



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

by

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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.¹ Thenceforth Australians could look to themselves and their country with a confidence sprung from their own achievements.

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.² 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.³ Pride of race, a basic

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.⁴, 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^{eh} 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

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.

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')⁵ and the Methodist minister, the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes.⁶ 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'⁷. 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,⁸ 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 Egypt⁹. French writers, of course, were only too ready to redress the balance with

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.¹⁰ 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 East¹¹, which contains some description of events in Cairo during the disturbances, and of Light Horse

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.¹² The only modern reference I can find is an allusion by Gamage to the burning of a village by the Second Light Horse Brigade.¹³ 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.¹⁴

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.¹⁵ 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 fact¹⁶ 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 Knew¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ 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

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 them¹⁹, 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.²⁰

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.²¹

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

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.²² Although I had free access to most of the papers

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.²³ 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 found²⁴, 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.

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,²⁵ the total number of newspapers published in Egypt was 106, of which 66 were in Arabic and 40 in European languages.²⁶ 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.²⁷ Military censorship, introduced on November 1st, 1914, helped ensure that the 'general tone of the newspapers remained correct'.²⁸ 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'.²⁹ 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.

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 Snelling³⁰, the obstreperous editor of the Egyptian Gazette³¹, (a paper I have frequently cited), was described as a 'constant source of trouble to the censorship'.³² 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.³³ 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-Akhbar³⁴ Youssef el-Khasem 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.³⁵

Of the other newspapers to which reference has been made, al-Mokattam was strongly Anglophile³⁶ and used by the British as a propaganda outlet.³⁷ 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.³⁸ I have also used the following Arabic journals; al-Basir, a financial paper with 'sensible and moderate' political views;³⁹ the 'Palace organ', al-Moayyad;⁴⁰ and the 'most widely read of all native Egyptian papers',⁴¹ 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,⁴² the Messaggero Egiziano, the semi-official organ of Italian opinion in Egypt⁴³, and the controversial Journal du Caire.⁴⁴ 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

38. F.O. 371/3718.

39. F.O. 371/3721.

40. Orientations, 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.⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶

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' letters⁴⁷ and relying on my own common sense to detect when a man is 'spinning a yarn' to impress his relatives.

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.'⁴⁸ 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"⁴⁹, 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,⁵⁰ 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

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".⁵¹

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'.

⁵¹
p. 1-2.



CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION TO EGYPT

THE COMING OF THE A.I.F.

SYNOPSIS

Strategic importance of Egypt---Britain's position threatened by Turkish alliance with Germany and the danger of an internal uprising---embarkation of the Australian first contingent---speculation as to destination---disappointment at being sent to Egypt---degree of acceptance.---propaganda value of Australian troops---the Protectorate proclaimed---attitude of Australians to Egyptian reaction to Protectorate---economic impact of A.I.F. ---attempts to woo their custom---cynicism of troops---curious affair of the silver currency---A.I.F. buys goods and services in the open market---catering contracts---two contracts examined ---reasons why never satisfactory---use of cheap Egyptian labour ---summary of impressions of Egyptians made upon Australians by those areas of contact dealt with in this chapter.

When war broke out in 1914, Great Britain was the centre of an empire which clearly reflected its origins in her maritime might--- an empire of vast resources, whether of goods or man-power, but 'far-flung', sprawling across the hemispheres. If the forces of that empire were to be utilised fully in the coming conflict it was essential that communications with the Motherland be preserved and the free passage of men and supplies maintained. British policy had been geared for many years to the safeguarding in such an eventuality of the route from India and Australia via Egypt and the Suez Canal. When hostilities commenced the continuing safety of so strategically important a channel was of immediate and pressing concern.

The British position in Egypt could be endangered either by an external aggressor or by some internal outbreak of disaffection, or by a combination of the two. Although Britain had garrisoned

troops in the major cities since 1882 and effectively controlled the administration through the appointment of Advisers, there was no legal backing for the British presence. Egypt remained in international law a province of the Ottoman Empire, under Turkish suzerainty. While Turkey remained weak there was no danger that she would seek to impose and implement her nominal authority, and throughout the nineteenth century she had been too weak to prevent the erosion of her empire. It had been particularly unlikely that she would become involved in any confrontation with Britain since Britain had been the principal defender of Ottoman interests, 'bolstering up the sick man', against the threat of Russian expansion. By 1914 however, there had been a significant shift in alliances.

In the 1880's Turkey had wished to open up the more distant areas of her empire for commercial exploitation and the more effective establishment of government control, by the construction of the Baghdad railway. Both Britain and Russia were opposed to the project which they each perceived as being contrary to the successful realisation of their own long-term ambitions in the area. With their traditional ally and enemy for once united against them, the Turks found support for the completion of the railway in a new quarter---from Germany. Further ties were established between the Sublime Porte and Berlin as German officers under Von der Goltz Pasha undertook the re-organisation and training of the Turkish army, and in 1898 the visit of the Kaiser to Constantinople was marked by demonstrations of friendship on both sides. In 1908, Britain concluded an alliance with Russia, which awakened considerable apprehension in Turkey¹ and made

1. Carl Brockelmann, History of the Islamic Peoples (this edition, London, 1964), p. 383.

that country all the more willing to yield to the intensive diplomatic campaign mounted by Germany to gain both Ottoman and Islamic support. The overthrow of the tottering Hamidian regime by the Young Turk revolution in the same year established a more dynamic leadership in Turkey, eager to recreate her past glories. It was a leadership which might, backed by such a powerful ally as Germany, begin to consider the recapture of the lost provinces.² Obviously, in the event of war between Germany and Britain, Germany would gladly support any Turkish assault on Egypt as an attack on the enemy in a vulnerable and vital spot.

On August 2nd, 1914, two days before Britain declared war on Germany, a secret offensive and defensive treaty was signed by Germany and Turkey.³ Though a state of war between Britain and Turkey was not actually proclaimed until November, Turkey began at once to evince signs of hostility. Armed bands of Bedouin started to infiltrate into Egypt in the vicinity of Rafah and German officers were reported as inspecting frontier posts, or more disturbingly, as appearing disguised and carrying explosives close to Kantara.⁴ The Turkish army began to deploy increasingly large concentrations of troops in Syria and close to the Egyptian border,

2. Orientations, p. 140-141. 'As early as 1905 Ghazi Mukhtar Pasha, the gallant old Turkish High Commissioner, had declared that "with twelve Army Corps in Syria, and the Germans at our back, it should not be difficult to turn the English out of Egypt."'

3. Die Deutschen Dokumente zum Kriegsausbruch, Nr. 733. Cited by Lt.-Gen. Sir George McMunn and Capt. Cyril Falls, Official History of the War. (Military Operations. Egypt and Palestine.) Vol. I, (London, 1928), p. 15.

4. ibid, p. 13 and 15.

though there seemed little likelihood that a successful invasion in strength could be mounted across the arid wastes of Sinai. There remained, however, a very real danger of attacks by raiding parties to sabotage the Suez Canal.

If, with the desert as their first line of defence, British forces sent to guard the Canal could feel comparatively safe from massive frontal assault, there seemed less assurance that security could be maintained in the rest of the country at their backs. There were many factions in Egypt who would be glad to see the British ousted. Egyptian nationalists with their strong anti-British sentiments could now be expected to welcome, even if they did not hasten, any set-back to the occupying power. German propaganda represented the country as being on the brink of revolution with agents stirring up the population against the British on all sides.⁵ While this was an exaggeration and there was little evidence to support such a contention, the extent of pro-German sympathies in some quarters was undeniably 'so marked as to amaze Europeans',⁶ though even before the war anti-British feeling had sometimes expressed itself in a show of Germanophilia.⁷ Pro-Turkish elements were also to be feared. There were 70,000 Turkish nationals in Egypt,⁸ too large a number for all but the

5. ibid., p. 15, note 2 (Maxwell to Kitchener, October 16th, 1914).

6. Orientalism, p. 154.

7. H. Hamilton Fyfe, The New Spirit in Egypt (London, 1911), p. 281.

8. Military Operations. Egypt and Palestine, Vol. I., p. 16.

most prominent to be interned, and many members of the Egyptian ruling class, including the royal family, were Turkish by descent and culture. Britain, as a Christian power, holding down the Muslims of India and Egypt, had long feared a possible upsurge of pan-Islamic feeling, and the threat of a jihad. Now there seemed a definite danger that Egyptians might rally to the side of their co-religionists, the Turks, against the infidel British. Proclamations from the Commander of the Fourth Turkish Army, including fatwas of the Grand Mufti of Constantinople emphasising the obligation laid upon all Muslims to support one another, were being secretly circulated throughout Egypt.⁹ Among English residents of the country the prevailing attitude was one of anxiety and fear of revolt.¹⁰ If confidence were to be restored and any attempt at an uprising forestalled, Britain must convincingly demonstrate the adequacy of her military preparedness. When the experienced regular troops of the small peace-time garrison were withdrawn to fight alongside other regulars in France, their place was rapidly filled by Territorials from Lancashire and units of the Indian Army which undertook the defence of the Canal.

Turkey entered the War on the side of the Central Powers at the beginning of November, and Britain began to take steps to resolve the anomalies of the situation created by her own legally undefined position as the effective ruling power in an Egypt over which Turkey remained the nominal suzerain. The plans which were

9. Orientations, p. 157, note 2.

10. Cheetham to Grey, September 10th and November 18th, 1914. (F.O.L.)

being formulated in London to this end were such as might well precipitate some local crisis in Egypt which even the recently augmented forces could not contain. On November 13th, it was decided that Egypt should be annexed to the British Crown, and only the most urgent representations of Sir Milne Cheetham and other officials on the spot that such a measure would have disastrous repercussions resulted in the adoption of the alternative solution that a Protectorate should be proclaimed. Even if this less drastic step were taken, some opposition was to be expected, which might require the presence of further troops. Lord Kitchener suggested to Sir John Maxwell that the appearance of Anzacs undergoing training in Egypt would 'undoubtedly impress public opinion.'¹¹

When Australians had come forward to enlist in the early days of the War, it was to fight against one great enemy---Germany. For most who left with the first contingent, their hope and expectation was that they would proceed to England and from there into service on the Western Front. To the more thoughtful, or better informed among them, however, there seemed to be other possibilities. In some quarters it was felt that untried Australian troops would probably be used for garrison duties in either Egypt or India, so as to release more British regulars for the fighting in France. Such an arrangement appeared the more likely in that the men would then be exposed to climatic conditions to which they were already accustomed, and the problem of maintaining

11. Orientalism, p. 144.

See also Official History Vol. 1. p.112, note 2.

communications with their home government would be minimised.¹² What was known of the strategic importance of Egypt, and the growing uncertainty in the Middle East where Turkey seemed increasingly hostile, strengthened the probability that the A.I.F. might be employed in that area.

The first convoy sailed from Australia with its destination still unconfirmed, however, but when news reached it at sea on November 2nd, that a state of war now existed between Turkey and Great Britain, speculation was renewed that the troops would be disembarked before reaching England. Aboard the transports, the men 'half-expected' that they would now be called upon to defend Egypt.¹³ Even before Aden was reached the sappers on the Geelong had begun to learn Arabic from one of their number who had been a language teacher at Broken Hill, in anticipation, and Captain Clogstoun of the 3rd. Field Coy. Eng., who had seen service in Egypt in peace-time, was enlightening his men as to the pitfalls with which that country beset the young soldier.¹⁴ Others preferred still to wait on events. On November 24th, Pte. L.R. Donkin of the 1st Btn. wrote in his diary, '... rumour says our destination is Alexandria. "The Mahomedans are riz." Let's see anyhow.' In fact, final confirmation of the convoy's destination was even now delayed, and when the ships left Aden on November 26th, there was still no official indication that ultimate disembarkation would be

12. For this paragraph and the beginning of the next, see Official History, Vol. I, pp. 109-112.

13. C.E.W. Bean, Anzac to Amiens. A Shorter History of the Australian Fighting Services in the First World War, (Canberra, 1946), p. 104.

14. T.H. Prince, Purple Patches. A Tale of the Sappers, (Sydney, 1935), p. 15.

anywhere but in Great Britain. During the passage up the Red Sea, however, General Bridges received a telegram from Sir George Reid, the Australian High Commissioner in London, to the effect that 'owing to unforeseen circumstances', the force was to complete its training in Egypt and 'go to the front from there.'

Now that Egypt had definitely been announced as the convoy's destination, there was some inevitable disappointment. The medical officers, for instance, believed that if they were not going to France, they would have no work.¹⁵ On the Omrah, many of the men of the 9th Btn., knowing nothing of any fighting or proposed fighting in Egypt, 'expressed their indignation in ardent language ---much of it peculiarly Australian.'¹⁶ In the 10th Btn., too, 'when Alexandria was named as the port of disembarkation, there was a certain amount of genuine resentment'.¹⁷ Before Egypt was reached some of the initial disappointment had been dispelled. On entering the Suez Canal the men were exhilarated to find themselves truly in the war zone. There were abundant indications of military activity on either bank, and since the Turks had recently armed the Sinai Bedouin there was a danger to shipping from snipers after dark. Guards were accordingly mounted, searchlights and sandbags appeared on the decks of the troop-ships, and most of the men were too excited by the prospect of seeing some action

15. James W. Barrett and Lt. P.H. Deane, Australian Army Medical Corps in Egypt, (London, 1918), p. 14.

16. Norman K. Harvey, Anzac to the Hindenburg Line. The History of the 9th. Battalion A.I.F., (Brisbane, 1941), p. 13.

17. November 28th, 1914. C.B.L. Lock, The Fighting 10th. A South Australian Centenary Souvenir of the 10th. Battalion A.I.F. 1914-1919, (Adelaide, 1936), p. 35.

to sleep.

It is terrible to reflect what risks the goat-tenders and camel-herders along the banks ran that night. The flare of a match would certainly have been followed by a burst of rifle fire from those eager watchers.¹⁸

Later, after disembarkation had been completed and the troops were encamped around Cairo, information was received which further reconciled them to their being in Egypt. Conditions on Salisbury Plain where the Australians had originally been bound, were deplorable and steadily worsening in exceptionally severe winter weather. Canadian troops already in the camps there were suffering a serious decline in both physical fitness and morale, with consequent disciplinary problems which were lowering their prestige. By completing their training in Egypt with its healthier climate, the Australians could avoid these hazards, as well as contributing to the security of the country by their presence. Letters and newspaper reports had publicised the notorious state of the English camps, and the official Australian correspondent, C.E.W. Bean, wrote from Mena on December 26th, that with these facts before them the men were now well satisfied with the change of plan that had brought them to Egypt.¹⁹ To train on the desert's edge was obviously better than to do so in English mud, and as long as there was a chance of action, and the promise that they would be sent to the front was not too long in fulfilment, the Australians were prepared to accept the situation. A protracted stay in an area remote from the firing

18. A.W. Keown, Forward with the Fifth, (Melbourne, 1921), p. 45.

19. Advertiser, January 22nd., 1915.

line, however, was altogether unacceptable. With the repulse of the main Turkish attack on the Canal at the beginning of February 1915, the hope of troops based in Egypt seeing combat began to recede. Boredom and frustration increased with inaction. Throughout this early period, all the reactions of the men of the A.I.F. to their surroundings, all their relations with the inhabitants of Egypt, must be seen as being in some measure poisoned by the troops' overwhelming desire to be elsewhere.²⁰

When the Australians landed on December 4th, however, these problems were still hidden in the unguessed future. What was of immediate importance was the effect of their arrival in stabilising Egypt's uncertain internal situation. The Lancashire Territorials had filled the gap left by the departure of the regular garrison, and the arrival of the Indian regiments had not only served the military objective of strengthening the Canal defences, but had also had a salutary political effect by refuting the claims of nationalist propaganda, that Indians, oppressed by the British, would never fight.²¹ Now the coming of the Australians brought further beneficial results. Firstly, the arrival of sizeable reinforcements helped to scotch certain seditious rumours among the Indian troops that they were being overstretched.²² Obviously with affairs in Egypt at such a sensitive stage it was imperative that the Imperial Forces should appear free from all signs of disaffection. Secondly, the presence of Australians rallying to support

20. See The Broken Years, p. 40-41.

21. Orientalism, p. 157, note 1.

22. Age, December 5th., 1914.

Britain was in itself a demonstration of the falsity of enemy propaganda, which had long been active in Egypt.²³ Bernhardt's well known contention that in the event of major war Britain's colonies would desert her was openly disproved,²⁴ and pro-British elements in the native press were able to expatiate upon the theme of loyalty within the Empire.²⁵ The Coptic al-Watan was able to combine a compliment to British rule with its description of Imperial solidarity by stating that 'Indians of all races, Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, and others, reveal, in the defence of their loving Mother, a proof that they are sensible of the benefits accruing to them from her.'²⁶ Even the new Sultan of Egypt found in the Australians an example of patriotism worthy to be held up to his own people for emulation.²⁷

This propaganda triumph was further heightened by the impressiveness of the Australian troops themselves. On December 14th, Ronald Storrs wrote:

During the last fortnight the general appearance of Cairo has changed, very much for the better. The streets are full of troops, the largest number of whom are Australians. These are at once feared and admired by the Egyptians, and are certainly well equal to any Territorials or Yeomanry we have yet seen.²⁸

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23. Official History, Vol. VII, p. 11; Times, January 6th, 1915. It must be stated, however, that Elgood considers German propaganda in pre-war Egypt to have been virtually non-existent. Egypt and the Army, p. 4.
24. See A. St. J. Adcock, Australasia Triumphant, (London, 1916), Chapter I.
25. al-Watan, December 6th, 1914; al-Mahroussah, December 16th, 1914.
26. December 30th, 1914.
27. Advertiser, December 22nd, 1914.
28. Orientalists, p. 169.

The magnificent physique of the men, 'the like of which has never been seen', and the splendid condition of their horses attracted wide-spread admiration and flattering comments in the local press, which were duly relayed to Australia.²⁹ Crowds of impressed sight-seers visited the troops in camp,³⁰ while smartly turned-out detachments, often accompanied by the regimental band, emphasised the strength of the British military presence by marching through the streets.³¹

On December 20th, the extent to which Britain now had the situation in hand was put to the test by the proclamation of the Protectorate. Rumours that a rising was imminent were being circulated among the troops in camp³² and every precaution was taken to ensure that hostile demonstrations could be quickly contained. Australians took their place alongside other British troops in lining the streets with twenty rounds of ball ammunition in their pouches.³³ Orders were received that they should '... sleep armed and ready to turn out in an instant ...'³⁴ '... in case

29. Wadinnil, December 15th, 1914; Advertiser, December 14th, 22nd, and 26th, 1914; Age, December 14th and 17th. Colvin Stewart Algie, diary, December 20th, 1914.

30. Advertiser, December 12th, 1914.

31. al-Jaridah, December 14th, 1914.

32. Sgt. W.W.B. Allen, letter to his mother, Mena Camp, December 27th, 1914.

33. Maxwell. Orders. December 20th, 1914.

34. Algie, diary, December 20th, 1914.

of any unrest on the part of the natives and Turkish emissaries.'³⁵
 There was, however, 'not even the remotest hint of a disturbance'.³⁶
 A ceremonial parade held three days later in connection with the
 formal installation of Prince Hussein as Sultan, to replace the
 dethroned Khedive, Abbas Hilmi, passed off similarly uneventfully,
 though not without anxiety.³⁷

A minority of men among the Australians seem to have taken
 the apparently docile acceptance of the Protectorate at face value.
 Perhaps they were too convinced of the benefits of British rule to
 imagine that anyone would wish to oppose it. One man wrote, 'The
 new regime seems to be heralded with joy by the natives,'³⁸ and
 another, '... the people are pleased that the British are over them.'³⁹
 In fact, there was little positive enthusiasm except possibly among
 Copts and foreigners. In Cairo, where students donned black ties
 and schoolgirls black rosettes, support was half-hearted at best, and
 displayed all the characteristics of time serving.⁴⁰ Most Australians
 were convinced that the lack of overt opposition did not reflect
 approval of the new order so much as the operation of the instinct
 of self-preservation. The build-up of British forces in Egypt had

35. Lt. J.M. Aitken, 11th. Btn., letter to his mother, December 22nd, 1914.

36. C.E.W. Bean. Cabelgram. CRS AZ.1915/3625.

37. Orientations, p. 148. See also Col. C.G. Fowles, (ed.), The History of the Canterbury Mounted Rifles. 1914-1919, (Auckland, 1928), p. 13.

38. Capt. G.D. Mitchell, 10th. Btn., diary, December 20th, 1914.

39. B/Sgt-Maj. N.G. Ellsworth, 102nd. Howitzer Bty., letter, December 19th, 1914.

40. Orientations, p. 147.

had its desired effect in stabilising the country, and Australians were not slow to appreciate their own role in impressing public opinion. Sir George Reid commented with satisfaction that 'the Young Australia Party in Egypt...had produced a very soothing impression on the Young Egyptian'⁴¹. Any ideas of rebellion Egyptians might have entertained had, as an N.C.O. in the 9th. Btn. less elegantly phrased it, been 'knocked...out of them' by 'the presence of this Australian army.'⁴²

'This Australian army' was also having a considerable impact on the Egyptian economy, particularly that of Cairo. Coming off the troopships with an accumulation of five weeks back pay, the first contingent embarked on an orgy of spending that rapidly convinced the bazaars they were all millionaires--even the private soldiers.⁴³ Al-Basir reported that Australian troops in the capital were said to have spent £5,000 in two days.⁴⁴ Ronald Storrs also noted that Australians and New Zealanders were spending between them from three to four thousand pounds a day in Cairo, out of their own pockets and 'quite apart from the immense military expenditure involved by the presence of troops here.'⁴⁵ The Cairenes had been facing financial disaster with the tourist trade halted by the War. Now

41. Times. January 25th, 1915.

42. Sg.t W.W.B. Allen, letter, December 27th, 1914.

43. E.C. Buley, Glorious Deeds of Australasians in the Great War, (London, 1915), p. 46-48.

44. December 17th, 1914.

45. Orientalist, p. 169.

their city found itself enjoying the best season it had ever had.⁴⁶

As the troops settled in a whole new commercial network began to grow up around the camps to cater for their various needs.⁴⁷

Shops of all sorts crowded along certain roads where they were allowed---shops of tobacconists, hairdressers, dyers and cleaners, news vendors, tailors, photographers, sellers of antiques. One day there would arrive a rickety donkey-lorry piled with tents, stove-pipe, tables, chairs, crockery, cloths, and with three Arabs squatting among them. Next day there would have sprouted another 'tea-room', announcing that it offered 'Australians System Afternoon Tea.'⁴⁸

Lantern makers and the plaiters of reed mats worked close by, finding a ready market for their products which introduced an air of domestic comfort to the regulation bell-tent for a mere 5 and 20 Pt, respectively.⁴⁹ For those seeking a really permanent and personal momento of their visit, there were the services of the tattooist--- 'Egypt, 1914', being a much favoured design.⁵⁰

Competition for the troops' custom was intense. Restaurants sought to attract Australians by advertising 'real dinkum tucker', or by adopting names with an Antipodean flavour.⁵¹

46. Bean, *Mena*, December 22nd, 1914. Report published in the *Age*, January 21st, 1915. Some indication of the severe falling off in tourists may be found in the record of visitors to Cairo museums and monuments as given in *Annuaire Statistique*, (Cairo, 1915), p. xxi, but the *Egyptian Gazette* asserted that 'the presence of the soldiers---was equal to the combined harvest of six good tourist seasons.' (February 20th, 1915).

47. Maj. T.H. Darley, *With the Ninth Light Horse in the Great War*, (Adelaide, 1924), p. 6. See also Donkin, diary, December 20th, 1914.

48. *Official History*, Vol. I, p. 116-117.

49. Donkin, diary, December 27th, 1914.

50. *ibid.*

51. *Egyptian Mail*, August 28th, 1917.

In some cases rival proprietors positively fought over potential patrons.⁵² Some firms, like Kramer's, the watchmakers, the dentist Anastassi, and the Hotel Bonnard in Alexandria offered substantial discount or special concessions for military personnel,⁵³ while others carried stock, or undertook services, that were specially aimed at the Australian market. Thus Australians (and there were many of them) who found Egyptian butter unpalatable could obtain their own home product at 10 Pt. per lb. from the Nile Cold Storage Company⁵⁴ and an English stationers near Shephard's Hotel stocked both the Australian and the Bulletin for Colonial readers.⁵⁵ There was even to be found in Cairo a man who would mend boomerangs.⁵⁶ English newspapers found their circulation now greatly extended,⁵⁷ and began to include items of special interest to their new readership, such as contributions from members of the A.I.F. and advice on the closure of the Australian mails, or the time of the last tram back to camp.⁵⁸

52. Egyptian Gazette, January 26th, 1915.

53. Egyptian Mail, March 9th, 1915; June 8th, 1916; February 3rd, 1915.

54. Egyptian Mail, June 8th, 1916.

55. Egyptian Gazette, January 27th, 1915.

56. Gen. Granville de Laune Ryzie, letter, March 14th, 1915.

57. From 1,000 to 10,000 in a fortnight. (Bean's report in the Age, January 21st, 1915).

58. See, among many examples, Egyptian Mail, February 2nd, 12th, and 18th, 1915; Times of Egypt, January 14th, February 7th, 19th, 20th, 21st and March, 25th, 1915.

Though most of the troops seemed to be naturally extravagant, they still tended to resent the sustained and concerted efforts of the Egyptians to separate them from their money. There were only two things cheap in Egypt, they complained---tea, and tram rides.⁵⁹ Having fed off affluent tourists for years, Cairo was an expensive city for the visiting soldier. 'Films are twice the price we paid in Adelaide', wrote one man. 'We are charged such outrageous prices we simply cannot afford it.'⁶⁰ Sgt. R.W.W. Adams told his mother, 'Cairo must be fairly battenning on the soldiers, especially the A.I.E.F.'⁶¹ The Australians with their higher rate of pay than the British soldier had become the chosen prey of the exploiter.

The businesses have marked up 'Special Prices for Australians'. its (sic) special prices alright as we always have to pay twice as much as anyone else.⁶²

As James Aldridge observes, the men 'always felt they were being "gypped", and more often than not, they were.'⁶³

The presence of so many troops spending so freely had one

59. Egyptian Mail, February 27th, 1915. Lt. D.W. Caldwell, 27th Btn., undated letter.

60. Lt. E.H. Chinner, 32nd. Btn., letter, April 23rd, 1916. See also Col. R.J. Millard, A.A.M.C., diary, December 14th, 1914.

61. Letter, June 7th, 1915.

62. Ellsworth, letter, January 29th, 1915.

63. Cairo, p. 223.

curious effect. Egypt had a chronic coinage problem,⁶⁴ a permanent shortage of specie. Paying the Colonial troops drained the silver holdings of the banks⁶⁵ and sometimes officers found it difficult to obtain money to make due payment.⁶⁶ On January 6th, 1916, the High Commissioner for Egypt cabled a request to the Australian Government asking for its surplus stocks of British silver to be dispatched to Egypt on the next steamer to help resolve the crisis. On this occasion, unfortunately, 'the last shilling' was not forthcoming.....

Egypt, meanwhile, was being converted into one vast base camp. While the troops were scattering their pay piecemeal among the country's various refreshment purveyors, souvenir sellers, gharry drivers and so forth, the Australian Army was engaged in a far greater and more systematic expenditure on goods, accommodation and labour. Not all supplies could be brought in from abroad and materials of all descriptions had to be found locally.⁶⁷ Hospitals had to be set up with adequate catering arrangements, fodder had to be provided for the many horses, and satisfactory provision be made for the disposal of waste materials and rubbish. To these ends contracts were made with local businessmen on the open market.

64. F.O. 371/2663. Because of the shortage of Egyptian currency, from 1887-1914, three foreign currencies---British, Turkish and French---had been acceptable. (E.R.J. Owen, Cotton and the Egyptian Economy. 1820-1914, (Oxford, 1969), p. 385.)

65. Egyptian Gazette, February 22nd, 1915.

66. Lt. J.D. Campbell, 6th. M.G. Coy., letter, July 2nd, 1915.

67. Egypt and the Army, p. 84.

There were obvious problems associated with this practice. Where hotels or large buildings had to be hired for army use, whether as hospitals or to other ends, the difficulties attendant on such negotiations in the normal run of business were further compounded in the Egyptian situation by the varied nationalities of the proprietors with whom dealings were held.⁶⁸ Moreover, the officers who were responsible for the drawing up of contracts suffered not only from lack of previous business experience, but also from ignorance of local conditions, factors which frequently led to the conclusion of terms that proved ultimately disadvantageous. Responsible British businessmen in Cairo who would gladly have given their invaluable advice were not consulted.⁶⁹ Where recourse was made to the special knowledge of British residents, as for example, in the setting up of the staffing arrangements for the Nasrieh Hospital, which was done under the supervision of Mr. Watson, the Minister of Public Works, results tended to be more satisfactory.⁷⁰

Catering contracts were, on the whole, fulfilled 'well and faithfully',⁷¹ by the former management where a hotel was taken over,⁷² otherwise by some neighbouring hotelier. It is possible to follow the system in operation at two Australian hospitals, the

68. F.O. 371/2356.

69. Lt. Col. J.W. Springthorpe, A.A.M.C., diary, April 26th, 1916.

70. W.O. 95/4742.

71. 'Serjeant Major', With the R.A.M.C. in Egypt, (London, 1918), p. 15.

72. Hotels used by the A.A.M.C. included, the Heliopolis Palace (1st. A.G.H.), Mana House (2nd. A.G.H.), the Ghezira Palace Hotel and the al-Hayat, Helouan. (A.A.M.C. in Egypt, Chapter III).

convalescent hospital at Helouan, and the 14th, A.G.H. (Nasrieh Schools Military Hospital), Cairo, to see how successful it was. At Helouan a catering contract was signed on August 1st, 1915 with the 'Al-Hayat' Hotel Coy., the proprietors of the building now being used by the A.A.M.C.⁷³ The terms of the contract provided for officers and nurses (who had officer rank) to be catered for at a rate of 25 piastres⁷⁴ per day per head, and for N.C.O's and men to be fed 'sufficiently and well' at a sliding rate of 15 piastres per day per head for numbers below 300, 14 piastres for between 3 and 600 and 13 piastres when numbers went above 600. Officers and nurses were to receive four meals a day as follows:-

- i) Breakfast: coffee, chocolate, cocoa or tea with milk and sugar; bacon and eggs/eggs in any form/ fish/ cold meat; bread, butter, jam and marmalade.
- ii) Lunch: macaroni, rice or any other suitable first dish; joint with vegetables; "suitable entremets"; cheese, biscuits and butter.
- iii) Tea: cakes; scones and butter; tea with milk and sugar.
- iv) Dinner: soup; fish or entrée; joint or poultry with vegetables; "suitable entremets"; coffee.

The men, in accordance with the lower charge made for them were to be offered only three meals a day, and those of a much plainer character. They were to receive the following:-

- i) Breakfast: tea, with milk and sugar; bread, butter and jam; kippered herrings and mash/bacon and haricot beans/liver and tomatoes/omelet and vegetables/ cold tongue, cucumber and gelée of meat/curried rice and minced meat/porridge with milk and sugar.

73. AMM File A2663 351/23.

74. A piastre equalled about 2½d.

ii) Dinner: bread; Irish stew/cold roast with cereal veg./ beef stew and four kinds of veg./collops of veal, fried potatoes, cooked salad/boiled beef, macaroni, fried celery/beefsteak à la Russe, with one green and one cereal veg./ leg of mutton, fried potatoes, green veg; semolina pudding/vermicelli rolls in honey/rice pudding/honeycake/chocolate pudding/vermicelli pudding/tapioca pudding.

iii) Tea: Bread, butter and jam; tea with milk and sugar.

In addition the contractor was obliged to keep 'all closets, bathrooms, corridors, public rooms and the terrace' in a sanitary condition. He had to provide at his own cost a 'thoroughly efficient staff of waiters, kitchen men and pantry men', and employ, with the Commandant's approval, sufficient native labour to keep the whole premises, including the gardens, clean. These last were to be paid for by the Commandant at a fixed tariff of 200 piastres per head per month. All required linen was to be provided in clean and serviceable condition and a supply of filtered water, fit for human consumption was to be maintained. All cooking and dining room crockery and utensils were to be furnished as needed, and finally, the contractor must gratuitously provide his personal services as manager of the Hospital. The Commandant remained responsible for the payment of running expenses, such as the telephone and electricity and for the cost of all running repairs.⁷⁵

At the beginning of October the Commandant seemed fairly satisfied with the contract and the food provided, although he expressed reservations about the quality of the bread and the quantity

75. ANMF. A2663 351/23.

of bone in the cheaper cuts of meat given to the men.⁷⁶ He felt also, that it would be of benefit if porridge could be served every day, instead of once a week, and if there were not so many stews or rissoles. There was more serious ground for complaint in that there had been an outbreak of diarrhoea, probably originating with the very chipped utensils the contractor had been using, though it was now hoped that the thorough boiling of all crockery would prevent a further occurrence. By the end of the month, dissatisfaction had grown.⁷⁷ It was now felt that the food 'could be better in view of the price', and a number of ways of tightening the contract to ensure the maintenance of standards were suggested. There should be some provision in the contract for samples to be taken, and instead of the rather indefinite alternatives listed, there should be a definite diet prepared for each day 'so that too much latitude is not given to the contractor.' A new contract was accordingly proposed at the end of November.

The hospital at Nasrieh was sited in a former girls' school, not a hotel, so accordingly a firm of outside caterers was employed, the George Nungovich Egyptian Hotels Co., Cairo. The contract signed with them on November 17th, 1916, was much stricter in its terms than that concluded a year earlier by the Helouan convalescent hospital, and probably reflects that some lessons had been learnt

76. ibid, S.M.O. to D.D.M.S., October 3rd, 1915.

77. October 30th, 1915.

in the meantime.⁷⁸ Two tariffs were quoted, one for patients and one for staff. For the former, officers and nurses were catered for at a rate of 4/6d. per head per day, and Other Ranks at 2/5d., decreasing to 2/3d. if the numbers rose above 600. The rate for staff was 3/3d. per day for officers and nurses, and 1/9d. for Other Ranks. This was to include all service in the kitchen and dining rooms, the provision of utensils, and the washing of all kitchen cloths, table linen, tea-tray cloths, and table napkins. The contractor had also to pay the O.C., A.I.F. Pay Office a rent of £30 a month for the use of the hospital stoves, as well as being obliged to make good all breakages. The right of inspection of all food at all times by the O.C. or his authorised deputy to ensure that it continued to be of first quality was expressly written into the contract, with a clear provision that the contractor should 'replace any article or articles rejected by a competent military authority at any time at his own expense.' A 'Daily Menu' was clearly set out on which it was particularly stressed that so-called milk puddings should indeed be made with milk and not water. For every failure to comply with the conditions of the contract, the contractor was liable to a fine of five pounds.

Despite the recorded willingness and efficiency of the Nun-govich Co. in meeting all sudden demands made upon them, there were a number of reasons why even this carefully drawn-up contract was

78. A/AF. A2663 351/22.

never fully satisfactory,⁷⁹ and it seems likely that all catering contracts suffered from the same disadvantages. The first ground of complaint was that Egyptian natives were 'very dirty in their habits', and could not be trained to be otherwise. They were slipshod in the performance of their duties. At Nasrieh a fire had been caused in the Sisters' Quarters through the carelessness of servants,⁸⁰ while at Helouan, corridors and walls had been left dirty and rooms crawling with vermin because Arabs had left sanitation duties to wait at tables.⁸¹ Secondly, 'The food was cooked and served in a style foreign to the Australian and not to his taste.'⁸² Since the contractor had no access to Army stocks of meat or butter, he obtained his supplies locally. The shortcomings of the meat at Helouan have already been mentioned. Of the local butter, an Australian wrote,

... (it was) too much for our palates. Rancid always, and made from either goats', camels' or water buffaloes' milk, and perhaps a mixture of all three. It was too awful for words.⁸³

Then, the contractor, no matter how honest himself, was daily constantly defrauded by 'an army of native sub-contractors, drivers and servants'.⁸⁴ All these made what profit they could for themselves

79. W.O. 95/4742.

80. April 24th, 1917, W.O. 95/4742.

81. AMGF, A2663 351/23.

82. W.O. 95/4742. See also 'the famous but unfancied Egyptian marmalade'. Appendix 4, W.O. 95/4557.

83. Maj. H.J.F. Coe, 12th. A.F.A. Bde., diary March 31st, 1915.

84. W.O. 95/4742.

out of the contract by any means available. One soldier patient found, for example, that more and better food would be forthcoming if he bribed the Sudanese servant.⁸⁵ In any case, as the war progressed, steeply rising food prices⁸⁶ made it difficult for the contractor to avoid making a loss without resorting to cheating.⁸⁷ The scarcity and expense of potatoes⁸⁸ had led the 'al-Hayat' company to attempt an evasion of their contract at Helouan by the substitution of sweet potatoes for ordinary ones in 1915.⁸⁹ By 1917, the rise in the cost of living had been so steep that all contractors had to be carefully watched.⁹⁰

Australian hospitals had employed catering contractors because, with all the draw-backs involved, it had been convenient to do so. Egypt offered one other great convenience which was eagerly seized upon by the Australian army as a whole---a seemingly unlimited supply of cheap labour.

'All the dirty work is done by Arabs and other natives at the Camp we live like Lords of the Desert'⁹¹

85. Sgt. H.M. Jackson, 13th. Btn., diary, August 25th, 1915.

86. Egyptian Mail, February 19th, 1915. Between 1914 and 1918 wheat flour, eggs, beef and bread more than doubled in price, and sugar very nearly trebled. (See Annuaire Statistique).

87. November 21st, 1917. ANMF A2663 351/22.

88. Egyptian Mail, September 9th, 1915.

89. ANMF A2663 351/23.

90. W.O. 95/4742.

91. Ellsworth, letter, December 9th and 19th, 1914.

wrote one man, clearly revelling in the unaccustomed pleasure of sitting back to be waited upon. '... if our bayonets rust', commented another, 'and we are too lazy to clean a bally rifle, 3p. will do it for us.'⁹² Natives were employed for sanitary work,⁹³ to cart away rubbish,⁹⁴ or in the more menial tasks of the horse lines, like raking muck.⁹⁵ Troops were even relieved of the burden of doing their own washing since this service could be performed for them at the trifling rate of 3 piastres for one dozen articles, 2 piastres per man per week, or 306 piastres a week for a whole unit's wash.⁹⁶ The nurses at Mana House found also that their duties were eased and their comfort augmented by the presence of Arab servants.⁹⁷ In time, military directives were issued regularising the conditions under which natives could be employed, defining the duties they might undertake, and limiting their numbers.⁹⁸ Such steps were obviously necessary in the interests of security, but even within these limitations Australian troops were freed from a number of disagreeable chores which normally as soldiers they would have to have performed themselves.

92. Donkin, diary, December 27th, 1914.

93. ANMF. 183/14 207.

94. ANMF. A2663 217/4 and 481/74.

95. Cpl. A.J. Anderson, 4th. L.N.R., letter, September 10th, 1915.

96. ANMF. A 2663 217/4.

97. Sister L.K. King, No. 2 A.G.H., diary, January 20th, 1915 and February 15th, 1915. Sister L.G. Moreton, A.A.N.S., A.I.F., letter, May 15th, 1916.

98. ANMF. 183/14 207.

What enduring impressions were left upon Australian minds by those contacts with Egyptians outlined in this chapter? Australian troops had been sent to Egypt in the first place because a rising was feared---therefore Egyptians were treacherous. There had been no rising. Egypt was now a British Protectorate and had been attacked by Turkey, yet she was allowing others to defend her. Australians were accordingly inclined to dismiss Egyptians as a 'cowardly lot' who 'can't and won't fight worth tuppence'.⁹⁹

In the bazaars the troops had been exposed to the 'tricky nightshirted Egyptian',¹⁰⁰ to that section of the population whose one interest in them was to make money out of them, 'to which task it devoted itself single-mindedly'.¹⁰¹ Avarice and dishonesty were the characteristics most clearly developed in most Egyptians they met in this context. At a more impersonal level the A.I.F. had, by establishing contractual relations with a number of firms, entered into the cut-throat world of Egyptian business. It had been forced to be vigilant in its own interest at all times, and there had developed a mistrust of the more established Egyptian commercial community which closely paralleled the ordinary soldier's attitude towards the petty tradesman. (At the end of the War, the inflated claims for damages made by Egyptian hotel owners against Australian hospitals¹⁰²

99. Lt. J.M. Aitken, 11th. Btn., letter, January 7th, 1915.

100. Cairo, p. 224.

101. Age, January 5th, 1915.

102. ANMF 207/12 and 207/12 229.

and the formation of rings to force the realisation of Australian owned instalations at ridiculously low prices¹⁰³, were the final confirmation of the rapacity of the business community).¹⁰⁴

Few Australians would have contested the statement of the New Zealand N.C.O. who wrote of Cairo, 'everyone, consciously, or without conscience, tries to rob everyone else.'¹⁰⁵ Finally, by the employment of natives to perform menial tasks, Australians were establishing their superiority. They were assuming, as white men, as Britons, their place in the top caste of the colonial hierarchy. That the work on which native Egyptians were most commonly engaged was of a sordid nature only served to confirm the Australians' view of them as essentially degraded.

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103. S.H. Bowden, ed., History of the Australian Comforts Fund, (Sydney, 1922) p.269-270.
104. The business community alluded to in this section were, of course, mainly European.
105. Egyptian Gazette, February 1st., 1915.

CHAPTER II AUSTRALIANS AND NATIVE EGYPTIANS.

AN EXAMINATION OF ATTITUDES.

Synopsis

Scope of chapter---Australian racism---a) attitudes towards aborigines--- b) the 'White Australia' policy'---racial stereotypes---Syrians in Australia---impact of Egypt, first impressions---social inequalities and squalor---heightened appreciation of Australia---antipathy towards Egyptians---language barrier---lack of hygiene among Egyptians---their rapacity and dishonesty---immorality---other objectionable characteristics---Australian contempt for Egyptians and its effect on behaviour---Egyptians as a source of diversion---post-Gallipoli violence---examples of friendliness between Australians and Egyptians---Egyptian opinion of Australians---unfortunate circumstances militate against formation of bonds of sympathy---conclusion.

This chapter will examine the racial attitudes of the men of the A.I.F. in Egypt during the Great War as these are revealed by the opinions they expressed concerning native Egyptians, and their behaviour towards them. It is not intended to suggest that these opinions were necessarily confined to the A.I.F., or that the prejudices they reveal are uniquely Australian. Principally it is intended merely to record them more comprehensively than has been done before, and to relate them to the more frequently studied areas of Australian racism. What follows is largely an examination in a new context of the operation of ideas on race which had already been arrived at and demonstrated under other circumstances.

