, who willingly submitted to being questioned for sometimes quite lengthy periods. My thanks are also due to the members of the post-graduate seminar I attended from 1973 for the encouragement I derived from their interest in my work, and the use I have made of their perspicacious criticisms.

In Egypt, I am indebted to the American University for the use of its library and for the assistance offered by Dr. Louis Cantouri of the Department of Political Science. I must thank the staff of the Dar-ul-Kutub and Cairo University Library both for their professional assistance in producing materials and for the friendliness they extended towards me as a foreign visitor. Almost everyone I met in Cairo seemed anxious to forward my research and I was put in touch with many old people whose memories reached back to the Great War. I thank all those who assisted me with their recollections and all my many intermediaries. Mention must also be made of Dr. Mohammed Ali ed-Didy of Ain Shams University, for his enlightening comments on Egyptian nationalism, his indication of interesting background reading and his guidance through Cairo's sometimes bewildering topography.

For assistance during my time in England, I acknowledge my debt to the staffs of the Public Record Office, the British Museum, the Imperial War Museum and Senate House Library, University of London, for their general helpfulness, but particularly to Dr. Peter Liddel of the Sunderland Polytechnic who gave up time to open that institution's special archive of First World War material to me during the vacation



and while he had serious family concerns to preoccupy his attention.

Finally I acknowledge an enormous debt of gratitude to my husband for cheerfully assuming both parental roles at intervals during the past four years when I have disappeared on study trips, as well as supporting me throughout with his interest and encouragement.

NOTES ON TRANSLITERATION, CONVENTIONS AND TERMINOLOGY.

Transliteration

1. The Arabic names which appear in this thesis have not been transliterated according to any rigid scientific principle since methods of reproduction make it impossible to represent some letters accurately. Most names are given in the version with which the majority of Australian readers are likely to be familiar, (an exception being Surafand which I prefer to 'Surafand' as it appears in the Official History, Vol.VII.) rather than in a pedantically correct form. The form of a proper name as it first appears in the text, is used as standard throughout, unless this is especially idiosyncratic, except where variants occur in direct quotations or passages which closely follow the wording of an original source of reference. (Thus in Appendix II, a street in Cairo is written 'Haret el-Wasser' as it appears in Bean's account which is being summarised. The normal form as found in the rest of the thesis would be Haret el-Wassa). Sometimes when different versions of the same name would have appeared in close proximity, even this easy rule is relaxed. I recognise that inconsistencies exist, but would ask the reader to extend to me the same indulgence that T.E. Lawrence demanded from the publishers of The Seven Pillars of Wisdom.
2. The definite article al has been generally used in the names of Arabic newspapers, but has occasionally been omitted in the case of al-Watan and al-Misr. A similar inconsistency when dealing with these particular proper names may be noted in F.O. 371/3718. The Wadi-l-Nil has been written as one word, Wadinnil, in

accordance with contemporary practice. (See F.O. 371/3718).

### Conventions

Foreign words like sunt (an acacia tree) and omdeh (a head-man) have been underlined in the text, except for those which like 'fellah' and 'piastre' have been absorbed into English and appear in the Concise Oxford Dictionary in a non-italicised form.

### Terminology

1. Despite their countries' Dominion status Australians and New Zealanders still sometimes referred to themselves at this period as 'Colonials'. (See page 87, note 78.) I have occasionally done the same.
2. I have sometimes used the word 'native' when referring to Egyptians. However, the term may be used in quotations, it should be taken that where it appears in the body of the text it is used in its original sense of an indigenous inhabitant, one who is born in a country, and with no racial overtones.
3. In the last four chapters, in dealing with events in Egypt in 1919 I have used terms such as 'revolution, revolt, rebellion, uprising, outbreak, disturbances,' etc. I realise that each of these words is only an approximate equivalent of the others and that each has specific associations. Sometimes a word has been selected because it is the best way of describing some particular manifestation of disaffection, but on the whole the terms have been used in an imprecise way. This has been partly to avoid repetition, and partly because I did not wish to commit myself to either an obvious pro-Egyptian position (by consistently speaking of a 'revolution') or to a pro-British one (by always

referring to a 'rebellion.')

Similarly I have preferred to write of 'nationalists' in general rather than 'Nationalists' in particular, so as to make my remarks applicable to as wide a section of the Egyptian populace as possible, rather than any particular political group. If such a group is intended, the term is usually expanded to some such form as 'nationalist activists'.