Before 1914 Australian racial attitudes were most clearly exhibited in the treatment of aborigines and in the formulation of the 'White Australia' policy. Early settlers had found an undeveloped continent, occupied by an indigenous population that was numerically weak, widely scattered, and possessed of only the elementary technology of a society of hunters and gatherers.

Unable to offer any sustained resistance to the incursions of European colonists these aboriginal inhabitants had been simply 'pushed ... out of the way.'¹ The ease with which this dispossession was accomplished reinforced convictions of white superiority, and the obvious disparity between the two cultures confirmed already popular theories of a hierarchy of races,² in which the Australian aborigine could be seen as occupying the lowest position.³ Treatment of the aborigines varied from deliberate genocide to well-meant but ill-thought out attempts at protection, but whether they were dismissed as less than human and treated with the utmost brutality, or whether they were seen as pitiable objects needing to be defended by legislation,⁴ the ultimate passing-away of their entire society was viewed with comparative equanimity as the inevitable outcome of the processes of social evolution.⁵ They had failed to exploit the resources of the land they inhabited and now must yield to a socially more efficient group.⁶ Although by 1914, actual contacts between the majority of city-dwelling Australians and aborigines were becoming

¹ Donald Horne, The Lucky Country, (revised ed., Harmondsworth, 1971), p. 125.

² See P.D. Curtin, ed., Imperialism, (London, 1971), p. xvi.

³ Bulletin, June 19th., 1880.

⁴ The Lucky Country, p. 124. A.F. Davies and S. Encel, eds., Australian Society: A Sociological Introduction, (Melbourne, 1970), p. 368-370.

⁵ A New Britannia, p. 62.

⁶ See, generally, the writings of the social evolutionists, Herbert Spencer and Benjamin Kidd. Specifically for Australia, see John Wisker, 'The Coloured Man in Australia', Fortnightly Review, 1879.

less frequent, the habits of thought that had characterised past relations still remained. In these, certain trends are discernible. The common humanity shared by members of different racial groups was de-emphasised and the concept of the brotherhood of man was given a very narrow application. Feelings of guilt for the callous behaviour of the strong towards the weak were minimised as that behaviour found justification in the extension of Darwinian theory to the sphere of human relations.

The absence of any previous significant development of the Australian continent had also encouraged the belief that it might provide the ground on which some original social experiment could be made. Throughout the nineteenth century political activity in Australia was largely concerned with the establishment of a particular kind of new society---an egalitarian society in which the tradition-derived inequalities of the Old World would have no place. It was to be a 'paradise for the working man'. The 'White Australia' policy had its origins partly in fears that this 'new democracy' could not be achieved if the country were flooded by elements from outworn or 'servile' nations, partly in reactions to a perceived threat to the white worker from an influx of cheap coloured labour.⁷ Even when political or economic reasons for its formulation were stressed,⁸ however, it was always, by modern

⁷Vance Palmer, The Legend of the Nineties (This ed., Melbourne, 1966) p. 16-17. W.K. Hancock, Australia, (Sydney, 1945) p.66 ff.

⁸Bulletin, June 22nd., 1901.

definition,⁹ a racist policy, since the underlying assumption was that non-white races possessed inherent and immutable characteristics which rendered them permanently unfitted for a place in the young and progressive Australia. The 'peak period' of the 'White Australia' agitation occurred during the generation before 1914¹⁰ because of the pre-occupation with nation building inevitably attendant on Federation. In 1901 the Labor Party began to advance an unequivocally racial policy,¹¹ and Labor organs, such as the Brisbane Worker, maintained an anti-coloured propoganda in the most inflammatory and emotive terms.¹² At the same time the new Commonwealth began to pursue a vigorous defence policy. 'To retain a great continent for ever for the exclusive use of the white races' because neighbouring nations failed to 'conform to the high ideas of civilisation adopted by the Briton'¹³ was obviously to provoke the overcrowded lands of Asia to the North. The building of an Australian navy,

⁹ See Statement on Race and Racial Prejudice, (U.N.E.S.C.O., Paris, 1967). Note the following:-

It is of cardinal importance to recognise that in this process of rationalisation of an instinctive belief, it is the belief which is the primary thing, while the explanation, although masquerading as the cause of the belief, as the chain of rational evidence on which the belief is founded, is entirely secondary and but for the belief would never have been thought of.

(W. Trotter, Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War, (2nd ed., London, 1919), p. 38.

¹⁰ S. Encel, in F.S. Stevens, ed., Racism: The Australian Experience. A Study of Race Prejudice in Australia (Artarmon, 1971), Vol. I, p. 33.

¹¹ R. Gollan, Radical and Working Class Politics. A Study of Eastern Australia, 1850-1910, (paperback ed., Melbourne, 1967), p. 195.

¹² March 30th., 1901. See also A New Brittainia, p. 50 f.

¹³ Glorious Deeds of Australasians, p. 267.

and the adoption of universal compulsory military training were in direct response to the threat of an Asiatic invasion. As a result of all this activity, the men of the A.I.F. who reached Egypt during the Great War may be said to have grown up in a society acutely sensitive to and obsessed by matters of race. For Australians, the natural suspicions of all men towards members of alien groups were specially heightened by constant and unavoidable references to the menace such groups offered to their way of life. In such circumstances as these, hostility rather than sympathy, became the conscious as well as the instinctive response to the foreigner.

It is doubtful that Australian troops had any specific pre-conceptions about native Egyptians before they met them in Egypt, but there were, however, certain stereotyped images¹⁴ of 'Asiatics' or 'coloureds' in general, which were current and widely accepted throughout Australian society. These had been derived from the generalisation of diverse experiences with the Chinese at the time of the mid-nineteenth century gold-rushes and had been disseminated thereafter in popular traditions, through the channels of mass communication such as the Bulletin¹⁵ and the Boomerang, and in the literary works of Charles Lane and Henry Lawson. All subsequent encounters with non-Europeans were likely to be viewed in terms of this existing stereotype, which was in itself the product of an irrational analysis, rather

¹⁴ For the role and formation of stereotypes in race and ethnic relations see A.H. Richmond, ed., Readings in Race and Ethnic Relations (Oxford, 1972), p. 5.

¹⁵ It is not without significance for the present study that the Bulletin was described as 'the most popular paper amongst the boys' (i.e. the A.I.F.) in Egypt. (Lt. E.H. Chinner, 32nd. Btn., letter, April 23rd, 1916).

than with due consideration of the full facts of the new situation. To put it another way, Australians were predisposed to show prejudice.

There was one further group of Asians with whom Australians were coming increasingly into contact before the First World War who had more obvious affinities with the Egyptians---the so-called Syrians, the Christian Arabs from Mount Lebanon. These refugees from the poverty and oppression of the Ottoman Empire were to be found to a varying degree throughout the whole of Australia, though they were mainly concentrated in the Eastern states, where by 1914 the New South Wales community had expanded to such an extent that an Exarch was appointed from the Patriarchate of Damascus to found churches, schools and benevolent societies for their use.¹⁶ While there is no way of accurately assessing how experiences with this group of Arabs may have influenced attitudes towards the Arabs of Egypt when they were met with, it is worthwhile examining reactions to the Syrians. They were well established within the social framework, but they were not popular. J.C. Watson, the Member for Bland, had lumped them with the Chinese and 'other coloured aliens' as a source of 'racial contamination'.¹⁷ The Bulletin, while admitting that they were white and not socially conspicuous, denounced them as belonging to one of the 'three non-fusible Asiatic races'.¹⁸ Syrians

¹⁶ Commonwealth Archives. General Correspondence. (Governor-General's) CP 78/22 1914/104

¹⁷ September 6th, 1901. Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, IV, p. 4633-4634.

¹⁸ January 18th, 1906. See also January 11th, 1906.

tended to be concentrated in the retail trade and as successful small shop owners earned themselves the whole-hearted hatred of European proprietors by the keen competition they offered with their willingness to accept a low profit margin providing that they thus were assured of a steady custom. This led naturally to accusations of despicable avarice. In the Bulletin's words:-

The Syrian type is a sordid one and its only ideal is money; in pursuit of that object it is patient and tenacious, sometimes blustering, sometimes cringing, but usually a liar devoid of shame.¹⁹

The Syrian was seldom to be found in manual employment, and was thus represented as 'a parasite and a drone.' Behind his superficial public presentability he was said to conceal a sordid domestic life far below commonly accepted Australian standards. The attack closely resembles the kind of hostile criticism more frequently levelled against the Jews, and probably grew out of the anxieties produced when members of an out-group appear to be achieving success within a society at the expense of its original and more typical members. Certainly, in South Australia, where the limited numbers of the Syrian community meant that it posed no very great threat, it seems to have been more favourably regarded and its desire to conform to the civic virtues appears to have been accepted as genuine.²⁰ While it is true that troops from New South Wales where the unpopularity of Syrians has already been noted were more likely to be the protagonists in

¹⁹ January 18th, 1906.

²⁰ Advertiser, December 2nd, 1914.

disturbances with Egyptians than were the South Australians who came from a State where no comparable feeling existed, it seems a stretching of possibilities to suppose the existence of a reservoir of definite Arabophobia among the men from Eastern Australia. In the first place their greater numbers made them statistically more liable to be engaged in brushes with the native population, and other reasons may be adduced, such as the increased likelihood of acts of larrikinism on the part of young men coming from the larger urban areas. Hostile reactions to Syrians within Australia had probably grown out of a generalised xenophobia, exacerbated upon occasion by local conditions of inter-group competition. Anti-Syrian feelings were then absorbed into the main body of anti-foreign sentiment, reinforcing it, but in an imprecise way, so that when later it was turned upon the Egyptians, it was because they were alien, not because they were particularly identifiable as belonging to a specific group. Egyptians and Syrians were both disliked, not because both were Arab, and shared noticeable Arab characteristics, but because both were simply 'un-Australian'.

(A handful of Syrians, born in Australia went with the First A.I.F. to Egypt. These young men were of great service to their comrades as interpreters and seem to have impressed Egyptian journalists by their poise and education,²¹ but unfortunately they have left no records of their experiences, uniquely caught between the two worlds.)

²¹ Al-Mahroussa, December 11th, 1914.
Al-Basir, December 16th, 1914.

For most of the men in the Expeditionary Force, Egypt constituted their first experience of a foreign country.²² Few lands could have offered a greater contrast to their own.²³ The troops were confronted and overwhelmed by a 'panorama of strange realities',²⁴ so that their diaries and letters home record their first impressions in vivid vignettes and kaleidoscopic detail. On all sides the curious and unexpected attracted attention---the strange and colourful clothing of the natives,²⁵ chanting oarsmen steering the triangular sailed river craft,²⁶ the great doors and fretted screens of Arab houses,²⁷ the daily milk coming literally straight from the cow, with the beast being milked at the customer's door.²⁸ The bewilderment of so much novelty is most effectively suggested in the following disjointed diary extract:-

The shops never close. The natives won't work on Friday, they say their prayers in the open. Women are beasts of burden, child marriage, harems, high palaces, and indescribably filthy stinking houses in which the donkeys, bison, fowls, sheep and goats all

²² Anzac to the Hindenburg Line, p. 11.

²³ N.F. Spielvogel (the 'Gumsucker on the Tramp') wrote:- Cairo is by far the most interesting city I have yet visited. London, Berlin, Rome, are variants of Melbourne, but here everything is strange; it is like a new world. (Bulletin, February 8th, 1906).

²⁴ J. Halpin, Blood in the Mists, (Sydney, 1934), p. 39.

²⁵ Lt. J.M. Aitken, 11th. Btn., letter, December 2nd, 1914.
Lt. B.W. Champion, 1st. Btn., diary, October 20th, 1915.

²⁶ Capt. A. Brown, 49th Btn., letter, July 24th, 1916.

²⁷ Champion, diary, August 1915.

²⁸ Aitken, letter, December 3rd, 1914.
Ellsworth, letter, January 29th, 1915.

sleep together with the natives; camels, overloaded donkeys, Arab horses, motor cars, phaetons, pyramids, Sphinx, tents, desert, cultivation, electric trams, plough drawn by a camel and donkey harnessed together, scorpions, huge beetles, mosquitoes, morning temperature 45, midday temperature 98, no rain, bell tents, marquees, the smell of the east, home memories, mix the lot and that is Egypt for you, as I know it.²⁹

Certain aspects of the Egyptian scene excited general comment.

Coming from a land of egalitarian ideals where it was desired that every citizen should have as high a standard of living as possible, Australians were particularly struck by the violent contrasts and inequalities exhibited by Egyptian society. Cairo was a:-

city of extremes---superb palaces, mosques, boulevards and Hotels on the one hand, and within a stone's throw...squalor... On the outskirts there was such appalling, stark poverty among the poorer classes, fellaheen as they call them---that it had to be seen to be realised and conditions existed such as troops from our new and clean southern lands were hardly prepared for.³⁰

Australia had nothing to compare with what the men now saw. One man wrote:-

People who say there are slums in Melbourne don't (sic) know what they are talking about. They have no idea what slums are. The lowest lanes in Carlton are clean and the houses palaces compared to the places in Cairo.³¹

Alongside evidences of enormous wealth, 'the poorer classes could

²⁹ Maj. H.J.F. Coe, 12th. A.F.A. Bde., diary, December 26th, 1914.

³⁰ 'An Anzac Looks Back'. Unpublished manuscript by Lt. Col. C.R. Duke (Pte. No. 963, 4th. Btn.), p. 23. S.P.A. See also H. Dinning, By-Ways on Service. Notes from an Australian Journal, (London, 1918), p. 20-21.

³¹ Lt. J.D. Campbell, 6th. M.G. Coy., letter, February 27th, 1915.

be seen lying asleep on bridges and in gateways and even on the pavements,³² or sorting through the camp garbage bins for 'stuff a starving dog would hardly look at.'³³ That the standard of living was infinitely lower than in Australia was obvious even to the least observant,³⁴ and the squalor was as striking as the poverty. Australians were, by contemporary standards, a cleanly people,³⁵ and most of the troops seem to have been appalled by the dirt and lack of hygiene,³⁶ although Egypt was probably no worse in such matters than most of Southern Europe.³⁷ To the Australians, native dwellings looked 'like heaps of rubbish' where men and animals lived indiscriminately together³⁸ and sanitation was primitive in the extreme---'just a big hole under the floor...never cleaned out until the smell gets too thick in the street',³⁹ or sometimes a neighbouring canal might be used as a latrine.⁴⁰ All the horrors of

³² Ellsworth, letter, December 9th, 1914.

³³ Pte. T.J. Cleary, 17th. Btn., diary, April 23rd, 1916.

³⁴ D.J. Cox, 3rd. L.H.R. Interview, Semaphore, S.A., 1974.

³⁵ 'Australia is peculiar among nations in that practically every home in the Commonwealth contains a bathroom which is frequently and regularly used...they like to have clean things about them.' (Age, October 2nd, 1914).

³⁶ Pte. N.B. McWhinney, 23rd. Btn., letter, November 1st, 1915. Ellsworth, letter, December 9th, 1914. Pte. H.T.C. Alcock, 23rd. Btn., letter, June 14th, 1916.

³⁷ W. Fraser Rae, Egypt Today, (London, 1892), p. 126. Sgt. R.W.W. Adams, 11th. Btn., letter, May 31st, 1915.

³⁸ J.D. Campbell, letter, June 15th, 1915.

³⁹ Ibid., February 27th, 1915.

⁴⁰ Cleary, diary, April 23rd, 1916.

poverty and filth seemed concentrated in the undersized children,⁴¹ their eyes encrusted with flies which no one bothered to brush away,⁴² so that one soldier was moved to record his great longing for the sight of a 'clean baby'.⁴³

Exposure to Egypt began to give the troops a clearer perception of the advantages of the land they had left, and their heightened appreciation became articulate in their letters home. One wrote:-

The squalor, filth and general unsavouriness of the slums of Cairo make one realise what a splendid stroke of fortune it is to be born and living in a place like Australia.⁴⁴

They remembered the 'clean Aussie cities with their wide streets',⁴⁵ and home seemed like Heaven when viewed against the miseries that they now saw surrounding them.⁴⁶ 'Talking of Australia', observed a nursing sister, 'the boys call it "God's Own Country", and so it is.'⁴⁷ Egypt, on the other hand, was becoming notorious as the 'land of sin, sand, shit and syphilis.'⁴⁸

⁴¹ Des Kelly, letter, July 25th, 1915.

⁴² Champion, diary August 12th, 1915. Coe, letter, January 30th, 1915.

⁴³ Chinner, February 4th, 1916.

⁴⁴ Pte. P.S. Jackson, 11th. L.H.R., July 31st, 1915. See also Coe, May 27th, 1915.

⁴⁵ C.Q.M.S. A.L. Guppy, 14th. Btn., diary, February 1st, 1915.

⁴⁶ Chinner, April 1st, 1916.

⁴⁷ A. Donnell, Letters of an Australian Army Sister (Sydney, 1920), p. 81.

⁴⁸ The Broken Years, p. 129. The alliterative horrors listed in this abusive epithet were varied according to the taste of the abuser, or bowdlerised suitably according to the audience. 'Sun', 'shame' and 'sore eyes' may be added or substituted at any point to the version here quoted. Egypt was not the first country to be so labled, however, since J.F. Fraser had previously commented on the habit of other Australians referring to Western Australia as offering nothing but 'Sun, sin, sand, sorrow and sore eyes.' (Australia. The Making of a Nation, London, 1910).

In addition, all the confused beliefs concerning the undesirability of coloured races on which the principle of maintaining a permanently White Australia rested, were receiving daily reinforcement from the troops' experience of the native Egyptians. Old prejudices were being confirmed and strengthened. Not all might have expressed their conviction as strongly as the Tasmanian grazier, N.A. Nicholson, who wrote:-

Filthy beasts! I was a sure believer in White Australia before I left home, but now I am a perfervid and rabid "White Australian."⁴⁹

but few would have quibbled with his sentiments.

There is an air of inevitability about Australian antipathy to native Egyptians. James Aldridge, writing generally of British troops in Egypt during the First World War, observes that 'Cairo and foreign soldiers have always been oil and water.'⁵⁰ The Egyptian lived his own intense internal life behind a frequently un-prepossessing exterior, and the outsider, too ignorant of language and culture to penetrate this shell, was likely to form superficial and hostile judgements. Contacts were not of a kind to encourage sympathetic understanding. In another century, General Dupuy, Napoleon's Governor of Cairo, had complained of the impossibility of getting to grips with the life of the city and concluded that it was 'detestable', its people 'horrible and brutish'.⁵¹ Now Australians, almost entirely

⁴⁹ Capt. N.A. Nicholson, 114th. Bty., 14th. A. Fld. A. Bde., March 19th, 1916.

⁵⁰ Cairo, p. 223. See also Egyptian Gazette, February 25th, 1915.

⁵¹ Quoted in Egypt Today, p. 67-68.

excluded from the formation of those relationships which alone develop the ties of affection between diverse peoples, were reaching similar conclusions.

The language barrier was never truly broken. Within the cities Egyptians of all classes had been exposed for many years to a range of European languages---English, which was used by administrators and taught in schools---French, which was commonly employed in the naming of streets and was the favoured tongue of the educated or sophisticated section of the indigenous population, and Italian, which was used more than any other language by hawkers in shouting their wares. English came increasingly to be used in this latter role with the influx of British troops, all potential customers, which the War brought about. Cries such as 'Eggs-a-cook!' and 'Two for one' (i.e. two oranges, eggs, etc. for one piastre) became familiar to every soldier. Urchins intoned 'Australia very good', or sang 'Tipperary', in the hopes of being rewarded with some small coin. In many cases, however, these and a few other similar useful phrases constituted the Egyptian's entire linguistic stock-in-trade---just sufficient for the pursuit of business. On their side, Australians also tended to learn only so much Arabic as had an immediate practical application in the satisfaction of their various wants.⁵² In most cases there was neither the time nor the facilities for them to pass beyond this stage. A soldier who reached Egypt with Light Horse reinforcements towards the end of the War describes the position thus:

⁵² Gen. G. de L. Rylie, letter, February 22nd, 1915.
Champion, diary, August 18th, 1915.
Coe, January 17th, 1915.

Quite a few of the troops made efforts to at least speak sufficient Arabic to enable us to make known our wants regarding the common necessities of life. So with the aid of a simple text book of translated comparisons, we stumbled through a few conversations. But to listen to two Arabs or Egyptians conversing, we floundered and realised our limited knowledge of the language.⁵³

It was an added misfortune that the Arabic the troops most readily picked up was designed rather to repel than otherwise. Wrote one:-

We are learning Arabic, and I know one word, "imshi", clear out, go to blazes etc. That is what we yell at the niggers when they come near the camp...⁵⁴

Debarred by ignorance of the language from all relationships with the humbler sections of the Egyptian community, other than those that derived from purely commercial transactions, most Australians were also shut out by the conventions of Muslim society from middle-class Egyptian homes where the communication problem would have been less acute.⁵⁵ Although many well-to-do Egyptians were adopting a more cosmopolitan life-style than heretofore, the majority of ordinary respectable families in 1914, still remained intensely conservative in their social behaviour, and for these the introduction into their domestic circle of any apparently unattached male was

⁵³ R. Gum, My Life with Experiences, (Adelaide, 1974), p. 195. See also Aitken, letter, December 13th, 1914.

⁵⁴ Lt. C.R. Morley, 5th. L.H.R., letter, February 9th, 1915. Sgt-Maj. C.O. Provis. Letter quoted in the Advertiser, January 20th, 1915.

⁵⁵ The Coptic minority conformed in this and most other respects to the mores of their Muslim compatriots.

unthinkable.⁵⁶ Though an invitation might be offered on the occasion of some semi-public celebration like a wedding feast,⁵⁷ or by a comparatively uninhibited family to an individual of unimpeachable respectability such as a chaplain,⁵⁸ for the most part Australian soldiers were denied admission into that area of Egyptian society where they might have found evidence to redress the balance of the unfavourable opinions they had formed from the life of the streets.

The grounds for these unfavourable opinions have to some extent been already touched upon in both this and the preceding chapter. Now they may appropriately be examined in greater detail, with special reference to the formation of a stereotyped view of Egyptians, and some attempt to relate that view to previous racial attitudes. Australian troops, like many European visitors before them, found numerous aspects of the life of native Egyptians to be objectionable or distasteful.⁵⁹ Probably the most frequently

⁵⁶ For the problems of social acceptability confronting the lone male in a Muslim society the reader is referred to M. Fickthall, With the Turk in Wartime, (London, 1914). Egyptian Muslims were generally regarded as being even more old-fashioned than the Turks.

⁵⁷ Dr. Coles. Manuscript based on original letters sent home to his family and now retained in his own possession. (Adelaide, 1975). This information from a passage dated October 29th, 1915.

⁵⁸ Rev. William Floyd Shannon, diary, July 13th, 1915.

⁵⁹ For the purposes of comparison see M. Clerget, Le Caire. Etude de Geographie Urbaine et d'Histoire Economique, (Cairo, 1934), Vol. I, p. 232, which lists past criticisms of the Cairenes by European travellers.

encountered hostile comments are those directed, as has been indicated above, against the low standards of hygiene. These are understandable criticisms, a natural response to actual circumstances, and not in themselves particularly an evidence of prejudice, although they undoubtedly both strengthened and justified its existence. The Australians may be accused of showing a lack of historical perspective in that there is no indication that they considered how recent was the concern of modern Western civilisation for cleanliness, and how for many centuries Egypt and the lands of Islam maintained their bath-houses while Europe remained unwashed. It is unreasonable, however, to expect that the remembered perfumes of past ablutions should have neutralised the impression created by a contemporary Egyptian who could be smelt at a range of ten yards,⁶⁰ or offset the nausea engendered by the open toleration of masses of flies.⁶¹ Australian condemnation of the insanitary habits of Egyptians could advance powerful proofs in its own defence. Even before disembarkation, some five hundred men aboard the Euripides had been struck down by ptomaine poisoning spread by contaminated goods brought from the small boats that crowded about the steamer as she entered harbour.⁶² Once landed, the men constantly found

⁶⁰ Coe, letter, December 21st, 1914.

⁶¹ ibid. January 30th, 1915. See also Capt. A.D. Ellis, The Story of the Fifth Australian Division, (London, no date), p. 48.

⁶² Capt. G.D. Mitchell, 10th. Btn., diary December 3rd, 1914. Other opinion maintains the outbreak was caused by frozen rabbits from the ship's stores, (Lt. T.J. Richards, 1st. Btn., diary, December 2nd, 1914).

themselves confronted by examples of a total ignorance of the elementary rules of hygiene. Vendors of food commonly carried their wares in the dirty skirts of their robes.⁶³ They could be seen searching for fleas and lice while engaged in the very act of selling cakes,⁶⁴ licking fruit to give it an attractive shine,⁶⁵ or making up today's pies and buns from yesterday's refuse.⁶⁶ Cigarettes of a 'robust' flavour were on sale, made from re-cycled fag-ends collected by small boys in the street.⁶⁷ Throughout the War medical officers were to find, also, that the presence near a camp of any form of native settlement immensely augmented the problem of sanitation, since though flies might be eliminated in the former, they would still drift in from the middens of the latter.⁶⁸ The men seem to have reacted in two principal ways to this dirtiness they denounced. Some recoiled in fastidious horror,⁶⁹ others seem to have

⁶³Champion, diary, September, 1915.

⁶⁴Pte. A.A. Brunton, 58th. Btn., diary, May 8th, 1916.

⁶⁵Campbell, letter, February 27th, 1915. Interview with Dr. Coles, Adelaide, 1975.

⁶⁶Brunton, diary, May 11th, 1916. On May 10th he wrote of native buns:-
... when you are eating them you want to let your mind dwell upon the Thirty Nine Articles, Bimetallism or the Calculus; anything at all as long as it is not upon the habits of dirty niggers in the obscurity of their homes.

⁶⁷Egyptian Mail, February 1st, 1915.

⁶⁸W.O. 95/4749.

found a perverse fascination in amassing lurid incidents, or perhaps creating their own tall stories, like the man who insisted that grapes were 'freshened up' by being urinated upon, and described (almost with relish) how:-

One of the nigs was caught...washing tomatoes in a pan that he had just emptied from Jones' place.⁶⁹

It was a matter of pride with the men of the first A.I.F. that they could extract humour from any situation, and even here their sardonic wit was at work. Fifty years later one man recalled a standard witicism. The wholesomeness of any purchase was suspect, and it was commonly said that 'even the camel manure tobacco wasn't pure camel manure.'⁷⁰

Almost as frequent as the criticisms of the lack of hygiene were charges of dishonesty and rapacity.⁷¹ 'Graspingness' provoked as much disgust as dirt.⁷² Tradesmen were 'as slippery as eels, cunning as foxes'⁷³ and would 'take you in for everything'⁷⁴ or 'take a blind man down for his socks.'⁷⁵ Troops suffered from artificially inflated

⁶⁹ Campbell, letter, February 27th, 1915.

⁷⁰ K. Inglis, letters from a Pilgrimage, No. 3, Canberra Times, April 22nd, 1965.

⁷¹ See Chapter I

⁷² Capt. G.D. Mitchell, 10th. Btn., diary, January 2nd, 1915. Nicholson, diary April 12th, 1916.

⁷³ By-ways on Service, p. 27.

⁷⁴ Letters of an Australian Army Sister, p. 45.

⁷⁵ Mitchell, diary, December 10th, 1914.

prices,⁷⁶ which were often set even higher after pay-day,⁷⁷ from the fraudulent manipulation of the various currencies,⁷⁸ and even, on occasion, from being passed counterfeit coins.⁷⁹ The Australians quickly adapted themselves for survival in this commercial jungle. 'The black cows try to rook us but we are up to them now', wrote one Light Horseman,⁸⁰ and Australians were soon proving that they 'knew a thing or two'⁸¹ sufficient to get the advantage even of the canny Egyptians. Some notable minor victories were won in the ceaseless unprincipled skirmishing of monetary exchange:-

The fortunate few can everlastingly praise the genius that gave to Australia ten shilling notes printed as they were in those days without the addition in warning letters of red, "Ten Shillings". Quite a few were exchanged as tenners...⁸²

Where there was no opportunity of achieving success through superior guile, satisfaction of a sort might be obtained through violence.⁸³

⁷⁶ Nicholson, diary, April 12th, 1916. Egyptian Mail, December 9th, 1915. Advertiser, January 28th, 1915.

⁷⁷ Nicholson, diary. No date, but probably April, 1916.

⁷⁸ R.W.W. Adams, letter, June 7th 1915. Aitken, letter, December 8th, 1914. Advertiser, January 28th, 1915. Egyptian Mail, August 14th, 1915.

⁷⁹ R.W.W. Adams, letter, June 7th, 1915.

⁸⁰ Morley, February 9th, 1915.

⁸¹ Egyptian Mail, December 9th, 1915.

⁸² Reminiscences of the Great War. Unpublished manuscript by members of the 8th. Bty., A.I.F.(S.P.A., England.)

⁸³ Nicholson, diary. No date, as above.

It became customary for men who felt they had been swindled to restore the balance by kicking the swindler.⁸⁴

The widespread incidence of sharp practice among tradesman was paralleled by the apparent universality of petty thieving.⁸⁵ Indeed, pilfering was so prevalent that it was brought to the notice of passengers aboard the transports before they had even landed. An early introduction was offered by the activities of the natives who could be seen coaling ships at Port Said. An Australian nurse observed:-

...they coal very quickly and have a happy knack of dropping large pieces of coal in the sea and then small Arab boats come with their nets and gather them up. The Arabs are certainly very wise.⁸⁶

Established in camp, the troops found their possessions constantly manaced by the paper boy, the laundry boy and all the other sundry hangers-on and servants,⁸⁷ so that it was 'not safe to place anything good outside without keeping an eye on it.'⁸⁸ When visiting places of

⁸⁴'Letter from a Pilgrimage', No. 1. Canberra Times, April 15th, 1965.

⁸⁵See, for example: Egyptian Mail, February 8th, 1915.
Ellsworth, letter, March 6th, 1915.
Col. R.J. Millard, D.D.M.S., A.I.F., diary
March 30th, 1915.
W.O. 95/4468.
W.O. 95/4469.

⁸⁶Sister L.K. King, diary, January 11th, 1915.

⁸⁷Pte. R.L. Donkin, 1st. Btn., diary, March 12th, 1915.

⁸⁸Capt. W.H. Sheppard, 17th. Btn., February 9th, 1916.

interest, or going for a swim, there was always the danger of pick-pockets.⁸⁹ Of the natives who congregated near the Pyramids one man wrote:- 'I believe they would steal your bootlaces if they got the chance,'⁹⁰ while another left his opinions in no doubt:-

As regards their trustworthiness well, when I am drinking tea and there is a nigger within smelling distance...I watch my tea closely to see that he does not steal the sugar out of it. I would not trust a nigger as far as I would a Chinaman, and the latter I would only trust round a corner if he was hobbled, handcuffed, and covered with a revolver, loaded and the trigger pulled out. Even then I would peep round to be sure of him.⁹¹

From their unfortunate experiences with some Egyptians, most Australians came to have a deep-seated mistrust of the entire nationality. Even a man who was aware that the troops had not been exposed to a fair cross-section of Egyptian society and acknowledged that they had no contact with its more decent members, admitted that he would find it difficult to trust any Egyptian.⁹² A process familiar to sociologists was, in fact, in operation, whereby uncomplimentary generalisations, built up on the basis of unpleasant encounters with some of its members, were being applied to a society as a whole.⁹³ Harassed by petty criminals and unscrupulous tradesmen, the men of the A.I.F. readily assumed dishonesty to be an attribute of all

⁸⁹ Mitchell, diary, January 10th, 1915. Nicholson, diary. No date, as above. My Life with Experiences, p. 194.

⁹⁰ Campbell, letter, June 27th, 1915.

⁹¹ Coe, January 30th, 1915.

⁹² Lt. T.J. Richards, 1st. Btn., December 7th, 1914.

⁹³ G.W. Allport and L. Postman, The Psychology of Rumour (New York, 1965), p. 156.

Egyptians, at the same time finding confirmation for established convictions of the universal duplicity of foreigners.⁹⁴

If dirt and dishonesty had long been regarded as typical of the non-white races, there was a third disreputable characteristic they were represented as possessing which the Australians now believed they saw abundantly demonstrated by the Egyptians. As the resorting to prostitutes and practice of sodomy by the womanless Chinese community on the Australian gold-fields in the past had been taken as an indication of the wide-spread depravity of all Asians, so now the presence in Egypt's cities of brothel quarters expanded to cater for the large concentrations of troops, was taken as evidence of the inherent viciousness of the native population. A Light Horse private expressed in his letters home both the traditional view of Oriental immorality and a newly acquired and specific condemnation of the Egyptians. 'There is something repellent about Eastern races', he wrote,

All places with a large "native" coloured population are undesirable, but vice and depravity are more deeply ingrained in Cairo than elsewhere.⁹⁵

Six months later he was attacking the 'complete absence of moral sense of nine-tenths of Egyptians of all classes.'⁹⁶ Men could write

⁹⁴ Notice how Coe in the last extract quoted naturally uses a Chinaman for purposes of comparison when discussing Egyptian dishonesty. Note also the conviction that there is no honesty outside Australia as expressed by Inglis' informant in 'Letter from a Pilgrimage', Canberra Times, April 15th, 1965.

⁹⁵ Pte. P.S. Jackson, 11th. L.H.R., July 31st, 1915.

⁹⁶ February 9th, 1916.

of 'the sin and corruption of the eastern world'⁹⁷ as if such matters were determined by latitude and longitude alone, and seem generally to have found reinforcement for the association commonly made between coloured peoples and 'loose life.'⁹⁸ The 'lasciviousness' of the streets where prostitution flourished was said to be Cairo's 'most representative' characteristic,⁹⁹ and the most violently repelled felt that there was need of a cleansing of Old Testament intensity, with the very foundations ploughed and sowed with salt,¹⁰⁰ as if the city lacked even the single virtuous man for whose sake it might be spared. Most of the troops, however, did not respond with any such display of moral indignation. Their prurient curiosity was aroused by the flagrant way in which the ladies of the red light area of the Wagh el-Birka and Wassa touted for custom as they sat, scantily clad, on their balconies.¹⁰¹ The garish streets of the brothel quarter exercised a continuing fascination and it became

⁹⁷ Lt. E.H. Chinner, 32nd. Btn., January 16th, 1916. He was compiling a collection of lantern slides to illustrate the consequences of promiscuity. See also By-Ways on Service, p. 36.

⁹⁸ See E.J. Dingwall, Racial Pride and Prejudice, (London, 1946), Chapter XIV. For a contemporary expression of the view see the Advertiser, January 27th, 1915. The other side of the coin, that is, the association between the true 'white man' and high standards of sexual morality can be found in 'Sergeant Jack' (pseud.), At the Front. A Story of Field Service (Melbourne, undated). (Cf. Lt. D. Doull, With the Anzacs in Egypt. Life and Scenes in the Land of the Pharoahs, as seen through Australian Spectacles (Sydney, 1916), p. 43., with Racism. The Australian Experience, p. 35.)

⁹⁹ By-Ways on Service, p. 35. See also J. Halpin, Blood in the Mists (Sydney, 1934), p. 47.

¹⁰⁰ Nicholson, March 19th, 1916.

¹⁰¹ For one man's description of this area see Cleary, diary, April 15th, 1916. Prostitution is dealt with more fully in Chapter III.

a standard feature of every sight-seeing excursion to tour them.¹⁰²
 To attend a performance of the 'can-can' in one of the houses was almost an obligatory part of every soldier's education.¹⁰³ New arrivals were invariably taken to the Massa by the old hands at the first opportunity, to be exposed to such a parade of open sexuality as would have been unimaginable back in Australia where Anglo-Saxon prudery still ensured that vice concealed itself in the back-streets.¹⁰⁴ It was probably this sudden confrontation with clearly visible immorality that impressed Australians with a sense of the general depravity of Egyptians, since later encounters with the equally abundant, but more discreet prostitutes of France and England were not taken as evidence of the national viciousness of either the French or the English. That the practice of prostitution was so blatant in Egypt seemed to argue a lack of shame and decency in the population which was further confirmed by the uninhibited way in which small boys exposed themselves,¹⁰⁵ adults relieved themselves in public places,¹⁰⁶ or men openly exhibited their 'degeneracy' by

¹⁰² Jacka's Mob, p. 32. Interview with Mr. A. Read (former Field Ambulance) taken at Brighton, South Australia, 1974. Guy Thornton, With the Ansars in Egypt. The Tale of a Great Fight (London, 1918), p. 77.

¹⁰³ Purple Patches, p. 30 ff.

¹⁰⁴ Mr. A. Read. Anyone familiar with the writings of Norman Lindsay is aware of Australian prudery and sexual hypocrisy in the years before 1914. As a measure of the revelation that Cairo's brothels offered to many young Australians it may be noted that during an interview with Mr. Charles King (11th. L.H.R.) in Adelaide in 1974, he recalled his amazement at seeing a woman smoke in public for the first time when he was in Alexandria.

¹⁰⁵ Jacka's Mob, p. 14.

¹⁰⁶ Rev. W.F. Shannon, diary, December 14th, 1915. See also, Cleary, diary, April 11th, 1916. He remarks, 'These niggers have no sense of decency.'

the purchase and use of scent.¹⁰⁷

Australians commented unfavourably on Egyptians for a whole host of other reasons and totted up the grounds for their dislike as new ones presented themselves. For example, they detested the natives' cruelty to animals,¹⁰⁸ especially the 'poor little donkeys', which were overloaded and over-worked.¹⁰⁹ They objected to seeing women in grossly subservient positions, and the man who rode while his wife walked behind might find himself suddenly ousted from his comfortable seat and his spouse installed therein in accordance with Australian ideas of chivalry.¹¹⁰ Australian troops found the Egyptians to be servile and offensively ingratiating.¹¹¹ A former reporter on the Melbourne Age wrote:-

¹⁰⁷ By-Ways on Service, p. 15. There is one significant omission from Australian writings on the immorality of Egypt. Apart from this condemnation by Dinning of the use of perfume by males as an example of 'degeneracy', there is no reference to homosexuality or the presence of male prostitutes. Up until 1916, however, when Harvey Pasha instituted a general round-up of 'degenerates' (See Sir Thomas Russell, Egyptian Service, 1912-1946, p. 180), the notorious 'ginks' operated freely. Since it is possible to find allusions even to bestiality (Purple Patches, p. 29), one can only conclude that homosexuality was the most tabu of all sexual subjects.

¹⁰⁸ Egyptian Gazette, May 16th, 1917. Champion, diary, September 7. For the S.P.C.A.'s assessment of the Egyptians' attitude towards animals see Egyptian Mail, October 9th, 1914.

¹⁰⁹ Ellsworth, letter, December 9th, 1914. Brunton, diary, May 1916.

¹¹⁰ Interview. Mr. Cox. See also, With the Anzacs in Egypt, p. 47-48.

¹¹¹ Capt. W.J. Denny, The Diggers (London, 1919), p. 109.

The Australian does not feel at ease in the midst of extreme servility. There is nothing more irritating than the perpetual utterance of "Australia very good very ni-i-ice" which all the lower class Egyptians indulge in.¹¹²

Even the skill with which those Egyptians who were employed as servants fulfilled their tasks, though it was praised by some Australians,¹¹³ merely convinced others that they were 'abominably obsequious'.¹¹⁴ Natives were also held in contempt for their cowardice,¹¹⁵ and for their tendency to stand and cry 'like kids' if the boys 'got a bit tough' with them.¹¹⁶ Further cause to despise them was found in the general lack of enterprise which Australians found demonstrated by the continuing use of primitive methods of agriculture,¹¹⁷ by apparent idleness,¹¹⁸ and the apathy engendered by a traditional fatalism.¹¹⁹ Of the peasants' resigned acceptance of the vicissitudes of Fate, Oliver

¹¹² Ivor Bertwhistle, 22nd. Btn., July 12th, 1915.

¹¹³ Ryrie, letter, January 16th, 1916. Ann Donnell, letter, March 26th, 1916 (National Library of Australia, MS 3962)

¹¹⁴ Bertwhistle.

¹¹⁵ See Chapter I also Lt. D.G. Armstrong, 21st. Btn., letter, December 16th, 1915.

¹¹⁶ Duke's manuscript, Chapter VIII, p. 37.

¹¹⁷ The Diggers, p. 86. With the Anzacs in Egypt, p. 11. Egyptian Mail, July 29th, 1917. This failure to make the most of the rich resources their country offered to the agriculturalist may have placed the Egyptians, in the eyes of some Australians, among those 'races which take up ground that might otherwise be occupied by progressive and energetic peoples.' (Bulletin, March 1st, 1906).

¹¹⁸ Letters of an Australian Army Sister, p. 84. Nicholson, April 20th, 1916.

¹¹⁹ Coe, May 27th, 1915.

Hogue wrote scathingly:-

...maleesch...expresses, oh, so wonderfully, the spineless, emasculated spirit of resignation which is the foundation of the fellahin's philosophy. A subject race, prey to all the warlike nations of the earth for centuries, exclaims at each change of masters, "Maleesch." The plagues of Egypt come and go, and the fellah, with imperturbable stoicism, says, "Maleesch." He is knocked down by a motor car, "Maleesch." He dies, and the neighbouring fellahin cry, "Maleesch."¹²⁰

Though an occasional A.I.F. observer might commend the Egyptians' piety,¹²¹ the intelligence and vivacity of the cleaner children,¹²² or the courteous manners of many of the tarbushed men-folk,¹²³ the bulk of opinions expressed about them were, like those recorded here, critical and unsympathetic. Old prejudices and an established sense of racial superiority inclined Australians from the first to look down upon the native population.¹²⁴ Subsequent experience, as it exposed the troops to many of the more undesirable features of Egyptian life, only served to confirm this tendency.¹²⁵ Like their contemporaries among the white colonising nations, the Australians who visited Egypt during the Great War accepted the view

¹²⁰ The Cameliers. (London, 1919), p. 116. 'Maleesch' may be translated 'no matter'.

¹²¹ Brunton. Volume II of diary. Brunton, who was English born, seems more inclined than most A.I.F. diarists to find good in the Egyptians. He shows himself touched by the Englishman's traditional fascination with the romantic East (diary, May 23rd and 24th, 1915) in a way which most Australians were not.

¹²² Brunton, diary, May 1916.

¹²³ Ann Donnell, letter, September 25th, 1916.

¹²⁴ See the quotation from Aubrey Herbert's Mons, Anzac, and Kut cited in Cairo, p. 223.

¹²⁵ With the Anzacs in Cairo, p. 34-35.

that the peoples of Africa and Asia were inferior, and their relations with them were tinged with contempt from the very start. Every man, it seems, from General Monash down,¹²⁶ when he spoke of Egyptians, made use of the faintly derisory diminutives, 'Gyppe' and 'Gyppie', or the flagrantly derogatory epithet, 'nigger'.¹²⁷ The constant assault which this contemptuous attitude necessarily entailed upon the status of Egyptians as men entitled to respect and consideration by virtue of their humanity, resulted in their association in army lists with beasts of burden (camels and donkeys) or with such despised articles as latrine covers.¹²⁸ At its worst, it made it possible for quite ordinary men to indulge, without any show of guilt, in acts of callous ill-treatment of natives.¹²⁹ Although the official records of offences committed by soldiers against civilians in Egypt still remain within closed files,¹³⁰ the historian seeking evidence of Australian maltreatment of native Egyptians is faced with no lack of references in other sources to misdemeanours ranging in seriousness from the vulgar accosting of women,¹³¹ to

¹²⁶ See letter dated April 8th, 1915, reproduced in F.M. Cutlack, ed., War Letters of General Monash (Sydney, 1934)

¹²⁷ 'If it were not too serious one would be tempted to smile at the crude ignorance which makes people confound all men of coloured race... in the common category of "niggers"'. (Lord Milner, 1908. See Racial Pride and Prejudice, p. 5)

¹²⁸ W.O. 95/4523.

¹²⁹ Cairo, p. 223.

¹³⁰ See Introduction.

¹³¹ Ellsworth, letter, December 9th, 1914. Brunton, diary, May 1916.

arson, looting,¹³² and rape.¹³³ With a remarkable freeness, and with few indications of conscience or disapproval, Australian troops recorded in their letters and diaries many incidents in which they, or their comrades, beset the Egyptians with acts of physical violence or by outrages upon their sensibilities. While C.E.W. Bean in the Official History condemns thefts from and attacks upon natives,¹³⁴ less formal published works contemplate the mayhem created by the A.I.F. in Cairo with complacency.¹³⁵ The reasons why many actions, which today would be regarded as reprehensible, are treated with an unembarrassed candour, passing, on occasion, into something like positive self-satisfaction, are to be found in three major factors which Dr. Gammage, in his book, The Broken Years, has identified as influencing the conduct of the troops in their relations with Egyptians. The three influences Gammage cites are contempt,¹³⁶ the quest for diversion,¹³⁷ and, (in 1916), the weakening of the 'respect for civilian niceties' brought about by exposure to the harsh realities of warfare on the Gallipoli Peninsula.¹³⁸

¹³² Duke, p. 46. Nicholson, diary (narrative apparently disordered at this point, so no date). Mr. Stanley, 23rd. Btn., interview, Adelaide, 1974.

¹³³ Pte. A.J. Adams, 13th. Fld. Amb., diary, October 27th, 1915.

¹³⁴ Vol. I, p. 128.

¹³⁵ See for example, F. Reid, The Fighting Cameliers (Sydney, 1934), Jacka's Mob, et al.

¹³⁶ The Broken Years, p. 123.

¹³⁷ ibid, p. 36.

¹³⁸ ibid, p. 123.

The first of these was undoubtedly of greatest significance in determining behaviour. Australians despised Egyptians, and, as has been indicated earlier, the effect of that contempt, in dehumanising the people who were its objects, was to free the despisers from the normal obligations of civility and humanity. Boorishness, bad manners and brutality sprang from a conviction of racial superiority,¹³⁹ and Australians were able to treat Egyptians without consideration because they were not deemed worthy of it. Actions that were a reflection of 'pride of race' were unlikely to arouse feelings of guilt or shame in those who performed them¹⁴⁰ and even the religion of the Egyptians was not proof against the mockery of men who raised derisive parodies of the Muslim call to prayer.¹⁴¹ Social position did not protect Egyptians from manifestations of Australian disrespect, for even a Minister might find his tarbush flicked from his head by soldiers speeding past in a gharry.¹⁴² An educated Egyptian who expressed his indignation at being blaggarded by an Australian with whom he had collided was reminded of his inferior position when the soldier

¹³⁹ An interesting parallel is to be found in E. Warburton, The Crescent and the Cross (London, 1843), p. 185. Warburton was apparently delighted at being recognised as 'an Englishman--- one of that race...the devil himself can't frighten or teach manners to.'

¹⁴⁰ The Times of Egypt noted that at this period the Bulletin was referring to 'the racial pride that has become a part of all but the utter degenerates among us.' (T. of E., July 15th, 1915).

¹⁴¹ Capt. A.D. Ellis, The Story of the Fifth Australian Division (London, no date), p. 51. Dr. Coles, 4th. L.H. Fld. Amb., interview, Adelaide, 1974.

¹⁴² C. Lowth in 8th. Bty. Reminiscences. (S.P.A.)

'sunk the boot into him.'¹⁴³ Old age was not respected, neither was infirmity necessarily viewed with compassion. When an elderly man was nearly knocked down in a wild drive through Old Cairo and his stock-in-trade was run over, the incident was regarded as 'great fun'.¹⁴⁴ Some men could even abuse a blind man, if he were an Egyptian.¹⁴⁵

When the high spirits encouraged by the onset of the festive season¹⁴⁶ or boredom at the monotony of desert training¹⁴⁷ drove the men to create their own diversions, they turned readily to playing practical jokes with the natives almost invariably the butts of humour that was generally crude, and sometimes cruel. Hawkers had their trays upset,¹⁴⁸ or, if they were carrying oranges in the hoisted-up skirts of their voluminous robes, swift surgery with a razor would send the fruit cascading to the ground.¹⁴⁹ Australians devised situations from which Egyptians emerged discomforted and ridiculous. A group of soldiers on a balcony would throw handfuls of small coins into the street and then empty bucket after bucket

¹⁴³ Advertiser, January 20th, 1915.

¹⁴⁴ Armstrong, letter, December 16th, 1915.

¹⁴⁵ Brunton, diary, June 3rd, 1916. Two incidents are cited. In the first an officer was involved. In the second, Brunton records that the culprit was sharply criticised by his comrades.

¹⁴⁶ Lt. T.J. Richards, 1st. Btn., diary, December 26th, 1914.

¹⁴⁷ The Broken Years, p. 36.

¹⁴⁸ Col. G.H. Ovens, A.MZ. Training Depot, diary, July 14th, 1915.

¹⁴⁹ Duke, p. 37.

of water over the heads of the swarming crowd that had inevitably gathered.¹⁵⁰ Guides were given 'comic references inciting people to kick them', or describing them in the most abusive and insulting language.¹⁵¹ Sometimes the humour, though equally broad, was freer of the element of physical violence, as when Australians taught the Arab news-boys scurrilous or obscene cries.¹⁵² Sometimes violence replaced humour altogether as when troops found an outlet for their frustrated aggressive instincts and amused themselves by acts of simple sadism in unprovoked attacks on inoffensive natives.¹⁵³ Better recreational facilities and a more imaginative training programme would have done much to channel Australian vitality and ingenuity towards worthier objects than the baiting of Egyptians. As it was, the native population only found relief from the attentions of their persecutors when these departed for the Flanders trenches or the hard-ridden distances of Sinai and Palestine.

Before the Egyptians were finally relieved of this latter-day plague which had befallen them, they were to endure a period when it raged with added vigour. The men who returned from the evacuation of Gallipoli at the end of 1915 were impatient of discipline and restraint.

¹⁵⁰ Nicholson, March 19th, 1916.

¹⁵¹ Champion, diary, August 18th, 1915.
Jacka's Mob, p. 32.

¹⁵² R.W.W. Adams, letter, June 7th, 1915.

¹⁵³ Ovens, July 14th, 1915.
Natives coaling ships at Port Said were bombarded with potatoes.
(Cleary, diary, April 11th, 1916).

They embarked upon a reign of terror, sniping at civilians, throwing Egyptian conductors from trains, assaulting minor officials and generally harassing small traders and donkey boys.¹⁵⁴ Trading booths belonging not only to Egyptians, but to Greeks, Armenians and others were burnt and looted as an act of summary justice by men who felt themselves cheated,¹⁵⁵ and desired to settle old scores before they were transferred elsewhere. Natives were regularly kicked¹⁵⁶ when they became tiresome, though in this the troops were rather displaying their over-enthusiastic adoption of local practice than demonstrating that they had grown brutal amid the brutalities of war. Egyptian police habitually controlled recalcitrant crowds or individuals with kicks and blows,¹⁵⁷ in the past tourists had had recourse to the services of their canes and walking sticks to keep the swarms of pedlars at bay,¹⁵⁸ and now Australians belaboured hawkers with their belts or sticks, or punished sneak-thieves when caught promptly and violently,¹⁵⁹ in accordance with the prevailing custom. 'The stick and plenty of it', proclaimed one soldier, 'seems to be the only language the

¹⁵⁴ The Broken Years, p. 123-124. Conductors of the Mena trams had long been subjected to like indignities.

¹⁵⁵ Nicholson. (See note 132) The 'Sayeedah' or native canteens had been looted on other occasions. (Brunton, diary, June 3rd, 1915).

¹⁵⁶ G.A. Radnell, 8th. Btn., note in front of diary covering period from 6th April to September, 1916. R.W.W. Adams, letter, March 23rd, 1916.

¹⁵⁷ Ellsworth, letter, December 9th, 1914; March 27th, 1915. Donkin, diary, December 8th, 1914; December 20th, 1914.

¹⁵⁸ The New Egypt, p. 20.

¹⁵⁹ Nicholson, p. 107. Sheppard, December 9th, 1916. Ellsworth, March 6th, 1915.

natives understand.¹⁶⁰ It was a language in which the Australians were outstandingly fluent.

Though the G.O.C. Egypt was constantly bombarded with letters complaining of the cavalier treatment accorded native Egyptians by members of the A.I.F.,¹⁶¹ it should not be thought that relations between the two groups were unrelievedly bad. There was a better side to them which should also be examined. Between individual Australians and Egyptians it sometimes happened that a shared interest such as sport,¹⁶² or music¹⁶³ might momentarily bridge the communication gap and provide an interlude of friendly association. During the early stages of the War, too, there was cordial fraternisation between the impressively smart Egyptian Army regulars and Australian troops.¹⁶⁴ First impressions of Australian behaviour in the weeks immediately following disembarkation were reported as favourable in certain sections of the native press. The editor of Misr praised the manners of the A.I.F. in conversation with C.E.W. Bean,¹⁶⁵ although to compare their conduct favourably with that of the notorious Turk was scarcely over-warm commendation. There was, however, a noteworthy tendency

¹⁶⁰ Sheppard, diary, September 13th, 1915.

¹⁶¹ Ovens, diary, July 14th, 1915. Journal du Caire, August 24th, 1915.

¹⁶² Richards, diary, December 28th, 1914. Alan Read, interview.

¹⁶³ Richards, diary, January 17th, 1915.

¹⁶⁴ By-Ways on Service, p. 25-26. al-Basir, December 10th, 1914.

¹⁶⁵ CRS AZ 1915/3625. Australian Commonwealth Archives.

to contrast the free and easy style of the Australians, who, having learnt the common greeting, would hail people in the streets,¹⁶⁶ with the wooden behaviour towards Egyptians that characterised the regular British soldiery.¹⁶⁷ British soldiers were restricted by the theory that over-familiarity with the natives would result in a loss of prestige, and intercourse with them was frowned upon.¹⁶⁸ Australians, on the other hand, as they settled into Egypt, frequently allowed a degree of friendship and intimacy to develop which threatened to compromise white dignity.¹⁶⁹ A Cairene, interviewed in 1975, remembered how much less stiff and formal the Australians were than the English and how this was appreciated by Egyptians. 'They laughed and joked with us', he said. 'The English used to behave as if we Egyptian people did not exist.' The Australian troops' habit of ignoring the established conventions of behaviour where they felt them to be superfluous, and of recognising no authority over their actions other than personal inclination thus resulted, paradoxically, both in demonstrations of friendliness towards Egyptians and displays of unrestrained hostility, seemingly conflicting manifestations which were yet akin in their rejection of the accepted social code.

What did native Egyptians think of Australians? Unfortunately

¹⁶⁶ Misr, December 8th, 1914.

¹⁶⁷ Advertiser, January 20th, 1915.

¹⁶⁸ Egyptian Mail, November 13th, 1914.

¹⁶⁹ Nicholson, April 20th, 1916.

most of the recorded opinions available are those of outsiders speaking about the Egyptians, rather than Egyptians speaking for themselves. According to Storrs, Australian troops were both feared and admired by the natives,¹⁷⁰ an observation which was supported by the Cairo correspondent of the London Star, who wrote:-

Look in any direction you like and you will find that Australia has captured the town---captured, I said, not captivated. The remarkable physique and virility of the rank and file together with the phenomenal luxuriance of their language and the peculiarity of their manners have inspired among the native population the kind of affection that a tyrant is said to provoke occasionally in his victims. There is something almost Oriental too, in their openhandedness: they fling their money about like nabobs.¹⁷¹

Like the despots to whom the British journalist compared them, Australians inspired terror by their potential for violence,¹⁷² and surprised delight by their acts of affability.¹⁷³ Their 'swagger' ways,¹⁷⁴ and exuberant behaviour---they rode donkeys into hotels,¹⁷⁵ swung singing from the roofs of trams and discharged

¹⁷⁰ Orientations, p. 169.

¹⁷¹ Quoted Egyptian Gazette, April 6th, 1915.

¹⁷² Cleary, diary, April 15th, 1916.

¹⁷³ al-Express, August 4th, 1915.

¹⁷⁴ Morley, letter, February 9th, 1915.

¹⁷⁵ Pte. A.J. Adams, 13th. Fld. Amb., diary, September 28th, 1915.

their fire-arms in restaurants.¹⁷⁶ ---provided the Egyptians with a continuing free spectacle which could not fail to appeal to their sense of the dramatic. Indeed, the natives, it was reported by the American archeologist, Dr. Reisler, were 'tickled to death,' with the Australians.¹⁷⁷ The Australians themselves felt, however, that if the Egyptians found anything about them interesting, it was their pockets.¹⁷⁸ If any preference were shown them over the soldiers of other units, that too was for financial reasons alone.¹⁷⁹ One man cynically observed that the 'gypo' who greeted Australians with the cry of 'Australia very good, very nice, English up to S...' probably reversed the names when an Englishman appeared, and all done for the sake of a piastre,¹⁸⁰ to donate which was as likely to inspire scorn for the white man's gullibility as admiration of his generosity.¹⁸¹ The real state of Egyptian feeling concerning Australians was hidden, swelling the general resentment of the British occupation as each new act of thoughtlessness or cruelty by an individual Digger underlined its harsher realities.¹⁸² Not until 1919 were those feelings to find full open expression.

¹⁷⁶ Orientalist, p. 169.

¹⁷⁷ A. St. J. Adcock, Australasia Triumphant (London, 1916), p. 47.

¹⁷⁸ Advertiser, January 6th, 1915. Pte. T.L. Young, 28th. Btn., letter, November 26th, 1915.

¹⁷⁹ Armstrong, letter, October 17th, 1915.

¹⁸⁰ Sheppard, diary, September 19th, 1915.

¹⁸¹ Richards, diary, December 3rd, 1914.

¹⁸² Cairo, p. 224.

Contacts between Australians and Egyptians during the First World War did not encourage the development of sympathetic understanding between the two nations. Circumstances militated against any such favourable outcome. Australians arrived in Egypt with well established preconceptions about other races, which their experiences seemed only to verify. It was their misfortune to enter the country during a period of social upheaval, which had commenced well before 1914, but the effects of which were exacerbated by war-time conditions.¹⁸³ Egypt was a society in transition from the mediaeval Islamic to the modern technological world. The breakdown of traditional restraints¹⁸⁴ and the drift of population from the countryside to the cities¹⁸⁵ where there were insufficient industries to absorb the extra man-power¹⁸⁶ had resulted in a rising crime rate¹⁸⁷ and an increase in vagabondage, particularly among young children. These waifs earned their bread through begging,¹⁸⁸ and constituted a large part of the crowds of pesterers who plagued the troops at every turn.¹⁸⁹ Australians, like civilian tourists

¹⁸³ BMSP. 1920. Vol. LI. Cmd. 957. Egypt, No. 1 (1914-1919).

¹⁸⁴ R.L. Tignor, Modernization and British Colonial Rule in Egypt, 1882-1914 (Princeton, 1966), p. 388.

¹⁸⁵ See Census of 1917. Also comment in Times, May 12th, 1917.

¹⁸⁶ L'Egypte Contemporaine, Vol. VI, November 1914 - January 1915, p. 3ff.

¹⁸⁷ Annuaire Statistique

¹⁸⁸ al-Ahali, March 25th, 1915. K.A. Greiss, 'La Mendicité en Egypte et sa Répression.' (L'Egypte Contemporaine, No. 26, 1916).

¹⁸⁹ Richards, diary, August 27th, 1915.

in the days of peace, tended also to derive their views of Egyptian society from their experiences with one particular class, the donkey boys, hawkers, and all who batted on the traveller.¹⁹⁰ The demands of their military training limited the hours during which they might have come to some fuller appreciation of the Egyptian people. Cairo, where they spent their leave, became during this period, 'a sort of madhouse of self-indulgence'¹⁹¹ and though the troops might joyfully succumb in this atmosphere to any temptation that presented itself, they naturally developed little respect for the people who provided them with the opportunity so to do. Egyptians too, were confronted by Australians in circumstances that were likely to show them in an unfavourable light. From the first the A.I.F. were associated with a regime which the Egyptians were beginning to find irksome. Then, removed from the restraining influence of home life, and often enough with no sound moral teaching to fall back on, Australians began to exhibit an increasing lack of self-control,¹⁹² which was frequently demonstrated upon the suffering persons of the indigenous population. War sometimes forges strong bonds of friendship between allies. Though Australians and Egyptians were nominally on the same side, they developed no such ties of affection.

¹⁹⁰ Egypt Today, p. 94 and p. 314.
The Diggers, p. 82.

¹⁹¹ Cairo, p. 223.

¹⁹² See Chapter III.

CHAPTER III RELATIONS BETWEEN THE A.I.F.
 AND EUROPEAN CIVILIANS: SOCIAL
 STRAINS IN WAR-TIME EGYPT.

Synopsis

Introduction and aims of chapter---description of the European community
 ---its historical evolution---difficulty of penetration by outsiders---
 traditional role of the military---reception of Australian officers---
 minor problems---reception of the men---work of the Anglo-Egyptian
 community---praise of this work by Australians---criticisms of inadequate
 response---smallness of community militates against development of
 personal relationships; some ways in which such relationships do evolve
 ---British snobbery---the ritual of the sportsfield---further discrimi-
 nation---differences between Australian and Anglo-Egyptian manners---
 difficulty of finding respectable female companionship---Australian
 mis-conduct as a factor in stifling possibility of friendly relations
 with European civilians---an episode at Ismailia---reasons for Australian
 misbehaviour---steps taken to prevent it---the voluntary agencies,
 particularly the Y.M.C.A., and the role played within them by European
 residents of Egypt---conflicts of aim within the Y.M.C.A.---'Win the War
 First' and attitudes of the service man to attempts to provide for his
 social welfare,-- concluding remarks.

The relations existing between Australian troops and civilians
 of European origin in Egypt during the First World War may be approached
 from a number of angles. They may be considered in the general context
 of an examination of the stresses placed upon the established social
 framework by the sudden vast augmentation of one of the groups---the
 military---normally operating within it; they may be explored for the
 light they throw upon the diverse development of two colonial off-shoots
 of British society---the Australian and the Anglo-Egyptian; they may be
 examined in relation to problems of discipline and decreased
 efficiency among the men of the A.I.F. as these resulted from the
 inadequate provision of recreational facilities and adversely affected
 the Force's public image; their role in the subsequent attempted am-

elioration of these unfortunate circumstances may be assessed. It is with these major themes in mind that this chapter seeks to present an over-all description of the contacts and interactions between Australians and Egypt's Europeans throughout the war years.

The European community the Australians encountered in Egypt from 1914 onwards was by no means a united entity. While all Europeans, by virtue of their privileged position under the Capitulations, their commercial and political ascendancy, and their common bonds of race and religion, felt that they constituted one distinct group as opposed to the native Egyptians, for the practical purposes of daily social intercourse, they were divided by their national affiliations into comparatively insulated clans. English, French, Greeks, Italians and others, tended to move within the confines of their own ethnic communities,¹ except in Alexandria where a vigorous cosmopolitan society had evolved.² The historical origins of these divisions are to be found partly in the nineteenth century rivalries of the Great Powers, their attempts to wrest special concessions for their nationals resident in Egypt, and their pre-occupation with the bolstering of their own political influence and prestige there. The British Occupation of 1882, while welcomed by those sections of the European community who saw it as a stabilising force and a guarantee of protection for their financial enterprises, aroused jealousy in other quarters, particularly among the French. The partisan French press in Egypt lost no opportunity to attack

¹Le Caire, Vol. I, p. 235.

²Egypt Today, p. 257.

and revile the extension of British control over the affairs of that country, thus keeping bitterness and animosity alive on both sides.³ Where Frenchmen and Englishmen worked together their relations were noticeably cool,⁴ and during leisure hours, the French turned to their exclusive clubs, while English residents preferred the company of their own kind.⁵ Between all groups commercial competition was keen, and sometimes provoked ill-feeling and accusations of malpractice,⁶ but up until 1900 there was still a certain amount of easy intermingling, despite conflicts of interest. European society in Egypt was a fairly recent growth and inter-community relationships had not yet become formalised.⁷

The period between the turn of the century and the outbreak of the War, however, was characterised by an increasingly rigid demarcation of social groups. The final ceding in 1904, under the Entente Cordiale, of French claims to the right of interference in Egypt, by confirming Britain's premier status in the country, brought about a decline in the political significance and social prestige of all other Europeans. There was a growing exclusiveness on the part of the English, who now dominated a quasi-colonial hierarchy, and consequently there was 'less mixing with and understanding

³ Egypt under the British, p. 41-42.

⁴ Egypt Today, p. 192.

⁵ Egypt under the British, p. 17. Col. the Hon. J. Colborne, With Hicks Pasha in the Soudan (London, 1884), p. 280-281.

⁶ Egypt under the British, p. 20-22 and p. 24-27.

⁷ Orientations, p. 83.

of Egyptians and foreigners'.⁸ Anglo-Egyptians conveyed an impression of ignoring the very existence of people who did not interest them,⁹ and by 1908, Lord Cromer noted, there was little 'social sympathy' to be found between them and any other section of the European community.¹⁰ Where snobbery did not preclude intercourse, national tastes, interests and leisure habits differed to such a degree that the lack of common ground severely restricted conversation and hampered the development of a greater intimacy.¹¹ Perhaps, too, Englishmen tended to hold back from establishing relationships with foreigners permanently settled in Egypt because they themselves were there only for as long as their work required¹² and their affectionate impulses were all directed towards Home, and the retreats in England to which they hoped ultimately to retire.¹³ Divisions between the various national groups were further accentuated by the concentration of certain nationalities in specific occupations. The English, for example, predominated in administrative positions, but were less active in the sphere of commerce than other Europeans.¹⁴ Frenchmen made up

⁸ ibid., p. 84.

⁹ Lawrence Balls, Egypt of the Egyptians (London, 1915), p. 231.

¹⁰ Modern Egypt (London, 1908), Vol. II, p. 255.

¹¹ Orientalisms, p. 85.

¹² F.O. 371/2932.

¹³ Lord Edward Cecil, The Leisure of an Egyptian Official (This ed., London, 1941), p. 92-93.

¹⁴ Egypt under the British, p. 104.

the bulk of the employees of the Suez Canal Company,¹⁵ and furnished the local foreign legal profession with many of its members.¹⁶ Greeks and Italians were most frequently found as small tradesmen or skilled artisans,¹⁷ with the former being largely associated with the dubious pursuits of petty usury or the manufacture and marketing of cheap alcohol,¹⁸ The latter provided the police force with the majority of its European recruits.¹⁹ This division of labour along national lines was reflected in the geographical distribution of foreigners in Egypt. Over three-quarters of the European population were concentrated in the five largest urban centres,²⁰ the remainder, scattered throughout the countryside, being mostly those Greeks whose calling involved living among and off the peasantry.²¹ The character of European society in the three cities where Australians were to have most contact with the non-indigenous population was clearly determined by the role those cities played in the economic and political life of the country. In Cairo, the capital and seat of the Administration, society was most clearly dominated by the English. Alexandria, the hub of commercial and financial enterprise

¹⁵ ibid., p. 20.

¹⁶ P.O. 371/3726.

¹⁷ Egypt under the British, p. 87. Egypt Today, p. 319.

¹⁸ ibid.

¹⁹ Egyptian Mail, June 19th, 1915.

²⁰ Cotton and the Egyptian Economy, p. 320.

²¹ These will be discussed more fully in connection with the Egyptian uprising of 1919.

in Egypt, revealed in its social life the cosmopolitan origins of its community of businessmen, among whom English influence was less marked. Ismailia, as a Company town on the Canal, was almost wholly French, in appearance, population and spirit.

How did a society with as little easiness between its internal component groups as Egypt's European community accommodate itself to strangers? Egypt was visited annually by ever-increasing numbers of tourists, but these, though obviously welcomed by hoteliers, were seldom shown any hospitality by the residents.²² The most wealthy, who maintained their own houses, and returned each winter, were received into society,²³ but the average tourist was confined to the company of his own kind and the entertainment provided for them within the hotels. In part this must have been an unavoidable consequence of the shortness of the standard visit which offered little time in which to form acquaintances, but it was also in some measure due to the tourists themselves, who frequently presented all the obnoxious characteristics of their kind.²⁴ Yet even visitors who came well-provided with good introductions were not likely to find many chances to socialise.²⁵ The European community as a whole was too absorbed in the daily pursuit of its own affairs to be able to spare time for a succession of transient guests with no concern

²² See Introduction

²³ Orientalism, p. 83.

²⁴ Egypt Today, p. 266-267. Orientalism, p. 84.

²⁵ Douglas Sladen, Egypt and the English (London, 1908), p. 501.

beyond their own diversion. Few were rich enough to embark upon any wide-spread entertaining of outsiders. None of the English inhabitants kept open house, since most were dependent on fixed salaries barely adequate for their needs in such an expensive country, and totally insufficient to support an additional burden of indiscriminate hospitality.²⁶ Even without any such expenditure, with the social pressure to keep up appearances,²⁷ it was almost impossible for the official who had no private means to live within his income.²⁸ Under normal peace-time conditions, then, the casual visitor tended to be avoided by all who were not directly concerned in providing for his comfort on a financial basis. To the ordinary residents he was a seasonal inconvenience, like the khamseen wind, and like the khamseen he passed on with no-one feeling under an obligation to make his stay pleasant.

Before 1914, the military, in the persons of the officers and men of the British army of occupation fitted unobtrusively into the social scene. The garrison was not large,²⁹ and its members were

²⁶ C.S. Jarvis, Desert and Delta (London, 1938), p. 72. Egypt and the English, p. 501.

²⁷ The Leisure of an Egyptian Official, p. 92.

²⁸ Egypt of the Egyptians, p. 231. Egypt and the English, p. 504.

²⁹ It consisted of one cavalry regiment, one battery R.H.A., one brigade of infantry, one company each of the R.A.S.C. and R.E., one mountain battery and detachments of the R.A.M.C. and A.V.C. (Maj-Gen. Sir L.T. Blenkinsop, (ed.), History of the Great War based on Official Documents : Veterinary Services (London, 1925) p. 128. Its average strength, excluding the medicos, was around 4,000 (J.W. Barrett, War Work of the Y.M.C.A. in Egypt (London, 1919), p. 32.

not greatly in evidence.³⁰ The circles of that clique and gossip-ridden³¹ English society which looked to the Residency as its centre, were open to the officers, whose presence could add prestige to its gatherings.³² Entertainments benefitted from both the financial support and the dashing presence of the commissioned ranks,³³ and they were assured of a welcome from 'their own countrymen of the dancing set',³⁴ and (if unattached) from the mothers of unmarried daughters. There was plenty of opportunity to indulge in the upper-class pursuits of pole or duck and grouse shooting,³⁵ and officers readily obtained membership of the exclusive Turf and Sporting Clubs. The ordinary soldier, however, found no such agreeable provision for his leisure hours. He had little in common with the members of the foreign community who hailed from other European countries, and there was no easy acceptance by his own compatriots who were dominated by the class prejudices they had

³⁰ Sir Ronald Wingate, Wingate of the Sudan. The Life and Times of General Sir Reginald Wingate, Maker of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan (London, 1955), p. 77.
Egypt under the British, p. 96.

³¹ A continuing phenomenon. These characteristics of Anglo-Egyptian society were noted both by Col. Colborne and, thirty years later by Hector Dinning. (Nile to Aleppo. With the Light Horse in the Middle East (London, 1920), p. 262.

³² Egypt and the English, p. 158.

³³ Egypt and the English, p. 157.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 158.

³⁵ Wingate of the Sudan, p. 77.

brought with them from England. If to be an officer was to be, by definition, a gentleman, and so socially acceptable, to be a private was automatically to occupy one of the lowest positions in the hierarchy---to play the Pariah³⁶---and therefore to be ignored. Not all the grades of English society were equally represented in Egypt. There were few workmen, and the Anglo-Egyptian community was overwhelmingly middle class, with only a small number of those lower class families and individuals by whom non-commissioned troops were likely to be received. For these scattered representatives of the English masses there existed a number of clubs which soldiers too might join, for they were so non-select as to allow even Egyptian members.³⁷ A Soldiers' Club had been established in Cairo in 1882 to keep the men from the city's numerous 'grog-shops', but this was specifically an Army enterprise, to which the only contribution made by the civilian community was an initial gift of indoor games from Thomas Cook's.³⁸ For the most part, other ranks were left to find their own amusements, usually in

³⁶ Sir Ian Hamilton, A Staff Officer's Scrap Book (London, 1905), Vol. I, p. 38.

³⁷ See Cairo, Chapter 14. The small British lower class element consisted of foremen and engine drivers with the State railways, non-commissioned officers in the Egyptian Police, and some small shop owners. A small elementary school existed in the slums of Cairo for the children of the 'less fortunately situated members of the British community'. (F.O. 371/3726):

³⁸ General Orders, Cairo, December 10th, 1882.

the euphemistically designated 'cafe and entertainment streets of the gay quarter'.³⁹ Though an occasional Frenchman might be offended by the sight of their British uniforms, providing their actions did not provoke scandal or excite a disturbance, the troops were of no interest to the civilian community. They were there to preserve order but no one felt the need to recognise their presence by becoming involved with them socially.

With the coming of War, the regular garrison departed for the Front and their place was filled by Territorials. Contingents began to arrive from the Empire, from India, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, to defend Egypt and safeguard the Canal. The officers of these fresh forces slipped quickly and easily into the social role formerly borne by their counterparts in the peace-time army of occupation. The English community which absorbed them, warmly welcomed their help in the maintenance of those pleasures the War had threatened to curtail. Except for the predominance of khaki, the Season was much as it ever had been, and before the influx of wounded from Gallipoli, the grim realities of the conflict tended to be pushed into the background.⁴⁰ Every opportunity was offered for officers to spend their off-duty hours in a distinguished environment. The best hotels were open to them at a reduced tariff,⁴¹ and they

³⁹ Egypt and the English, p. 162. See also Egypt under the British, p. 48-51.

⁴⁰ For a description of Cairo during the early days of the War see Orientalists, p. 152.

⁴¹ Advertiser, January 22nd, 1915.

were admitted to the membership of the élite Sporting Club at a special low subscription rate.⁴² The officers of the A.I.F. shared in this general unconditional acceptance of all men of commissioned rank, and reaped the benefits thereof. They were introduced to prominent civilian officials,⁴³ and received many little kindnesses from respected members of the community---the offer of hot baths, bunches of flowers to decorate tents and messes, and help in purchasing presents to send home.⁴⁴ There were invitations to a variety of amusements, such as quail shooting, tennis and poker evenings.⁴⁵ Dinner parties were an almost nightly occurrence, and the usual culmination of a day spent at the races.⁴⁶ For those with the youth and stamina to take part, there was a succession of dances.⁴⁷ Nor was hospitality one-sided, for Australian officers were able to show their gratitude and appreciation to all who had entertained them by organising 'rather swell' gatherings in the great hotels.⁴⁸

⁴² A.H. Tubby, A Consulting Surgeon in the Near East (London, 1920), p. 136.

⁴³ See General Ryrie's letters throughout 1915 and 1916. Walter Crozier, late I.C.C., interview, Adelaide 1974. Colonel Millard, as a medical officer, met Public Health officials and was cordially received by a Professor of Pathology and other prominent local doctors. (Diary, February 23rd, 1915; March 10th and 18th, 1915).

⁴⁴ Ryrie, letters, February 13th, 1915; February 27th, 1915; January 22nd, 1916; February 24th, 1916.

⁴⁵ ibid, March 22nd, 1915; March 14th, 1915, February 13th, 1915.

⁴⁶ Coe, diary, June 10th, 1915.

⁴⁷ Nile to Aleppo, p. 244.

⁴⁸ Ryrie, letters, April 12th and 18th, 1915. See also the diary of M.R. Evans, who served in the Light Horse. Entry dated January 21st, 1915 (S.P.A.).

There is no indication that Australian officers had any reservations about accepting the attentions they received largely by virtue of their rank. Such adjustments as they had to make to fit into an unfamiliar society were comparatively trivial. The organising of the daily routine about the siesta was generally disconcerting to strangers,⁴⁹ and the resulting idiosyncracies of the social time-table led one officer to lament:-

Everything is the wrong way up. Dinner starts at 7.30 p.m. The concerts start at 9.30 and finish at midnight. The Opera starts at midnight and finishes between 2 and 3 a.m.⁵⁰

Such trifling uneasinesses were soon overcome, however, and it seems that the officers fitted only too well into the social round. In a number of instances they were joined soon after their arrival by their female relations who proceeded to assist them in the maintenance of gaiety and diversions, and to adapt themselves with even greater energy to the enjoyment of the pleasures of Society. Many embarked on the pursuit of 'title-hunting' in the best (or worst) traditions of British snobbery,⁵¹ and participated with so much enthusiasm in all amusements that by the end of 1915, it became necessary to pack the surplus womenfolk back home in the interests of military

⁴⁹ C.E. Hughes, Above and Beyond Palestine (London, 1930), p. 111-112.

⁵⁰ Coe, diary, December 26th, 1914.

⁵¹ Ryrie, letter, February 14th, 1915.

efficiency. Socialising by the officers of all forces had become excessive and restraints had to be placed upon all distractions as part of a general process of tightening up.⁵²

On their side, the civilians of Egypt's European community made few alterations in their normal behaviour patterns in accommodating Australian officers within the framework of their society. The A.I.F.'s democratic promotion policy which raised to commissioned rank men whose qualities of leadership and fighting ability were not necessarily accompanied by an equivalent command of the usages of polite society, did not come fully into operation until later when the battlefield was reached. In the early days of the War, there were few Australian officers who could have offended the proprieties by their social solecisms, so all could be received without reservations. The hospitality offered them by civilians was in accord with established peace-time practice, and imposed no strains upon accepted conventions, although the greater numbers involved may have caused severe overloading of some engagement calendars. If the bulk of the attentions showered upon officers came from the Anglo-Egyptian community, this too was in line with pre-War custom, since the English had always tended to monopolise the socially eligible ranks of the military. Where other European residents had the opportunity to make contact during the War, relations were generally cordial.⁵³ Inevitably,

⁵² Monash, letter, October 24th, 1915.
Ryrie, letter, December 31st, 1915.

⁵³ Sister King, A.A.N.S., diary February 7th, 1915.
Walter Crozier, interview.

in English-dominated Cairo such contacts were comparatively rare,⁵⁴ but in cosmopolitan Alexandria, Australian officers found themselves entertained by members of an elite drawn from diverse nationalities where British influence was not automatically paramount.⁵⁵

Though the officers of the A.I.F. were absorbed fairly readily and to the apparent satisfaction of all the parties concerned, the same could not be said of the men. The status-conscious society evolved by Egypt's resident Europeans, with its tendency to insulate itself from personal contacts with strangers and to overlook the common soldiers who guaranteed its security, was singularly ill-adapted to receive a sudden influx of troops, particularly Colonial volunteers unaccustomed to the workings of an unimaginative and inflexible class-system.⁵⁶ For the European community there had been no inclination or necessity to show friendship towards the ordinary men under arms in their midst in the past. The coming of War, for all it might arouse greater concern for the welfare of the troops through the promptings of patriotic duty and the desire to make some personal contribution to the Allied effort, was not likely to

⁵⁴Note the publicity given to an incident where Mr. Spathis, a Greek soft-drinks manufacturer, entertained the officers of the 10th. Btn., A.I.F. (Egyptian Mail, March 3rd, 1915; Egyptian Gazette, March 4th, 1915.) 'We marched to Cairo one day and a senior Greek citizen offered all the officers drinks ... a gesture much appreciated ... we didn't meet many European people ... we had nothing much to do with them.' (Frank Allichin, late 10th. Btn., interview, Adelaide, 1974.)

⁵⁵Coe, diary, June 10th, 1915.

⁵⁶See Australia. The Making of a Nation, p.116.

succeed entirely in relaxing attitudes and inspiring civilians with the urge to offer general hospitality. A free fraternisation as between equals was improbable, and there was a danger that relations between the European community and non-commissioned soldiers might take on the appearance of condescension on one side and stir up resentments on the other.

The group from which Australian soldiers might most naturally have expected the heartiest welcome, and the greatest display of sympathy and friendship, especially in view of the reception accorded their officers, was that formed by the English residents. These were people with whom they shared a common language and cultural heritage, people to whom they were united in their mutual allegiance to King and Empire, and with whom they had close ties of kinship.⁵⁷ For its part, the Anglo-Egyptian community seems to have acknowledged from the very outset that the fact of War placed it under an obligation to the common soldier which could not be fulfilled by treating him with the lack of concern it had shown his peace-time predecessors. The first indications that the troops' welfare was no longer to be a matter of indifference began to appear in October

⁵⁷ An interesting example of the family ties which ran through the Empire and gave substance to pronouncements on the 'crimson thread of kinship', is offered by the English chemist, Stephenson, whose business had branches at Cairo and Alexandria. This member of the Anglo-Egyptian community had three sons serving in Lord Kitchener's Army, and a fourth with the Queensland contingent of the Australian Light Horse.

1914, when the English-language press commenced regularly to feature appeals for volunteer helpers, money and books, for the benefit of those Territorials who had already reached Egypt. When the A.I.F. arrived later in the year a number of voluntary services were at once instituted to cater for their needs,⁵⁸ and requests for 'clean, healthy literature' for their use were repeated with greater urgency.⁵⁹ A wide range of activities were undertaken on behalf of the Australian troops,⁶⁰ and many of the good works initiated in the first few months were maintained throughout the War. For example, the difficulties encountered by those in search of an evening's entertainment in their own language⁶¹ were partially offset by the presentation of numerous amateur concerts, to which men, women and children all made a contribution.⁶² The discomforts experienced at times by the sick and wounded from the great heat,⁶³

⁵⁸ Anon., The History of the 2nd. Light Horse Regiment, A.I.F. (Tamworth, no date), p. 13.

⁵⁹ Egyptian Gazette, February 1st and 12th, 1915.

⁶⁰ A.W.M.F. 481/74 p. 6. Egyptian Mail, February 9th, 1915. Launceston Examiner, June 30th, 1917. Egyptian Gazette, June 3rd, and 6th, 1918. Oliver Hogue, Trooper Bluegum at the Dardenelles (London, 1916), p. 84-85.

⁶¹ Egyptian Gazette, November 6th, 1918.

⁶² A.W.M.F. 481/74. Egyptian Gazette, March 22nd, 1915; January 16th, 1917; May 18th, 1918. Egyptian Mail, March 5th, 1915; June 5th, 1915. Richards, diary, March 29th, 1915.

⁶³ Times, July 14th, 1915; July 11th, 1916.

and ancient dirty buildings, hastily converted for hospital use,⁶⁴ were made more bearable by the kindnesses of hospital visitors.⁶⁵ When bad liaison and organisational breakdowns resulting from the internicine squabbles of both the Army medical establishment and the Red Cross prevented patients from receiving petty luxuries like picture post-cards and cigarettes, or basic necessities like razors, toothbrushes and clean clothes,⁶⁶ the benevolence of concerned Englishwomen helped to supply the deficiencies.⁶⁷ Tea-rooms with associated facilities for reading and indoor games were set up for the troops' use, and later these branched out into the subsidiary operation of railway canteens.⁶⁸ Convalescent outings were arranged,⁶⁹ with one particular married couple themselves acting as hosts to no less than 600 Australians over a period of under a year, their guests ranging from General Birdwood to a humble private struck dumb

⁶⁴ W.O. 95/4386.

⁶⁵ Egyptian Gazette, May 11th and 31st, 1915.
A Consulting Surgeon in the Near East, p. 15-16.

⁶⁶ Springthorpe, diary, June 18th, 1915; July 24th, 1915; August 26th, 1915; April 8th, 1916. (N.B. Lt. Col. Barrett whom Springthorpe particularly singles out for criticism was exonerated from all charges. (M.J.A., May 20th, 1916, p. 418-419). Though a full investigation was outside the scope of this thesis it seems apparent that Barrett was at least guilty of concentrating too much power in his own hands, and that since the task was too great for one man, some areas were inevitably neglected.)

⁶⁷ Springthorpe, diary, April 9th, 1915.

⁶⁸ Egyptian Mail, February 11th, 1915; October 22nd, 1915; March 24th, 1916. Times of Egypt, April 1st, 1916.

⁶⁹ Egyptian Gazette, January 22nd, 1917.
G.A. Radnell, 8th. Btn., and 2nd. M.G. Coy, A.I.F., memoir (S.P.A.).

with shell-shock.⁷⁰ Fifteen voluntary workers ran a bureau of enquiry where help might be obtained in the tracing of wounded or missing personnel,⁷¹ numerous fund raising activities were initiated to obtain comforts for the troops,⁷² and enormous quantities of flowers were provided from ransacked home gardens to make Christmas decorations or Anzac Day wreaths in their appropriate season.⁷³ The most spectacular gesture of all was made by the quixotic Civil Service official, John Young, who gave up his leave in order to distribute gift packages to the fighting men on Gallipoli.⁷⁴

Many Australians wished to place their gratitude and appreciation for these and other kindnesses on record. Thus one man, who claimed to voice the opinions of the majority wrote:-

... I would like to draw attention to the graceful way in which their kindness has been shown, their hospitality given, and their ministrations to the sick offered by those who have specially taken long and tedious classes to perfect themselves in nursing and first aid. It has all been done so naturally, as if we had every right to expect it ...⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Springthorpe, diary, December 12th, 1915.