ABBREVIATIONS

- A.A.M.C., Australian Army Medical Corps.
- A.A.N.S., Australian Army Nursing Service.
- A.A. and Q.M.G., Assistant-Adjutant and Quartermaster General.
- A.A.W.R.C., Australian Army Records Collection (=A.W.M.F.)
- A.D.M.S., Assistant-Director of Medical Services.
- A.F.A. Bde., Australian Field Artillery Brigade.
- A.G.H., Australian General Hospital.
- A.I.F., Australian Imperial Force.
- A.L.H., Australian Light Horse.
- A. Mtd. Div., Aust. Mtd. Div., Australian Mounted Division.
- A.N.Z. Mtd. Div., Anz. Mtd. Div., Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division.
- A.N.U.P., Australian National University Press.
- A.V.C., Army Veterinary Corps. (Now the R.A.V.C.)
- A.W.M., Australian War Memorial.
- A.W.M.F., Australian War Memorial File.
- Bde., Brigade.
- Bde. Maj., Brigade Major.
- B.M.S.P., British Museum State Papers.
- Btn., Battalion.
- B/Sgt. Maj., Battery Sergeant-Major.
- Bty., Battery.
- Capt., Captain.
- C.I.G.S., Chief of the Imperial General Staff.
- C.O., Commanding Officer.
- Col., Colonel.

Coy., Company.

Cpl., Corporal.

C.Q.M.S., Company Quartermaster Sergeant.

C.T.C., Camel Transport Corps.

D.D.M.S., Deputy Director of Medical Services.

E.E.F., Egyptian Expeditionary Force.

E.G., Egyptian Gazette.

E.L.C., Egyptian Labour Corps.

Eng., Engineers.

E.S.R., Egyptian State Railways.

E.T.C., Egyptian Transport Corps.

Fld. Amb., Field Ambulance.

F.O., Foreign Office.

F.O.L., Foreign Office Library.

G.C.M. General Court Martial.

Gen., General.

G.O.C., General Officer Commanding.

G.S., General Staff.

H.Q., Headquarters.

Inf. Bde., Infantry Brigade.

I., Intelligence.

I.S., Intelligence Summary.

I.W.M., Imperial War Museum.

L/Cpl., Lance-Corporal.

L.E., Egyptian pound. (Worth approximately 6d. more than the pound sterling.)

L.H. Bde., Light Horse Brigade.

L.H.R., Light Horse Regiment.

Lt., Lieutenant.

Lt.-Col., Lieutenant-Colonel.

Maj., Major.

Maj.-Gen., Major-General.

M.G. Coy., Machine Gun Company.

M.J.A., Medical Journal of Australia.

M.P., Military Police.

M.U.P., Melbourne University Press.

N.C.O., Non-commissioned officer.

N.L.A., National Library of Australia.

O.C., Officer Commanding.

O.U.P., Oxford University Press.

P.R.O., Public Record Office.

Pt., P.T., piastre.

Pte., Private.

P.U.P., Princeton University Press.

R.A.E., Royal Australian Engineers.

R.A.M.C., Royal Army Medical Corps.

R.A.S.C., Royal Army Service Corps.

R.E., Royal Engineers.

Regt., Regiment.

R.H.A., Royal Horse Artillery.

R.Q.M.S., Regimental Quartermaster Sergeant.

Sgt., Sergeant.

Sgt. Major, Sergeant-Major.

S.M.O., Senior Medical Officer.

S.P.A., Sunderland Polytechnic Archive.

Squad., Squadron.

Tgm., Telegram.

T. of E., Times of Egypt.

W.D., War Diary.

W.O., War Office.

ADDENDA

C.C.F. Commonwealth Cadet Force.

C.M.F. Citizens Military Forces

L. of C. Lines of Communication.

L.R.Op. Light Railway Operating.



INTRODUCTION

The volume of writing on Australia during the Great War, both published and in thesis form, is so considerable that the undertaking of any new dissertation requires some justification. This would seem to be similarly true of Egypt, which appears a well-worked field where further labour can only re-turn furrows already thoroughly ploughed. Why then, should there be any need for this particular project?

In the broadest terms, it is hoped that in combining two areas of historical interest which are usually examined separately this thesis may open new perspectives on both. For both Egypt and Australia the years between 1914 and 1919 are of special significance, being generally acknowledged as crucial in any study of the emergence of nationalism in the two countries. In Egypt, occupied by Great Britain since 1882, and formally proclaimed a British Protectorate in December 1914, the war years saw the nationalist movement undergo a change from a largely intellectual pursuit (confined chiefly to urban centres where the level of political consciousness had been raised by exposure to the more overt aspects of imperialism, and educational standards were higher) to the physical violence of the revolutionary disturbances of 1919, which not only erupted in the cities but were also wide-spread throughout rural areas. It is one of the objects of this thesis to recapitulate the causes of the spread of disaffection with special reference to the role which Australian troops may have had in stirring up resentment.

The revolt itself was rapidly suppressed, partly with the assistance of the Light Horse whose activities are described in

Part III of the present work. Their methods aroused considerable discussion at the time, receiving high praise in some quarters and outspoken criticism in others. This thesis will reproduce the full range of these opinions and examine the reasoning behind them, as well as offering a new interpretation of the springs of Australian action and an assessment of its immediate and long-term consequences both for Egypt and in the wider sphere of international affairs.

For Australia, the period under examination is important for very different reasons. In 1914, though economic ties and mutual needs for defence still bound Australia to Great Britain, the young Commonwealth was an autonomous nation. There was no political struggle to be waged against a colonial master like the battle for independence Egypt had to fight. Instead, there was a pressing psychological need for Australia to prove herself worthy of an honourable place among the nations, and particularly within the great traditions of the British Empire. The War provided the opportunity for that need to be met. Australia emerged from her geographical remoteness into her first large-scale participation in world affairs - emerged, moreover, to play an increasingly ego-building role as her troops successfully defended the Mother Country so long looked-to as the ultimate source of security. Anzac gloriously dispelled all anxiety that the British stock might have declined following its transplantation to the southern continent, and established Australia's right to nationhood in the eyes of her own people and the world.<sup>1</sup> Thenceforth Australians could look to themselves and their country with a confidence sprung from their own achievements.

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1. Bill Gammage, The Broken Years. Australian Soldiers in the Great War., (Canberra, 1974), p. 84 ff.

Though this growth of an independent military tradition was important in the development of national as opposed to imperial pride and loyalty, and for the creation of a sense of specifically Australian identity, it was by no means the only factor involved therein. For the first time as a result of the War, a large body of Australians, drawn from a wide variety of social and occupational backgrounds, but for the most part having no experience of any country other than their own, found themselves exposed to the impact of the outside world. They were suddenly surprised into an awareness of how they differed from other peoples, including the British with whom they shared such close ties of blood and sentiment. Confronted by the unfamiliar and often unacceptable behaviour patterns of foreigners they more readily perceived the underlying similarities of thought that bound them to their fellow countrymen. They became gradually conscious of what made them distinctively Australian. In this process, ordinary human contacts, the chances of daily social intercourse, were even more important than exceptional deeds on the field of battle.<sup>2</sup> Nowhere was the contrast between the troops and the civilians they encountered so marked as in Egypt. Australians continuing to serve in the Egyptian Expeditionary Force in the Middle Eastern theatre were inescapably confronted by alien culture, an unfamiliar religion with a different scale of values, and strange social usages. They responded by developing an almost tribal loyalty to each other and the land they had left.<sup>3</sup> Pride of race, a basic

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2. " ... by the daily doings, great and small ... the Australian nation came to know itself." C.E.W. Bean, ed., Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918, (Sydney, 1921 onwards). Vol. VI. p.1095.

3. Col. Waters Taylor, quoted in Horace E. Samuel, Unholy Memories of the Holy Land, (London, 1930), p. 38.

element in the consolidating national character of the A.I.F.<sup>4</sup>, was nowhere more in evidence than in their treatment of non-Europeans in this area. Through the behaviour and expressed opinions of the men serving in Egypt this thesis examines racialism as a component of Australian nationalism during the Great War.

So far, in considering what value there may be in a study of relations between the A.I.F. and Egyptian civilians, I have been concerned exclusively with Australian interaction with the indigenous population. Egypt was, however, a composite and cosmopolitan society, its administration largely staffed by Englishmen, its commerce dominated by Frenchmen, Greeks and other Europeans. This society was accustomed to strangers in that it accommodated an annual influx of tourists, and to the presence of soldiers to the extent that a small pre-war garrison of some three to four thousand men had guaranteed its protection against any local upsurge of xenophobia. Save for rare instances, however, relations with tourists, whose social needs were catered for by the great hotels, were maintained on a purely commercial basis quite distinct from the home lives of the settled European population. As regards the resident military, though the officers were readily accepted as a welcome addition to the ranks of eligible males, the men were ignored and left almost entirely to find their own entertainment in the dubious environs of the Ezbeki<sup>eh</sup> quarter. This arrangement was workable under peace-time conditions because the number of men involved was comparatively small, and, as serving regulars in the rigidly hierarchical British Army, where military rank and social class closely corresponded, they

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4. On the significant role of racist ideas in the development of an Australian ethos, see A.G. Butler, The Digger. A study in Democracy, (Sydney, 1945), p. 26. Also, Humphrey McQueen, A New Britannia. An Argument concerning the social origins of Australian radicalism and nationalism., (Harmondsworth, 1970).

were aware of their status and had no high expectations.