⁷¹ Egyptian Gazette, January 22nd, 1917.

⁷² W.O. 95/4556 Springthorpe, diary, December 20th, 1915.

⁷³ ibid., December 25th, 1915. Times of Egypt, April 26th, 1916.

⁷⁴ History of the Australian Comforts Fund, p. 239. For an insight into the character of John Young, see Orientations, p. 87.

⁷⁵ Egyptian Gazette, letter, June 7th, 1915.

Some ladies had entirely given up parts of their homes for use as reading rooms, and had entertained as many wounded soldiers as they had space for. One broadcast her invitations freely, limiting them only by the caution that she could not accommodate more than twenty visitors at a time.⁷⁶ Testimonials as to the 'splendid work for the soldiers'⁷⁷ undertaken by the English community as a whole came in from many Australians to swell newspaper correspondence columns,⁷⁸ and lady hospital workers were gratified to learn that one soldier, an orphan with no tender recollections of the female sex, had conceived a higher admiration for women than ever before as a result of their kind attentions.⁷⁹

It would be incorrect, however, to conclude from the length of the list of good works that were performed for the troops that all Anglo-Egyptians were making the fullest effort in that direction of which they were capable. Nor were all Australians as satisfied with the treatment they received as were those whose opinions have been given above. Ignorance, the general slackness and loss of initiative that tend to creep over Western residents in Oriental

⁷⁶ ibid.

⁷⁷ Egyptian Gazette, letter from 'An Australian Trooper', June 4th, 1915.

⁷⁸ ibid., letter from 'Uninvited', June 10th, 1915;
ibid., letter from 'A Colonial', June 14th, 1915.

⁷⁹ ibid., letter, June 4th, 1915.

countries, and an inability to organise or overcome the obstructions of officialdom,⁸⁰ rendered Anglo-Egyptian enterprises somewhat sluggish and lacksadaisical upon occasions. It was sometimes necessary to prod English civilians as a whole into more positive action if their community was not to appear to fall short of what might reasonably be expected of it. When the hospitals began to fill with wounded from Gallipoli in 1915, the press had forcefully to remind the 'British matron' in Cairo that she could no longer justify her existence merely by looking charming, but that her behaviour should emulate her appearance, and she should make both her home and her car freely available to the 'men planted..so far from home'.⁸¹ Though the majority of women who were not prevented by their work schedule from participating,⁸² worked steadily in the service of the troops through a succession of hot summers as the War advanced,⁸³ it was always possible to find examples of others who offered only occasional help with the men, preferring to entertain bored officers at the Savoy, spending their time in 'golfing, or

⁸⁰ Ibid., Editorial comment, May 31st, 1915.

Ibid., letter from 'An English Officer', June 4th, 1915.

Ibid., letter from 'Visitor', May 29th, 1918. See also E.R. Peacock. The Australian Young Men's Christian Association in the Great War (Melbourne, no date), p. 6.

⁸¹ Egyptian Gazette, article, 'Australians in Cairo. A Word to Hostesses', by 'E.A.S.', May 26th, 1915.

⁸² Egyptian Gazette, letter from 'A Hard-working British Woman', May 23rd, 1918.

⁸³ Ibid., letter from 'One of Them', June 8th, 1918.

playing tennis by day, and dancing by night.'⁸⁴ Every English family, no matter how restricted its means, was capable of showing Colonial troops some kind of hospitality when they had come so far, so where even such humble activities as knitting and sewing circles were 'conspicuous by their absence', Australian soldiers could genuinely complain of the inadequacy of their welcome, and the lack of thought taken for their needs.⁸⁵

In marked contrast to their officers who were almost overwhelmed with invitations, the men in the ranks of the A.I.F. had few opportunities to enjoy private hospitality or develop personal contacts with the civilians. In part, this was the inevitable result of the logic of numbers. The English community, for instance, as some Australians recognised, was too small to 'make close friends of all the thousands of troops'.⁸⁶ Its major enclave, in the city of Cairo, near which the greater part of the Australian force were encamped, numbered only about 3,000 men, women and children included,⁸⁷ with smaller communities in other Egyptian cities. In January 1915,

⁸⁴ ibid., letter from 'Another Woman Worker', May 21st, 1918.

⁸⁵ ibid., letter from 'An English Officer', June 4th, 1915.

⁸⁶ ibid., letter from 'An Australian Trooper', June 4th, 1915.

ibid., letter from 'Australasian', June 7th, 1915.

It was possible for Australian soldiers to be almost unaware of Cairo's English families. See, Egyptian Gazette, article, 'Australians in Cairo', May 26th, 1915; Alcock, letter, June 14th, 1915.

⁸⁷ The War Work of the Y.M.C.A. in Egypt, p. 30.

the first A.N.Z. contingent and the second Australian contingent who were then in Egypt totalled just over 39,000 making with the East Lancashire Territorials and Indian Army troops a combined force of more than 84,000 men. A year later, after the evacuation of Gallipoli, there were more than 64,000 Australians and New Zealanders in a total force of nearly 150,000.⁸⁸ The problem of how so many were to be welcomed by so few was usually solved by the adoption of some expedient comparable to the action taken by the English inhabitants of the suburb of Zeitun, where a score of families discharged their duty to thousands of soldiers by running a canteen.⁸⁹ Communal effort on behalf of the men in general had necessarily to take precedence over the fostering of intimate relations between individuals, and even when the European community as a whole is considered it is clear that this was still the most practical way of coping with the situation. French, Greek, Italian and other foreign residents, like the English, made their contributions to the troops' welfare by donations to military charities,⁹⁰ the organisation of fund raising functions,⁹¹ the loan of premises,⁹²

⁸⁸ W.O. 95/5474. The Australian troops who remained with the E.E.F. between 1916 and the end of the War numbered between 16,000 and 17,000 throughout that period. During the Sinai and Palestine campaigns, however, only comparatively small numbers of these men, consisting of those who were hospitalised, on leave or undergoing special training, were present in Egypt at any given time.

⁸⁹ Egyptian Mail, October 22nd, 1915.

⁹⁰ Times, October 22nd, 1917.

⁹¹ Journal du Caire, September 14th, 1915.

⁹² A Consulting Surgeon in the Near East, p. 11. The War Work of the Y.M.C.A. in Egypt, p. 46.

orchestral concerts for the wounded,⁹³ and large-scale picnic teas for convalescents,⁹⁴ rather than by inviting them into their own homes. Where more friendly relationships were established they were often the outcome of chance encounters,⁹⁵ or of contacts established through some shared interest.⁹⁶ In a very few cases Australian soldiers had introductions from mutual friends,⁹⁷ but common religious affiliation might also serve to initiate a deeper acquaintance than normally developed across the counter of a tea hut or within the flaps of a recreation tent. Thus Presbyterians were hospitably received by the minister of St. Andrew's Church, Cairo, and by the members of his congregation.⁹⁸ Mr. Logan and Mr. Swan at the Egyptian and General Mission, and Dr. Zwemer of the American Mission combined indefatigable service to the troops as a whole, with offers of moral support, assistance with practical problems, and

⁹³ Sister L.G. Moreton, A.A.N.S., A.I.F., letter, April 29th, 1916.

⁹⁴ Ion L. Idriess, The Desert Column, Leaves from the Diary of an Australian Trooper in Gallipoli, Sinai and Palestine (Sydney, 1933), p. 62. (September 20th, 1915).

⁹⁵ Times of Egypt, letter from 'Southern Cross', July 10th, 1915. Donkin, diary, December 20th, 1914. Interview, Mr. Stanley, late Light Horse and 23rd. Btn., Kilburn, S.A., 1974.

⁹⁶ e.g. Esperanto. (Egyptian Mail, December 5th, and 12th, 1915). See also the development of contacts between Freemasons (Egyptian Mail, November 5th and 17th, 1914) and Australians with Kentish connections with the Association of Men of Kent and Kentish Men (Egyptian Mail, April 7th, 1915).

⁹⁷ Advertiser, letter from Pte. H.H. Howe, February 5th, 1915; L/Cpl. G.C. Cooper, No. 475, diary, October 10th, 1916. For the development of the relationship, see entries for October 15th, 1916 and February 22nd, 1917.

⁹⁸ C.Q.M.S. A.L. Guppy, 14th. Btn., diary March 13th, 1915.

the freedom of their households to lonely church-goers, who were in this way absorbed into resident Christian circles.⁹⁹ The soldier who was a practising believer could spend many happy hours developing his acquaintance with his co-religionists.¹⁰⁰ Nor was it only Christians who benefitted from their religious ties. Australian Jewish soldiers were not only given the opportunity to celebrate services regularly in the principal synagogues,¹⁰¹ and presented with a special Scroll of the Law for use by their chaplain in the Field, but were also inundated by offers of hospitality at Passover time. It is reported of the Jewish communities of Alexandria and Cairo that 'a cordial welcome was offered to every soldier', and no family was too distinguished to open its doors.¹⁰²

Regrettably, however, there were reasons beyond the limited number of potential hosts which cut off from the pleasures of private hospitality the majority of Australian troops who were neither fortunate in their random meetings with civilians, nor persona grata by reason of their religion. Some of these reasons reflect discredit upon certain civilians, others present the

⁹⁹ With the Anzacs in Cairo, p. 36. Pte. F.J. Gates, 1st M.G. Coy., letter, September 12th and October 20th, 1915.

¹⁰⁰ Egyptian Gazette, letter from 'Uninvited', June 9th, 1915.

¹⁰¹ Lt. Harold Boss, The Australian Y.M.C.A. with the Jewish Soldier of the Australian Imperial Force (London, 1919), p. 112 and 115-116.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 114-115. The Jewish community in Egypt impressed their co-religionists of all nationalities as a 'kindly, hospitable people'. (Lt. Col. J.H. Patterson, With the Judeans in the Palestine Campaign (London, 1922), p. 53.

Australians in a poor light, while the remainder stem from the difficulties in achieving compatibility between members of societies with different rules of etiquette and degrees of formality in behaviour.

Many Australians resented the fact that they were unable to establish friendships with members of the English community, their co-subjects of the British Empire, in the strange land of Egypt.¹⁰³ From the end of 1914 onwards there were, indeed, a minority of families prepared to entertain numbers of the men to tea in their own homes, but attempts by the churches and Y.M.C.A. to promote similar offers met with a disappointing response.¹⁰⁴ Snobbery and an unjustified low opinion of the common soldier were blamed for this neglect and unfair discrimination. A Light Horseman wrote from Mena Camp, urging that there was no need for people to concentrate on entertaining only officers or 'recommended' N.C.O.'s, since:-

...if the non-combatants of the British community in Egypt were to entertain our troops in their homes ...they would soon learn that our troops are men of whom we should be proud...¹⁰⁵

Even the most unpromising of soldiers, he stressed, could be expected to behave like a gentleman if he were a guest in a private home, implying thus that the lack of invitations sprang from a belief that many rankers were socially undesirable. A more explicit denunciation of British élitism came from another correspondent,

¹⁰³ Times of Egypt, letter from 'Australian', July 4th, 1915.

¹⁰⁴ Egyptian Gazette, January 5th, 1915.

¹⁰⁵ Egyptian Gazette, letter from 'Old Trooper', May 28th, 1915.

who wrote:-

Perhaps the British residents here believe they lower themselves socially if they mix with the masses...as I am an Australian and therefore democratic, I would rather be left alone than patronised by such snobbery.¹⁰⁶

Australians were finding the bitter truth of Sir Ian Hamilton's maxim, that with the British, the individual had no existence beyond his class status, that the race pride, which might have acted as a common bond between them and the Anglo-Egyptians, was almost entirely swallowed up in caste pride.¹⁰⁷ They could expect no automatic welcome. English residents were notorious even among their own countrymen for their reluctance to form friendships,¹⁰⁸ and their 'rather stand-offish manner'.¹⁰⁹ Even within the narrow confines of their tiny expatriate community social discriminations were not relaxed and the humbler sections of their society, the ordinary teachers and skilled workmen, received little sympathy from their professional superiors.¹¹⁰ The confirmed habit of ignoring the enlisted men of the regular garrison has been described

¹⁰⁶ ibid., letter from 'Young Trooper', May 31st, 1915.

¹⁰⁷ A Staff Officer's Scrap Book, p. 38.

¹⁰⁸ Egypt of the Egyptians, p. 231.

¹⁰⁹ W. Barron (a British soldier) Manuscript in Imperial War Museum, London.

¹¹⁰ Letter from H. Warwick (a railway employee) F.O. 371/2351.

already. If some Australians serving in the ranks felt that their inability to establish personal relationships within the British community derived from the reluctance of many of its members to accept them socially, their opinion would seem to be in accord with the balance of probabilities.

One area in relationships between English civilians and troops stands out as particularly embodying the ambivalence of attitudes which sought to reconcile the patriotic necessity of acknowledging the social existence of the men who were actively engaged in the Allied cause, with the long-standing acceptance of the view that only officers were worthy of consideration. The sports field had in the past provided an opportunity for the English community to discharge its minimal social obligations to service-men without compromising its dignity unduly by association with inferiors.¹¹¹ From the earliest days of the War, the length of fixture lists indicated the continuing acceptability of this method of discharging a duty.¹¹² Boxing tournaments, football(soccer), lacrosse, hockey and cricket matches were arranged with civilian teams, and played before crowds of spectators, both in and out of uniform, as were those ties in which rival Army units took part. The Australian national addiction to all forms of competitive sport ensured that the A.I.F. were frequent

¹¹¹ Egypt under the British, p. 52. These games also provided an opportunity for employers and employees to meet in a situation of controlled democracy.

¹¹² Any edition of the Egyptian Gazette or the Egyptian Mail for 1915 will afford an example of the number and variety of these sporting engagements. A typical list of fixtures is that appearing in the Egyptian Mail, February 1st, 1915.

participants in these encounters.¹¹³ The ritualised mingling of opposing teams in some game or other, however, though it may have satisfied the consciences of the civilian players as a fitting display of their magnanimity towards the troops, was not necessarily so received by the troops themselves. Australians, at any rate, expected that playing together would be the prelude to greater familiarity, and that their opponents would unbend towards them. Often, though, they were met with a frigidity which bordered on the discourteous, and some civilian teams made it painfully obvious that relations were to be confined strictly to the actualities of play. A sergeant in the Light Horse complained of the behaviour of cricketers at the Ghazirah Club, stating:-

They do not invite us to have a cup of tea, nor do they condescend to talk to us except about the match in progress.¹¹⁴

On all sides Australians were irked by social discrimination against enlisted men as they encountered manifestations of the rigid Anglo-Egyptian variant of the British class system, reinforced by the

¹¹³ The A.I.F. extended the range of sports played in Egypt by introducing the Rugby League Code to that country in a match played by the 1st. Infantry Bde., N.S.W. (Egyptian Mail, February 2nd, 1915).

¹¹⁴ Egyptian Gazette, June 12th, 1915.

distinctions the Army maintained between officers and Other Ranks.¹¹⁵ From the one grew such distasteful acts as the closure of certain Alexandrian beaches to common soldiers on the insistence of members of the English community,¹¹⁶ and from the other such blatant assertions of the exclusive privileges of rank as the placing out-of-bounds to the men of those elegant places of resort, Sheppard's Hotel and the Continental.¹¹⁷

There were, however, certain factors which may have made much of the behaviour of English residents to Australians more snobbish in effect than it was in intention. Although the members of the Anglo-Egyptian community and the men of the A.I.F. had sprung from a common stock, their societies, evolving in widely differing circumstances, had developed their own characteristic codes of manners.

¹¹⁵The Australian Scouts Association for ex-members of the Boy Scout Movement had to conduct its meetings in different places for officers and men. (Regimental Order No. 73, 4th. L.H.R., March 12th, 1915. (W.O. 95/4336)). Other examples of Army snobbery and discrimination may be found in Champion, diary, September, 1915 and Chinner, letter, April 2nd, 1916. To the credit of the English civilian community it should be recorded that they sometimes enabled Australians to circumvent Army Regulations by providing rankers and officers with the opportunity to meet socially under their roofs. (Egyptian Gazette, article 'Australians in Cairo', by 'Leon', May 31st, 1915.)

¹¹⁶Egyptian Gazette, letter from 'An Officer's Wife', June 7th, 1915; ibid., letters from 'A Civilian's Wife' and J.D.I. Kingston, June 10th, 1915; ibid., letters from 'Bulkeleyite', B. Murray and Rev. H.T. Valentine, June 12th, 1915. In fairness to the English community it should be noted that all these letters condemned the 'ungracious and ungrateful act' and suggested measures to be taken against it.

¹¹⁷Ryrie, letter, January 22nd, 1916. For the contrast between the pleasures of an officer's leaves and the opportunities of the man in the ranks to enjoy himself see Lt. C.R. Morley, 5th L.H.R., letter, August 12th, 1917.

Anglo-Egyptian society was a ruling élite with a position to maintain. It was inevitably highly formal and 'proper'¹¹⁸ and many of its members belonged to that class of administrators who highly value respectability. Their inherent solemnity which derived from a conviction of their civilising mission could pass easily into pomposity and self-importance. The coming of the War had seen the departure to join the colours of all the able-bodied younger men who could be spared, and left in situ those older officials who were more likely to be conscious of their own dignity. These men were separated from Australian troops not only by differing social conventions but also by the generation gap, and the 'mysterious and misplaced "reserve"' which was an essential British trait.¹¹⁹ Australian soldiers, whatever their rank, might be disconcerted by the undemonstrativeness and cold behaviour of individual British residents,¹²⁰ and one Australian nurse specifically described the difficulty she, her colleagues, and the Colonial troops in general experienced in feeling at ease with the majority of the English.¹²¹ English formality seemed to clash with the 'free, broad-minded and independent spirit' of the Australians.¹²² Anglo-Egyptians

¹¹⁸ Orientations, p. 84.

¹¹⁹ Egyptian Gazette, letter from 'An English Officer', June 4th, 1915.

¹²⁰ Richards, diary, September 27th, 1915.

¹²¹ Letters of an Australian Army Sister, p. 38.

¹²² ibid.

regarded the casualness of Australians as 'wickedly bad-mannered',¹²³ while Australians found the punctiliousness of British attention to etiquette both absurd and artificial, as well as out of touch with the realities of a War-time situation.¹²⁴ The courtesy that to one group was the necessary lubricant of the social machine, smacked of hypocrisy and affectation to the other,¹²⁵ and because each judged the other by the norms of its own society, Australians as a whole tended to appear as churlish and ill-bred to Anglo-Egyptians, while Anglo-Egyptian pre-occupations with correct social conduct reinforced the Australian opinion that the British were essentially snobs whose treatment of a man was in no way connected with his intrinsic worth.

Among other European residents, manners were more relaxed, and Australian soldiers found it rather easier to achieve a satisfying degree of intimacy.¹²⁶ There was, however, one area in which the men of the A.I.F. found themselves unable to establish the relationships which they desired, and which would have been perfectly

¹²³ Richards, diary, September 22nd, 1915.

¹²⁴ ibid.

¹²⁵ For outsiders' views on the state of Australians' manners see Australia. The Making of a Nation, Chapter XI, and also the report of the Trade Commission of the American Association of Manufacturers reprinted in the Egyptian Mail, April 20th, 1916. For Australian comments in which 'gush' and mere conventional expressions of politeness are contrasted with sincere, if inarticulate feeling, see the Egyptian Mail, article, 'The Maedi Camp. An Australian's Impression', by 'Sarto', February 9th, 1915; see also Gen. Birdwood's address to a reception given by the 'War Chest Fund', April 20th, 1920. (History of the Australian Comforts Fund, p. 54.)

¹²⁶ Nile to Aleppo, p. 244, 258 and 262.

admissible in their own land. Between the 'British matron' who served him a cup of tea in a Soldiers' Cafe and the dance hostesses of establishments like the 'Abbaye des Roses' or the 'ladies of the glad eye', there were few opportunities for the man in the ranks to enjoy the pleasure of female company. There could be no respectable 'girl-friends'. Nurses were officially accorded officer status and could not associate with the lower ranks.¹²⁷ All other relationships between Australian bachelor troops and unmarried girls were subject to the full weight of European middle-class propriety. No meeting could take place without adequate chaperonage,¹²⁸ and any man who showed more than a passing interest in a girl from the French or Italian communities was in danger of being hastened into marriage.¹²⁹ Women seem to have been anxious not to place themselves in compromising situations.¹³⁰ In Heliopolis, the women who sauntered casually through the streets by day, disappeared 'as if by magic' in the evenings when the soldiers left camp.¹³¹ Any unaccompanied respectable lady who saw a soldier approaching in the street would automatically cross to the other side.¹³²

¹²⁷ Blood in the Mists, p. 47.

¹²⁸ Alan Read, sergeant in 7th. L.H. Fld. Amb., interview, Brighton, South Australia, 1974.

¹²⁹ Ibid. See also Above and Beyond Palestine, p. 113.

¹³⁰ The possibility that respectable women might feel themselves contaminated by inadvertant association with some reprehensible soldier was admitted by 'Leon' in his article in the Egyptian Gazette, May 31st, 1915.

¹³¹ R.Q.M.S. B.C. Hobson, 13th. Btn., diary, February 15th, 1915.

¹³² Donald Black (pseud. of John Lyons Gray), Red Dust: An Australian Trooper in Palestine (London, 1931), p. 213.

Even a comparatively emancipated girl who was employed in a commercial school in Alexandria and did Red Cross work in her spare time refused to go to the pictures with an Australian sergeant she had encountered professionally many times, 'because that was tantamount to admitting she was a woman of no morals'.¹³³ One Australian author, describing his own embittering experiences, concluded that civilians avoided the Colonial troops because they 'probably feared for the safety of their daughters'.¹³⁴

Such extreme caution did not arise merely as a result of an exaggerated sense of respectability within the European community. It grew up largely in response to the rapid deterioration of the reputation of the Australian troops which commenced shortly after their arrival in Egypt. Initial admiration accorded them by the civilian population¹³⁵ soon gave way to disillusionment as instances of drunkenness, riotous behaviour and brothel-crawling mounted up. Intoxicated Australian soldiers wandered in a stupor for days through the Cairo streets,¹³⁶ picked fights with each other in public places,¹³⁷ or beset civilians.¹³⁸ Insobriety and misconduct

¹³³ Alan Read, interview.

¹³⁴ Red Dust, p. 196 and 212.

¹³⁵ Age, December 17th, 1914.

¹³⁶ R.W.W. Adams, letter, August 31st, 1915.

¹³⁷ W.W.B. Allen, 9th. Btn., letter, December 27th, 1914. Article by Italian press correspondent seized by the Censor, January 1st, 1915. (F.O. 371/2355.)
A.J. Adams, diary, August 17th, 1915.

¹³⁸ F.O. 371/2355.

by the troops threatened to undermine the prestige of the white races in general and of the Allied forces and dominant British regime in particular.¹³⁹ In Germany the enemy press was quick to make capital out of reports of immoderate drinking habits and the decay of discipline,¹⁴⁰ while in Egypt the Arab press commented on the loss of military dignity when soldiers misbehaved on leave.¹⁴¹ Their conduct on the trams¹⁴² where Australians indulged in a whole range of new misdemeanours which necessitated the introduction of a more comprehensive set of by-laws¹⁴³ was singled out for particular condemnation.¹⁴⁴ In the red-light district where soldiers could be found queuing more than six deep to take their turn, patrols took up to five hours every night to clear the crowds of A.I.F. troops who frequented houses of ill-fame.¹⁴⁵ Rates of venereal

¹³⁹ For the importance of troop behaviour in relation to the maintenance of prestige, see Egypt under the British, p. 49-51. For the difficulties caused for British residents by Australian misconduct, see Egyptian Gazette, letter from 'Melbourne', June 12th, 1918.

¹⁴⁰ Nordeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, February 11th, 1915.

¹⁴¹ al-Ahali, March 18th, 1915.

¹⁴² Norman K. Harvey, From Anzac to the Hindenburg Line. The History of the 9th. Battalion, A.I.F. (Brisbane, 1941), p. 100-101. The Fighting Cameliers, p. 3-4. Egyptian Gazette, February 12th. and April 3rd, 1915.

¹⁴³ Egyptian Mail, June 7th, 1915.

¹⁴⁴ al-Ahali, March 18th, 1915.

¹⁴⁵ W.M.F. Gamble, 7th. Btn., letter, September 18th, 1915. Richards, diary, December 29th, 1914. Springthorpe, diary, April 1916.

sickness were appallingly high.¹⁴⁶ Many of the men made themselves objectionable by their indulgence in foul language, being especially crude in the terms in which they discussed women.¹⁴⁷ Newspaper reports of a scandalous incident where a quiet family party, dining in a respectable restaurant, were approached by a drunken digger apparently trying to buy their daughter, strengthened convictions that neither her own modesty nor the worthiness of her surroundings would necessarily save a lady from the embarrassment of being molested by a non-sober Australian.¹⁴⁸ Though, of course, such conduct was not universal throughout the A.I.F., it was inevitable that the misbehaviour of a few wasters should compromise the reputation of the entire force. 'Manifestations of the lower man' on the part of some Australians could cause civilians to look askance at them all, an attitude that was understandable even if it was somewhat irrational.¹⁴⁹ Though there were many fine men in the ranks it was impossible for the local resident to discriminate among so many thousands 'like a wool classer',¹⁵⁰ and inevitably the law-abiding majority shared in the obloquy and ostracism which had been merited by the larrikin few.

¹⁴⁶ Springthorpe, diary, May 25th, 1916.; W.O. 95/4335.; Australian Commonwealth Archives. File No. 1918/89/478. For example, on December 29th, 1914, there were 405 recorded cases of V.D. in the 1st. Australian Div. (W.O. 95/4335).

¹⁴⁷ The Broken Years, p. 125. P.S. Jackson, letter, December 29th, 1916.

¹⁴⁸ Messaggero Egiziano, January 6th, 1915. Egyptian Gazette, January 7th, 1915.

¹⁴⁹ Egyptian Gazette, June 4th, 1915.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., May 31st, 1915.

One particular episode may be cited here as illustrating clearly how, even when good relations had been established between one group of Australians and a section of the European community, the hooliganism of another unit could ruin the situation and effectively prevent the development of any future friendships.¹⁵¹

A small group of sappers from the 3rd. Fld. Coy., R.A.E., were stationed at the beginning of 1915 near the predominantly French town of Ismailia. They were readily welcomed by the community, partly because they were possessed of special skills which were utilised in connection with the local power plant, and partly because their commanding officer, who had served in Egypt with the Regular Army, used his contacts to procure them such privileges as the right to shop in the Cooperative stores belonging to the Suez Canal Co. Local tradesmen allowed them to run up accounts for meals, fruit and tobacco, and numerous families offered them hospitality and the use of their private bathing cabins on Lake Timsah. They played soccer against the town team and were on the friendliest of terms with the Superintendent of the Botanical Gardens, who showed them his plants personally and made them gifts of produce. The idyll lasted until the 7th. and 8th. battalions of the 2nd. Australian Bde. were moved up from Mena in response to the Turkish menace on the Canal. These infantrymen had been re-

¹⁵¹The source for this entire incident is Purple Patches, p. 40 ff.

cruited from the Bendigo and Ballarat areas¹⁵², and perhaps there may have been among them some of those early enlistments who had been signed up without an adequate investigation of their antecedents¹⁵³. Their disorderliness was not, however, immediately apparent. 'At first, they were received with unconcealed joy by the citizens, who remarked how fine it was to have some more of these charming Australians among them.'¹⁵⁴ That joy was to be short-lived. The new arrivals snatched goods from self-service shops without paying, took over cafes and estaminets, and broke into the Botanical Gardens, 'like schoolboys' rather than grown men, looting fruit trees and strawberry beds, trampling the flowers. They started a riot in the native quarter. Not all the infantry were implicated, but by the early afternoon of the day of their arrival '... all the business places had put up their shutters ... and gloom had descended on the populace.'¹⁵⁵ The next day the sappers found they had lost their popularity. It was vain to protest that they were personally innocent. An outraged inhabitant exclaimed, 'They were your compatriots. I have done with the lot of you.'¹⁵⁶

The bad behaviour and crumbling discipline evident in the A.I.F. in the weeks which followed their arrival in Egypt not only

¹⁵² Official History, Vol. I, p. 41-42.

¹⁵³ See note 158.

¹⁵⁴ Purple Patches, p. 49.

¹⁵⁵ ibid., p. 50.

¹⁵⁶ ibid.

progressively alienated from them the sympathies of the European residents. Among the military authorities there was deep concern at the deterioration in the efficiency of the force and the damage being done to its image and the reputation of Australia. The causes of the disintegration had to be marked down and prompt steps taken to rectify a grave situation.¹⁵⁷ Many of the more serious instances of misconduct could be attributed to the presence in the force of undesirable elements---old soldiers (often not Australian) of dubious character, and 'criminals and sharpers,' whose unsuitability had not been detected at enlistment.¹⁵⁸ These were returned to Australia with the reasons for their dismissal publicly stated.¹⁵⁹ Drunkenness, venereal infection and riotous behaviour, however, had not been confined entirely to this disgraced minority, although they were the chief offenders. The degeneration of the A.I.F. could be seen as a direct result of the juxtaposition of numbers of well-paid, active men in the prime of life, and the 'great half-European pleasure resort of Cairo.'¹⁶⁰ Respectable amusements such as sight-seeing were exhausted in a few days and thereafter boredom and curiosity drove many men to seek diversion in less wholesome quarters. The authorities had been culpably negligent in neither restraining the activities of brothel keepers and purveyors of cheap alcohol, nor providing the troops with alternative non-corrupting recreational facilities. The Official Historian, C.E.W. Bean, records that when the men first arrived

¹⁵⁷ Official History, Vol. I, pp 127-130.
The Broken Years, p. 36-37.

¹⁵⁸ Official History, Vol. I, p. 129
 '... criminals and wastrels who were taken into the ranks perforce indiscriminately from the Enrolling Officer's books.' (War Diary, Ist. Inf. Bde., A.I.F., Appendix 28. W.O. 95/4341)

¹⁵⁹ Official History, Vol. I., p. 129.

¹⁶⁰ ibid., p. 128.

there was only one room, operated by the Y.M.C.A., between the camp and Cairo, where they might read or write in peaceful surroundings.¹⁶¹ Yet during that same period, fifty new bars and taverns were opened in the city.¹⁶² The liquor sold in these establishments and others like them, or purchaseable from itinerant vendors was frequently of a potency to induce rapid and violent intoxication, and sometimes such as to be permanently injurious to health.¹⁶³ As to the brothels, police records showed 660 native prostitutes on the register and subject to regular inspection at the beginning of January, 1915.¹⁶⁴ European women on the register were only slightly fewer in number,¹⁶⁵ but the system of Capitulations which prevented the local authorities from exercising proper control over foreign nationals enabled an undisclosed number to ply their trade without interference.¹⁶⁶ Thus the temptation to drunkenness and promiscuity seemingly confronted Australian troops on every side. Their comparatively high rates of pay, the ready availability of leave, or the ease with which unofficial

¹⁶¹ ibid., p. 127.

¹⁶² Nieuw Courant, Hague. Report reproduced in Egyptian Gazette, February 12th., 1915.

¹⁶³ Egyptian Gazette, January 1st and 20th., 1915; Egyptian Mail, February 23rd., 1915; al-Basir, March 24th., 1915.

¹⁶⁴ Commandant, Cairo City Police to G.O.C., Egypt. (Governor-General's Correspondence, Commonwealth Archives, Canberra. CP78/23, item 89/262.)

¹⁶⁵ ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Official History, Vol. I, p. 128
One soldier believed that there were 300,000 prostitutes in Cairo. (Ivor Birtwhistle, diary, June 17th., 1915.) Though the number is an obvious exaggeration, it still indicates that, to the troops, there seemed to be an enormous concentration of harlots.)

'leave' might be taken,¹⁶⁷ provided them with means and opportunity to indulge in those temptations, while ignorance of the risks involved, bravado, or the desire to conform with wilder associates further encouraged such indulgence.¹⁶⁸ Moreover, in some instances the officers were too inexperienced to exert proper control over the men or provide them with guidance.¹⁶⁹ Until their pent-up energies could be more properly dissipated on the field of battle, the continuing incidence of misconduct among troops encamped near Cairo seemed assured. Steps had to be taken to reduce that misconduct to an acceptable level.

To absorb the 'overflowing spirits' of the men and restrict their access to the city, training was intensified from the beginning of January 1915, and the road between Cairo and the camp at Mena was put under a 'strong picket.'¹⁷⁰ At the request of General Bridges, the official correspondent sent home to Australia a dispatch which concealed nothing of the disciplinary problems the force was encountering.¹⁷¹ Though its publication excited great bitterness among the men who felt they were all being maligned for the wrong-doing of a few, the

¹⁶⁷ The Broken Years, p. 36.

¹⁶⁸ A.G. Butler, ed., The Official History of the Australian Army Medical Services in the War of 1914-1918, Vol. III, p. 173. Advertiser, December 9th, 1914.

¹⁶⁹ Algie, diary, February 16th., 1915.

¹⁷⁰ Official History, Vol. I, p. 130 ff. The Broken Years, p. 37.

¹⁷¹ Official History, Vol. I, p. 129. The dispatch was reproduced widely by Australian newspapers, except in N.S.W. See, for example, the Advertiser, January 22nd., 1915.

controversy and discussion it provoked helped to instil a sense of shame into many who had erred through thoughtlessness. Now men became more conscious that they were responsible for their country's good name, that they could seriously damage Australian prestige by their actions, and their conduct improved accordingly.¹⁷² On its side, the Administration stepped up measures against prostitutes and other moral offenders,¹⁷³ and moved against the liquor trade.¹⁷⁴ Though much could be accomplished under Martial Law in areas that had been impossible to police before the War, the problem was too extensive and complex to be solved quickly. Prostitutes driven from one area by tighter legislative controls re-appeared elsewhere or found means of evading surveillance.¹⁷⁵ Those whose houses in the Ezbekieh were closed, re-opened business in carriages circulating the island of Ghezireh.¹⁷⁶ Others operated in the cemeteries.¹⁷⁷ Bar keepers too, devised ways of avoiding restrictions, and continued to sell their alcohol 'in coffee cups ... and in tea cups' or from rooms concealed behind their main premises.¹⁷⁸ Nevertheless, the combined effect of these steps

¹⁷² The Broken Years, p. 37.

¹⁷³ Egyptian Mail, August 8th. and 21st., 1915, January 4th., 1916; Journal du Caire, September 25th., 1916.

¹⁷⁴ al-Misr, December 29th., 1914; Egyptian Mail, March 30th., August 4th. and 10th., 1915; Egyptian Gazette, April 21st., 1915; Journal du Caire, July 19th., 1916.

¹⁷⁵ al-Ahali, May 10th., 1915; Journal du Caire, September 25th., 1915, August 17th., 1916.

¹⁷⁶ Journal du Caire, December 21st., 1915.

¹⁷⁷ Egyptian Mail, May 27th., 1915.

¹⁷⁸ ibid., May 1st., 1915. The report was based on information previously published in al-Basir.

was to bring about a marked improvement in the general conduct of Australian troops. The excesses of the first few weeks after their landing were not repeated except for two notorious riots in the Massa quarter, one immediately before embarkation for Gallipoli and the other some months later.¹⁷⁹ No measures could be completely effective, however, given the peculiar Australian attitude towards military discipline.¹⁸⁰ Misdemeanours continued to occur¹⁸¹ and rates of venereal infection among Australian troops remained consistently higher than those recorded for other units.¹⁸²

Meanwhile, the problem was being approached from another angle. Attempts were made to preserve the soldiers from the 'non-too-healthy' temptations of Egyptian cities¹⁸³ by providing them with alternative opportunities for 'recreation under conditions of comfort, quiet and respectability.'¹⁸⁴ Clubs run by individuals were not a satisfactory answer because of lack of co-ordination between their activities and the varying efficiency of their managers.¹⁸⁵ The Red

¹⁷⁹ See special Appendix II.

¹⁸⁰ The Broken Years, p. 37.

¹⁸¹ On January 1st., 1916, Pte. N.B. McWhinney of the 23rd. Btn., was still writing:

'Some of our fellows go mad when they get into town and I believe the total amount of damage done by the Australian troops in Egypt is enormous. Even in camp they go to extremes. They behave like a lot of schoolboys at times and like lunatics at other times.'

¹⁸² History of the Australian Army Medical Services, Vol. I, p. 772-774.

¹⁸³ General Maxwell at the opening of a soldiers' club. (Egyptian Mail, August 18th., 1915.)

¹⁸⁴ McKahon, (Egyptian Gazette, September 13th, 1915.)

¹⁸⁵ The War Work of the Y.M.C.A. in Egypt, p. 66.

Cross was bound to restrict its care to sick and wounded men and could not exceed its mandate by diverting funds into services for men outside these categories. The Army itself had not yet developed those provisions for rest and recreation which it was to offer men in the Second World War. It fell to the voluntary agencies to make good the deficiency. The Australian Comforts Fund¹⁸⁶ arranged financing for and distribution of, stationery and equipment for indoor games and outdoor sports.¹⁸⁷ Officials of the Fund co-operated with the English residents of Maadi, contributing financial and personal assistance in the running of the club they had set up for the Light Horse regiments. Similar co-operation existed between Fund officials and Anglo-Egyptians in the running of the Entertainment Committee which, under the presidency of Lady McMahon, the wife of the High Commissioner, arranged concerts and other diversions in the camps and hospitals around Cairo.¹⁸⁸ The most note-worthy efforts to improve the recreational facilities offered to the troops, however, were those made with the combined backing of the military authorities, both British and Australian, the Civil Administration, and many notable European residents, through the work of the Y.M.C.A.¹⁸⁹ Among the first in the field in catering for the

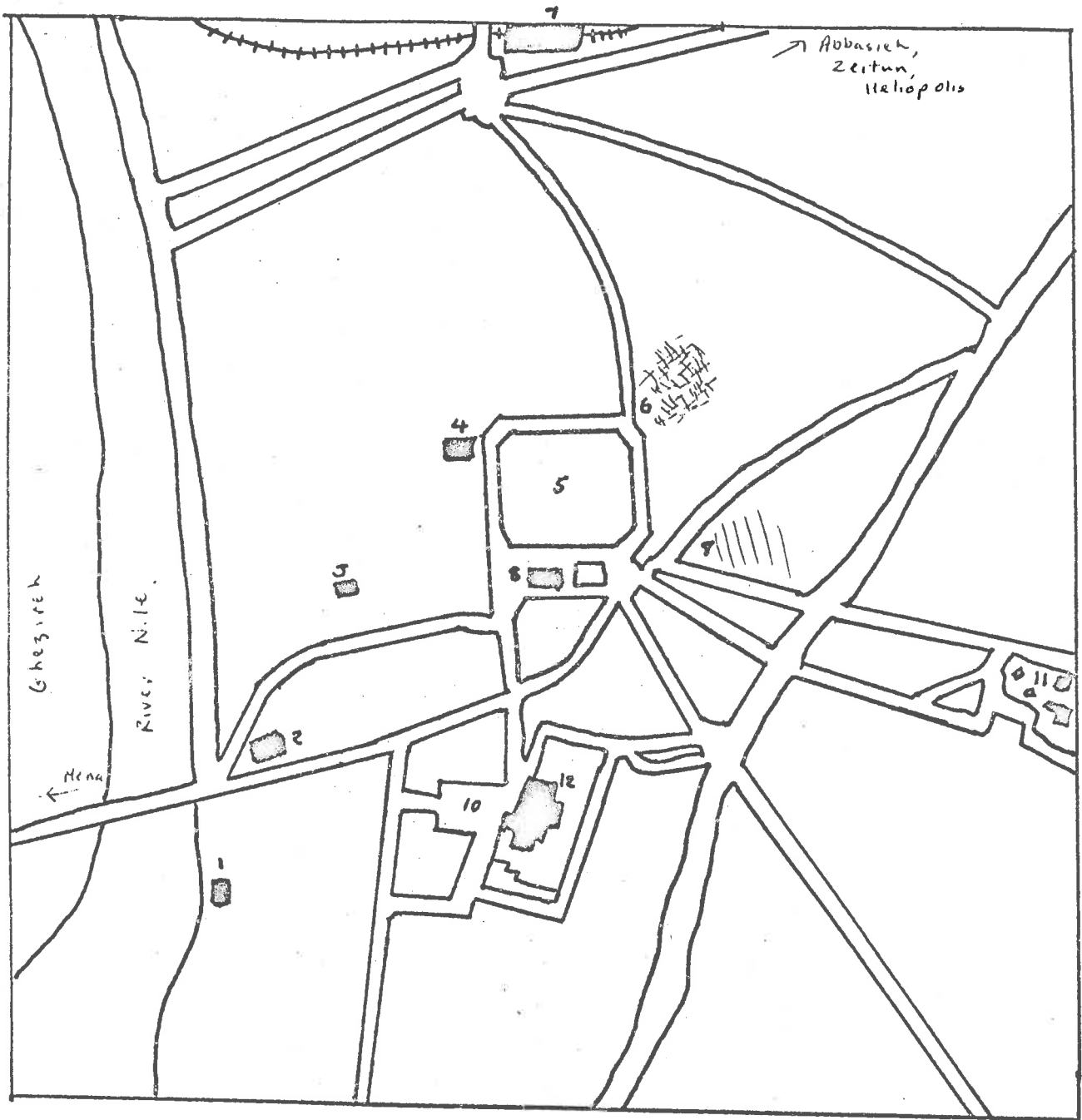
¹⁸⁶ Officially established August 4th., 1916, but honorary commissioners had been serving in Egypt for some time. (History of the Australian Comforts Fund, p. 206.)

¹⁸⁷ ibid., p. 252.

¹⁸⁸ ibid., p. 251.

¹⁸⁹ The War Work of the Y.M.C.A. in Egypt, *passim*.

SKETCH MAP OF CAIRO 1914-1919 (not to scale, only main streets indicated.)