The War enormously swelled the numbers of troops in Egypt as the country became the base first for the assault on the Dardanelles and later for the Sinai and Palestine Campaigns. There were now too many soldiers for the filling of their free time to be a matter of indifference to the civilian community they swamped. They were too much in evidence to be ignored. At the same time the nature of the troops had changed. The regular soldiers were being replaced by Territorials and Colonial volunteers--by men who derived their conceptions of their own social position and worth not from any rank they might hold in the Army while hostilities lasted, but from their place in civilian life. To be a ranker was no longer necessarily to be of no social consequence. The old framework within which relations between troops and civilians had operated was no longer adequate. New attitudes and patterns of behaviour had to be evolved to suit the changed circumstances. This thesis examines the frictions of this period of adjustment as they involved Australians, and in so doing contrasts two variants of British society, the Australian and the Anglo-Egyptian.

There remains one other major aspect of the Australian experience in war-time Egypt which may profitably be approached through research into the relations between troops and civilians. In the months before Gallipoli surpassed the nation's highest hopes, there seemed a very real danger that those hopes would founder for ever in the back streets of Cairo. Indiscipline, drunkenness and venereal disease were undermining the A.I.F.

before it even reached the fighting line. This crisis had arisen in large measure from the newly organised army's failure to appreciate or cater for the emotional and recreational needs of the troops. As a greater understanding of the nature of the problem was reached, attempts were made to rectify the situation. Local officials of voluntary agencies such as the Red Cross and Y.M.C.A. worked together with specially accredited representatives from Australia, with senior army officers and helpers from the resident European community, to make good deficiencies, and offer "a wholesome alternative" to the bottle or the brothel. This thesis looks anew at their efforts and what degree of success they had. It examines the conflicting opinions and methods of the workers, and how far they were appreciated by the men. In so doing special attention will be paid to the way in which the philosophy of 'Win the War First' induced compromise in the treatment of moral issues.

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#### Survey of the existing literature

I opened this introduction by referring to the extent of both the literature on Egypt, and that dealing with the Australian forces during the Great War. I shall now proceed to a more careful examination of this literature and the relation it bears to this thesis.

By 1914 Egypt had long been a major object of literary interest. The nineteenth century had seen a steady flow of works of a descriptive nature--travel books, in modern terms--from the

pens of authors as diverse as Harriet Martineau (a 'sort of Simone de Beauvoir of the 1840s')<sup>5</sup> and the Methodist minister, the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes.<sup>6</sup> With a winter climate superior to the South of France, ancient monuments to satisfy the most extreme case of 'ruinmania', a superabundance of Biblical and historical associations and the over-all charm of the exotic, Egypt could not fail, as the means of transport became more comfortable and the country more stable, to attract tourists in increasing numbers. Many of those who came were only too ready to display their talent for fine writing and record their impressions in print. Influenced by the Romantic Movement, the literature they created was largely preoccupied with the landscape and the effects produced upon its beholders by such obvious sources of inspiration as the Pyramids, the Sphinx, or sunset over the Nile. Occasionally a writer, such as Pierre Loti, with an exceptional gift for creating atmosphere, has left a work that still stirs the imagination, but for the most part the modern reader finds himself lost in a labyrinth of purple passages leading nowhere. This whole body of writing lies under the justifiable condemnation that it 'confines itself to presenting mere elegant pictures, depicting a background on which human figures are merely filled in'<sup>7</sup>. In it native Egyptians appear only as fragments of

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5. James Aldridge, Cairo. Biography of a City., (London, 1970), p. 184.
  6. Contributor to the Methodist Times, and author of various theological works as well as The Morning Lands of History. A Visit to Greece, Palestine and Egypt., (London, 1901). As Hughes suggested and his title indicates, Egypt had the further advantage that it could be included without extra trouble or expense in a package tour of the Holy Land or the sites of Classical Greece.
  7. Fr. Henry Habib Ayout, The Fellaheen, (Cairo, 1954). Originally published in French, with the title, Fellah d'Egypte, (Cairo, 1934).

local colour. Despite the general triviality of the school, however, it is not entirely devoid of interest to the historian, and more especially to one whose work touches in any way upon the social life of Egypt's alien residents, or the day-to-day experiences of visiting travellers. Many glimpses are to be caught of the emerging European society of the cities of Cairo and Alexandria, and frequently an author will record his dealings with those inevitable adjuncts of Egyptian tourism, the guide, the dragoman, and the vendor of 'antikas'. When the coming of the Great War put an end to travel for pleasure, the place of the peacetime visitors was to some extent filled by soldiers, who in their turn were exposed to the perennial hazards of persistent street pedlars, devious donkey boys and gharry drivers cheerfully ignorant of their destination. For the purposes of this thesis, the travel literature of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries offers materials from which comparisons may be made between the behaviour and reactions of the A.I.F. and those of previous tourists. (To cite but one example of the usefulness of this source of comparison, I would draw attention to the way in which Australian soldiers dealt with the nuisance of pestering hawkers by driving them off with canes. References to similar behaviour on the part of other visitors to Egypt before them demonstrates that they were resorting to a well-established, if regrettable practice, rather than displaying some peculiarly Australian brutality of conduct.)

Egypt was not, however, simply a superior holiday resort. Situated at the cross-roads of three continents and possessing agricultural land of fabled fertility, its strategic and commercial



possibilities could not fail to attract the attention of European imperialism. The spread of cotton cultivation, providing a valuable raw material for the factories of the industrialised northern countries, and the opening of the Suez Canal which formed such a vital link between Britain and her eastern empire were not so much harbingers of the successful regeneration of Egypt, as irresistible incentives for more powerful nations to seek control of her national life. The financial incompetence of Egypt's rulers gave these predators the opening they desired to obtain domination of the country. For a while Britain and France shared that domination through their joint control of Egypt's finances, set up in 1879, but in 1882 Britain stole a march on her rival by occupying the country, ostensibly at the request of the Egyptian Government for aid in the suppression of the Arabi rebellion, and to preserve foreign lives and interests from violent demonstrations of xenophobia on the part of the rebels. Once thus established, Britain, despite constant promises to withdraw her troops,<sup>8</sup> continued to consolidate her position. Alongside the accounts of travellers' experiences there began to appear works of a strongly political nature, as Britons sought to justify their position in Egypt by the enumeration of the benefits they had brought to the country and a constant denigration of the talents and character of all Egyptians who held nationalist ideals. In this triumphal arch of self-congratulation, the key-stone is undoubtedly Lord Cromer's Modern Egypt<sup>9</sup>. French writers, of course, were only too ready to redress the balance with

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8. 'An industrious Frenchman has stated that England has given 63 promises to evacuate Egypt since 1882'. A.H. Beaman, The Dethronement of the Khedive, (London, 1929), p. 27 note.

9. London, 1908.

hostile criticism of British influence, and Egyptians were not without supporters and sympathisers for their cause among English writers, such as Francis Adams and Wilfred Scawen Blunt.<sup>10</sup> In all, by 1914, the 'Egyptian question' was almost as absorbing a topic of intellectual debate as the Irish, and the revolutionary disturbances of 1919, which are the focus of the last part of this thesis were inevitably the inspiration of many articles and feature prominently in numerous memoirs and general works on Egypt.

The rising presented no serious military threat to the British occupation, and it was quickly suppressed. Short-lived campaigns of pacification, 'police' action against disaffected peasants, seldom earn more than a few lines of description in military histories, and while there is much discussion of the causes of Egypt's post-war flare-up, accounts of its suppression are scanty in the extreme. Inevitably the events of a few months in Egypt in 1919 have been completely overshadowed for the military historian by the great conflict which had just reached its end, and among laymen the episode has been almost entirely forgotten. There are very few Australians beyond those who were personally involved who remember the role of the Light Horse in containing the rebellion, and there is very little literature on the subject for those who might wish to extend their knowledge. Among other works may be cited Hector Dinning's Nile to Aleppo. With the Light Horse in the Middle East<sup>11</sup>, which contains some description of events in Cairo during the disturbances, and of Light Horse

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10. Francis Adams, The New Egypt, (London, 1893)

11. London, 1920

reaction to manifestations of Egyptian nationalist feeling, a one-page appendix at the end of Volume VII (Sinai and Palestine) of the Official History; and a short narrative by Brig.-Gen. L.C. Wilson, dealing with the operations of the Third Light Horse Brigade.<sup>12</sup> The only modern reference I can find is an allusion by Gamage to the burning of a village by the Second Light Horse Brigade.<sup>13</sup> Only Wilson deals with events in any detail, but Dinning's account may be supplemented by reading the description of Australians in Cairo in 1919 to be found in the memoirs of Russell Pasha who then headed the city's police.<sup>14</sup>

That the causes of the outbreak should have attracted more attention is only to be expected. Egypt was regarded by many Englishman as the showpiece of British imperialism. To many of the British public, lulled into complacency by the myth of Cromerism, it came as a complete and unpleasant surprise that there should be such a rejection of beneficial British rule. Explanations had to be found, and the first serious attempt at analysing the causes of the revolt appeared in an article in the Contemporary Review for May, before the rebellion had been put down.<sup>15</sup> The best overall survey of the sources of disaffection, however, is probably that given by Lt. Col. P.G. Elgood, one-time principal of the Cairo Police College and chief administrator of Port Said under martial law, in his two books, Egypt and the Army, (Oxford, 1924) and

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12. Narrative of Operations of the Third Light Horse Brigade. (Including the Egyptian Rebellion from 27th October, 1917. (no imprint.) This copy held by the Imperial War Museum, London.
  13. The Broken Years, p. 146.
  14. Sir Thomas Russell Pasha, Egyptian Service, 1902-1946, (London, 1949)
  15. 'The Problem of Egypt', by Rt. Hon. J.M. Robertson.