Key

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Residency | 7. Railway Station |
| 2. Kasr el-Nil Barracks | 8. Opera |
| 3. Turf Club | 9. The Muski (Mouski) |
| 4. Shepherd's Hotel | 10. Abdin Square |
| 5. Ezbekieh Gardens | 11. Al-Azhar |
| 6. Brothel Quarter | 12. Abdin Palace |

troops at the start of the War, the Cairo Y.M.C.A. was a recent foundation,¹⁹⁰ and did not initially have the experience, personnel or accommodation to cope with the influx of troops. It was, however, particularly fortunate in its Superintendent, the Canadian Jessop, and in the dedication with which many members of the European community voluntarily assisted him and other officers of the Association.¹⁹¹ The few modest tents set up near the camps were augmented by increasingly more numerous and impressive premises spreading throughout Egypt wherever troops were to be found.¹⁹² Probably the two projects which most benefitted the Australian troops were the Anzac Hostel and the Soldiers' Club in the Ezbekieh Gardens, which developed out of a small tea room run for the men by voluntary workers.¹⁹³ In these enterprises, local residents not only provided staff to help with the catering and prepared special food,¹⁹⁴ but also contributed their services as entertainers, lecturers and teachers,¹⁹⁵ and as guides.¹⁹⁶ They gave up their time to organise fund raising activities, always a pressing concern where even to maintain tents for letter writing could cost £150 a month.¹⁹⁷ The consistency and continuity of these services throughout the War must represent the finest contribution made by any group of European residents on behalf of the troops

¹⁹⁰ 1913. (The War Work of the Y.M.C.A. in Egypt, p. 28.)

¹⁹¹ See Barrett's War Work of the Y.M.C.A. in Egypt.

¹⁹² ibid., p. i. There were 38 Y.M.C.A.s in Egypt, 11 in and around Cairo.

¹⁹³ Egyptian Gazette, February 10th., 1915; Journal du Caire, August 20th., 1915; Letters of an Australian Army Sister, p. 111; War Work of the Y.M.C.A. in Egypt, p. 65-66; Y.M.C.A. Army Dept. Report, 1916-1917, p. 26-27.

¹⁹⁴ Y.M.C.A. Army Dept. Annual Report, 1916-1917, p. 27-28.

¹⁹⁵ War Work of the Y.M.C.A. in Egypt, p. 60.

¹⁹⁶ Egyptian Gazette, October 23rd., 1917.

¹⁹⁷ War Work of the Y.M.C.A. in Egypt, p. 35.

in Egypt.¹⁹⁸

The primary objective of the military authorities in encouraging the work of the Y.M.C.A. was the maintenance of the men as efficient fighting units. By offering the troops healthy amusement,¹⁹⁹ the Y.M.C.A. helped to preserve their efficiency and was of 'great assistance to the officers.'²⁰⁰ Yet though the Association's accent on 'four-square manhood'---'Think Clean. Live Clean. Talk Clean. Play the Game.'---²⁰¹ made it an ideal agency for fostering desired standards of conduct, its specific religious commitment rendered it potentially unattractive to sections of the Force. The Army required the Y.M.C.A. to meet the social and leisure needs of all the troops, and did not wish any men to be kept away by fear of sermonising. Accordingly, when a joint committee, on which the Army was strongly represented, met to formulate a policy to govern the Association's work in Egypt, it was decided that though the traditional ban on alcohol on Y.M.C.A. premises was desirable, and religious activities might be mounted for those who desired to attend them, there must be no proselytizing.²⁰² After all, for the Army, the aim was to preserve

¹⁹⁸ ibid., passim.

¹⁹⁹ Journal du Caire, August 20th., 1915.

²⁰⁰ See appreciative comments from such high ranking officers as Chauvel and Godley in Mélaide Y.M.C.A. Army Dept. Report, 1916-1917. See also War Work of the Y.M.C.A. in Egypt, p. 36-37.

²⁰¹ Egyptian Gazette, April 2nd., 1917.

²⁰² War Work of the Y.M.C.A. in Egypt, p. xii.

men's bodies for the battlefields of the present, not save their souls for Eternity.

Not all Y.M.C.A. officials, however, were satisfied with such a policy. Controversy raged not only in Egypt, but throughout the entire movement during the War years over the ends for which it should be striving and the means by which they might be attained. At the extremes of opinion were, on the one hand, those who believed that work among troops offered an opportunity for evangelism which should not be missed, and on the other, those whose policy of 'Win the War First', led them to concentrate on the troops' social rather than spritual well-being.²⁰³ That section of the Association which tended to support the first view felt that the essentially Christian nature of their movement was being overshadowed, reducing it to 'simply a clean and decent social club.'²⁰⁴ Men needed more than writing paper, food, and social amusement, and it was the 'needs that lie deepest' in men's hearts and minds'²⁰⁵ which the Y.M.C.A. should be seeking to satisfy. The evangelising group among Association workers in

²⁰³The debate is outlined in 'The Adelaide Y.M.C.A. (Some Aspects of Its Development, 1879-1934)' by J.W. Daly. (B.A. thesis, University of Adelaide, 1972.) Typescripts of interviews and tape recordings of interviews are also held in the Y.M.C.A. Archive in the South Australian Archives, Adelaide.

²⁰⁴War Work of the Y.M.C.A. in Egypt, p. 24.

²⁰⁵With our Boys at the Front, (Y.M.C.A. Army and Navy Dept., Melbourne, 1917.) p. 33-34.

Egypt accordingly expanded the simple religious services with voluntary attendance envisaged by the original policy makers into a great revival campaign,²⁰⁶ and approached individual soldiers with moral advice.²⁰⁷ The revival meetings were, in fact, well attended, and amid highly charged emotional scenes, thousands of men declared for a 'better and cleaner life.'²⁰⁸ Not all men responded in the same way, however, and many Australian seem to have felt that the Y.M.C.A. exuded too great an air of conscious moral rectitude. The cost of the things it offered was not sufficiently low to encourage them to pay the added price of suffering its sanctimoniousness.²⁰⁹ A more successful relationship with the men was established by those Y.M.C.A. officials who felt that Christian commitment was not inevitably compromised by concentrating on social welfare without overt displays of religion. They saw the soldiers' moral lapses not so much as an expression of individual sinfulness to be repaired by righteous exhortation, but more as the outcome of peculiar war-time conditions. Their concentration on 'winning the War first' was not simply a subordination of religious idealism to military utility, but more a conviction that the best way to preserve the characters of the men was to work for

²⁰⁶ ibid.

²⁰⁷ War Work of the Y.M.C.A. in Egypt, p. 63.

²⁰⁸ Y.M.C.A. Army Dept. Report, 1916-1917.

²⁰⁹ This was a practically unanimous response among those old soldiers I interviewed. For other criticisms levelled against the Y.M.C.A., including accusations of over-charging, see E.R. Peacock, The Australian Young Men's Christian Association in the Great War: £750,000 public subscriptions together with vast quantities of goods in kind and honorary services---? (Peacock Bros., Ltd., Melbourne, no date.)

victory and the restoration of the less corrupting times of peace. By providing a civilised domestic atmosphere in which men could relax, rather than one permeated by religious fervour, they not only offered an acceptable alternative to the unsavoury diversions of the city streets, and guarded the health of the Force, but also subtly influenced the conduct of the troops for the better. Assisted by the presence of the ladies of the European community, they sought to radiate a 'home influence', reminding the men of the families they had left behind.²¹⁰ By these means they were able to assuage an enduring and wide-spread loneliness, and to counter-act in some measure, the coarsening effects of army life.²¹¹

'I didn't think so much about it at the time'

said a returned digger,

'but now ... I thank the Red Triangle from the bottom of my heart for having kept the home banner flying in Egypt.'²¹²

Egypt had proved to be an unexpected testing ground for the A.I.F. Unable to bridge the culture gap, and unwilling to try through racial antipathy, Australian troops were shut out of native Egyptian society, while long-standing social conventions debarred them from participating in the life of the European community. In such a situation, their internal resources were soon exhausted,²¹³ and with little official provision for recreation hours, boredom drove them to

²¹⁰ Y.M.C.A. Army Dept. Report, 1916-1917. p. 28.

²¹¹ Letter from 'Anglo-Australian', Times of Egypt, January 16th., 1915.

²¹² Through the War with the A.I.F., (Y.M.C.A. pamphlet, Melbourne, 1919) p. 3.

²¹³ Pts. P.S. Jackson, letter, December 29th., 1916.

seek out diversion in unsalubrious places. Disoriented in an alien environment, many temporarily lost control and presented the military authorities with a severe disciplinary problem, at the same time incurring the dislike of many European residents. Steps were taken to improve the conduct of the Force and it was recognised that greater attention must be paid to the satisfaction of the troops' social and leisure needs. Existing facilities were expanded and new ones set up to meet those needs with Anglo-Egyptians and other foreigners participating voluntarily in running them. Senior officers praised these efforts for their effectiveness in reducing misconduct in the cities, while the men appreciated the antidote they offered to attacks of homesickness.

Relations between Australian troops and European residents of the cities of Egypt during the Great War seem comparable to those normally existing in garrison towns between the Army and the civilian population. There was the same acceptance of officers, the same tendency to overlook the other ranks, and the same antagonism towards them when their behaviour outraged the proprieties. Local conditions, the large number of troops and small number of European residents, the presence of a native population, all tended to exaggerate the frictions. At the same time, civilians were being stirred up by their sense of duty, and later by the sight of the wounded returning from Gallipoli, to make their contribution to the War effort through a more active interest in the welfare of the troops than had previously characterised their community. They deserve to be remembered for the value of this work rather than for their acts of petty ungraciousness.

CHAPTER IVWITH THE LIGHT HORSEIN SINAI AND PALESTINE.Synopsis

Review of Australian military involvement in the Middle East up to 1916---departure of the greater part of the A.I.F. for the Western Front, leaving the Light Horse in Egypt to embark on a campaign against the Turks in Sinai and Palestine---brief outline of Light Horse operations from 1916-1918¹---existing historical literature on Australian involvement in Palestine campaign---its background---conventional treatment of the Light Horse campaign; the Official History and unit histories---one area of evident bias---relation of present thesis to existing literature---artistic difficulty of incorporating the events of 1919 into the traditional presentation---aspects of the Light Horse experience in Sinai and Palestine of particular relevance to this thesis---

- a) relations with the Egyptian Labour and Camel Transport Corps;
- b) development of certain attitudes towards the British authorities;
- c) relations with the civilian population, especially the Bedouin;
- d) the development of group loyalty and a 'tribal' code; the decivilising effects of war---the incident at Surafand---conclusion.

The first Australian contingent reached Egypt at the beginning of December, 1914, having been diverted to that country as an insurance against any threat to its security from internal dissidents and external invaders.² When the attack came in February, 1915,

¹This account is drawn from H.S. Gullett, Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918, Vol. VII. Sinai and Palestine. (Sydney, 1938), and

Capt. Cyril Falls and Maj. A.F. Becks, Official History of the War. Military Operations. Egypt and Palestine, Vols. I and II. (London, 1930).

²See Chapter I.

however, it was Indian troops who were chiefly responsible for repulsing the Turks from the Suez Canal. No Australian regiment was actually engaged in the hostilities, although the 7th. and 8th. Infantry Battalions temporarily garrisoned the trenches after the battle.³ Until March, when the first of the Force embarked for Lemnos, the A.I.F. spent its time training in the desert around Cairo. On April 25th., the landing at Anzac opened almost eight months of bitter fighting. The invasion of the Peninsula was intended to establish a beach-head from which Constantinople could be threatened, and, had the initial infantry operation been a success, the Light Horse were to have taken part, mounted, in the advance to the Turkish capital. Since a determined defence kept the Allied forces pinned down on Gallipoli where there was no room for the deployment of cavalry⁴ and rapidly rising casualties made immediate reinforcements imperative, the Light Horse were brought in to serve as infantry, while their mounts were left in Egypt.⁵ The campaign was a military failure, but Australian troops distinguished themselves by their conduct in battle and the sterling qualities they revealed as fighting men. All doubts as to their worth were silenced. In December, 1915, after the evacuation of the Peninsula, the survivors were returned to Egypt where for a few months they recuperated. Some re-grouping of forces took place within the A.I.F.;

³Official History, Vol. I, p.164.

⁴The Light Horse were not cavalry, strictly speaking, but mounted infantry.

⁵Official History, Vol. I, p.599-600; Vol. VII, p.20.

the old divisions were brought up to strength and two new ones were created by combining experienced troops with reinforcements lately arrived from Australia.⁶ There was to be no further attempt to storm the Dardanelles, and the 300,000 and more Allied troops in Egypt⁷ were urgently needed for the Western Front.⁸ On March 15th., 1916, the despatch of Australian units to France commenced.

The Light Horse Brigades remained behind.⁹ As mounted troops they were of far greater value in the continuing defence of Egypt with its long desert frontiers than in the trench war-fare of the major European theatre.¹⁰ Some of them had already been engaged in a highly successful minor campaign against the Senussi who had threatened to invade Egypt from the West.¹¹ Now their full resources would be brought into use to secure Sinai and the eastern approaches.

At the time of the Turkish attack in 1915, Egypt's defences had rested on the Suez Canal. The deficiencies of such a scheme are obvious. The Canal was a vital strategic link to be protected at

⁶The Broken Years, p.118.

⁷Made up of British Regulars and Territorials, Indians, Australians and New Zealanders. (Official History, Vol. VII, p.21)

⁸The Germans commenced their major assault on Verdun on February 21st., 1916. Great Britain began to enforce compulsory enlistment in June and the First Battle of the Somme opened on July 1st.

⁹The 13th. Light Horse Regt. and a troop of the 4th. Light Horse Regt. went to France where they were used principally as traffic police. In the Middle East Australians also served with the A.F.C. and the Imperial Camel Corps. (See The Broken Years, p.126, n.41.) In the camel brigade 10 out of the 18 companies were Australian.

¹⁰Sir Archibald Murray strongly opposed a proposed removal of the Light Horse to France because of their valuable role in the defence of Egypt. (Official History, Vol. I, p.599.)

¹¹Official History, Vol. VII, p.55-57

all costs, not a defensive barrier to be sheltered behind. While the British front line followed the waterway so closely there was no adequate safeguard against damage by long-range enemy artillery or from sudden commando raids. In early 1916, therefore, steps were taken to rectify the situation by throwing up forward defences about twelve miles out in the desert, and a line of trenches, excavated and maintained with great labour, was stretched across northern Sinai.¹²

General Murray, who assumed sole responsibility for the forces in Egypt in March,¹³ was convinced that an active defence would constitute a surer safeguard against the Turks now massing in Palestine, than the preparation of elaborate fortifications. Only by advancing a force across Sinai to occupy a line between Kossima and El 'Arish could the safety of the Delta be assured.¹⁴ A railway, roads and a pipe-line carrying water were accordingly commenced to enable British troops to take the war into southern Palestine, while the passage of the Sinai Peninsula was made impossible for any large hostile force by the systematic destruction of wells and cisterns.¹⁵ The scanty local population---impoverished Bedouin who had received arms from the Turks---were rounded up and removed to prevent them offering assistance to the enemy by acts of sabotage and espionage. Most of

¹²Official History, Vol. VII, p.26.

¹³He had previously shared a divided command with Maxwell, but the arrangement had proved unworkable.

¹⁴Cyril Falls, Armageddon---1918, (Philadelphia, 1944) p.6.

¹⁵German engineers had sunk new wells and improved ancient ones prior to Djemal Pasha's advance in 1915.

this work fell to the Light Horse patrols¹⁶ who performed the routine tasks of reconnaissance with efficiency, and soon proved their adaptability to uncomfortable conditions. They drew their first blood of the campaign at Jifjafa on April 13th.,¹⁷ but throughout May and June such positive encounters with the enemy were rare. In July, however, the Turks at last began their advance. On August 3rd. and 4th. an enemy assault in strength on prepared positions at Rasani was successfully thrown back with Australian troops playing a significant role both in the achievement of victory and in the subsequent harassment of the retreating Turkish forces.

British forces now began a cautious advance to El 'Arish during which Light Horsemen took part in raids on Turkish posts at Masar and Maghara. El 'Arish itself was taken without a fight on December 21st. Two days later Australian mounted troops and Cameliers successfully stormed Magdhaba in a classic operation. Rafa fell on January 9th., 1917, and the British forces were threatening Gaza by March. Their attack on the city on the twenty-sixth of the month was unsuccessful, despite notable achievement on the part of the Australians and New Zealanders who actually managed to enter the city. For the next few months the Light Horse were engaged in patrolling No Man's Land and making lightning raids on Turkish installations, such as the railway line between Suja and Asluj.

¹⁶ W.O. 95/4534 and 95/4535; The Cameliers, p.57. The native population comprised 17 minor nomadic tribes or about 35,000 to 40,000 individuals, most of whom were women and children. (Military Report on the Sinai Peninsula. (Gen. Staff, War Office), 1914.) The Turks had pressed them into service for invasion but they had melted away taking their arms with them. (Egyptian Gazette, February 25th., 1915.)

¹⁷ April 13th., 1916.

In July Murray was recalled and the command passed to General Allenby. After a summer spent in consolidation, the campaign gathered momentum under this new leadership. The victory gained at Beersheba on October 31st, when a dashing charge by the 4th. and 12th. L.H. Regiments scattered Turkish resistance, opened the way for the advance into Palestine. With the enemy being driven steadily back, Jerusalem was taken in early December, and the Australians, who by now were showing the effects of protracted campaigning over demanding country, were allowed to rest. Men and horses soon picked up condition, and by February were once more taking part in major raids. Early success north of Jericho in the Wadi el-Auja region was followed, however, by a setback. A combined infantry and mounted operation against the railway at Amman¹⁸ carried the fighting to the east bank of the Jordan. Though bridgeheads were established, progress to the objective was impeded by bad weather and unexpectedly firm opposition from the enemy. Amman itself proved to be strongly held, and the raiders were able to inflict only minor damage before withdrawing discomforted. Australian troops suffered high casualties.¹⁹ A later raid²⁰ across the river in which the Australian Mounted Division took part had more satisfactory results with the capture of Es Salt, but the British forces were too extended, and a counter-attack by the Turks drove them back behind the Ghoraniye bridgehead by May 4th.

¹⁸ Operation commenced March 21st., 1918.

¹⁹ 177 were killed and 1023 wounded or missing.
 'This was as many as at Houni and almost a quarter of those suffered by Australians during the entire campaign.' (The Broken Years, p.135.)

²⁰ April 30th., 1918.

The summer was spent with the utmost discomfort in the heat and humidity of the Jordan Valley until the launching of the final offensive on September 19th., 1918. Allenby attacked the Turks in an unexpected quarter, clearing the enemy from the Plain of Sharon, Nazareth fell, then Nablus and Samaria. By the 23rd., the Seventh and Eighth Turkish Armies had been destroyed, captured or driven out of the western sector, and Chauvel commanded the plain from Haifa to Beisan.²¹ On the east bank of the Jordan the remaining mounted troops under Chaytor now encountered little opposition from a thoroughly demoralised enemy. Nothing could halt the triumphant advance, though there were still occasional stiff engagements like the one at Semakh on the Sea of Galilee in which Light Horsemen took part on September 25th. With the fall of Damascus on October 1st., the campaign was virtually over. Light Horsemen fought their last action of the War the next day at Khan Ayash north of the city.²² Allenby's forces continued to advance to Aleppo in Syria, and on October 30th., Turkey signed an armistice. The War in Palestine was finally over.

To examine the activities and experiences of the Light Horse in Palestine, as this Chapter intends, for an insight into their subsequent dealings with Egyptians, is to approach the material with an unusual objective. Aspects of the Australian experience normally ignored or treated in a perfunctory manner become important, while

²¹ His force comprised the 4th. and 5th. Cavalry Divisions, and the Australian Mounted Division under Hodgson.

²² "Near this village on that day 100 men of the Third Light Horse Brigade captured 1500 prisoners and three guns and two light horsemen took eighty-eight prisoners and a machine gun." (The Broken Years, p.137.)

more familiar incidents need to be re-appraised. Before proceeding to any such new interpretation, it is useful to consider briefly the conventional historical presentation of Australian involvement in this campaign, for the purpose of contrast, and to demonstrate how it has inhibited the development of certain areas of research.

There is no large body of literature on the Palestine campaign.²³ When personal narratives such as Idriess' The Desert Column and Ronald Black's Red Dust are discounted, few more properly historical works remain. Of these, some, like the British Official History are concerned with the Light Horse only as a component of the Expeditionary Force---as part of a much larger whole. Gullett's The Australian Imperial Force in Sinai and Palestine (Vol. VII of the Australian Official History), and various unit histories comprise virtually the entire field of writing which concentrates specifically on the Light Horse. In discussing them, it is necessary first to examine the atmosphere in which they were compiled.

The Great War of 1914-1918 was a cataclysm which engulfed many nations, affecting the lives of millions of individuals and altering the societies to which they belonged. For Australia the conflict acquired added national significance through occurring during the second decade after Federation when the young Commonwealth was still seeking to establish an identity. Australia entered the War eager to prove itself and, as the presence of an official correspondent with the troops from the outset suggests, with a conscious desire to record the founding of a glorious national tradition. After the War

²³ Armageddon, p.xi.

that tradition was to receive its definitive expression in the marvellous volumes of the Official History, a work thoroughly infused with the personality, beliefs and ideals of its editor, C.E.W. Bean. Bean had conceived a great love and admiration for the Australian troops whose courage and endurance he saw demonstrated on the battlefields of Gallipoli and France, and now his compassion held him back from recording their failings, 'for clearly it pained him to write ill of any man'.²⁴ The history he wrote emphasized the virtues of loyalty, self-sacrifice and comradeship that the War revealed, and he contrasted the noble idealism of the fighting men with the petty obsessions of peace.²⁵ Above all he continually related the brilliance of A.I.F. achievements to the presence within the Force of numbers of bushmen, whom he regarded as presenting the finest and most distinctive expression of the national character. Under Bean's editorship the Official History became not just a chronicle of events, nor even simply a sustained tribute to the Australian soldier. It became the chief literary embodiment of a legend.²⁶

Gallatt's account of the Light Horse in Sinai and Palestine is set firmly within this framework. In fact, the campaign he described was peculiarly well suited for incorporation within the emerging tradition. It had been fought by troops who were regarded as being most typically Australian²⁷ ---bushmen at war---'Australia's Own'.

²⁴The Broken Years, p.vi.

²⁵Official History, Vol. I., p.xviii.

²⁶Ken Inglis has written extensively both on the formation of national legend during the Great War and on C.E.W. Bean.

²⁷Official History, Vol.I, p.32; Times, August 15th., 1916.

It had been fought over country rich in historical associations, and in gaining their victories on ground over which had passed the armies of Alexander, Richard the Lionheart and Napoleon, the Light Horse had clearly demonstrated their right to a place beside the great heroes of the past.²⁸ Moreover, they had been troops ideally suited to the style of warfare the terrain demanded, mobile and inventive,²⁹ excellent marksmen with the initiative to carry out constant lightning raids to harrass the enemy³⁰ and the dash that could decide the issue in a wavering battle.³¹ Even the most objective presentation of their military exploits must make inspiring reading. Gullett was able to produce an excellent campaign history³² that read like a glorious legend. No wonder that after the War the story of the Light Horse in Palestine captured the public imagination and still retains its hold.³³ The reasons are obvious. In France the Australian infantry had fought with outstanding courage and skill, but their war had been a grim test of endurance in the blood-soaked mud of the trenches. Their deeds could be honoured but the circumstances in which they

²⁸The obvious comparisons were made. For example, Major W.S. Kent Hughes entitled his account of the campaign, Modern Crusaders. With the Light Horse Through Sinai and Palestine. (Melbourne, 1918)

²⁹W.O. 95/4527.

³⁰W.O. 159/623

³¹Witness the charge at Beersheba.

³²Armageddon, p.xi.

³³Note how a serious historian, Bill Gammage, yields to its romantic appeal. (The Broken Years, p.146.)

were performed could not long be contemplated without revulsion. Minds turned in relief to the spectacle of the young horsemen, riding singing to victory through the clean air and sunshine of the Holy Land.³⁴

The various unit histories, like Gullett's volume, are primarily concerned to record military exploits and are usually simply expanded versions of the regimental or Brigade war diary. They may be seen as a more or less conscious attempt to give orderly expression to traditions originating in the events of the campaign and calculated to fulfil the same role in establishing esprit de corps, as the traditions of the British Regular Army. Secondly, they appear to be publicity exercises designed to repair the neglect of Light Horse achievements that had existed prior to the appointment of an official correspondent in 1918.³⁵ As such they tend to avoid all controversial or potentially damaging material.³⁶

³⁴ The power of the image is evident in Frank Dalby Davison's, The Walls of Beersheba, (Sydney 1933.)

³⁵ Lt. H. Bowden Fletcher, Boundary Riders of Egypt, (Melbourne, no date.) See Introduction. Compare also, A. Briscoe Moore, The Mounted Rifleman in Sinai and Palestine. The Story of New Zealand's Crusaders, (Auckland, 1920) p.3, and Antony Bluett, With Our Army in Palestine, (London, 1919) p.vii. The correspondent appointed was Gullett, who subsequently wrote the Official History. A letter in the possession of Mr Charles King of Adelaide, describes the acute publicity consciousness of of Generals Cox, Ryrie and Wilson. Wilson, of course, himself wrote a Narrative of the Operations of the 3rd. Light Horse Brigade, a copy of which (no imprint) may be seen in the State Library of South Australia. An example of Ryrie's pursuit of publicity occurs in his letter of April 12th., 1915.

³⁶ Their unstated motives may be compared to those honestly admitted by the author of The Fighting 10th. He wrote:-

...I have attempted to please all and offend none, whilst at all times I have been solely actuated by one underlying motive---that of perpetrating 10th. Battalion traditions.

(p.6.)

One other element in the conventional historical presentation should be considered. The history of a campaign which extends deep into enemy territory cannot confine itself solely to the description of encounters between the opposing forces. Relations between the troops and the resident population are an integral and important part of the military situation and must be dealt with accordingly. The conventional historical treatment of the state of affairs existing between the Light Horse and the natives of Palestine is heavily biased in favour of the former. The local population, especially the Bedouin, are uniformly and violently condemned. Reprisals taken against them by Australians are regarded as completely justified, and the Higher Command are denounced for interfering. Australian ideas of loyalty and the propriety of defending oneself and avenging one's 'mates' are contrasted with British official perfidy in placing political considerations above the safety of the troops. Gullett, who was himself a Light Horseman, reproduces uncritically the Light Horse view of the situation. His objectivity deserts him in discussing the relations between the Australians, the Arabs and the Higher Command.³⁷ The unit histories are infected with the same bias, and some less partisan re-appraisal is long overdue.

This thesis, unlike the histories discussed above, is not particularly concerned with the military aspects of the Palestine campaign. It is not a further contribution to the Light Horse legend, and though it is not conceived as a direct attack thereon, it deals with aspects of Australian behaviour in Palestine which

³⁷ Armageddon, p.153.

may be difficult to reconcile with the traditional interpretation. In concentrating on the campaign only for what relevance it may have for an improved understanding of the Egyptian revolt and its suppression, this thesis is reversing the normal approach in which the events of 1919 are merely an untidy post-script to the history of the War years. Australian historians as a whole have not previously been concerned to relate the Light Horse experience in Palestine to subsequent happenings in Egypt.³⁸ When General Wilson extended his narrative³⁹ of operations to cover the suppression of the Egyptian uprising, it was a simple up-dating of the story of the 3rd. Light Horse Bde. to repatriation, and the only link suggested between the major and minor campaigns is the participation in both of the same body of troops. Gullett could find no place for such a description in the main body of his text and so relegated it to a brief appendix. While this would seem a technically correct way for an Official History to treat an episode which occurred between the cessation of hostilities and the final return to Australia of the troops, it is possible that other considerations than those of presentation are involved. After the great drama of the victorious campaign against the Turks, the description of the pacification of an illiterate and ill-armed peasantry, no matter how efficiently carried out, could come only as an anticlimax. Perhaps it is this artistic difficulty of incorporating the events of 1919 into the conventional rendering of Australian involvement in the Near East that has contributed most to their historical neglect.

³⁸An exception is Bill Gammage. (See The Broken Years, p.146)

³⁹See note 35.

In the examination of the Light Horse campaign in Palestine for the insight it can give into certain later occurrences in Egypt, four areas stand out as being of special significance. Three of them are concerned with the relations between Australians and other groups; the Egyptian labourers serving with the E.E.F., the British authorities, and the civilian population. The fourth deals with the effect upon the Light Horse of the conditions under which they fought and lived. Each of these will now be considered in order.

'The War in Sinai and Palestine was to a decisive degree a struggle between the efficiency of two great systems of Communications.'⁴⁰ Without the pipeline bringing water from the Canal, without the supplies which reached the troops through the railheads,⁴¹ without the trains of camels carrying rations and material to scattered fighting units, and bearing back the wounded from each armed encounter, victory would have been almost impossible. With them, the defeat of the less-efficiently served Turks was only a matter of time. The pipeline, the railway and many miles of road were laid, often at amazing speed⁴² and under extremely difficult conditions,⁴³ through the efforts of the Egyptian Labour Corps. As the campaign proceeded so increasing numbers were recruited to this work force to meet the demands of the military machine. By the summer of 1917 50,000 Egyptian labourers were being employed and in August of the following year their numbers

⁴⁰ Official History, Vol. VII, p.27.

See also Djemal Pasha, Memories of a Turkish Statesman, 1913-1919. (London, 1922) p.163.

⁴¹ Correspondence in M.O. 158/611.

⁴² Memories of a Turkish Statesman, p.171.

⁴³ General Allenby, dispatch dated September 18th., 1918 (Supplement to the London Gazette, Vol. VII, pp.366 and 678.)

had risen to 135,000.⁴⁴ Mobility was maintained during fighting over hilly terrain because the combat troops could be kept supplied by the Egyptians of the Transport Corps, some 170,000 of whom served as camel drivers between December, 1915 and demobilisation in 1919.⁴⁵ Their work was unostentatious, but it was vital, and as such it was acknowledged by General Allenby.⁴⁶

Contacts between so large a body of men, so intimately concerned in the conduct of the campaign and Australian troops were inevitably frequent, but the two groups were separated by too great a cultural gap for any close personal relations to develop. In any case, the Army frowned upon and sought to discourage the growth of familiarity.⁴⁷ Where their duties brought Australians into direct daily association with Egyptian personnel as in the case of those N.C.O's who were seconded to the Transport Corps, their relations seem to have been on the whole professionally correct and not marked by any notable friction,⁴⁸ although there is evidence of bad feeling in the A.A.M.C., where on one occasion three drivers requested to be

⁴⁴ Official History, Vol. VII, pp. 366 and 678.

⁴⁵ Allenby. Dispatch. See above.
For numbers serving see Lt.-Col. G.E. Badcock, A History of the Transport Services of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force. 1916, 1917 and 1918. (London, 1925). p.14.

⁴⁶ Allenby. Dispatch as above.

⁴⁷ A.A. and Q.M.G., August 30th., 1917. (A.W.M.F. 30/147)

⁴⁸ History of the Transport Services of the E.E.F., p. 27.

reduced to the ranks rather than serve with natives.⁴⁹ Among the rest of the Australian troops who sometimes observed Egyptians at work, or made occasional use of their services, attitudes towards them seem to have been divided. The capacity for hard physical labour and the cheerfulness of the E.L.C. were generally marked with approval,⁵⁰ but the competence⁵¹ and commitment⁵² of the Egyptians serving with transport was sometimes questioned. Differing personal experience was probably the chief factor influencing Australian attitudes in assessing the worth of the Egyptians engaged in Palestine. In one respect, however, Australian opinion was completely united. The conviction of their own racial superiority was held by the entire force. This conviction might lead men to look on

⁴⁹ War Diary, August 10th., 1917. (W.O. 95/4529.)

It seems from the wording of the entry that their objection was prompted by racial antagonism although it is possible that they objected to serving with natives because many of these had little experience with horses and were incompetent. (See War Diary entries for August 27th., 1917 (W.O. 95/4529); August 30th., 1917 (W.O. 95/4525); November 24th. to 26th., 1918 (W.O. 95/4556).)

⁵⁰ Egyptian Mail, article, 'Concerning the "Elsies"'. With the Egyptian Labour Corps at the Front' by Frank Reid, July 10th., 1917.

Charles Duguid ("Scotty's Brother"), The Desert Trail. With the Light Horse through Sinai to Palestine, (Adelaide, 1919).p.59.
Maj. T.H. Darley, With the Ninth Light Horse in the Great War, (Adelaide, 1924).p.56. Interview Mr D.J. Cox, late 3rd. Light Horse, Adelaide, 1974.

⁵¹ See note 49.

⁵² Col. Arthur James Mills, 4th. ANZAC Camel Bn., diary, March 18th 1918. He wrote:-

The C.T.C. only play with their camels...If my boys can get through the C.T.C. should be able to get through too...the Egyptian camel leader of the C.T.C. does not care whether he goes through or not.

Egyptians rather condescendingly,⁵³ and sometimes resulted in an unattractive callousness. A 'Gyppie' in difficulty or danger was a humorous object.⁵⁴ The unarmed and exposed railway workers or camel drivers who fled from the enemy bombers or artillery fire were laughed at and their terrors deliberately played upon.⁵⁵ When numbers of Egyptian labourers died of exposure after a night spent in the open in bitter cold and rain, a Light Horseman noted with self-congratulation, 'We are hardier by far than the native Egyptians'.⁵⁶ A more serious consequence of the belief in the inferiority of the Egyptians was the ill-treatment of them that such a belief made possible. In August 1917 it was found necessary to issue a condemnation of the 'promiscuous beating and flogging of native drivers by H.C.O's and O.R.'⁵⁷ Nearly a year later the Field Ambulances and Sanitary Section were still being cautioned about their handling of natives.⁵⁸ Australian lack of sympathy for, and occasional acts of brutality towards, Egyptian personnel, together contributed to a number of factors which hindered recruitment to the E.L.C. and E.T.C. during the War.⁵⁹ When revolt broke out in Egypt in 1919 some part at least of the rural disaffection had its origin in resentments Australians had helped to arouse among the Egyptians who served in

⁵³ For example, Egyptians are described as being like children. (Modern Crusaders, p.22.)

⁵⁴ The Cameliers, p.6.

⁵⁵ The Desert Column, p.130.; With the Ninth Light Horse, p.57.

⁵⁶ The Desert Column, p. 373.

⁵⁷ A.A. and Q.M.G., August 30th., 1917. (A.W.M.F. 50/247)

⁵⁸ Col. A.D.M.S., A.N.Z. Mtd. Div., to Fld. Ambulances and Sanitary Section, July 11th., 1918. See also Regt. Order No. 43. (A.N.Z. Mtd. Div.) W.O. 95/4533.

⁵⁹ See Chapter V.

Palestine.

The relations between Australians and the British authorities, and between Australians and the civilians of Palestine are too intimately bound up to be discussed sequentially. Although, however, the handling of the local population was the principal issue that produced the tension between the Higher Command and the Anzacs, it was not the only one. The British forfeited Australian respect on a number of occasions and for a variety of reasons during the campaign, and it is arguable that had they not done so they might have received a greater degree of support, from senior officers at least, for their policy towards the inhabitants of Occupied Enemy Territory. Had there not been other instances of apparent incompetence or neglect of Australian interests, Australian troops might have co-operated more readily with orders they felt to be both stupid and dangerous.

When the Light Horse advanced into Sinai in 1916, they were already somewhat cynical about the British. In Egypt they had been irritated by the obsession of Imperial officers with such military superfluities (to their mind) as the salute, and in the Dardenelles they had seen the consequences of bungling in high places. Early in the campaign⁶⁰ their cynicism had increased as a result of the circumstances of the Turkish victory over the Fifth Yecmanry Brigade at Katia and Oghratina. No sentries had been posted and the enemy had over-run the British positions while many of the British officers whose carelessness had thus exposed the force had left their men and fled. Australian troops moving up to relieve Romani were disgusted to find the luxuries with which the Yecmanry officers

⁶⁰ April, 1916.

had surrounded themselves and which they had abandoned in their flight.⁶¹ As the campaign progressed other factors arose to drive the Australians out of sympathy with those in command. After the battle of Romani, the arrangements for the care of the wounded were so deplorable that numbers of officers and men whose condition had not been serious when they left the ambulances died of 'sheer neglect and exhaustion' on the journey back to Kantara.⁶² Discontent and resentment also swelled after Romani when the awards for the fighting were allocated and it was found that a disproportionate number had been given to United Kingdom troops and Staff officers.⁶³ Then the horsefeed supplied to the mounted units during the subsequent advance to El 'Arish was of such inferior quality as to suggest gross incompetence, if nothing worse, among those charged with inspecting it before its dispatch from the base area.⁶⁴ General Murray, the Commander-in-Chief, was meanwhile earning the increasing dislike of the Australian troops. They were impatient of his cautious conduct of the campaign, and the petty restrictions that were placed upon them during their leave periods seemed to indicate a poor grasp of the priorities of war at his Headquarters.⁶⁵ The first battle of Gaza was, however, to provide the Australians with what they saw as the crowning example of British stupidity and ineptitude. New Zealand troops and men of the Second Light Horse Brigade had actually penetrated into the city when the order to retreat was received. Victory, they felt, had been thrown away through the blunders of the

⁶¹The Broken Years, p.127. Official History, Vol. VII, p.92.

⁶²Official History, Vol. VII, p.162. A similar situation arose after the fight at Magdhaba. (See The Broken Years, p.131)

⁶³Official History, Vol. VII, p.192.

⁶⁴ibid., p.199.

⁶⁵ibid., p.246.

British staff.⁶⁶ When Murray was replaced by General Allenby shortly afterwards, the Australians were delighted. Now they at last had the active and decisive leadership they had long desired, but unfortunately it had come too late to prevent or counteract entirely the development of lasting feelings of antagonism towards the Higher Command.

Examination of the conditions under which the first part of the Sinai and Palestine campaign was waged reveals that Australian troops were less than just in their appraisal of Murray and his staff. Murray was in an unenviable and impossible position. He was responsible not only for the direction of the forces in the field, but also for the internal security of Egypt. Most of his time was necessarily spent in Egypt since this was the best way he could fulfil the duties of his dual command at a time when there seemed a likelihood of unrest in that country after the Allied reverse at Gallipoli. He was under orders to adopt and maintain a defensive position along the Egyptian frontier rather than to pursue the offensive. Even when these orders were relaxed he was still forced to implement a policy of caution. The subordination of the needs of the war in the Middle East to the demands of the Western Front meant that he could not develop a plan of campaign with confidence that his strength would not be suddenly depleted by the withdrawal of units to France.⁶⁷ Much of the dissatisfaction among Australians at the conduct of operations might have been avoided had not the Commander-in-Chief been overworked and tied by superior

⁶⁶ A vivid description of the battle is to be found in The Broken Years, p.132-133.

⁶⁷ For this paragraph see Official History, Vol. VII, p.24-25.

orders. Many of the British blunders that produced resentment might have been prevented if he had been in more direct communication with the force.

Troops in the field cannot be expected to have the same perspective as the historian. They judge from their own limited experience and without the benefit of acquaintance with the wider situation, or the advantage of hind-sight. Their judgements cannot be other than subjective. Lack of objectivity, however, does not prevent an opinion from being widely held, nor does it limit its influence on behaviour. Australian views on the general competence of the British military authorities during the Palestine campaign may have been over-critical, but whether or not they were justified is of less importance than the fact that they existed and influenced relations between A.I.F. troops and the Higher Command.

The chief cause of friction between Australians and British has been left until now to be dealt with because it concerns relations with the third group under study---the civilians of Palestine. The development of these relations will be easier to understand if it is placed against the Palestinian background.

At the start of the Great War Palestine was part of the Turkish Empire, inhabited by a diverse population. The country districts were occupied chiefly by Muslim Arab peasants (fellaheen) and tribes of Bedouin whose primitive existence was the natural outcome of an innate conservatism and an impoverished environment. Some areas, notably around Nazareth, Bethlehem and Es Salt, were predominantly Christian, while in Jerusalem a mixed population of Muslims, Jews and Christians had lived together for centuries. A number of

Zionist settlements had been established in two successive waves of migration starting in 1882 and 1904, and there were colonies of Tartars, Circassians and Pomaks (Muslim Bulgars) in the area of Asman.⁶⁸ Under the old Ottoman regime this multiplicity of religious and racial communities had customarily been governed loosely through its own leaders, enjoying a fair amount of autonomy provided Turkish suzerainty was respected and the taxes paid. This policy was the outcome of inefficiency rather than enlightenment, however, and when Abdul Hamid II was overthrown by the Young Turks in 1908, their more dynamic administration soon began to initiate changes enforcing Turkish law and control over areas which had previously enjoyed virtual self-government and their own legal code.⁶⁹ When War broke out in 1914, Palestine became a base from which Turkey could set out to recover the lost province of Egypt. Administrative control of the country passed into the hands of Djemal Pasha and the Turco-German military machine, and soon degenerated into a brutal repression. Army demands for supplies and livestock began to exhaust naturally limited resources and in many areas conditions for the local population became appalling.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Information obtained from the Military Handbook on Palestine. (G.S.C.I), E.E.F., Cairo and Arab Bureau. First Provisional edition, January 23rd., 1917). Also Sykes, A Soldier's Handbook. Palestine and Jerusalem. Salient Points of Geography, History and Present-Day Life, (London, 1918). Also Israel Pocket Library, History from 1880, (Jerusalem, 1973). pp.12 and 16.

⁶⁹ A case in point is that of the Beersheba Arabs who before the Young Turk revolution had enjoyed a kind of 'Home Rule'. (W.O. 157/689)

⁷⁰ Political and Economic Intelligence Summary. (W.O. 158/924) See also Francesco Gabrieli, The Arab Revival, (London 1961). p. 66-67

The Turks earned the enmity of all communal groups with the exception of the Circassian, Tartar and Bulgar colonies which they had themselves founded to extend their control into an unruly area, and of the Jewish settlements where a conciliatory attitude was maintained.⁷¹

The E.E.F. did not, on the whole, however, find themselves welcomed as liberators. In the towns and cities the demonstrations that greeted them were often more clearly marked by the relief of the inhabitants that they were not to be harmed than by any more positive show of support.⁷² The Jewish settlements made a great show of hospitality⁷³ but in the country districts the attitude of the population was more one of unfriendly neutrality. The Bedouin had no desire to exchange one set of masters for another,⁷⁴ and the more settled Arabs had already lost too much to the Turks to contemplate with equanimity the further appropriation or destruction of their crops and the consumption of their water supplies by another force.⁷⁵

⁷¹ W.O. 158/924.

⁷² For various descriptions of the welcomes received by the E.E.F. see Clement Ranford, 3rd. L.H.R., manuscript, p.4. (South Australian Archives.) Official History, Vol. VII, p.517 and pp.523-524. With the Ninth Light Horse, p.107. John Robertson, With the Cameliers in Palestine, (Dunedin, 1938) p.57.

⁷³ Rylie letters, November 23rd., 1917; January 22nd. and 25th., 1918; February 4th., 1918.