The Transit of Egypt, (London, 1928). While not underestimating the very real strength of nationalist feeling which the rebellion expressed, Elgood carefully details how the abuses born of the war-time situation brought the temper of the countryside to the point where it could only boil over into violence. His work is of particular interest for this thesis in that he singles out the role of the Australians in provoking hostility for special mention.

Australian war literature is not greatly concerned with Egypt, which was for the A.I.F. in general, more a base from which operations were mounted than the scene of actual conflict. Sir James Barrett's books on the Australian Army Medical Corps and the Y.M.C.A reflect this fact<sup>16</sup> since they show how the country served as hospital, convalescent home and recreation centre for the troops. C.E.W. Bean in Volume I of the Official History, and in Two Men I Knew<sup>17</sup> offers a description of the conversion of Egypt into a vast training camp prior to the invasion of the Dardenelles, and Guy Thornton investigates the seamier side of army life outside the firing line in With the Anzacs in Cairo. The Tale of a Great Fight.<sup>18</sup> These are determinedly serious works and problems of discipline are handled with a proper gravity. In the greater part of the remaining writing--unit histories, personal reminiscences--the sojourn of the A.I.F. in the land of the Pharoahs tends to be treated as a brief knock-about interlude before the serious

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16. Australian Army Medical Corps in Egypt, (with P.E. Deane), (London, 1918) and The War Work of the Y.M.C.A. in Egypt, (London, 1919)

17. Sydney, 1957

18. London, 1918

business of war. The Australian forces are represented very much like the 'ragging' students to whom Bean compared them<sup>19</sup>, with the native Egyptians taking the place of the despised 'Town' in its traditional conflict with 'Gown', and stuffy British officers fulfilling the role of College authorities. Hector Dinning observed:-

... the Cairo we know probably amuses us because soldiers are in it: it is the combination of the soldier and the Gypso that has produced most of the Cairensa humour that we love. And it is the humour of the place we shall remember.<sup>20</sup>

The evidence of works like Jacka's Mob bears him out. Australians resisted and mocked those aspects of military discipline, like saluting, that they deemed superfluous. Their cheerful irreverence in the face of the pompous and self-important brought out examples of wit which can still afford amusement. In their dealings with the Egyptians that Dinning found so humorous there was too often that element of cruelty and insensitivity associated with the practical joke, and the light-hearted treatment such incidents receive in Australian writing should not blind the reader to the underlying lack of humanity.<sup>21</sup>

There is one modern work to which I have already referred which, in some measure, covers the same ground as the early part

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19. Official History, Volume I, p. 130, note 12.

20. Nile to Aleppo, p. 264

21. In an interview with an old soldier he expressed regrets for the lack of sympathetic understanding he had shown 'the natives', in the tricks he had played on them. From the wisdom of nearly eighty years of age he was inclined to believe that such behaviour was the result of a failure of imagination, common to all young men, who cannot readily put themselves in 'the other feller's place.'

of my dissertation--Dr. Gammage's The Broken Years. Dr. Gammage has based his book on the letters and diaries deposited in the Australian War Memorial. He has recreated the events of the Great War through the words of the soldiers who took part in them. I am greatly indebted to this book as a work of reference which helped me locate more easily than would otherwise have been the case those personal records which could be of use to me. I hope that this study will complement Dr. Gammage's chapters on the troops in Egypt by considering in greater detail issues that he could only touch upon in a work the scope of which covered the duration of the War in all theatres. Occasionally, as in my discussion of the Battle of the Wassa, I offer somewhat a different interpretation of the facts, perhaps because I was exposed to the recollections of Egyptians as well as Australians.

### Sources

In addition to published materials such as unit histories, personal narratives and collections of letters I have consulted the following sources:-

#### 1. Official Documents

I have consulted four major collections of official documents, two in Australia and two in England. These are the Commonwealth Archives, and the War Records Collection in the Australian War Memorial Library, both in Canberra; the Foreign Office Library and the War Records Collection in the Public Record Office, London.<sup>22</sup> Although I had free access to most of the papers

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22. The P.R.O. retains duplicates of Australian Army records for the Great War, though the originals are held in Australia. It will be found that many documents are cited in the footnotes of this thesis by their call numbers in the London collection, where I found it easier to locate material through the catalogue.