⁷⁴ They wished 'to be left alone'. (W.O. 95/455)

⁷⁵ For damage done to crops, the seizure of agricultural produce and the exhaustion of local water supplies, see Rylie, letter, May 2nd., 1917.; A.W.E. Mtd. Div. War Diary, November 10th., 1917 and May 6th., 1918. (Wilson Papers. MS 3932, National Library, Canberra); Modern Crusaders, pp.28, 80, 86 and 109; Pte. A.J. Adams, diary, March 24th., 1917.

For the men of the Light Horse, these Arabs in the dirty poverty-stricken villages of rural Palestine, and above all, the Bedouin in their scattered encampments became the object of a sustained hatred. They were 'poor miserable specimens'⁷⁶, 'very low caste' natives⁷⁷, with 'skins like shrivelled-up dates'.⁷⁸ Their behaviour was as unlovely as their appearance. Inveterate thieves they pilfered whatever they could lay their hands on⁷⁹ and looted abandoned Turkish positions with the thoroughness of a locust plague.⁸⁰ Disinclined to attack unless superior numbers assured them of victory,⁸¹ they hung about every engagement like vultures, ready to descend on the dead and wounded. Terrible stories were told of the barbarous treatment meted out to stragglers or wounded who fell into Bedouin hands.⁸² After Oghratina and Katia, it was found that

...some of the wounded Tommies had been slowly choked to death. The Bedouins had twisted wire around their throats...thin wire, that binds the bales of horse fodder.⁸³

The dead were stripped and left 'naked, blackened and swollen in the sun'⁸⁴ and the very graves were desecrated by 'wretched natives in

⁷⁶ Modern Crusaders, p.41.

⁷⁷ Cooper, diary, January 9th., 1917.

⁷⁸ Capt. H. Wetherall, 5th LHR, letter, May 19th., 1916.

⁷⁹ My Life with Experiences, p.156.

⁸⁰ Modern Crusaders, p.135; War Diary A.W.S. Mtd. Div., November 9th., 1917. (Wilson Papers).

⁸¹ Modern Crusaders, p.42.

⁸² Humphrey Kempe, Participation. (Melbourne, 1973.)

⁸³ The Desert Column, p.81.

⁸⁴ Lt. J.R.B. Love, 14th., LHR, letter, November 10th., 1916. See also The Desert Trail, p.124 and W.O. 95/4520.

their lust for gain'.⁸⁵ Not all the Bedouin were corpse-robbers or would-be murderers,⁸⁶ but the accounts of the base savagery of some that were in general circulation among the troops made it seem unwise for the solitary soldier to risk falling in with any.⁸⁷ 'Foul verain', one man called them,⁸⁸ while another regretted that they had not been exterminated.⁸⁹

Australians further hated the Bedouin because they were convinced that they were in league with the enemy and spied for them whenever the opportunity arose.⁹⁰ They were said to signal information on Light Horse positions to the Turks by the lighting of signal fires and other means.⁹¹ Bedouin were also regarded as displaying their treachery by deliberately misleading the invading force with false information⁹² and by being unreliable as guides.⁹³ Perhaps prejudice rather than reason influenced the formation of Australian opinion on this point. Some Bedouin may have worked with the enemy but the

⁸⁵ Official History, Vol. VII, p.243.

⁸⁶ 'C' Squadron of the 2nd. L.H. Bde. found after Katia that a mortally wounded Englishman had been looked after by Bedouin women. Other wounded had been given water and some of the dead roughly buried. (W.O. 95/4520)

⁸⁷ Participation, p.100.

⁸⁸ Love, letter, November 10th., 1918.

⁸⁹ Maj. C .H. Anderson, A.A.M.C., manuscript. (A.W.M.F. A2663 481/30.)

⁹⁰ Rylie, letters, May 1st and 24th., 1916. See also The Desert Column, p.155, and Price's narrative (Wilson Papers, No. 788)

⁹¹ The Desert Column, p.235; Lt. Col. R.M.P. Preston, The Desert Mounted Corps. An Account of Cavalry Operations in Palestine and Syria, 1917-1918, (London, 1921) p.119-120.
The suspicion was often unreasonably entertained. (W.O.95/4534)

⁹² Rylie, letter, August 5th., 1917.

⁹³ Official History, Vol. VII, p.87.

but the Turks do not appear usually to have been aware of British and Australian movements,⁹⁴ which argues that they were not receiving accurate reports. Though the Bedouin may have been often hostile and uncooperative with the E.E.F., there was no widespread support for the Turks among them. The Turks themselves regarded the Arabs as the most dedicated of their enemies,⁹⁵ and were terrified of falling into their hands.⁹⁶

Britain had plans of extending its control over Palestine after the War, and with a view to making this easier when the time came, was eager to conciliate the local population. The gross offences committed by the Bedouin went unpunished, while any complaints they made against the Australians soon brought about official retribution.⁹⁷

Australians, however, felt that this policy was based on total ignorance of the character of the Arabs, and pandered to them foolishly.⁹⁸ Inevitably, advantage was taken of the situation.

For more than two and a half years (the Bedouin) continued to engage with impunity in thieving and more serious crimes against the British forces, and to bring false charges against the men to the sympathetic ears of British staff officers.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Official History, Vol. VII, p.259.

⁹⁵ S.W.O. 158/924.

⁹⁶ Witness the incident at Eisa when Turks and Australians bivouacked together. (Price's narrative.)

⁹⁷ Official History, Volume VII, p.243, The Broken Years, p.145; Modern Crusaders, p.135.; See also Col. Mills, diary, January 20th., 1918. Evidence which seems to contradict this position, however, is to be found in Unholy Memories of the Holy Land, p.31.

⁹⁸ Official History, Vol. VII, p.243; Maj. Anderson, manuscript, p.13.

⁹⁹ Official History, Vol. VII, p.243.

Australians could not always be restrained by orders of which they thoroughly disapproved, however, and more than one sniper found that official policy could not protect him from the wrath of the southern soldiers.¹⁰⁰ The A.I.F. in Palestine were always quick to take vengeance for the death of any of their comrades. The conditions under which they lived were such as to encourage to an exceptional degree the development of group loyalty. Thousands of miles from home, they were doubly isolated by their almost unbroken service in the field. Their leave periods were rare and short, and even when they occurred, could only be spent in the largely alien environment of Egypt. After a few days in Cairo, men returned to their units with relief. The 'exhilaration of disciplined comradeship'¹⁰¹ took the place in their lives of the domestic ties that had been severed by the demands of war, and their regiments stood in place of their families. One Light Horseman wrote:-

It is like being without a mother and
father to be away from the Reg.¹⁰²

Australians in Palestine were not merely a fighting force. They were a brotherhood in arms.¹⁰³ Years of war had accustomed them to the resolution of all situations through violence. Their characters had hardened, their ideals had been eroded by the grim realities of camp life.¹⁰⁴ They could contemplate suffering unmoved.¹⁰⁵ They

¹⁰⁰ Love, letter, November 10th., 1918.
The Fighting Cameliers, p.85.

¹⁰¹ The Desert Column, p.131.

¹⁰² Lt. F.J. Burton, 4th. L.H.R., letter, December 27th., 1916.

¹⁰³ Official History, Vol. VII, p.33.

¹⁰⁴ The Cameliers, p.11.

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, the description of an Arab encampment under fire. (Byrie, letter, November 5th., 1917.)

were a wandering tribe, and when they avenged their dead, they did so in accordance with the savage dictates of tribal justice.¹⁰⁶

In the context of an examination of the three-way relations between Australians, Arabs and British authorities, one incident stands out as being peculiarly significant. In December, 1918, after the Armistice, a force of Australians and New Zealanders was encamped near Surafand---a 'wretched hamlet on a dune'.¹⁰⁷ The natives of the area had been a constant nuisance with their perpetual thieving. Night after night property disappeared from the tents until on the tenth of the month, a sleeping New Zealander was aroused by a native attempting to remove the bag that served him as a pillow. He sprang up and gave chase to the marauder, but as he overtook him, the man turned and shot him. The entire camp was mobilised and the tracks of the murderer were traced to the village of Surafand. A cordon was placed around it and in the morning the headmen were asked to surrender the offender. They were unco-operative and the divisional staff when approached were slow to take action. That night, Australians and New Zealanders united to exact justice themselves. The women and children were passed out of the village, and then the troops turned upon the men with sticks, beating them with such savagery that many of them died. The village was fired, and a neighbouring nomad camp which was felt to be implicated was also raided and burnt. When, in the morning General Headquarters demanded that those responsible should be handed over, the Anzacs presented

¹⁰⁶ Unholy Memories of the Holy Land, p.38.

¹⁰⁷ With a population of, at this time, around 220, its most prominent features were an unfinished mosque, great heaps of manure, and the neighbouring stone quarries.. (Handbook on Northern Palestine and Southern Syria, E.E.F., April 9th., 1918)

a united front. No individual could be definitely charged. The men had felt completely justified in taking the action they did and General Allenby's denunciation of their conduct left them resentful rather than penitent.¹⁰⁸

The involvement of Australian troops in Palestine is closely bound up with subsequent events in Egypt in 1919. In their relations with Egyptians working in the Labour and Transport Corps, Australians were upon occasion guilty of behaviour which had repercussions throughout the rural areas of Egypt where the men had been recruited and contributed to the increase of disaffection among the fellahs. In their relations with the British, Australians came first to question their general competence, and later to find themselves in direct opposition to their policies. Australians showed themselves unwilling to subordinate personal ideas of honour and obligation to comrades, to political considerations. They were increasingly prepared to fly in the face of express orders if these offended their own code of behaviour. The conditions under which they fought had welded them into an exceptionally united group, while familiarity with death had blunted their sensibilities so that they could be utterly callous in their dealings with disliked out-groups. In the suppression of a revolt such as the one soon to break out in Egypt, they would be unlikely to favour gentle methods. The restoration of order in such a way that further lasting resentment should not be generated would be of less concern to them than that retaliation should be made for any casualties they might incur. Contacts with the Bedouin had roused their antipathy to non-white races to the point of violent hatred, and at Surafand they had shown

¹⁰⁸ Official History, Vol. VII, p.787-789.

themselves ready to exact heavy communal punishment where a particular offending native could not be identified. Egyptians who crossed them would need to beware.

CHAPTER VTHE EGYPTIAN UPRISING OF 1919. AN EXAMINATION OF ITS
CAUSES WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO AUSTRALIAN TROOPSSynopsis

Introduction: the eve of the revolt; position of the Light Horse at the beginning of 1919---background to the uprising; Egyptian nationalism before 1914 and during the War---rapid development of events after the Armistice---the outbreak of revolutionary disturbances---uprising totally unexpected by many; surprise at the timing of the revolt and at the extent of involvement of the rural population---reasons for this surprise---some Australian observations on the Egyptian political scene---the causes of the uprising---behaviour of Australian troops towards native Egyptians specially singled out for criticism by some contemporary commentators---accusations refuted by Barrett---Australian role in provoking disaffection more dispassionately assessed---ways in which behaviour of Australians may have influenced the calculations of some nationalist organisers---gross miscalculation by nationalists of potential Australian sympathy for their cause---actual response of troops detained in Egypt---brief outline of the course of the revolt and of Light Horse operations up to their departure for Australia---how this is to be developed in three following Chapters.

After more than four years of bloody fighting, the Great War in Europe came to an end with the signing of the Armistice with Germany on November 11th., 1918. The war with Turkey was already over¹ and now the enormous task of demobilisation and repatriation was to be accomplished. In the general impatience to have done at last with the restrictions of army life, officers applied themselves vigorously to the completion of preliminary paper-work so that their units might be ready for the first available transports. In January, 1919, the Australian force in the Middle East was sufficiently well-organised to contemplate sending home 4,000 troops a month by the beginning of March.² The Australian Mounted Division was brought

¹ October 31st., 1918.

² W.O. 95/4372.

by sea from Tripoli to Kantara to await embarkation, while the Anzac Mounted Division remained at Rafa on the borders of Egypt and Palestine.³ The regiments were no longer on a war footing. Horses, which could not be shipped home were called in, and, to the lasting distress of the men who had ridden them through two and a half years of hard campaigning, either sold to the local population or destroyed.⁴ The bulk of the kit was surrendered, and a programme of drills, physical training, educational classes and sports meetings was initiated, designed to keep the men occupied and happy until transport could be allotted.⁵ In Egypt, concert parties relieved the off-duty hours and at the Anzac Hostel the 'Red, White and Blues' played to enthusiastic and carefree audiences.⁶ At the end of February in Cairo, civilians and military, English and Egyptians, joined together in a pleasant sporting occasion at el-Ghezirah, where amid an air of general festivity, Lady Allenby presented the prizes.⁷ On March 1st., the first Australian troops (the 1st and 2nd Regiments Light Horse under General Cox) sailed for home.⁸

Those who remained were confident that they would soon follow, but their hopes were to be dashed by the sudden eruption, coming 'like

³Official History, Vol. VII, p.792.

⁴The Broken Years, p.138.

⁵W.O. 95/4539.

⁶Egyptian Gazette, January 3rd., 1919.

⁷al-Ahram, January 3rd., 1919.

⁸Official History, Vol. VII, p.792.

a bolt from the blue'.⁹ of wide-spread insurrection, Equipment was hastily re-issued, and remounts, albeit of inferior quality, were found.¹⁰ All further embarkations for Australia were suspended and every man available was put on to the work of containing the revolt.¹¹ Within twenty-four hours the 3rd. Light Horse Bdg. under General Wilson were on their way to one of the centres of disturbance at Zagazig.¹² The first active encounter with insurgents occurred on March 16th., when a packet of twenty men under one officer put down with ease a small scale civil disturbance in Ismailia.¹³ For a few days contradictory orders left the Light Horse uncertain of its immediate fate. On March 18th., the War Diary of the 7th. L.H.R. recorded both orders placing the regiment on standby in case of a further escalation in the uprising, and notice that they were to leave for Australia on or about the twenty-fourth of the month.¹⁴ Later, strong rumours indicated March 28th. as a likely sailing date.¹⁵

⁹ History of the Australian Comforts Fund, p.267. Few Europeans in Egypt outside the highest official British circles, and those connected with the police force realised that an explosive situation was developing. The Australian troops were certainly unaware of anything untoward.

¹⁰ W.O. 95/4523 and 95/4540.

¹¹ 'So urgent at the outset was the call for mounted men that even the convalescents from the hospitals were enlisted.' (Official History, Vol. VII, p.793.)

¹² ibid.

¹³ Narrative of the Operations of the 3rd. Light Horse Brigade, p.8.

¹⁴ W.O. 95/4540.

¹⁵ ibid.

but the end of March found the Australian troops still encamped throughout the countryside, engaged in the task of pacification. Hopes of an early home-coming receded, and the seven ships expected to leave Egypt in April bearing the Light Horse were put to other uses.¹⁶ Weeks were to pass before embarkation would be resumed,¹⁷ and it was not until the end of the summer that the last of the troops were able to leave.¹⁸ In going to war in 1914 Australians had demonstrated the solidarity of the white Dominions within the Empire, and joined the cause of the defence of small nations. Now they were being used unequivocally in the enforcement of British Imperial authority over a subject people striving to achieve their independence.

The Egyptian uprising of 1919 was primarily a nationalist revolution against British Colonial rule.¹⁹ It came as the climax of more than forty years of struggle against external domination which had commenced with the inauguration of the Liberal National Party in 1878. Committed to a programme of resistance to foreign intervention, the party was pledged also to seek the establishment of a constitution and a parliamentary system of government. It found itself in immediate conflict with Khedivial authority. The internal crisis which was precipitated in 1882 by the attempt of a group of party activists under Arabi Pasha to impose reforms on the Khedive Tewfik, led directly to the occupation of the country by the British. Henceforth, it was

¹⁶ Age, March 12th., 1919.

¹⁷ The next troops to embark, the 3rd. L.H.R., did so in May. (Official History, Vol. VII, p.792.)

¹⁸ ibid. A few special details remained behind.

¹⁹ Sir Milne Cheetham to the F.O., Tgm. 403, March 17th., 1919 (F.O. 371/3714)

the British, as they came increasingly to control the administration, who provided the nationalists with their major adversary. The leaders of the Arabi Revolt were removed from public and political life, but Egyptian nationalism found a new dynamic leader in Mustafa Kamil, who became its chief spokesman until his death in 1908. An outburst of journalistic activity by nationalist thinkers about the turn of the century encouraged the spread of their ideas throughout the community.²⁰ The aims of 1882 (the end of foreign dominance and introduction of constitutional government) continued to be pursued but new elements emerged. The most important of these were the growth of pan-Islamic feeling, and, after the Dinshawi incident of 1906,²¹ a greater awareness of and preoccupation with the miseries of the fellaheen.²² Mustafa Kamil's party survived him only until 1912, when, riven by factionalism and implicated in an assassination plot against the Khedive and the British Resident, it was dissolved. The more moderate 'Party of the Nation' survived until 1914.²³

Turkey's entry into the Great War on the side of the Central Powers in November 1914 created problems for both Egyptian nationalists and for the British who had to deal with them. In the past

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²⁰ Ahmed, Jamal Mohammed, The Intellectual Origins of Egyptian Nationalism, (London, 1960), p.29-32.

²¹ A party of British soldiers were set upon by a group of villagers after shooting some domestic pigeons. They were severely beaten and one, unable to crawl to shelter died subsequently of heat exhaustion. The disproportionately severe punishment inflicted upon the fellaheen outraged Egyptian public opinion.

²² The Intellectual Origins of Egyptian Nationalism, p.62-63.

²³ For this paragraph see The Arab Revival, p.55-59.

the nationalists had periodically affirmed the continuing validity of Turkish suzerainty over Egypt, partly from vague stirrings of pan-Islamic sentiment, but more usually because it was a useful weapon against Great Britain. Now they were confronted by a real possibility of that suzerainty being restored with the assistance of Germany, and they had no desire merely to exchange one alien regime for another.²⁴ Britain, for its part, was forced to seek some regularisation of the existing relationship with Egypt which would effectively terminate the Turkish link in International Law without arousing undue hostility among the Egyptians. The Protectorate was a compromise which maintained the British position without overly offending Egyptian sensibility. Most nationalists were ready to accept it as a temporary war-time expedient, especially since they had reason to believe that the move was intended to 'accelerate progress towards self-government' rather than otherwise.²⁵ The question of Egyptian independence was regarded by them as being shelved for the present rather than abandoned for the future. The Protecting power deported those of its opponents whose presence might endanger the war-effort, and stifled any overt criticism of its regime by the introduction of a rigorous censorship of the Press. Outwardly nationalist activities seemed in abeyance, but behind the scenes preparations went on, quietly but undiminished, for the renewal of the struggle towards independence and full sovereignty that would

²⁴ Orientalism, p.140.

²⁵ There was great acrimony over this point after the War, with the nationalists claiming that they would never have accepted the Protectorate if they had believed it would be permanent. Despite British counter-assertions that this position was absurd, the suggestion that the Protectorate was only a first step towards self-government had indeed been made in the very words here quoted. Cheetham to Prince Hussin Kamil, December 19th., 1914. (F.O. 371/3722).

commence with the restoration of peace.²⁶

The urgent desire of the Egyptian nationalists to renegotiate their country's position was signalled by the promptness with which they took action after the Armistice. On November 13th., a group of four nationalist notables led by Sa'ad Zaghlul²⁷ were received by the High Commissioner, Sir Reginald Wingate,²⁸ and laid before him a request for permission to go to England, to plead Egypt's right to self-determination, both there and at the forthcoming Peace conference. They had many reasons to be hopeful of a successful outcome to such an enterprise. The Allies had constantly claimed that they had entered the War to defend the rights of small nations,²⁹ and President Wilson's Fourteen Points seemed even more explicit. The Egyptian press asked rhetorically if there could be any fear, after such a clear statement, that small nations would be deprived of their rights.³⁰ The Anglo-French declaration³¹ promising self-determination for those peoples now freed from the Turkish yoke was felt to apply to Egypt equally with the Arabs, whose revolt the British had both subsidized and actively encouraged.³² Egypt, too, "had sided

²⁶ Cairo, pp. 222-223.

²⁷ For the character and early career of Sa'ad Zaghlul, see The Arab Revival, p. 77.

²⁸ For dealings between Wingate and the nationalists at this time see Wingate of the Sudan, p. 224 ff.

²⁹ Having made much of this assertion at the start of the War, the British feared the loss of their credibility if they subsequently annexed Egypt. This was an important factor in determining on a Protectorate rather than an Annexation. (Orientalism, p. 144)

³⁰ al-Umma, October 3rd., 1918.

³¹ November 1st., 1918.

³² See Official History, Vol. VII, p. 786.

with the right",³³ and was conscious of the extent to which she had contributed to the war-effort.

Wingate was prepared to take the delegation's request seriously. They would not, he felt, have sought this interview had they not had the tacit support of the Sultan and his ministers, so to some extent the views they advanced reflected not only the aspirations of the nationalist group but of the Egyptian Government as well.³⁴ He felt that the interests of law and order could best be served by allowing the deputation to go to Europe. They could be out-maneuvered at the negotiating table and would do less damage at the conference than if left to agitate and intrigue in Egypt. He accordingly advised the Foreign Office to grant the deputation's request, but it refused to do so. Frustration mounted among the nationalists who felt that their voice was being deliberately stifled and in a manner which gave the lie to the British Government's other public utterances on the universal right to self-determination. It was resented that Egypt was being denied the representation that other nationalist movements were receiving. The Emir Feisal had gone to France, and even the 'most extreme' Indian agitators had been given a hearing.³⁵ There was increasing anxiety among the Sultan and his ministers also that 'some vital decision might be given in regard to Egypt without the purely Egyptian point of view having been heard'.³⁶ It was remembered that

³³ al-Watan, October 31st., 1918.

³⁴ It may be noted that Wingate's opinion was confirmed in a subsequent discussion with the Sultan who 'showed clearly that he had been influenced by national sentiments'. (Eastern Report No. XCVIII, December 12th., 1918. (Foreign Office Library.)

³⁵ Adly Pasha in conversation with Dunlop. (Eastern Report No. XCVIII.)

³⁶ Wingate. (Eastern Report No. XCVIII.)

Britain had often taken a very high-handed attitude towards the Government of Egypt during the War, and this, together with Russian revelations of the scope of Anglo-French expansionist plans in the Middle East, excited fears that the country was about to be absorbed without consultation into the British Empire.³⁷ Zaghlul attempted to circumvent the Foreign Office by wiring Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister, directly, but this move to gain a hearing was also blocked.³⁸

Egyptian patience began to wear thin. By early March there were demonstrations and disturbances in the streets of Cairo. Wingate had been summoned to London, and his successor, Cheetham, was confronted by a situation rapidly going beyond control. In an attempt to regain command of events he had Zaghlul and his three closest associates arrested and deported to Malta on March 8th.³⁹ The deportation triggered a general uprising. In Cairo, student demonstrations gave way to strikes and ugly encounters between the native population and the forces of law and order. Communications were seriously disrupted as bands of peasants throughout the countryside ripped up miles of railway track and cut telegraphic links. For a while Cairo was completely isolated. Marauding Bedouin took advantage of the breakdown of central authority to loot and pillage. On

³⁷ Wingate of the Sudan, pp. 204-209.
See also material in F.O. 37/3204.

³⁸ Eastern Report No. XCVIII.

³⁹ It seems possible that since he was aware that in the opinion of the United States military mission armed disturbances were imminent in Egypt, he hoped to precipitate a crisis before the opponents of the regime were properly organised, or alternatively to spread confusion by removing an important segment of the nationalist leadership. For the degree to which he was informed about the possibility of an armed rising, see Cheetham to F.O. Tgm. 184, February 3rd., 1919. (F.O. 371/3711)

March 18th., a group of officers and civilian officials trying to reach safety in a disturbed rural area were beaten to death when their train was attacked by a mob. Isolated soldiers were set upon, and the property of some Europeans and unpopular minority groups was plundered and destroyed.

The universality of the disturbances and their seriousness came as a surprise even to those administrators who were aware of the wide-spread desire of Egyptians of all classes, 'from Sultan to fellah', that their country should gain its autonomy.⁴⁰ To the bulk of the English colony in Egypt, whose social contacts with Egyptians were minimal,⁴¹ to the general public in Britain, and to the troops now used to contain the unrest, the situation was totally unexpected and almost inexplicable, especially in terms of its timing and in the involvement of the hitherto politically inactive fellahs.

The unpreparedness at an official level was an inevitable but disastrous consequence of the War. Many competent officials whose regular duties would have enabled them to assess the mood of the people had been crossed off for service in Britain or with the Forces.⁴² Those who remained were overworked and pre-occupied with the war-effort.⁴³ Even when valuable information concerning the deterioration of relations with native Egyptians did reach London, it was all-too-frequently lost in the confusion of authorities empowered to conduct Egyptian affairs.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Cheetham to F.O., March 15th., 1919. (F.O. 371/3714)
See also Wingate of the Sudan, p.220; Terry, James Joles, 'Sir Reginald Wingate as High Commissioner in Egypt, 1917-1919', (Ph.D. Thesis, University of London, 1968.) p.207.

⁴¹ The Fellaheen, p.20.

⁴² F.O. 371/2352.

⁴³ Times, December 19th., 1917; Wingate of the Sudan, p.221.

⁴⁴ Wingate of the Sudan, p.174.

and not re-communicated to the men on the spot who could have made best use of it. The complaisance with which other Anglo-Egyptians and the ordinary Britons back home regarded the situation in Egypt was in large measure due to the wartime censorship of the Press which worked to obscure the true state of affairs behind propagandistic pieces, encouraging a false sense of security and well-being.⁴⁵

After the early setbacks to the economy at the beginning of the hostilities, Egypt was represented as being largely untouched by the War, and certainly not inconvenienced by it.⁴⁶ By 1917, the Times was reporting, the country had 'more than recovered lost ground' financially since she was put to no war expenditure, while the increase in the cost of living, it was stated, affected Europeans rather than the native population.⁴⁷ A 'state of contentment with the British regime' was said to prevail⁴⁸ and even Martial Law, and the presence of the Army

⁴⁵ M. Travers Symons, Britain and Egypt. The Rise of Egyptian Nationalism, (London, 1925). p.57.

⁴⁶ In view of Egypt's importance as a military base, it is difficult to see how anyone could suppose that it was untouched by the War, yet Mr J.I. Craig, the Controller of the Statistical Department prefaced the 1917 Census thus:-

...the country herself remains unaffected by the strife. Like some isolated rock she stands untouched, or touched only by flecks of spray, with the tide of war surging round her to east and west, to north and south.

⁴⁷ Times, January 19th., 1917.

⁴⁸ Times, December 19th., 1916.

It should be noted that throughout the War the Foreign Office regularly coped with attempts to raise potentially embarrassing Parliamentary Questions on Egypt by postponing the answer until after the cessation of hostilities.

in the country were shown solely as a benefit to the populace.⁴⁹ The belief that Egyptians had done well out of the War without actually fighting was also widely held by the troops who saw how fast their pay disappeared into Egyptian pockets.⁵⁰ The hardships suffered by the great majority of the population went largely unrecorded, and the disaffection they engendered was accordingly unsuspected.

An Egyptian revolt had been widely anticipated on the entry of Turkey into the War and at the Proclamation of the Protectorate in December 1914.⁵¹ This anxious period had passed, however, without major incident. Later, in 1915, the lack of success in the Dardanelles and the number of wounded soldiers being returned to hospitals in Cairo and Alexandria so seriously weakened British prestige that the situation again became 'very shaky'.⁵² Then, the following year, after a series of Allied reverses in the space of a few months (the withdrawal from Gallipoli, the capitulation of Townshend at Kut-el 'Amarah, and the overwhelming of the Yeomanry force at Katia), Egypt's internal situation once more gave cause for concern so that General Murray was forced to divert his attention from the Palestine campaign.⁵³

⁴⁹ Times, December 28th., 1916 and December 12th., 1917.

⁵⁰ Australians had read at the start of the War that their thousands of freely-spent pounds had given Cairo its best season ever. (See Chapter I) When the Armistice with Turkey was signed, the noisy celebrations of the natives of Port Said surprised one Light Horseman who wondered why they should rejoice now that the opportunity to harvest the soldiers' pockets was coming to an end. (My Life with Experiences, p.173.)

⁵¹ See Chapter I, p.5.

⁵² Lt. D.W. Caldwell, 27th. Btn., diary, August 19th., 1915. See also Davidson (a four-year student under the 'Carlsbergfund' of the 'manner of life and thought of the Fellah') in Politiken, Copenhagen, October 23rd., 1915. (F.O.371/2352)

⁵³ Official History, Vol. VII, p.195.

Precautionary measures were taken,⁵⁴ but again no serious disturbance eventuated. Britain had thus survived the nadir of her fortunes in the Middle East without having to quell an armed uprising in Egypt. Such anti-British manifestations as there were during the War years were largely limited to sporadic acts of violence against the troops,⁵⁵ and other gestures of disaffection, such as the attempted assassination of the Sultan⁵⁶ and occasional attacks on the railways,⁵⁷ lacked the co-ordination of an organised resistance. If there had been no large-scale revolt against the British regime when it had been pre-occupied with waging war, it seemed unlikely that it would be seriously challenged on the restoration of peace.

If the timing of the revolt had taken many people by surprise, the degree of involvement of the rural population was even more unlooked-for. There was a widely-held stereotype of the fellah as an apolitical being, at best a child, at worst only one stage removed from his animals,⁵⁸ and for the most part they were ignored by European residents except those who were actively engaged in their exploitation. The abolition of the corvée and the courbash, the introduction of a more equitable taxation and the development of irrigation projects, were held to be sufficient to keep the fellah happy and contented.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ See Operation Order No. 13, Appendices A & B, C & D, 1916. (W.O. 95/4536); Young, diary, November 26th., 1915.

⁵⁵ Egyptian Mail, February 18th., 1915; al-Ahali, April 14th., 1915; Morley, diary, April 18th., 1915; Beeken, J., MS., 'First World War Account'. (Imperial War Museum, London.)

⁵⁶ Orientalist, p.148.

⁵⁷ Egyptian Mail, June 19th., and 23rd., 1915; al-Ahram, Sept., 13th., 1915

⁵⁸ The Fellaheen, p.27.; Egyptian Mail, August 24th., 1915.

⁵⁹ Times, December 30th., 1915.

Under the British the fellahs were better off than ever before and if not gratitude, then self-interest must make them the one section of Egyptian society on whose loyalty reliance could be placed.

In fact, neither the contentment nor the lack of political consciousness were as complete among the fellahs as the British liked to believe. Modernisation and increased governmental efficiency had not been hailed as unalloyed blessings. They were seen as operating more for the benefit of Egypt's overseas creditors, and the growing number of foreigners within her borders, who were enabled by their greater familiarity with European business practice⁶⁰ and the large measure of freedom from the processes of the law they were accorded under the system of Capitulations, to gain a stranglehold on the economy. Neither a familiarity with the concept of nationalism nor a perfect grasp of its vocabulary were necessary for the agricultural labourer to perceive the glaring social inequalities between his lot and that of the European 'covered by treaties, protected by his consul and prospering upon his advantages'.⁶¹ The land passed increasingly out of peasant ownership during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,⁶² and the chief effect of Kitchener's 'Five Feddan Law' of 1912, which was intended to protect a minimum holding from seizure for debt, was to drive the fellah to borrow essential capital from unscrupulous private money-lenders (usually Greeks),

⁶⁰ An example of the gearing of the system to Europeans rather than Egyptians may be found in al-Mokattam, August 20th., 1917.

⁶¹ Mr Kyriacopoulos, proprietor and editor of Le Progress, quoted in Egypt under the British, p.178.

⁶² 'The small fellah landholding average declined from 1.17 feddans in 1907 to 0.94 in 1918...many became landless labourers.' (Kassih, Walid, 'The Evolution of the Egyptian Political Elite, 1907-1921'. (Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1970.)

since the larger banks would not lend without security.⁶³ Traditional disrespect for the law, which was obeyed only where it could not be avoided,⁶⁴ could not be removed by Britain's attempts to reform the legal system and implement formal justice more equitably, when social injustice was so glaringly obvious.⁶⁵ In the years preceding the War there was increasing concern over the break-down of public security in rural areas,⁶⁶ generally attributed by the authorities to rising prosperity, but seen by Russell Pasha who served in the Egyptian Police throughout this period, as arising from a submerged class war.⁶⁷ The landlords and exploiters were often foreigners, and this coincidence of class enemy with alien resident could not fail to heighten national consciousness.⁶⁸ When the War began population pressure had already raised rents to the point where the average fellah could only make a

⁶³ The Fellaheen, p.49.

⁶⁴ Lufti Said, al-Jaridah, March 7th., 1909.

Now, too that taxation was inescapable, though more fairly computed, the peasant missed the opportunities for evasion which were as much apart of the old inefficient despotism as its periodic violent extortions. (Egypt Today, p.260-261.)

⁶⁵ This attitude found expression in such typical sayings as 'Since we have been robbed of everything, we will steal'. (The Fellaheen, p.47.)

⁶⁶ During the War years the increase in the crime rate in rural areas rose by 19%. (D.N.S.P., 1920.Vol.LI. Cmd.957., Egypt No.1,1914-1919.)

⁶⁷ Egyptian Service, p.33.

⁶⁸ On the other side of the coin, wealthier Egyptians might be cautious in their attitude towards nationalism, since any change in the status quo might seriously upset their own position. (The New Spirit in Egypt, p. 279-280.)

minimal profit, if any,⁶⁹ yet the landlords devised further surcharges which whittled away even this narrow margin.⁷⁰ The countryside was smouldering with discontent and if the British community were surprised by its violent and universal eruption, the reason is to be found in their total absorption in their own narrow affairs which blinded them to the true facts of the situation.

Australian troops who had no previous experience of the country were unlikely to have been better prepared intellectually for the 1919 rising, although they were less handicapped by the weight of a conventional wisdom in assessing the state of affairs in Egypt. Like British residents of Egypt they had regarded Egyptians in the early days of the War as only awaiting a Turkish success and the reverse of Britain's fortunes to break out in revolt,⁷¹ a point of view which was introduced to them in the information dispensed officially to newly arrived units.⁷² Their exposure to the Egyptians of the bazaars probably made them more aware of the general hostility towards the British Empire⁷³ than were residents who made few such contacts, but their contempt for Egyptian cowardice as they saw it,⁷⁴ was so great that they did not expect Egyptians would be prepared to take up arms to throw off the foreign yoke.⁷⁵ On the other hand, they did recognize that there were factors which might spark discontent. Although

⁶⁹ Cotton and the Egyptian Economy, p.356.

⁷⁰ '...in addition to the ordinary rental, the tenants must pay L.E.5 per feddan per year in return for permission to plant cotton over half the area leased.' (Egyptian Mail, October 15th., 1914.)

⁷¹ Sheppard, diary, February 9th., 1916; Ryrie, letter, February 27th., 1915.

⁷² A.W.M.F. 183/13.

⁷³ See Capt. N.W. Brain, *Ms memoirs*, (S.P.A.)

⁷⁴ Aitken, letter, January 7th., 1915. See also Chapter I, p.13-14.

⁷⁵ See The Desert Column, p.266.

they were impressed by the great public works that were the visible evidence of Britain's imperial civilizing mission along the Nile,⁷⁶ they were well aware that extreme social inequality and grinding poverty still existed,⁷⁷ and that 'the Gypsy had big reasons to kick'.⁷⁸

Although it was the political issue of self-determination which provided the Egyptians with both a rallying point and the final impetus to revolt in 1919,⁷⁹ the disaffection which fired the supporters of the uprising to action had sprung from a variety of causes. The general motivation was nationalist but the direction taken by specific outbursts was determined often by the character of purely local resentments. Contemporary analysis reflected the complex nature of the origins of the revolt. Thus Cheetham's original assessment of the uprising as 'anti-British, anti-Sultanian,⁸⁰ anti-Foreign, and... Bolshevik'⁸¹ was expanded and modified in later reports as the momentarily predominating nature of the disturbances dictated. When rural unrest was wide-spread about March 23rd., Cheetham observed that in certain districts the movement had taken on the character of a peasant rising against landlords.⁸² Allenby, who was put in charge of the emergency on March 25th., saw the revolt as originating in long-standing political discontent, but was inclined to rank the lust for pillage as a primary motivation.⁸³ When different aspects of

⁷⁶Purple Patches, p.2. See also Champion, diary, October 20th., 1915.

⁷⁷Chapter II, pp.38-39.

⁷⁸Col. Mills, diary, Palm Sunday, 1919.

⁷⁹Wingate of the Sudan, p.281.

⁸⁰Appreciation, Eastern Report No. XXXIV, September 19th., 1917, suggests why the Sultan was unpopular.

⁸¹For Cheetham's assessment see materials in F.O. 371/3714.

⁸²Tgm. 426, (F.O. 371/3714.)

⁸³Allenby to Curzon, May 4th., 1919. (F.O. 371/3717.)

the situation were considered, it was possible for apparently contradictory reports on its nature to be issued,⁸⁴ and so diverse and complex was the character of the revolt that the isolation of its causes and the rating of their relative importance inevitably provoked controversy.⁸⁵

The causes of discontent, particularly in rural areas, which dated back to before the War have already been touched upon, but disaffection had grown to the point of making a general uprising possible in 1919, because of war-time conditions. The Great War had intensified existing grievances as well as producing a host of new ones, unsettling men's minds as it shook the old accepted order.⁸⁶ Despite an early assurance that Egypt would have to bear no part of the burden of hostilities,⁸⁷ her interests were consistently subordinated to those of the military between 1914 and 1918.⁸⁸ The steady draining of requisitioned food-stuffs, fodder and material to supply the Army's needs, while it had brought prosperity to some,⁸⁹ left the majority to struggle unsuccessfully against an exceptional increase in the cost of living, further inflated by the large numbers of troops quartered in or passing through the country.⁹⁰ With the intensification of the U-boat campaign in 1917 and 1918, the Army had drawn on local Egyptian resources to an even greater extent than in the previous years of

⁸⁴ Compare Appendix to Western and General Report, No. EXV, May 15th., 1919, and the British Empire and Africa Report of the same date. (F.O.L.)

⁸⁵ The findings of the official mission of investigation which was sent to Egypt after the revolt were published in 1921 in the Milner Report.

⁸⁶ B.M.S.P., 1920, Vol. LI, Cmd. 957. Egypt No. 1, 1914-1919.

⁸⁷ Proclamation, November 2nd., 1914.

⁸⁸ See Egypt and the Army, passim; also Latifa, Mohammed Salim, 'Misr wa'l-Harb al-'Alim al-'Aval' ('Egypt and the First World War'), M.A. Thesis, University of Cairo, 1970.

⁸⁹ Egyptian Gazette, letter signed 'Sphimaris', January 4th., 1919.

⁹⁰ Nadinnil, October 22nd., 1918; Acting Financial Adviser to High Commissioner, October 10th., 1919. (F.O. 371/3727); F.O. 371/2352.

the War.⁹¹ Economies were now made in the civilian consumption of fuel,⁹² but harder to bear were the shortages in basic food commodities, and the deprivation of draught animals. As regards the former, the War brought about a steady decline in nutritional standards among the humbler sections of the population. In August, 1917, Wingate informed the Foreign Office that the wheat eating population had 'long been subsisting on a very mixed form of bread'.⁹³ Later it became impossible for the inhabitants of the Damanhour and Zagazig districts to purchase grain at all,⁹⁴ and when high-quality Australian flour was distributed among the poor, they sold it in order to obtain larger quantities of the biladi flour to stave off hunger.⁹⁵ Scarcity led to profiteering and the formation of sellers' rings which forced the price of bread over 100% above what was considered reasonable,⁹⁶ and yet merchants were still allowed to continue exporting grain while the poor found it difficult to get enough food.⁹⁷ In Cairo, during two years, 1915 and 1918, the number of deaths actually exceeded the birthrate.⁹⁸

⁹¹ Wingate of the Sudan, p.217.

⁹² Times, August 10th., 1917.

Since most fuel had to be imported civilian requirements were in competition for limited shipping space with items of military necessity. By 1919 the coal shortage had led to growing inadequacies in the rail service. (al-Ahram, January 6th., 1919.)

⁹³ Wingate to Sir R. Graham, August 18th., 1917. (F.O. 371/2928)

⁹⁴ Egyptian Gazette, May 24th., 1918.

⁹⁵ al-Mokattam, June 14th., 1918.

⁹⁶ Egyptian Gazette, January 1st., 1919.

⁹⁷ Wadinnil, January 6th., 1919.

⁹⁸ Le Caire.
Vol. II pp. 24 and 26.

As 1919 opened, a low Nile and the ravages of influenza, in part worsened by the incompetence of the sanitary authorities and the suspension of works of urban hygiene through the War, threatened to exacerbate the situation further.⁹⁹ Britain had obtained food supplies from Egypt on a scale which far surpassed the exactions of the Turks in Syria and Palestine,¹⁰⁰ and all Egypt's greater fertility could not save her population from the oppressive effects of such a mighty sapping of resources. 'There is no doubt', the Foreign Office recorded, 'that we squeezed the country very hard'.¹⁰¹

In some ways the compulsory purchase of livestock was even more far-reaching in its consequences, and stirred up even greater resentments. Animal plagues at the start of the century had already seriously depleted holdings, and now with the War interrupting the flow of imports from such traditional sources as the Hejaz and Turkey, the press observed 'Egypt has to content herself with the animals she has within her limits for doing all transport work, agriculture, and supplying the needs of the Army'.¹⁰² The camel and donkey shortage resulting on the whole-sale commandeering of livestock by the Army, almost paralysed the fellah, especially in districts where there was no rail link.¹⁰³ The people showed their reluctance to lose their beasts by keeping them concealed, until the penalties suffered by those caught out convinced them it was better to co-operate of 'their

⁹⁹ Egyptian Gazette, January 3rd., 1919.
Times, January 21st., 1916.

¹⁰⁰ Official History, Vol. VII, p.27.

¹⁰¹ P.O. 371/3714.

¹⁰² al-Mokattam, November 14th., 1917.

¹⁰³ al-Watan, August 22nd., 1917.

own free will'.¹⁰⁴ As the Army found it progressively more difficult to obtain animals in replacement of those 'wasted' on the long Palestine Lines of Communication, even breeding females were taken, ensuring that the depletion of stock became permanent. By 1919 the ratio of animals to people was 1:12 as against 1:7 in 1903.¹⁰⁵

The depredations did not end there. Rural womenfolk were pressured into yielding up their pathetic stores of gold ornaments, the family's traditional form of security,¹⁰⁶ and a spate of wild rumours began that the authorities wished to take all copper utensils, or all fowls and hens.¹⁰⁷ It was all reminiscent of the dark days of the past, and completely reversed any pro-British feeling that past improvements in rural life might have engendered.¹⁰⁸ Worst of all, the ancient evils of the courbash and the corvas which the British had taken pride in abolishing appeared in a new guise with the recruitment of the fellahs into the E.T.C. and E.L.C.¹⁰⁹ When voluntary enlistment failed to maintain the numbers the Army needed, the authorities turned a blind eye towards, or actively encouraged, the forcible and corrupt recruitment of men for service in Palestine.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁴ ibid., October 5th., 1917.

¹⁰⁵ Walid Kazziba, thesis, p.253.

¹⁰⁶ F.O. 371/2357. See also Times, October 30th., 1917.

¹⁰⁷ Egyptian Gazette, September 22nd., 1917.

¹⁰⁸ Memorandum from 'a friendly Egyptian', (F.O. 371/3714.)

¹⁰⁹ For an assessment of the role this recruitment played in triggering the 1919 rebellion, see M.S. Latifa, thesis, p.518.

¹¹⁰ Desert and Delta, p.160.

So great was the fellahs' hatred of this recruitment, that whole villages fled to avoid suspected recruiting raids, and in some areas recruiting agents were afraid to enter the hamlets because of the vengeance that might be exacted by families whose members had failed to return from war service.¹¹¹ Much of the hatred and obloquy the Army and the British regime earned in this context was earned for them by the activities of local authorities, and particularly the omdehs,¹¹² at whose activities they connived.

Though the Army might be negligent in upholding the law where its interests were being served, in other ways it was unduly intrusive. Martial Law was peculiarly all-pervasive, and to Egyptians, unnecessarily irksome. General Murray had noted how it penetrated to all aspects of the civil administration of the country, but had stated that this was inevitable because of the need to mobilise all the available resources of the country for the 'prosecution of the War in general, and the defence of Egypt in particular'.¹¹³ Military necessity, however, was not always so apparent to the civilian population as it was to the Commander-in-Chief of the Expeditionary Force. They saw no need, after the Turks had been driven back from the Canal, for continuing interference in their normal occupations and way of life,¹¹⁴ nor for the 'dumping of...huge military forces'

¹¹¹ ibid.; See also Second Report of Committee on Manpower, etc., in Egypt. (F.O. 371/2932)

¹¹² For the corruption of omdehs and other local authorities and complaints about them see Egyptian Gazette, August 24th., 1917, April 22nd., 1918 and August 5th., 1918; Misr, July 8th., 1918; Journal du Caire, April 9th., 1915; Wadinnal, January 31st., 1916.

¹¹³ Memorandum November 28th., 1916. (F.O. 371/2930)

¹¹⁴ For an example of such interference see W.O. 95/4534.

in their country.¹¹⁵ The arbitrary nature of Martial Law and its demoralising effect on the civil government¹¹⁶ were both causes of resentment to be added to the long list of grievances that the presence of the Army had excited.

Even before the uprising of 1919 was properly over, speculation was appearing in Britain as to its causes. In May 1919, the Rt. Hon. J.M. Robertson, M.P., had produced an article calling attention to the probably crucial role of the Army in arousing disaffection in Egypt.¹¹⁷ Among all the causes of resentment that he listed, he singled out the conduct of the Colonial troops in Egypt, and 'especially the Australians', as being the chief reason for resentment. In support of this contention he quoted at length from a statement made by the writer Miss M.E. Durham in the Daily News of April 2nd., 1919. She had written:-

I was in Egypt from November 1915 to April 1916, and can confirm...that it is to our own treatment of the Egyptians that we owe the present trouble. The Authorities are certainly to blame for landing Colonial troops in Egypt without carefully instructing them as to the population they would meet there. So ignorant were numbers of these men that they imagined Egypt was English,¹¹⁸ and that the natives of the

¹¹⁵ Letter from Roland Nett to Sir Henry Craik, M.P., September 22nd., 1915. (P.O. 371/2356.)

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ 'The Problem of Egypt', Contemporary Review, May 1919.

¹¹⁸ Francis Adams had noted in 1893 that to most Australians 'Egypt is justly and inevitably part of the Empire'. (The New Egypt, p.xix.)

land were coloured intruders. "Why were these —niggers allowed in here at all." More than one Australian said that he would clear the lot out if he had his way. They treated the natives with cruelty and contempt. In the canteen in which I worked a very good native servant was kicked and knocked about simply because he did not understand an order given to him by a soldier. An educated native in the town was struck in the mouth, and had his inlaid walking stick forcibly snatched from him by a soldier who wanted it. More than one English resident said to me, "It will take years to undo the harm that has been done here by the army".

Robertson observed that there were many historical precedents for individual acts of violence, such as these, precipitating crises, and that Miss Durham's testimony, confirmed as it was by the impressions he had received from others explained much that had seemed hitherto inexplicable.

Lt.-Col. Sir James W. Barrett of the A.A.M.C. sprang to the defence of the Australian troops. His refutation of the charges received a 'curt refusal to publish' from the Contemporary Review, so he had it brought out privately in pamphlet form.¹¹⁹ Barrett expressed his desire to correct the false impression that such a 'wholesale...and unwarranted generalisation' as that made by Robertson might produce.¹²⁰ He admitted there had been a number of riots in Cairo and listed the three big ones of April and June 1915, and Armistice Night, 1918, which last, he said, Australians had helped to quell. Commenting on those occasions when the troops had taken the law into their own hands, he stressed that these had been isolated incidents, provoked by the

¹¹⁹ Reply to the Editor of the 'Contemporary Review', (Melbourne, 1919.)

¹²⁰ ibid., p.4.

'insistent bargaining and touting of the Egyptian vendors of commodities and services'.¹²¹ He, personally, had witnessed no such occurrence, though he imagined that there had been 'odd instances of troublesome conduct'.¹²²

The evidence would suggest that either he was unobservant, or that his patriotism was stronger than his veracity.¹²³ Incidents had been common enough for A.I.F. troops to acquire an unenviable reputation, in the cities at least.¹²⁴ According to the Secretary of the Egyptian Association:-

...the conduct of the Colonial Troops was most insulting, to knock down people in the roads, to hold up men and women to deliver them money, to set fire to houses, run away with articles from shops, insult ladies in the street, was very frequent during the last five years.¹²⁵

If their behaviour had made no impression on Barrett, it had printed itself lastingly upon the minds of the inhabitants. An Egyptian interviewed in 1975 recalled the Australians thus:-

¹²¹ ibid., p.5

¹²² 'I do not recollect seeing a single street row, and I remember, on leaving Egypt, asking myself whether it was possible that in any other part of the world there had been such prosperity and such freedom from trouble between two dissimilar sets of races.' (ibid., p.6.)

¹²³ See Chapter II, passim.

¹²⁴ Cleary, diary, April 15th., 1916.

¹²⁵ F.O. 371/3717. Examples of all these kinds of misconduct have been cited in Chapters II and III.

They did hard things. They would get drunk, so drunk they did not know anything, and then they did hard things. I looked into a café, and I wondered how the poor people could ever survive the things they did.¹²⁶

Yet it was not the misconduct of the Australians that aroused resentment so much as the attitude taken towards it by the authorities. Complaints were made that the police never interfered with Australians, no matter what they did.¹²⁷ Their behaviour appeared to Egyptians to go virtually unpunished or be granted excessive indulgence. Another interview subject stated:-

If a man sold cigarettes in the street, they sometimes upset his things and beat him. I once saw three officers among them do this. I think in the British Army they would shoot such an officer. We heard that only when they were caught three times in bad ways, they were sent away to Australia.¹²⁸

The unfavourable impact made upon the minds of the populace by outrages committed by soldiers upon natives could only be counteracted by the proper punishment of military offenders, as in India.¹²⁹ Only the enforcement of strict justice would have satisfied the Egyptians, but in deference to public opinion in Australia, the A.I.F. were spared the full rigours of disciplinary action.¹³⁰

Australian behaviour can be clearly demonstrated as having aroused feelings of resentment in Cairo, but the position in the

¹²⁶ Cairo, June 1975. The subject was a high school student in 1919.

¹²⁷ Journal du Caire, August 24th., 1915.

¹²⁸ Cairo, June, 1975. Subject had served in the E.L.C. and worked in the camps around Cairo at the start of the War as an errand boy, cleaner, etc.,

¹²⁹ 'The Problem of Egypt', p.492.

¹³⁰ Egypt and the Army, p.115.

countryside is less well defined. Before 1919 the A.I.F. did not penetrate into the rural areas on any considerable scale, and there are only a few recorded occasions on which Australian thoughtlessness,¹³¹ or unruly conduct may have angered the fellahs.¹³² Australian troops did, however, have a protracted relationship with one section of the rural community. In Palestine the men serving with the E.E.F. came into frequent contact with the Egyptian Labour and Transport Corps. Barrett states that he never saw a case of ill-treatment of one of these workers by any soldier,¹³³ but the evidence again suggests that he was making an over-favourable judgement.¹³⁴

No objective assessment of the conduct of Australian troops in Egypt will deny that often their actions were such as to produce bitter and lasting resentment among the native inhabitants. Mistreatment of native Egyptians was not, however, an exclusively Australian vice. British and Indian soldiers as well as Australian troops were involved in street disturbances in Cairo and in the mistreatment of Egyptian workers in Palestine.¹³⁵ If the men of the A.I.F. were not as innocent as their defenders insisted, they were at least not as uniquely guilty

¹³¹ Miss Durham remarked in her article that when she pointed out to the offending troops how their actions were creating enemies they were surprised.

¹³² McWhinney, letter, January 16th., 1916, (rifles discharged to scare off children); Brunton, diary, May, 1916, (women shouted at in a suggestive manner).

¹³³ Reply to the Editor of the 'Contemporary Review', p.6.

¹³⁴ See Chapter IV.

¹³⁵ Among Australian soldiers I interviewed I found an anxiety to stress this involvement of other troops in altercations with Egyptian natives. For ill-treatment of natives in Palestine see Manchester Guardian, March 28th., 1919; History of the Transport Services, p.91-92; Britain and Egypt, p.74.

as their detractors implied. To assert, moreover, that the conduct of the Australian troops was a principal cause of the 1919 uprising is to see it completely out of perspective. Egypt's condition of political tutelage,¹³⁶ the saturation of the civil service by Britons which denied opportunities within the administration to emerging indigenous élites,¹³⁷ a wide range of other economic and social grievances, and resentment at the exploitation of the country during the War, were all more significant and enduring causes of disaffection than the hooliganism of some Colonial troops, even if this did contribute to the general ill-will. Ultimately the misdeeds of the Australians were less important in themselves than in the circumstances in which they were committed. Their greatest significance lies in the fact that they brought home to the ordinary Egyptian in a peculiarly obnoxious fashion the unacceptability of occupation by a foreign power, the oppressive presence of the British Empire.

Other aspects of Australian behaviour than their violent treatment of civilians seem to have had some minor significance in the outbreak of disturbances. The drunkenness and other dissipations in which a number of Australians had indulged, particularly at the start of the War, had earned the contempt of the native population¹³⁸ and

¹³⁶ The conduct of the A.I.F. may have an indirect bearing on fears for Egypt's political future. Wingate noted 'a genuine fear that the Egyptians may be absorbed into an empire of which the most robust members are young, confident peoples, nearly related by blood to the Mother country'. (My italics). Wingate to A.J. Balfour, November 20th., 1918. (F.O. 371/3204.)

¹³⁷ Sir Rennell Rodd, 'The Present Situation in Egypt', Contemporary Review, Vol. CXXI, 1922, p.412.

¹³⁸ Daily News, April 2nd., 1919.

contributed to a lowering of British prestige.¹³⁹ At the same time they had high-lighted a disciplinary problem and created clearly perceptible tension between Australian troops and the British Staff. How far this appeared to reveal a chink in Britain's armour to observers who might one day wish to test its strength can only be speculated, but it must be remembered that German propaganda concerning the doubtful loyalty to Britain of the Dominions had long been active in Egypt.¹⁴⁰ Though the alacrity with which Australia, and New Zealand had rallied to the British cause in 1914 had been demonstrated within Egypt's very borders, Bernhardt's assertions do not seem to have been entirely dislodged from Egyptian minds. In 1919 some Egyptians still placed Australians in the same class as themselves and the Irish, as peoples seeking independence from Great Britain. They felt that in any demonstration they might make against the British regime, they could count on Australian support. Australians, because of their colonial status, should understand Egypt's desire for freedom, and even perhaps help her gain her political independence.¹⁴¹ One nationalist supporter recalls today:-

We thought the Australians would understand. I had heard in 1917 they supported the Irish and would not fight against them, their brothers. Many of us know that they said this. We thought they might see we were like the Irish.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ See Chapter IXI, p.102.

¹⁴⁰ See Chapter I, p.11.

¹⁴¹ Capt. H.W. Brain, memoir.

¹⁴² Interview, Cairo, June, 1975. Subject was a student at the time of the 1919 uprising.

The 'No' vote in the conscription referendum may have strengthened this view. At any rate, Irish and Australians came to be linked together in rumours of defection from the British flag current among Egyptians at the time of the uprising¹⁴³ and a seditious letter, inciting a railway engineer to sabotage at the end of March read:-

You may agree with the Australians and Irishmen to plot against these traitors the English, because the former hate the latter bitterly.¹⁴⁴

In the event Egyptian hopes of Australian sympathy and support proved wishful thinking. Australians did not make the identification of Egyptians with Irish, and it is unlikely that it even occurred to them to do so. They jeered at Egyptian attempts to win them over.¹⁴⁵ Against the increasingly mutinous behaviour of some British units in Egypt who were thoroughly impatient of the extension of their service,¹⁴⁶ the Australian troops stand out as being singularly uninvolved in agitations and as the most reliable section of the force. Their sense of frustration at the delay in their repatriation was turned not against the Army authorities but against the Egyptians who were the cause of their detention. Sgt. King of the 12th. L.H.R. wrote:-

Cuss the Gippes. We thought we had finished up with horses, rifles, and all the rest of it, and here we are again--- fully equipped in war footing---some poor Gippes will be sorry.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ Narrative of Operations, pp.13-14.

¹⁴⁴ W.O. 95/4468.

¹⁴⁵ See Chapter VII. The Egyptians seemed unable to grasp the nature of the relationship between Britain and Australia.

¹⁴⁶ For British problems with mutinous troops see W.O. 95/4402.

¹⁴⁷ Diary, March 18th., 1919.

All the regiments of the Australian Mounted Division and the Anzac Mounted Division with the exception of the 1st. and 2nd. L.H. which had already sailed, took part in the suppression of the Egyptian uprising. Seven regiments were based at Zagazig under General Wilson, three operated in the area of Damenhour, one was in Cairo, and the twelfth at Minia in Upper Egypt. Lt. Col. Foster and Lt. Col. Olden each commanded small columns. There was no organised fighting but a number of sharp encounters with rioters in which Australians suffered about twenty casualties. The worst disturbances were soon contained and communications gradually restored. Within a month the crisis was over, but the Light Horse remained on patrol duty for a few weeks in the country districts until their embarkation for Australia.¹⁴⁸

This chapter has examined the outbreak of the 1919 uprising. The next three chapters will deal with Australian involvement in its suppression. Chapter VI is concerned with events in Cairo, the capital of Egypt and the centre of the revolt. Chapter VII covers the pacification of the rural areas with particular attention being given to Lower Egypt where the bulk of the Australian troops were engaged. The final Chapter discusses certain incidents during the campaign in which Australians were involved, and their international repercussions.

¹⁴⁸Official History, Vol. VII., p. 793.

CHAPTER VIREVOLUTIONARY CAIRO AND AUSTRALIAN TROOPSSynopsis

Introduction: an incident in January, 1919---background of urban social problems---war-time discontent and sedition---post-Armistice manifestations of nationalist sentiment---deportation of the Pashas and outbreak of serious rioting---problem of best means to contain rioting---clashes between military (especially Australians) and civilians---escalation of violence; the Deirut murders and their effect on the attitude of the troops---fears for the European population; the 'Shem-al-Massin' Contingency plan---superfluous nature of elaborate preparations; their psychological effect on troops and native civilians---arrival of General Allenby; the reasons for his appointment and the nature of his instructions---his first moves---further manifestations of the breakdown in law and order; the character of the revolt begins to change---more incidents involving Australians---release of the deported leaders and resultant Egyptian jubilation---clashes over the use of the 'Turkish' flag---strikes and the imposition of Martial Law---gradual restoration of the situation; the reasons therefore---Australian troops in Cairo during brief period before repatriation; lasting memories of Cairo---conclusion; nature of the situation in Cairo from March to May, 1919; role of Australian troops in the events of this period assessed and their attitude examined.

On January 19th., 1919, a sudden heavy shower of rain fell on Cairo, a rare event in that desert city. Even under normal circumstances the collapse of houses in the poorer quarters was not uncommon, and now the fierce downpour and resultant flooding led to wide-spread ruination, leaving numbers of the unfortunate inhabitants trapped beneath the rubble of their fallen homes.

Thousands of Australians and British troops formed volunteer rescue parties and performed prodigies of good work in extracting people from collapsed houses, and their cheery conduct, despite the heavy rain, earned them many blessings from the...natives they rescued.¹

¹Egyptian Gazette, January 20th., 1919.

For a moment the frictions of the War years were transformed to harmony as disaster brought to the fore the better characteristics of the two parties---the soldiers' willingness to help distressed women and children, and the friendliness and warmth so often noted in the Cairenes when they are not actively rebuffed.² Yet it was false idyll. The very calamity which had momentarily drawn troops and populace together was itself symptomatic of powerful and enduring considerations which must keep them apart. By demonstrating how Cairo's drainage scheme³ operated efficiently for European districts but aggravated the problems of the native quarter, the flooding of January 19th. emphasised Britain's failure, despite all the great engineering works and superficial modernisation, to improve the life of the ordinary urban Egyptian.⁴ Troops and populace were permanently divided by the regime which the former defended by their arms and the latter threatened by the potential explosion into rebellion of their long-nurtured grievances.

The period before the Great War had seen a steady drift of distressed and dispossessed peasants from the countryside to the cities of Egypt. There was little industry, however, to offer them even subsistence wages when they arrived, and they passed readily into lives of vagrancy and crime.⁵ The 1917 Census revealed that out of a total local subject population of 721, 973 in Cairo, some 13,185 supported

² Cairo, p. 223.

³ The scheme had been completed in its main features by 1914, when the outbreak of War caused sewage and reticulation work to be temporarily suspended. (Times, November 22nd., 1914.)

⁴ Cairo, p. 228.

⁵ Egyptian Mail, reproduction of material from Wadinnil, June 5th., 1914.

themselves solely through begging, vagabondage and prostitution, though these represented only the visible tip of the problem. Unreckoned numbers eked out an existence on the fringes of legality, or by a series of temporary expedients.⁶ Not only unskilled labourers but skilled workers too had difficulties in finding employment⁷ and by 1919 there existed in these 'out of work poorer class clerks and street-arabs of the towns', a body of disaffected manhood from which the uprising of that year drew much of its support.⁸

Discontent had grown throughout the War. The irritations and impositions resulting directly from the war-time situation, the misconduct of troops, the restrictions of Martial Law, scarcity of commodities and soaring inflation,⁹ had all stirred up resentment. In addition the influx of Greek, Syrian, Armenian and Jewish refugees from the Turkish dominions into Egypt excited fears that the poor and unemployed might be still further disadvantaged. The authorities were represented as 'housing and feeding thousands of foreigners, many of whom belonged to mendicant religious bodies, at the expense of the Egyptian poor', who were left to starve.¹⁰ Seditious rumour,

⁶ Something of their existence may be gathered from a survey made by the Egyptian Association for Social Studies. (The data was collected in 1918, but the situation it described was chronic.) Poor Egyptians '...lived five to six persons in one room, got seven and a half weeks' work per year, earned an average annual income of nine Egyptian pounds, spent fifty-two piastres (ten shillings) on food a month, and lived permanently in debt'. (Cairo, p.227.)

⁷ Egypt and the Army, p.89.

⁸ Egyptian Gazette, April 17th., 1919.

⁹ See Chapter V.

¹⁰ Tgm. Sir Henry McMahon to F.O., February 15th., 1915. (F.O. 371/2355.); Wingate to F.O., Tgm. no. 909, August 30th., 1917, Eastern Report No. XXXII, September 6th., 1917. (F.O.L.)

despite the threat of deportation hanging over the heads of those who spread it,¹¹ was never entirely suppressed and contributed to the growth of disaffection. Censorship prevented the dissemination of sedition through the Press, but student agitators took advantage of the mistrust occasioned by the control of the printed word to dismiss British reports as fabrications and to circulate their own version of events.¹² Despite the elaborate machinery established by the British to counteract the rumours that were thus put into circulation,¹³ some were too closely attuned to the people's inner convictions to be entirely neutralised. These persisted, to add to the general restlessness. Two examples may be cited here. It was maintained in bazaar talk that the bombing of Cairo in the summer of 1917 was not enemy action but the work of a British aeroplane, its mission to intimidate Egyptians.¹⁴ This particular rumour gained wide credence because the full panoply of Martial Law made it appear that the British were holding down Egypt as an enemy country, rather than preserving its integrity as a friend. Then, at the end of the War, it was widely put about among the native population that Turkey had not really been defeated.¹⁵ This rumour

¹¹ Under the Proclamation of November 11th., 1914, any one in possession of a seditious document was required to surrender it to the military authorities or the nearest branch of the civilian authorities. The possession, introduction or distribution of seditious material would incur heavy penalties under Martial Law.

¹² Orientalism, p.154.

¹³ ibid., pp. 137 and 154.

¹⁴ History of the Transport Services of the E.R.F., p. 302.

¹⁵ Wingate to F.O., November 20th., 1918. (F.O. 371/3204.) Wingate regarded these rumours as being of particular interest 'as revealing the general political tendencies and speculations of the native intelligentsia and towns-people'.

may have originated either from a reluctance by Turkish sympathisers to recognize the British victory, or, as one commentator has suggested, from the apparent apathy with which the British celebrated their triumph.¹⁶ The weapon was employed effectively once again on the eve of the uprising in 1919, when nationalist agents were able to augment hostility towards Britain by insinuating that the livelihood of indigenous workers was being threatened. The troops undergoing retraining for civilian life in the E.S.R. and Government Workshops were presented as being prepared to take over positions permanently from native personnel, and it was said that many were to be resettled in Egypt.¹⁷

The years from 1914-1918 had been comparatively unmarked by open acts of opposition.¹⁸ Zaghlul's delegation to Wingate in November, 1918, however, was a public announcement that the war-time moratorium on overt nationalist activities was ended. Foreigners began to complain of the attitude of native officials,¹⁹ and by February there were demonstrations at the tomb of that indefatigable opponent of British rule, Mustafa Kamil.²⁰ Encouraged by hopes that their claims would be backed by the Bolsheviks,²¹ by President Wilson,²²

¹⁶ M. Travers Symons in Britain and Egypt, p.79.

¹⁷ Egyptian Gazette, March 21st., 1919; Times, March 24th., 1919. It is of interest to note that rumours that the Government would grant land in Egypt to suitable applicants were current in England before the War. (Rev. Willink to F.O., March 11th., 1914. (F.O.L.) There had also been some discussion of troops taking up land in Palestine after the War. (See W.O. 95/4372: Age, March 12th., 1919.)

¹⁸ See Chapter V.

¹⁹ Wingate to F.O., December 27th., 1918. (F.O. 371/3204)

²⁰ February 11th., 1919. (F.O. 371/3714.)

²¹ See Eastern Report No. LI, January 17th., 1918. (F.O.L.)

²² See Chapter V.

and by Spain, Italy and France,²³ the supporters of Zaghlul and his party²⁴ grew increasingly vociferous. The Egyptian Government, caught in an intolerable position between a hostile populace which persistently taunted it with accusations of collaboration,²⁵ and the pressures exerted upon it by the British, solved its problems by resigning.

To appoint a new cabinet without provoking further political unrest seemed an almost impossible task.²⁶ On March 3rd., Zaghlul told the Sultan that any such attempt would be met with violence.²⁷ The authorities chose to take this not as a simple statement of the situation but as a direct threat. Zaghlul and the other three members of his original delegation to Wingate were arrested, and on March 8th., a battleship left Alexandria taking them to exile in Malta. In the next few days many notable figures were arrested.²⁸ By Monday, March 10th., student demonstrations in Cairo had got out of hand and 'mobs of riff-raff' were roaming the streets, 'smashing

²³Wingate to F.O., November 20th., 1918. (F.O. 271/3204.)
For possible grounds on which these hopes could have been based see F.O. 371/3715 and 3717. See also 'Report from a friendly Egyptian' in F.O. 371/3716.

²⁴The Wafdists, so called from their wafd (delegation) of November 13th. (See History of the Islamic Peoples, p.460-461)

²⁵Because it had agreed to the Protectorate. For reasons why this was not necessarily as collaborationist as it appeared see Chapter V.

²⁶British refusal to take a definite line in resolving the ministerial crisis probably exacerbated the situation. (See Eastern Report No. C, (F.O.L.); Coles Pasha, letter, Times, March 25th., 1919; Cyril Goodman, letter, Times, March 27th., 1919.

²⁷History of the Islamic Peoples, p.460. Zaghlul's statement was read as a threat because its implication was that no government other than that of himself and his party could be appointed without an outbreak of violence.

²⁸Egyptian Gazette, March 11th., 1919.

trancars and street lamps, and stoning Europeans and British soldiers'.²⁹
 The disturbances continued unabated in the following days and the city
 seemed to be in open revolt.³⁰

For the authorities the immediate problem in bringing about a restoration of order was the choice of an agency which would carry out the task without provoking the very manifestations of disaffection it was intended to quell. There were three possibilities; the troops of the E.E.F., the Egyptian Army, or the Cairo Police. The E.E.F. were dismissed as unsuitable. It was established Army practice from the start of the Occupation to keep the troops away from the native population at all times of intense emotion. Usually this had been interpreted as meaning during religious festivals, and so it had been applied throughout the War years.³¹ The troops, as Christians, might by their presence on some Islamic occasion cause a violent demonstration by the Muslims. Wearing the British uniform, they could only provoke further disorder by appearing now where political feeling was running high. It was accordingly decided that troops should only be employed in disturbances with extreme caution and in case of the most urgent necessity.³² The sight of Egyptian soldiers would not have the same effect upon crowds of potential rioters, but there were other reasons why they were also unsuitable for enforcing law and order. In 1914 the Egyptian Army had been eager to fight beside the British

²⁹ Egyptian Service, p. 192.

³⁰ al-Ahram, March 11th-14th., 1919.

³¹ See, for example, Aitken, letter, December 8th., 1914; Champion, diary, October 10th., 1915. Punishments for British subjects who interfered with Islam were set out in 'Egypt, Order in Council, February 16th., 1915.' (F.O.371/2353.)

³² W.O. 95/4402.

in defence of their country, and even officers on the retired list had volunteered for service.³³ This opportunity had not been given them, however, and although they had served along the Canal and with brilliance in operations at Darfur and in the Sudan,³⁴ they had been denied full participation in the War on a footing comparable to that of the other Allied combatants. They had fulfilled all that they had been called upon to perform with competence and their record was marred only by a few inter-unit brawls,³⁵ so they were extremely sensitive that their full services had been rejected.³⁶ Resentment on this score reinforced the natural sympathy which, as patriots, they felt for demonstrators in the cause of national independence. They could not be expected to fire upon their fellow-countrymen if disturbances became serious enough to warrant armed intervention.³⁷ There remained the police. They were well-officered, and, despite

³³ Egyptian Mail, October 6th., 1914.

³⁴ G.O.C., Egypt to C.I.G.S., W.O., May 24th., 1917. (F.O. 371/2932.)

³⁵ For example, see entry for August 17th., 1915 in W.O. 95/4402. Some indication of the Australian assessment of the loyalty of the Egyptian Army during the War may be found in the War Diary of the 3rd. L.H. Bde, which recorded (January 30th., 1916) a 'rising of the Egyptian Army Reserve in Cairo'. (W.O. 95/4542) In fact the incident was merely some commonplace unruliness by reservists at the Camel Corps encampment. (W.O. 95/4543.)

³⁶ The War Office cited 'administrative problems' as their reason for not making full use of the Egyptian Army, (Times, July 26th., 1917.) but inevitably it seemed as though their decision was casting doubts upon the trustworthiness of the Egyptian force.

³⁷ It is interesting to note that as the revolt progressed, Egyptian troops were entrusted with the evacuation of Europeans to safety in areas where British troops could not be used because of the 'bitter feeling' of the population against them. (Cheetham to F.O., Tm. 433, March 25th., 1919. (F.O. 371/3714.))

periodic affronts to their standing by troops who refused to accept their authority, their morale was high.³⁸ There was a leaven of Sudanese troopers in their ranks whose loyalty was not compromised by a sense of identification with the aspirations of demonstrators. On the other hand they did not excite the instant hostility of the masses in the same way as British troops. Though they might occasionally be deliberately inefficient in the search for arms or incriminating documents,³⁹ they could be trusted to handle a tense situation in a crowded city street with considerable skill. Using simple techniques of crowd control⁴⁰ and without resort to fire arms, they were the safest means of dispersing an ugly mob.

In the week which followed the deportation of the Pashas Cairo stood in great need of a force to restore the peace. Rowdy crowds collected in the space of a few minutes, to scatter just as quickly when the police appeared.⁴¹ In the feverish atmosphere engendered by large numbers moving in disorganised and loudly shouting mobs, the representatives of the authorities needed to practise the strictest self-discipline if bloodshed was to be avoided.⁴² On March 14th., there was an exchange of shots in a clash between some soldiers and Egyptians,⁴³ and while the police still continued to take the leading

³⁸For defiance of the police, see Journal du Caire, August 24th., 1915. Russell Pasha's book, Egyptian Service, gives the fullest description of the Cairo Police at this period.

³⁹W.O. 95/4468.

⁴⁰The New Spirit in Egypt, p. 122-123.

⁴¹W.O. 95/4468.

⁴²al-Ahram, March 15th., 1919.

⁴³ibid.

role in controlling demonstrations and dispersing crowds with their truncheons,⁴⁴ British and Australian troops armed with rifles were now employed in guarding strategic road junctions and other trouble spots.⁴⁵ Troops were ordered to proceed in the city only in armed parties,⁴⁶ and encounters between the military and the hostile populace in the first ten days of serious rioting resulted in seventeen deaths.⁴⁷

The situation demanded the delicacy of handling needed to deactivate a bomb. Even though this was recognized, however, it was not always possible to implement. The whole city seemed on the march, not only students, activists and rowdies, but as national fervour overcame years of social conditioning, upper-class Egyptian ladies as well.⁴⁸ As the streets filled with enthusiasts, the chances that even a peaceful demonstration might develop into a violent incident because soldiers could not be trusted not to interfere, were high.⁴⁹ Australian troops seem to have been particularly unaware of the explosiveness of the situation, and dangerously provocative in their behaviour. On March 17th., Russell Pasha of the Cairo Police narrowly averted disaster.⁵⁰ Confronted by a procession of students from the ancient Muslim university of al-Azhar, peaceable, but ready, if opposed, 'to lose all discipline, and turn

⁴⁴ ibid., March 16th., 1919.

⁴⁵ al-Ahram, March 16th., 1919.

⁴⁶ War Diary, Gen. Staff, A. Mt'd. Div., March 15th., 1919. (W.O.95/4551)

⁴⁷ Advertiser, March 21st., 1919.

⁴⁸ al-Ahram, March 21st., 1919.

⁴⁹ Such an incident is described by Cheetham, Tqn.406, March 18th., 1919. (F.O.371/3714.)

⁵⁰ Egyptian Service, p.196.

into a hysterical mob, capable of anything',⁵¹ he obtained permission from Military Headquarters to handle them in his own way. Accompanied by the sheikhs from al-Azhar, he led the procession from outside the Abdin Palace where they had gathered, to demonstrate noisily, but non-violently in front of the foreign legations. Just as all seemed to be going well, he saw to his horror, a handful of Australians coming down a side street. 'They were in shirts and shorts and were all carrying hockey sticks and obviously out for trouble'. As he tried to head them off he ran into a British Tommy, who, intent on some private revenge, was levelling a rifle at the crowd. Russell deflected his aim handed him over to the Australians and took care of them by promising them some 'useful street fighting' if they met him later in the Esbekieh.⁵² That this group were armed with hockey sticks seems typical of the levity with which the Australians were approaching the highly tense situation in Cairo at this time. A British civilian saw two of them in the bazaar area of the Muski at the height of the unrest 'acting as bait' while their friends lay in wait for any group of Egyptians so unwary as to rise.⁵³ It seems that the low opinion they held of the Egyptians prevented them from taking the troubles seriously. Later, General Ryrie wrote:-

Some of our men were killed through being careless and through the contempt which they have for the Gyppo, two or three Australians with sticks would attack a

⁵¹ ibid., p.197.

⁵² ibid.

⁵³ Prof. Prescott (who was working in Egypt as an agricultural scientist). Interview, Adelaide, 1975.

mob of some hundreds of rioters. There was a procession of about 20,000 marched through Cairo, and there were 4 Australians standing in the middle of the street talking, they never moved and the procession had to march around them⁵⁴

Meanwhile the contagion of violence was spreading outwards from the capital, which was entrenched and barricaded as for civil war.⁵⁵ On Tuesday, March 11th., revolutionary emissaries came from al-Ashar to the Government farm at Bahtim some eight miles from the centre of the city across the Ismailiya Canal. Though they did not succeed in inciting the farm employees and local inhabitants to attack the agricultural installations, their agitation did lead to the sacking of the post office at al-Mostared on the following Saturday,⁵⁶ and a general outbreak of rioting in the suburb of Shubra. Elsewhere, however, unrest took a more serious form, and by March 17th., all rail and telegraphic links between Cairo and the rest of Egypt had been severed. If student agitators had met with little success at Bahtim, on March 18th., at Deirut, south of Minia, their inflammatory speeches were grimly proved to have been effectual. A disorderly crowd, thrown into a frenzy by accounts of the British shooting school-boys in Cairo, fell upon and murdered a group of soldiers, one of them an Australian, who were travelling towards safety aboard a train. The account of the affair produced later for official files is filled with emotional revulsion:-

⁵⁴ March 29th., 1919.

⁵⁵ Egyptian Service, p.198.

⁵⁶ Prof. Prescott, interview.

In this final abominable scene the bodies were stripped, plundered and exposed to every violence and indignity, while the mob laughed, cried and screamed with delight. It seems to have been an indescribable orgy, almost beyond telling ...⁵⁷

As news of this gory incident, further embellished by rumour, seeped through, the attitude of the troops hardened into a violent hatred of all Egyptians. Old atavistic fears, traditional beliefs about the bestial degradations the dark races practised on their foes, and the almost superstitious concern for the bodies of their own dead, which the Australians in particular exhibited, were worked upon by stories of the murderers drinking the blood of their victims, severing their limbs, defiling their bodies with filth and spital, and destroying the corpses in the furnace of the very engine the slaughtered men had hoped would draw them to safety.⁵⁸ The authorities went in constant anxiety that the soldiers, infuriated by the report of these murders and the rising list of military casualties,⁵⁹ might 'set the town ablaze'⁶⁰ by starting a riot. Australian Headquarters found it necessary to issue a most definite order to its own personnel against taking part in, or even approaching, any disturbance.⁶¹

⁵⁷ W.O. 95/4402. The Australian was Pte. Redding, No. 18930, of the A.A.M.C.

⁵⁸ W.O. 95/4402.

⁵⁹ F.O. 371/3715.

⁶⁰ Egyptian Service, p. 196.

⁶¹ A.W.M.F. 181/12 423.

The murders at Deirut and the continuing hostile stance of the native population made it seem that the general émeute against Europeans which had been feared ever since the Occupation, was now at last about to become a reality. The festival of Shem-el - Nessim falling towards the end of March, appeared to offer a natural occasion for such an outbreak. Contingency plans were set up for the defence of European residents in the event of trouble, and those in exposed or isolated positions were brought to a place of safety. Australians responded whole-heartedly to the thought that they now had the positive task of protecting English women and children.⁶² Senior Australian officers even arranged a little out-manceuvring of the British to satisfy themselves that adequate protection was being offered where it was most needed. Australian Headquarters managed to have a Hospital Rest camp established on 'Gezireh Island', a sound defensive position, and there some three hundred convalescents were equipped with arms.

...this force was organised as a defence rallying point and all British women in Cairo were quietly informed. A suggestion was made that these convalescents be sent away from Cairo on duty. Our H.Q. evaded this by inducing the Medical Authorities to refuse to discharge these men from Hospital supervision.⁶³

⁶² Advertiser, April 23rd., 1919.

Their determination to spare no effort in ensuring the safety of English womanhood was probably increased by the general acceptance of certain rumours, current at this time, concerning outrages committed upon white women. (A 'D' notice was issued to the Press Bureau concerning such rumours on April 16th., 1919.)

⁶³ Narrative of Operations...1919, p.20.

On the whole, however, civilians in the area were not molested. Those rescued from Bahtin, for example, by a mixed Australian and British patrol complete with Ford cars and machine guns, had been in no danger from the local inhabitants, who expressed hurt that the higher authorities should have thought the Europeans in any way menaced. (The locals had actually been relying on their restraint toward the Government farm and its administrators as an insurance against subsequent British reprisals.⁶⁴ It was, moreover, reported generally elsewhere that, though the hatred of the military presence and the British uniform was intense, it did not extend to ordinary civilian residents.⁶⁵ The so-called 'Shem-el-Nessim' contingency plan' had in fact, been redundant, but the measures of military preparation, 'real or reported', which its implementation entailed, resulted in considerable unease among the native population and an intensification of feeling against the military who were seen as planning some indiscriminate act of vigorous repression.⁶⁶ At the same time the precautionary nature of the plan had tended to confirm the troops in their view of the Egyptians as being essentially treacherous and murderous. Ill-will was thus increased on both sides, and in the ensuing state of tension it was found necessary to issue orders to Australians of all ranks, both officers and men, that their habit of hurling abuse at all Egyptians, regardless of class, served only to foment unrest further, and must be replaced by a dis-

⁶⁴ Prof. Prescott, interview.

⁶⁵ 'Friendly Egyptian' to F.O. (F.O. 371/3716.)

⁶⁶ F.O. 371/3717.

-play of dignity and self-control designed to forestal anger.⁶⁷

On March 25th., General Allenby arrived in Cairo. His victories in Palestine had both enhanced his personal prestige and proved his military efficiency.⁶⁸ In the threatening situation now existing in Egypt, where smouldering resentment flared up in periodic outbursts of violence, the respect he commanded by his achievements might have some useful effect in restraining dissidents, while his past record was an assurance to the British Government that it could rely upon him to act with the decision and authority the circumstances required. His instructions were to make the maintenance of the Protectorate his prime concern.⁶⁹ This policy demanded the speedy containment of the revolt, and accordingly, upon his arrival, Allenby issued a proclamation designed to calm the populace by a judicious combination of hints that their grievances would be examined and threats of stern reprisals against wrong-doers.⁷⁰

It was a skilful move. Although Egyptians were still fundamentally united in their desire for national independence, the more conservative elements in the population, and those who desired change only through constitutional and peaceful means had been appalled

⁶⁷ Confidential Memorandum, No. 29., March 20th., 1919. A.W.M.F. 183/17 423.

⁶⁸ For the effect upon Egypt of Allenby's victories in Palestine see Wingate to F.O. Tyn. No. 1184, November 11th., 1917. (Eastern Report No. XLII, November 16th., 1917. (F.O.L.)

⁶⁹ History of the Islamic Peoples, p. 461.

⁷⁰ It was announced at this time that the Military Authorities would implement a policy of assigning collective responsibility for all dislocations of rail and telegraphic links to residents of the area in which they occurred.

by the violence and blood-shed of the past weeks. They desired the restoration of order as much as the British and were prepared to endorse Allenby insofar as his actions might curb looting and attacks on persons or property which they regarded as 'against all laws, human and divine'.⁷¹ The General had gained the support of an important and influential group. His success, however, had little immediate effect in restoring tranquility to the streets of Cairo. The nature of the revolt was changing. In the prevailing atmosphere of excitement and disorder which had driven prominent Egyptians to turn back towards the British as the defenders of orderly society, sectarian quarrels were rekindled, and groups turned to pursue private grudges far removed from the original nationalist objectives. Unpopular religious minorities---the Armenians and the Jews---came under repeated attack,⁷² while a Greek and a British railway official who had incurred Egyptian hatred in the past were both murdered.⁷³ Some British property was pillaged and destroyed,⁷⁴ but not apparently as part of a systematic assault on foreign holdings, the sporadic nature of the depredations suggesting they were acts of individual revenge against specific individuals or institutions, or the random operations of common criminals taking advantage of the general disorganisation. Australian troops were again involved in incidents

⁷¹ Egyptian Gazette, March 28th., 1919.

⁷² W.O. 95/4698; A.W.M.F. 183/12 423. Eastern Report No. CIV, (F.O.L.) See also Egyptian Service, p.201.

⁷³ Greeks as a nationality tended to be unpopular with Egyptians because so many of them operated as loan sharks. English railway officials were also not popular. In the past the 'English heads of the railways (had been) chased and pelted by the workmen, maddened by the unfair treatment they were receiving from their chiefs'. (H.S. Warwick to Sir W. Langley, May 1916. (F.O. 371/2666.))

⁷⁴ Throughout this period the violence in Cairo was said to be the worst in the country. (These details from materials in A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.)

with native Egyptians, but the lightheartedness with which the soldiers had approached crowds at the start of the revolt was gone. The crowds, too, were more grimly purposeful in their opposition and in their hatred of the Army. On three separate occasions on April 4th., Australian patrols were forced to open fire to extricate themselves from dangerous situations. The first of these arose before noon when an Australian soldier seemingly thoughtlessly discharged his revolver in Abdin Square where a crowd of demonstrators had gathered. It is not recorded that his action was in response to any threatening gesture from the Egyptians, but it resulted in their behaviour then becoming so menacing that the patrol was forced to resort to the use of fire arms before it could withdraw.⁷⁵ At 1330 hours (possibly as a consequence of this first confrontation?) another patrol also found itself surrounded and shot its way out.⁷⁶ The third incident which also occurred about mid-day, does not seem to have had any connection with the other two. A group of Australians, accompanied by light cars, moved in to quell an anti-Armenian riot. When the rioters turned and stoned them, the soldiers opened fire to disperse the mob.⁷⁷ The dangers of troops circulating the city 'on their legitimate affairs or on leave', and carrying arms as they were obliged by their orders to do,⁷⁸ were underlined by the events of the

⁷⁵ W.O. 95/4688; Aust. Mtd. Div., I.S., No. 2, April 5th., 1919. (A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.)