I wished to consult, I found that all documents relating to courts martial or to incidents between civilians and soldiers resulting in disciplinary action, had been re-classified when the other files on the Great War were opened in the 1960s, and are to remain closed until the year 2000, doubtless to protect the relatives of those named from embarrassment. I attempted to get round this obstacle by requesting, if it were possible, that I might be given anonymous details, or a statistical abstract of offences. My request was considered but dismissed, so unfortunately my thesis lacks the hard figures which would have strengthened the argument. I was not able to trace 'crime' sheets either, and those archivists I asked were of the opinion that these had been destroyed, although H.S. Gullett seems to have consulted them in the 1920s.<sup>23</sup> It would have been useful also to have included some kind of table to indicate the comparative strength of Australian and other troops in Egypt throughout the period studied, but the Ministry of Defence Library assured me that though such information might once have been available the figures had not been preserved. (Occasionally, however, a break-down of the composition of the forces in Egypt for a particular period can be found<sup>24</sup>, though the information is too scattered for proper tabulation.) Despite these limitations the records have yielded much useful material and are the major source for Part III of this thesis.

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23. See Official History, Volume VII, p. 35.

24. e.g. W.O. 95/5474 gives ANZ 1st. Contingent, Australian 2nd Contingent, East Lancashire Territorial and Indian Army strength in Egypt for the period December 1914 - January, 1915.

## 2. Newspapers

I have upon occasion referred to Australian newspapers, notably the Age, and to the London Times, as well as other overseas publications, but it is the Egyptian press, both Arabic and foreign language, that has provided me with most material. For its size Egypt was a country singularly well provided with newspapers. In 1917, despite a paper shortage,<sup>25</sup> the total number of newspapers published in Egypt was 106, of which 66 were in Arabic and 40 in European languages.<sup>26</sup> Of course, the Press in wartime is always a doubtful source of information because of the operation of censorship, and the distortions of propaganda. In Egypt the Press was placed under 'strict guidance and control' from the very beginning of the War.<sup>27</sup> Military censorship, introduced on November 1st, 1914, helped ensure that the 'general tone of the newspapers remained correct'.<sup>28</sup> This censorship was later to become notorious as the 'most incompetent, the most inept and the most savagely ruthless in any country under British control'.<sup>29</sup> Newspapermen profited by the incompetence and ineptitude where they could, so that Sir Ian Hamilton complained that even information of strategic importance was divulged by the foreign language press.

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25. Which caused the disappearance of the Arabic paper al-Ahali. Egyptian Gazette, September 26th., 1917.

26. EG, May 1st, 1918.

27. Note from Adviser of the Interior, December 27th., 1914. (F.O. 371/2355.)

28. ibid.

29. Lt. Col. Elgood, Egypt and the Army, (Oxford, 1924), p. 220, note 1. Cited as the opinion of the Times.



Robert Snelling<sup>30</sup>, the obstreperous editor of the Egyptian Gazette<sup>31</sup>, (a paper I have frequently cited), was described as a 'constant source of trouble to the censorship'.<sup>32</sup> His habit of leaving mutilated columns blank to show that the censor was preventing him from printing the truth resulted in his being cautioned by the authorities.<sup>33</sup> His paper ran a lively and controversial correspondence on the role the Anglo-Egyptian community were playing in ensuring the welfare of the troops, and provided Australians with an opportunity to voice the most strident criticisms. In other areas, too, sections of the Press were taking as independent a stand as restrictions allowed. In al-Akhbar<sup>34</sup> Youssef el-Khazem refused to be used as an outlet for propaganda releases, stating that there was nothing in the war news worthy of mention since all reports and official communiqués were alike.<sup>35</sup>

Of the other newspapers to which reference has been made, al-Mokattam was strongly Anglophile<sup>36</sup> and used by the British as a propaganda outlet.<sup>37</sup> The Coptic owned Watan, in which at one time

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30. A man whose personal idiosyncracies were reflected in his editorial policy. (F.O. 371/3721).
31. The Gazette was the organ of the commercial section of the British community and frequently published views at variance with official policy.
32. F.O. 371/3718.
33. ibid.
34. The 'native organ of France-Syrian thought'. (F.O. 371/3718).
35. April 14th., 1915.
36. F.O. 371/3718.
37. Ronald Storrs, Orientations (London, 1939) p. 207.

the loyalty of Australians to the Empire was fulsomely praised, was a consistent supporter of the British occupation, and its views should be judged accordingly.<sup>38</sup> I have also used the following Arabic journals; al-Basir, a financial paper with 'sensible and moderate' political views;<sup>39</sup> the 'Palace organ', al-Moayyad;<sup>40</sup> and the 'most widely read of all native Egyptian papers',<sup>41</sup> the nationalist Wadinnil. Among European language papers I have consulted the Egyptian Mail, an earnestly non-controversial publication with a large circulation among the troops,<sup>42</sup> the Messaggero Egiziano, the semi-official organ of Italian opinion in Egypt<sup>43</sup>, and the controversial Journal du Caire.<sup>44</sup> Since I obviously could not consult all 106 newspapers, the above have been chosen as a fairly representative selection within the limitations of my linguistic abilities.

#### Unpublished Sources

I have used in the course of this thesis many of the diaries and letters to be found in the Australian War Memorial Library and in other Libraries throughout Australia as well as some I traced still in the possession of private individuals. In England I had access to similar material in the Sunderland Polytechnic Archive of the First World War. I cannot do better in discussing the

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38. F.O. 371/3718.

39. F.O. 371/3721.

40. Orientalism, p. 95.

41. F.O. 371/3718.

42. F.O. 371/3726 and F.O. 371/3721.

43. F.O. 371/3726.

44. F.O. 371/3718.

limitations of such evidence than refer the reader to Dr. Gammage's observations thereon.<sup>45</sup> In his own diary, or in letters to friends a man is not, as Dr. Gammage remarks, 'obliged to be accurate'. The collection of private war records preserved in the Australian War Memorial Library carry this caution from C.E.W. Bean, the Official War Historian:-

The private diaries in this collection furnish some of its most valuable historical records, but like all private memoirs which were not compiled with any historical purpose, they should not be regarded as firsthand evidence except where it is certain they are so ... the diarist is subject to no obligations or inducement to indicate whether he is recording his own observations or incidents told him by friends or heard of at third or fourth hand at the mess table.<sup>46</sup>

I would submit, however, that inaccuracies and second-hand reports are more likely to be a feature of descriptions of actual combat, where the writer is exposed to a confusion of impressions, and where in order to present a coherent overall picture he is forced to supplement his own limited experience with details taken from his comrades, than of accounts of everyday relations with the civilian community. Nevertheless, I have approached this body of material circumspectly, remembering General Monash's cautionary words on soldiers' letters<sup>47</sup> and relying on my own common sense to detect when a man is 'spinning a yarn' to impress his relatives.

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45. The Broken Years, p. xiii ff.

46. See also, Gen. Wilson to Col. Cameron, letter, August 19th., 1922. NLA MS 3932.

47. Letter, January 4th., 1915 and April 8th., 1915.

A more difficult problem to solve is that of how representative any individual's views or experiences may be of those of the majority. 'Each man', wrote E.J. Rule, 'lived his own life. To claim that one man's experience was the experience of all would be foolish presumption.'<sup>48</sup> At the same time, men are not so dissimilar that no generalisations can be made about their behaviour. Like Dr. Gammage I have been forced to use 'imprecise indications of number--"most", "many", "some", "a few"<sup>49</sup>, but in using them I have been influenced by evidence from other sources where this is available, by the balance of probability, and by my own feelings. I have sometimes asked returned soldiers how my conclusions accorded with their personal experience. Where there has been an obvious division of opinion among diarists and letter writers I have included the opposing views. Finally, so that the reader may draw his own conclusions I have included a biographical appendix to which he may refer for details of the background of each soldier cited.

At the beginning of his book, The Diggers,<sup>50</sup> Capt. W.J. Denny discusses the origin of the word 'Anzac'. In commenting on the various fanciful and fabulous explanations that have been advanced, he quotes the following as one of the more interesting:-

... there is an Arabian word called Anzac or Anzag--the meaning of which is 'To cause to jump!' In view of this distinctive attribute having been so gallantly displayed at the famous landing at Gallipoli and the fact of the word being Oriental, this conception seemed so apposite that it was forthwith accepted by many. When the Australian

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48. Jacka's Mob, (Sydney, 1933). Preface.

49. The Broken Years, p. xvi.

50. London, 1919.

Minister of Defence (Senator George Pearce) first heard the theory, he described it as a "happy coincidence".<sup>51</sup>

Consult an Arabic dictionary, and the word to which Denny is referring, 'nazaqa', will be found to have a wide range of meanings:- 'to storm ahead, rush forward, to be hasty, rash, precipitate, impetuous, lightheaded, frivolous, reckless, ruthless.' It is a word that implies both desirable and undesirable qualities, that suggests that each virtue has its corresponding vice.

This is not a debunking thesis but it is undeniably a de-glamourising one. Australian historical writing on the Great War has tended to stress the good that may come out of conflict, the self-sacrifice, the courage and the strengthening of bonds between a man and his comrades in arms. I do not deny that all these virtues are to be found among the men of the A.I.F. who visited Egypt, but I would look deeper into the meaning of War, to see how it not only provides the opportunity for great deeds, but how also, in the words of the Chicago feminist Jane Addams, it 'is destructive of delicacy, sympathy, and rational thinking'.

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<sup>51</sup>  
p. 1-2.