⁷⁶ A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.

⁷⁷ Ibid.; See also W.O. 95/4688.

⁷⁸ W.O. 95/4551., for the order always to carry arms. For the quotation see Egyptian Service, p.198.

day. Both Military and civil authorities were awake to those dangers, and accordingly all troops were confined to barracks until further notice to avoid exciting more disturbances.⁷⁹

Allenby now made a bold stroke, by announcing on April 7th., that the deported leaders were to be released. "Perhaps more than any other political or military act this one saved Egypt for Britain for years to come"⁸⁰ for by it he removed the chief affront to the sensibilities of those who were prepared to 'negotiate the British out of Egypt', and conciliated Egyptians of moderate opinion who were already uncomfortably aware of how displays of lawlessness were damaging their cause internationally.⁸¹ Reaction to his Proclamation was immediate and joyous. Large crowds moved through the streets of Cairo, raising cries of 'Liberty...Independence...Egypt' and even, occasionally, 'Vive l'Angleterre' and it was noticed that the people now appeared to be perfectly good humoured and well-disposed towards the troops.⁸² This pleasant state of affairs was brought to an end by the troops themselves. The exuberance of the Egyptian celebration had a provocative quality, especially to men who felt that the murders of the past month should be brought home to the entire guilty nation. The Australian author, Hector Dinning, who was an officer in the Light Horse, asserts that in their demonstrations of rejoicing the Egyptians were really saying 'Look at

⁷⁹ April 5th., 1919, W.O. 95/4468; W.O. 95/4552. As will be seen, the troops were back in the streets of Cairo by April 7th.,

⁸⁰ Cairo, p. 225.

⁸¹ Egyptian Gazette, April 16th., 1919.

⁸² Summary of Events in Egypt, No. 23. (A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.); I.S., April 16th., 1919. (W.O. 95/4551.)

our numbers and see what we could do if you don't give us all we ask',⁸³ and the evidence would suggest that the majority of British and Australian troops were in agreement that the demonstrations constituted a derisive gesture against British authority.⁸⁴ As the day advanced the troops formed counter-demonstrations of their own, and when one such party of British troops encountered a native procession there was an exchange of fire resulting in a number of Egyptian casualties.⁸⁵ Al-Ahali reported later that the confrontation had developed because of the use by the Egyptians of their old national flag. Indistinguishable from the Turkish flag, this standard had provoked still further troops who had fought against the Turks at the Dardanelles, in Syria and Palestine.⁸⁶ Australian and British soldiers were involved together in an attempt to remove this flag by force, and had come into conflict with certain Egyptian cadets who were taking part in the procession.⁸⁷ The temporary improvement in the

⁸³ Nile to Aleppo, p. 266.

⁸⁴ Confidential Document from Lt.-Col., Gen. Staff, on behalf of the G.O.C., Cairo District, April 9th., 1919. (A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.)

⁸⁵ Report from an Egyptian Army Officer in Summary of Events in Egypt, No.23. (See above.)

⁸⁶ April 10th., 1919.

⁸⁷ W.O. 95/4451; Summary of Events in Egypt, No. 24. (A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.)

Note: As this point the dating of events in the various sources consulted becomes confused. I have assumed the dating to be correct as given in my account, and that there was one major clash near the Babekieh Gardens on April 7th., and not, as it appears if the dating in all sources is assumed to be correct, two such incidents on April 7th., and 8th. The descriptions tally so exactly as to make it almost certain that they refer to the same event, the most noteworthy among a number of minor incidents involving trouble over the Turkish flag. The confusion, I think, arises from the practice of gathering individual reports made at various times within one Intelligence Summary. This summary is usually timed and dated very precisely (e.g. No.24.---0930 hrs., 8.4.19 to 0930 hrs., 9.4.19), and the reports within it are similarly exactly recorded (e.g. Cairo. 0915 hrs., 8.4.19.) The time and date refer, however, to the compilation of the report, rather than to the events described within it. A similar potential source of confusion can be found in the War Office files where orders appear under the date they were issued rather than the date on which they came into force. Thus an order confining troops to barracks on April 9th., appears as an entry under April 8th. (W.O. 95/4688.) It will be seen that I have assumed that Russell Pasha, despite his obvious pre-occupations, dated his letters accurately.

temper of the Egyptian populace towards the troops was violently reversed. One army lorry was attacked twice in that same evening, and there were reports of brawls with Australians in the Babekiah Gardens, of British soldiers beaten to death in the Abdin Square, and of a man of the Irish Rifles murdered in the Shari'a Mahomet Ali.⁸⁸ The next day Tommies and Diggers were picking fights with Egyptian soldiers who were now positively lined up with their fellow Countrymen. In one fracas which seems to have developed into a regular street battle, two men of the Mounted Troop of the Cairo Police who had been called in to restore order were killed by stray bullets, and a member of the Fire Brigade was wounded. Twice that night there were 'bad scraps caused by infuriated Australians', in the course of which some eight or ten Egyptians were killed.⁸⁹ When two 'colonials' were attacked passing through Shubra by car, a band of fifteen hundred Australians and New Zealanders marched against the suburb armed with sticks to take their revenge.⁹⁰ '...If Cairo was looking for a fight, they were ready to give it.'⁹¹

The Army responded by once more stopping all leave to troops and confining them to quarters,⁹² away from the crowds who remained comparatively orderly if no soldiers were in sight.⁹³ The troops were

⁸⁸ Situation Report, No. 17 (A.W.M.F. 183/12 423)

⁸⁹ For these incidents see Russell Pasha, letter to his father, April 9th., 1919, in Egyptian Service, p.201.

⁹⁰ Nile to Aleppo, p.268-269.

⁹¹ ibid. p.268.

⁹² W.O. 95/4468; W.O. 95/4552; Circular Memorandum 142, (C3A 4078. (A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.)

⁹³ Egyptian Service, Chapter 15, passim.

strictly forbidden to carry flags (Union Jacks) and it was thought advisable for Commanding Officers to explain the political situation to all N.C.O's and men. Stress was laid on the fact that Egyptians had been permitted to show their pleasure at the release of their leaders by organising processions 'in exactly the same way as people in England would celebrate any political success'. The counter-measures in which soldiers had ignorantly indulged were to blame for the subsequent loss of life on both sides.⁹⁴ All unit commanders were called upon to impress upon their men that the use of the Turkish flag, which was the only Egyptian flag the people possessed, was a symbol of rejoicing not a deliberate provocation.⁹⁵ Over the next week leave was granted or denied as the day-to-day situation seemed to warrant,⁹⁶ while officers were required to be present with their men at all times that they were confined to quarters, to ensure that the order was properly enforced.⁹⁷

In the streets the Egyptians continued to celebrate, and under the effect of the universal excitement,⁹⁸ 'women of the less reputable type', the twilight creatures of the Wagh-el-Birket, were seen abroad as never before.⁹⁹ It was reported that:-

⁹⁴ Confidential Document, April 9th., 1919. (A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.) Union Jacks had been featured prominently in the troops' counter-demonstrations. (Nile to Aleppo, p.266.)

⁹⁵ Circular Memorandum 142, CEA 4078. (A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.)

⁹⁶ W.O. 95/4402; W.O. 95/4552.

⁹⁷ Order, April 9th., 1919. (W.O. 95/4468.)

⁹⁸ The Age likened it to Mafeking Night. (April 17th., 1919.)

⁹⁹ Egyptian Gazette, April 18th., 1919.

the ladies of the Wazza paraded on carts in their gauds and chemises, with music and the khan-khan.¹⁰⁰

The permission to hold processions was withdrawn, but the Cairenes evaded the prohibition by holding grandiose public funerals for those who had been killed in the earlier clashes with the troops. Hector Dinning wrote:-

(They) made processions of them---bearing flags, shouting their slogans and making the funeral the vehicle of quite open propoganda. It was hard to stop this: and it was not stopped until all the victims had been buried.¹⁰¹

On April 9th., Rushdi Pasha and his government resumed the office they had earlier laid down, and there was an immediate worsening of the situation.¹⁰² To the general unruliness with which the Egyptians had observed the triumph of the Pashas' release were added more serious manifestations of discontent that Zaghlul was not yet permitted to return to Egypt and that the 'collaborationist' government had been re-installed. Mobs appeared on the streets armed with clubs and other ready-made weapons,¹⁰³ trees were torn up and windows broken.¹⁰⁴ Strikes, a weapon which Wafdist supporters had already employed on a smaller scale, now gripped the city. The doors of

¹⁰⁰ Nile to Aleppo, p.266.

¹⁰¹ ibid. p 267.

¹⁰² History of the Islamic Peoples, p.461.

¹⁰³ Summary of Events in Egypt, No. 25. (A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.)

¹⁰⁴ Nile to Aleppo, p. 265.

government offices were picketed, and such employees as were not kept away by political commitment or by intimidation through anonymous letters, were forcibly prevented from entering.¹⁰⁵ Black-legs in a strike of locomotive workers were threatened with violence, while tram drivers who refused to stop work were beaten up or blinded by vitriol throwers.¹⁰⁶ Seen as a politically motivated general strike of Government and public utility workers aimed at paralysing the British administration, these manifestations were not sufficiently consistent to be entirely successful. The use of troops to prevent the wide-spread intimidation of workers, and an ultimatum from Allenby that all who did not return to work would be regarded as having resigned, had a partial success in controlling the situation.¹⁰⁷ Although as late as April 18th., rail services from Meascar Station to the capital were still interrupted because of unrest among the native officials along the line,¹⁰⁸ by that time the syces of the Remount Depot at Zeitoun were returning to work,¹⁰⁹ and among tram-way operatives and the public scavengers political considerations were yielding to more narrowly economic pressures.¹¹⁰

Now two events checked the progress of the revolt. On April 20th., Woodrow Wilson announced that the United States would recognise the British Protectorate, thereby depriving the nationalists of what they had regarded as their chief international support. Two

¹⁰⁵ ibid. p. 267.

¹⁰⁶ ibid.; See also materials on Egyptian Revolutionary Disturbances in A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.

¹⁰⁷ Mem. to Aleppo, p.267.

¹⁰⁸ W.O. 95/4552.

¹⁰⁹ Summary of Events in Egypt, No. 30 (A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.)

¹¹⁰ ibid.

days later Allenby threatened the country with the most rigorous application of Martial Law.¹¹¹ Few gestures could have been more damaging to nationalist morale than this seeming renegeing of the American President, of whose sympathetic assistance many hopes had been entertained,¹¹² and even if Martial Law were, as some Egyptians asserted, 'the weapon of hopelessly defied governments', where it could not coerce support, it could crush opposition.¹¹³

The revolt began to collapse.

Gradually

the streets of Cairo became safe.

Isolated murders ceased... collisions

with troops were no more.¹¹⁴

By May the situation in the city appeared to be well in hand, and at the end of the month troops assisting the Civil Police in raids on suspected cafés, etc., were able to lay aside their rifles and bayonets in favour of sticks and entrenching tool handles.¹¹⁵ A few Italians who turned out to demonstrate against President Wilson's Adriatic Note were vociferously applauded by Egyptian spectators,¹¹⁶ but there were no longer any massed processions of emotional patriots to disturb the peace. In this state of comparative calm, the Australian troops were

¹¹¹ History of the Islamic Peoples, p.461.

¹¹² Eastern Report No. CXII, (F.O.L.); Cairo, p.226.

¹¹³ al-Afkar, quoted in Egyptian Gazette, August 6th., 1917 in connection with the break-down of public security in the Behera.

¹¹⁴ Nile to Aleppo, p.267.

¹¹⁵ May 30th., 1919. (W.O. 95/4468.)

¹¹⁶ Aust. Med. Div., I.S., May 6th., 1919.
 'The Italian shouts of "Viva Fiume", were interpreted as "Vive Fayum", but there was also informed sympathy for the Italians who were considered to have been betrayed by the Allies. (Allenby to Curzon, July 12th., 1919. (F.O. 371/3727.)

neither so inflamed nor so inflammatory as in the preceding two months, and they fell back into their old unruly, but not potentially dangerous habits. They had always been ready to fight anybody, now the French consul complained that one of his nationals had been assaulted by Australians.¹¹⁷ Along their old battleground, the Massa, offences multiplied until increased picquets, composed only of reliable men (those with bad records being carefully excluded), were posted to prevent unauthorised access.¹¹⁸ As the date of their deferred embarkation drew nearer, Australians in Cairo resolved to make the most of their remaining time. 'Cairo', wrote a Light Horse Sergeant, 'Lived every minute to its fullest, and went round all the old haunts again'.¹¹⁹ Cairo had provided many Australians with a comprehensive introduction to life. As they returned home, it would not be the revolutionary Cairo that they would choose to remember, although it had brought an unlooked-for death to comrades who had survived the perils of war.¹²⁰

In conclusion, it remains to assess the particular role of the Australians in the events which occurred in the Egyptian capital during the uprising of 1919. There was never any doubt that Britain could, whenever she wished, crush the rebellion by the might of her military presence. The nationalist leadership, if not all their followers, were perfectly aware of this fact, and emphasised it in the

¹¹⁷ May 1st. and 4th., 1919. (W.O. 95/4552.)

¹¹⁸ Bde. Maj. to O.C. 10th. L.H.R. (A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.)

¹¹⁹ King, 'Memoirs of a Light Horseman', June 17th., 1919.

¹²⁰ Nile to Aleppo, p. 264.

statements made to the foreign press.¹²¹ Nationalists pinned their hopes of gaining autonomy not on the success of arms they did not possess, but on the sense of justice of the British electorate and the World Powers, if confronted by wide-spread manifestations of the wishes of the Egyptian people. There was no concerted effort to remove the physical presence of the British by force, for this could only have been doomed to failure, and in any case most prominent patriots abhorred violence,¹²² and many must have feared the consequences of a full display of British wrath. It was in Britain's interests to restore order as quickly as possible, both to prove the efficiency of her administration in the peaceable conduct of the affairs of the country, and to remove the issue of Egyptian independence from the focus of world attention. In a context where international opinion was ready, in the main, to recognise the British Protectorate, a too blatant use of superior strength in quelling the rebellion would not have further validated the status quo, or improved the British title, but would rather have provided propaganda for the regime's opponents, and created obstacles for the successful conciliation of supporters in the future. A delicate balance had therefore to be maintained between insufficient firmness, and an excessive show of force. In the first case there was danger that the situation might degenerate into anarchy as lawless elements, taking advantage of the authorities' embarrassment, indulged in hooliganism

¹²¹ See, for example, A.E. Sayed in La Vérité, Paris, March 23rd., 1919.

The French Socialist press was consistently helpful in providing Egyptians with an outlet for the dissemination of information relating to their cause.

¹²² Cairo, p.226.

and looting. The use of excessive force, on the other hand, would both arouse external criticism and remove all hope of controlling the country in the future without the threat of arms. Activities of a criminal type, such as attacks upon individuals or the sacking of property had to be suppressed, but demonstrations and similar expressions of a political nature could be indulged, insofar as they did not hinder the administration, nor provide the occasion for more violent outbursts.

The temporary restoration of order in Cairo¹²³ by May 1919, was not brought about by the military. The revolt had lost momentum for the reasons indicated above, and not because opposition to the British regime had been thoroughly quelled. During the disturbances, the Army had been of less practical use in containing riots than had the City Police, and the presence of the troops had often served only to produce a deterioration in the situation. Though tension had been constant throughout the revolt, actual violence had been sporadic, and often associated with the appearance of Army personnel.¹²⁴ Disturbances had frequently been provoked by troops, either because they were seen as the instruments of an unwanted rule, or because they had themselves deliberately performed acts of outright provocation. Troops from all units might be involved in these disturbances. Antagonism towards the Egyptians was universal throughout the E.E.F. A British soldier observed:-

¹²³ The struggle against Britain was soon to be resumed. (See Cairo, p.266 ff.)

¹²⁴ The disjointed progress of the revolt is indicated by the periodic curtailment and restoration of leave to the troops. (W.O. 95/4552)

...if our chaps could only get the order they would almost wipe them out, for they hated them before the trouble, so you may get an idea as to what they think of them now they have been the cause of stopping the demob.¹²⁵

The desire to avenge wounded comrades was common to all, and troops who had seen service were beginning to exhibit signs of the psychological strain imposed by the conduct of war. Emotionally, they were in an extremely volatile state,¹²⁶ and considerations of official policy were unlikely to restrain their actions. Almost any one of them was capable of creating an incident should his feelings of bitterness and hostility get the upper hand in a public place.

It would seem, however, that Australian troops were involved in a disproportionately high percentage of the clashes that took place between the military and native civilians.¹²⁷ A number of reasons for this may be adduced. Egyptians may have been more inclined to attack Australians, either because they were more provocative¹²⁸ or, as some Australians believed themselves, because they were the most feared section of the British force, and their elimination was a matter of tactical necessity to would-be insurgents.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ W. Barron, undated entry in a diary covering the events of 1919. (I.W.N.)

¹²⁶ W.O. 95/4742.

¹²⁷ Australians were present to the strength of one regiment, though there were, in addition various convalescents, and when communications were not disrupted, nor disturbances too acute, numbers would come into Cairo on leave. (I have encountered some difficulty in establishing from the records which Light Horse Regiment was stationed in Cairo at this time, but by a process of elimination, I believe it to have been the 3rd. L.H.R.)

¹²⁸ See Rylie's letter in this Chapter. See also Chapter V for the role played by Australian troops in stirring up discontent in the cities before the revolt.

¹²⁹ Nile to Aleppo, p.268.

Secondly, though all troops were unmindful of political considerations and inclined to take the law into their own hands,¹³⁰ the Australians were particularly so. Their tendency to place personal revenge before military orders had already been demonstrated in Palestine.¹³¹ In Cairo they continued to exact retribution 'in the manner of a primitive tribe', inclining to a seven-fold retaliation as justly reflecting their superiority over the Egyptians.¹³² Not only the men, but the officers, regarded British attempts to deal with the situation with finesse as a sign of weakness,¹³³ and no concern for the future government of Egypt restrained them from imposing punitive measures in accord with their own notions of self-respect.¹³⁴ The inevitable conclusion is that in the restoration of order in Cairo in 1919, Australian troops played a negative rather than a positive role.

¹³⁰ Confidential Document, April 9th., 1919. (A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.)

¹³¹ See Chapter IV. The Surafand Incident is particularly significant.

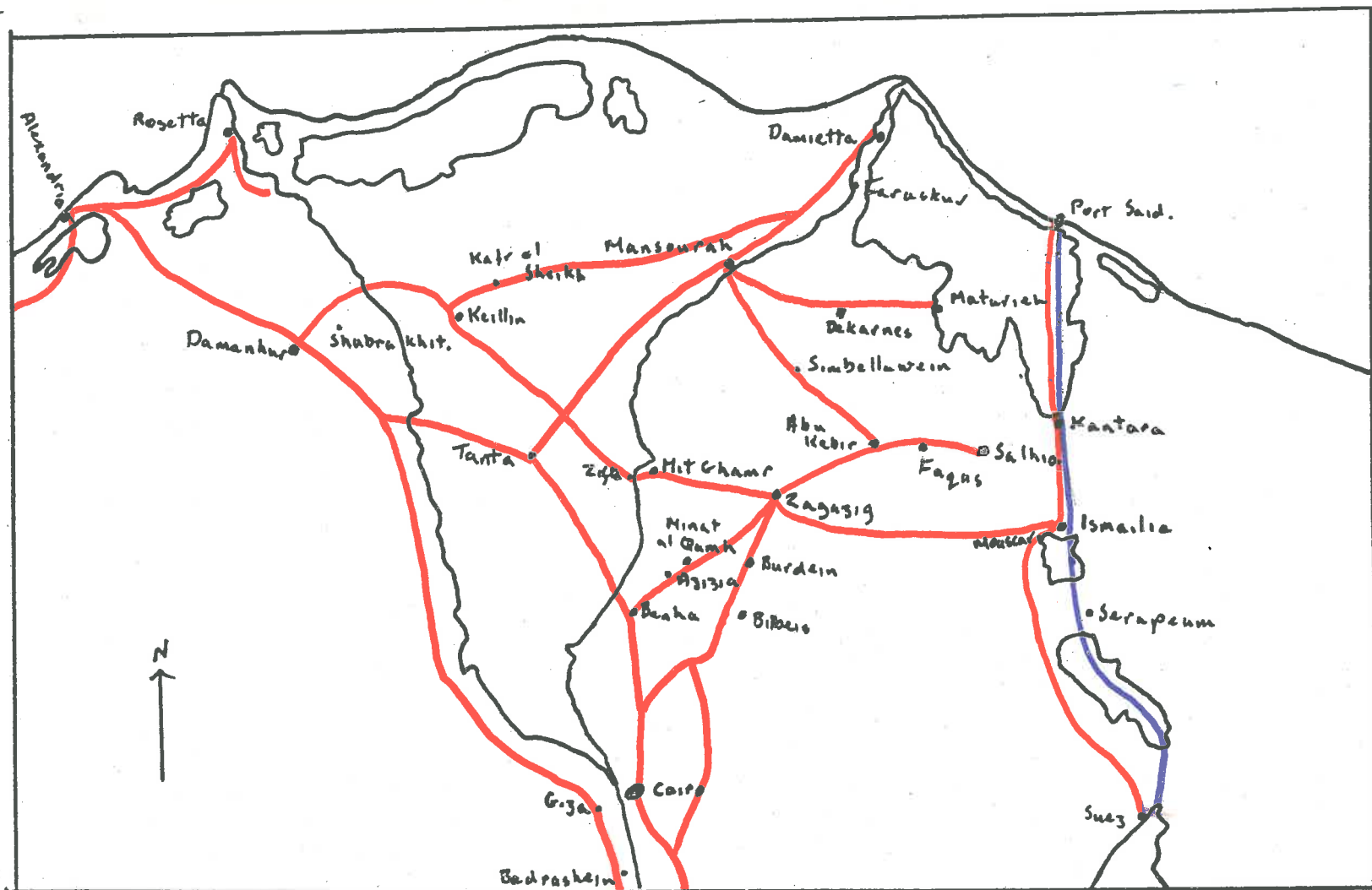
¹³² Nile to Aleppo, p.269.

¹³³ See Dinning's attitude throughout his description of the revolt in Nile to Aleppo.

See also Narrative of Operations...1919, p.24-25.

¹³⁴ Nile to Aleppo, p.269.

MAP TO ILLUSTRATE LIGHT HORSE OPERATIONS IN THE NILE DELTA 1919



0 30 60
Scale in Miles

Key
— Railways.
— Suez Canal.

Based on Narrative of Operations of 3rd L.H. Bde., p.2.

CHAPTER VIITHE ROLE OF AUSTRALIAN TROOPS IN THE TASK OF RURAL PACIFICATION. AN ACCOUNT OF LIGHT HORSE ACTIVITIES IN THE EGYPTIAN COUNTRYSIDE, 1919.Synopsis

Nature of the rural revolt---deployment of Light Horse; the nature of the terrain---acts of sabotage on the railways---dangers of indiscriminate and excessive bloodshed---methods of preventing attacks on the railway net-work---restoring order---the work of mobile columns and the Military Courts---problems associated with the use of troops to contain disturbances and restore order---repair work on the railway lines---treatment of effendis---state of Delta by April---show of friendliness towards troops---hidden hostility---lack of genuine co-operation from oudehs---fears of murderous attacks upon troops---displays of strength---return to normalcy---the Army administers the Delta---criticisms of patrols and Military Courts---propaganda campaign---arms round up---repatriation of Australian troops---their role assessed; as a military exercise; for its long-term political effects.

In 1919, though revolutionary disturbances and disorder were wide-spread throughout rural Egypt, there was no regular and united rebellion. After the initial assault on communications, where there was the appearance of organised planning,¹ the outbreaks and manifestations of discontent were largely unco-ordinated. Some districts were in a state of general turmoil, like the provinces of Upper Egypt, which sheltered numerous Bedouin tribesmen within their borders and were inhabited by a population noted for its passionate temperament.² In the Delta civil government broke down completely for a time in such well-known potential trouble spots as Tanta, which had long had a reputation for turbulence,³ and in Dammanhur.⁴ The notoriously law-

¹The attack on communications in 1919 closely resembled the known plans of the German agent, Mors, who was captured in Egypt during the War. (S.A.W.R.C., file No. 183/17.)

²P.G. Elgood, The Transit of Egypt, (London, 1928) p.242.

³Cheetham to P.O., March 12th., 1919. (F.O. 371/3714)

⁴British Empire and Africa Report, No. CXIX, March 26th., 1919. (F.O.L.)

-less province of Behara, and Dakahlia, which had been troubled since 1917 by bands of robbers,⁵ were reported at the end of March as being in open revolt,⁶ and in and around Zagazig the population was very unsettled and rioting frequent.⁷ On the other hand, some areas, notably the Delta province of Menufieh, remained relatively undisturbed,⁸ and at Zifta local authorities actually organised a volunteer police force against unruly elements in an exceptional demonstration of loyalty towards the ruling regime.⁹ The lack of cohesion between the various

⁵ al-Basir, July 23rd., 1917.

⁶ British Empire and Africa Report, No. CXII.

⁷ Aust.Mtd. Div. G.S., March 17th., 1919. (W.O. 95/4551.)

⁸ The Transit of Egypt, p.242, note.

⁹ Aust. Mtd. Div., Intelligence Summary, April 1st., 1919. (A.W.M.F. 183/12 423)(W.O. 95/4540.)

insurgents was further emphasised by the declaration of local 'republics' in various municipal centres, the most efficient and least ephemeral of these being that set up at Minia.¹⁰ Under such conditions the troops employed in suppressing the uprising found themselves not so much called upon to meet rebel forces in regular armed encounters, as required to restore order by the piece-meal reduction of scattered pockets of disaffection.

From the start of the revolt the British authorities were convinced that the existing concentration of troops within Egypt was sufficient to cope with the emergency. Their commander was General Bulfin, 'a good reliable officer' who 'would stand no nonsense'.¹¹ At the first hint of disturbances in rural areas, Chestam recommended to the Commander-in-Chief that detachments of troops be sent to safeguard provincial centres and reassure their European inhabitants, as had been done at the start of the War.¹² With the exception of

¹⁰ For the Minia 'Soviet' see Aus. Mtd. Div., Intelligence Summary, April 1st., (as above). An abortive republic was set up by the Nationalist Committee at Zagazig on March 23rd. (See British Empire and Africa Report, No. CXXII, March 26th., 1919; Chestam to F.O., Tgm. 425, March 23rd., 1919. (F.O. 371/3714.)) Of a similar enterprise at Mit Ghamr, Col. Mills wrote:-

They were to be something apart from the rest of Egypt and were going to ask America to see that they got recognition. When asked about an army the president...said that they were joining the League of Nations, that war was a thing of the past and armies not needed. Sounds great...A bit of a hitch cropped up when the nationalisation of wealth was being discussed. The poorer people of their new council were all for it but somehow...the wealthy...could not see the advantage...it was left for discussion later. But before 'later' came the troops arrived and the lovely republic went 'fut'. (Palm Sunday, 1919.)

¹¹ Robert Graham to F.O., March 16th., 1919. (F.O. 371/3714.)

¹² Chestam to F.O., March 15th., 1919. (F.O. 371/3714.)

those troops who were based in Cairo, and the 12th., L.H.R. which formed part of Massey's Force in the Minia area, the Light Horse regiments were deployed throughout the Delta,¹³ a region of rich cultivation and densely-populated isolated villages.¹⁴ Through these remote hamlets, lying away from the Nile or the principal canals, no important roads passed. The principal towns were accessible by car on a recently-completed system of roads, mainly earth-surfaced,¹⁵ but in the marshy countryside motorised transport was useless, and even mounted troops were to find that the network of small irrigation ditches made movement difficult.¹⁶ In such a situation forces had to be split up into small groups of from thirteen to twenty men for outpost duty and patrol work,¹⁷ and as these patrols were away from their base in remote or inaccessible areas during duty hours, a considerable degree of autonomy in the interpretation and enforcement of General Orders was necessarily granted.¹⁸

¹³ The 7th., 8th., 9th., 10th., 11th., 14th., and 15th., were under the command of General Wilson with Headquarters at Zagazig. The 4th., 5th., and 6th., L.H.R. operated around Damahur. The operations of the 12th., L.H.R. with Massey's force are only scantily covered in the sources and this chapter will contain few further references to them. For what information there is the reader is referred to W.O. 95/4402 and 4451, A.W.M.F. 183/12 423 and 183/16 741.

¹⁴ This description of the Delta is based on The Fellaheen, pp.9 & 72.

¹⁵ Times, January 22nd., 1914. A programme of macadamising had been begun, but it was interrupted by the War.

¹⁶ Patrol Report, Bahig, June 5th., 1919. (A.W.M.F. 183/16 741).
Note: Unless otherwise stated all patrol reports cited in this chapter emanate from Australian units.

¹⁷ W.O. 95/4552; See also History of the Australian Comforts Fund, p.267.

¹⁸ Narrative of Operations...1919, p.22-23.

In the restoration of order, the maintenance of the means of communication, the protection of vital installations, and the safety of the European population were of prime concern. To safeguard the first of these, Orders under Martial Law were issued on March 11th. and 13th., warning that unauthorised demonstrations and gatherings would be summarily dealt with, and that any person caught destroying, damaging or in any way tampering with railway, telegraph or telephone communications, or attempting to do so, was liable to be shot.¹⁹ At Moascar a squadron of the Australian Mounted Division was put on day-and-night stand-by from March 13th., and picquets were placed on the waterworks, electric light plant, pumping station and lock; the largest, of some twenty-six men being put to guard the railway station and bridge.²⁰ The camp was virtually emptied as Australian, British and Gurkha troops combined to guard the Fort Said-Cairo line, but the rail-link was effectively severed by the destruction of all stations between Benha and the capital.²¹ On March 15th., news was received that rioters had further damaged communications on this route.²² Groups of several hundred men working together had removed the fish-plates at the end of a fifty-yard section of track, and raising rails and sleepers bodily together, had hurled them into a neighbouring canal.²³ Similar acts of sabotage were committed throughout the Delta region, and at Faqus, in the north-east on the railway line from Abu Kabir to Salhia, a bridge was tipped into the canal.²⁴

¹⁹ A.W.M.F. 183/17 423.

²⁰ W.O. 95/4402.

²¹ History of the Australian Comforts Fund, p.267.

²² War Diary, G.S. Aust. Mtd. Div. (W.O. 95/4551)

²³ For a description of this technique see Narrative of Operations... 1919, p.6.

²⁴ War Diary, March 21st., 1919. (W.O. 95/4551).

There was a serious danger that the use of armed troops for the protection of the railways might lead to indiscriminate bloodshed which would, in its turn, excite added hostility among the populace and prolong the period of un-rest. An incident at Tanta in which 20 rioters were killed in an attack on the station, was followed by a period of constant rioting.²⁵ All ranks were warned that recourse should be made to arms only when the intention to damage or interfere with rolling stock, etc., was clearly apparent, and when the circumstances enjoined 'immediate and drastic' action. Such action was only to be taken under orders from the senior officer, warrant officer, N.C.O. or man present.²⁶ The vague terms of these instructions were not an adequate guide, however, if a high death toll were to be avoided in confrontations. Their limitations were revealed in an incident at Minet el-Qusha on March 16th.²⁷

At 0915 mobs started advancing towards (the) railway station... Upon a train approaching from Cairo a large mob of about 900-1,000 made a rush for the level crossing. Stones and bottles were thrown and (they were) refusing to stop 4 yards from the rails. Lt. McGregor and others were being hit with stones, rioters also attempting to gain the platform from the end near the level crossing and the centre of the station. It was then

²⁵ Advertiser, March 19th., 1919.

²⁶ Circular Memorandum No. 26, March 15., 1919. (A.W.M.F. 183/17 423.)

²⁷ All place names in this chapter appear as they are found in Australian military records. Where the spelling makes recognition difficult I have placed the more usual spelling next to the Australian version in brackets. In some instances I have found the version of a place name appearing in a patrol report to be totally incomprehensible, (e.g. 'Gries) despite close study of maps and the Official Census for the area.

Lieut. McGregor gave the order, 'Fire', and 'Cease Fire', when the mob broke. The firing lasted about one minute, except a few shots fired by my orders in front of natives attempting to cross the line...²⁹ natives were killed and 25 wounded. The Egyptian Police assert that 40 also were drowned but my men only saw one sink of the many who jumped into the canal.²⁸

Fifteen troopers had managed to kill forty natives in sixty seconds.²⁹

More practical measures were now taken to ensure that armed patrols did not inflict too heavy casualties. All pouches and ammunition had to be checked when troops returned to quarters to establish that only those authorised to fire had done so.³⁰ Every eleventh round was withdrawn from the belt or drum of all machine and Lewis guns likely to be brought into action against rioters, so that at every tenth shot the automatic fire would be broken and the gunner compelled to deliberately re-start the gun should the situation warrant continued fire.³¹

Other methods of preventing acts of sabotage against the railways than placing them under armed guard were also introduced. General Bulfin, informing the Sultan that there was need for the severest

²⁸ Report by Capt. Palmer, 10th., L.H.R. (A.W.M.F. 183/17 423.)

²⁹ *ibid.* The Australians do not appear to have been armed except with rifles and bayonets, but a burst of 'warning' fire from a British aeroplane may have raised the number of native casualties. One trooper is reported as having been slightly wounded by gunshot in the neck and shoulder. In other sources the native casualties appear variously as 25 killed (War Diary, Aust. Mtd. Div. G.S.) and 30 killed, 25 wounded. (Wire, March 18th., 1919.) (Both these last W.O. 95/4551.)

³⁰ G/163 to C.O.'s 8th., 9th., 10th. L.H.R.'s and 3rd. L.H.Fld. Amb. (A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.)

³¹ Narrative of Operations...1919, p.9.

measures,³² issued a statement in English and Arabic that those villages that lay in the vicinity of damaged rail and telegraph links would be held responsible for all sabotage, and so liable to be burnt.³³ Propaganda and public warnings to this effect were successful in some areas,³⁴ but failed in others. Telegraph lines were cut by a band of 2,000 natives at Godeidah,³⁵ and there were various attempts on the track near Zagazig, Keillin (Kailin), Abu Kabir and Burdein, resulting in unspecified native casualties and one sergeant of Light Horse killed.³⁶ The simple precaution of placing the gangers' tools from all posts along the line in military custody at night, thereby depriving would-be saboteurs of their use,³⁷ was probably as effective as the vigilance of armed patrols at this stage, and communications between Cairo, Alexandria, and provincial towns were considerably improved by the twenty-second of the month.³⁸

At the same time as they were defending the railways, Australian troops were also engaged in containing a variety of disturbances, and generally restoring order. Between the beginning of the revolt and the end of March, they were called to deal with situations which ranged in seriousness from the display of offending flags in Zagazig, to virtual anarchy in the province of Bahra. The former was easily dealt with by a simple show of force; after a detachment

³² British Empire and Africa Report, No. CXLII.

³³ War Diary, Aust. Mtd. Div. G.S., March 17th., 1919. (W.O. 95/4551).

³⁴ al-Ahram, March 19th., 1919.

³⁵ Report by Captain Palmer, March 17th., 1919. (A.W.M.F. 183/17 423.)

³⁶ Appendix 13, W.O. 95/4551.

³⁷ War Diary, Aust. Mtd. Div., March 20th., 1919. (W.O. 95/4551.)

³⁸ al-Ahram, March 22nd and 23rd., 1919.

of the 3rd. Light Horse Bde. paraded through the town the flags were obediently hauled down.³⁹ The latter required the dispatch of a special mobile column of the 5th. L.H.R. on a two-day operation to 'clear up the Bedouin situation'⁴⁰ ...to strengthen the hands of the Civil authorities in restoring order, and to bring in European women and children'.⁴¹ Throughout the Delta area acts of violence and destruction were sporadic, but their frequency during this period was not at first diminished by the activities of the troops. Certain bastions of disaffection proved difficult to reduce to an enduring state of tranquility. At Zagazig, during the festival of Shaw-al-Nessim when traditionally the people came out in family groups and thronged public places, the uncertainty of the situation and the restiveness of the inhabitants inspired an order forbidding any assemblage of more than ten persons in the streets.⁴² After attempts were made to implement this order, riots developed outside the Madiriah (provincial) building, in which one rioter was wounded.⁴³ Attacks on Greek-owned shops followed.⁴⁴ At Fagus, where assaults on railway installations had already taken place, Christian churches and some businesses were looted, and the temper of the populace was so consistently hostile that Greek residents were afraid to remain

³⁹Wire, March 19th., 1919. (W.O. 95/4551)

⁴⁰In some quarters the uprising was seen as offering an excellent opportunity to deal with and disarm the Bedouin. (F.O. 371/3714.)

⁴¹War Diary, 2nd. L.H. Bde., March 28th., 1919. (W.O. 95/4538.)

⁴²G/162 DE 1/21 O.C. Troops, Zagazig, March 21st., 1919. (A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.)

⁴³March 22nd., 1919. (Appendix 15, W.O. 95/4551.)

⁴⁴Cheetham to F.O., Tgm. 416, March 22nd., 1919. (F.O. 371/3714.) There was a similar outbreak at Tanta on March 20th., (Cheetham to F.O., Tgm. 420, March 22nd., 1919. (F.O. 371/3714.) Damage to Greek shops was a usual feature of demonstrations in Delta towns. (Cheetham to Curzon, March 25th., 1919/(F.O. 371/3715.)

isolated in neighbouring villages.⁴⁵ Mit Ghamr was particularly noted as a focal point for anti-British feeling and unrest, and on March 26th., it was reported to have set up its own government and to be levying taxes.⁴⁶

On March 25th., mobile columns left Tanta, Damenuh and Salhia for a round-up of the Kafr-el-Sheikh, Hosh Issa, Delingat and Faqus areas.⁴⁷ At Hosh Issa 1,000 men, some of them reputedly armed, were reported as attempting to cut the railway line, while Kafr-el-Sheikh was the centre of violent disturbances, in which police posts had been attacked and rifles stolen.⁴⁸ A procedure was established for dealing with such disaffected areas. Troops moved up against the area during the night and at daylight surrounded it with a cordon which was maintained while arrests were being made.⁴⁹ A single village, or group of villages might be included within this cordon. Anyone attempting to escape was called upon to halt or risk being shot. The notables of the village, cawdah and sheikhs, would be summoned for questioning and to receive instructions, while the troops, split up into small parties, conducted a house-to-house search, forcing an entry where it was denied. Suspects, and those in possession of arms, stolen goods, or other suspicious material

⁴⁵ Narrative of Operations...1919, p.13.

⁴⁶ Appendix 17, W.O. 95/4551.

⁴⁷ British Empire and Africa Report, No. CXIII, April 2nd., 1919. (F.O.L.)

⁴⁸ Appendix 17, W.O. 95/4551.

⁴⁹ British Empire and Africa Report, No. CXIII; The History of the Canterbury Mounted Rifles, p.248-249.

were arrested, and if any particular offence was being investigated, the village authorities were given three days to produce those responsible. Men, women and children were collected in separate groups and searched.⁵⁰ Then the ground was examined for any incriminating object that might have been thrown down.⁵¹ When offenders were identified, certain officers were authorised to hold Summary Military courts with the power to inflict punishment as follows:-

- i) imprisonment, with or without hard labour, up to six months;
- ii) fine up to £.E.10;
- iii) whipping or flogging up to twenty strokes or lashes;
- iv) police supervision up to one year;
- v) any combination of the above punishments.⁵²

Those sentenced to lashes were punished on the spot, those to be imprisoned were handed over to the nearest police caracol.⁵³

The chief problem associated with the restoration of order, as with the safeguarding of the means of communication, was how the desired objective could be achieved without the building up of future resentment and the compounding of present discontent by an excessive show of force. The British desired to establish order

⁵⁰ After incidents which will be discussed in Chapter VIII, it was arranged that the women be searched by members of their own sex appointed by the police.

⁵¹ For details of this procedure see note (49) above, and W.O.95/4468.

⁵² Circular Memorandum, S/C/131/19/18. (A.W.M.F. 183/2 445.)

⁵³ W.O. 95/4468.

for the present but needed to conciliate opinion for the future,⁵⁴ and sought to obtain a pacifying effect from a display of force without an actual shedding of blood which would close all ranks against them.⁵⁵ The use of troops was possible, because, in contrast to the passion excited by the sight of uniforms in the cities, informants suggested the fellahs had no great hatred for soldiers as such,⁵⁶ but their use in suppressing rebellion could lead to 'the creation of deep racial animosities which it would take years to eradicate'.⁵⁷ The mobile columns aroused fears of impending massacre among the peasantry, which were augmented by troops openly asserting in public places that the authorities intended to 'wipe out Egyptians'.⁵⁸ In some areas, perhaps because of reports of the violent treatment meted out to certain villages,⁵⁹ or perhaps because of the high casualties inflicted upon natives in brushes

⁵⁴ Cheatham to F.O., Tgm. 411, March 20th., 1919. (F.O. 371/3714.)

⁵⁵ Cheatham to F.O., Tgm. 419, March 22nd., 1919. (F.O. 371/3714.)

⁵⁶ Report by Mr Fischer, April 22nd., 1919. (F.O. 371/3716.)

⁵⁷ ibid.

⁵⁸ Confidential Circular Memorandum, April 1st. and 2nd., 1919 (A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.)

'Should evidence be forthcoming of any Officer indulging in any such expressions of opinions foreshadowing violent oppressive measures, such Officers will be tried by G.C.N.'

⁵⁹ See Chapter VIII.

with rioters,⁶⁰ the appearance of Australian troops was regarded as particularly sinister and threatening. At Sihbellauein, a notable told Capt. F.C. Higgins of the 15th L.H.R.:-

Don't think we have not noticed that the English troops were withdrawn and Australian troops put on to do any killing that had to be done.⁶¹

The end of March and the beginning of April marked the commencement of serious operations to repair the railways, though these still came under attack from time to time.⁶² Generally speaking, the troops found the forced labour they supervised along the line worked well, but near Wasta, between Zagazig and Mit Ghamr, an Australian escort party encountered reluctance and hostility which could only be overcome by force.⁶³

The local villagers were escorted down to the break in the line and pushed into the canal and made to pull the sleepers and rails out and put them back in their original places...the villagers resisted, and one was shot, and two, who attempted to break guard were bayoneted.⁶⁴

Most reconstruction work, however, was peaceful, and not without a certain humorous appeal to the troops. Australians preferred

⁶⁰ In encounters between armed troops and rioters, usually armed with nothing more than stones, at this time, native casualties were reported as high as from 50 to 90 killed in individual incidents. (Summary of Events in Egypt, No. 16., March 31st., 1919 - April 4th., 1919.) (A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.)

⁶¹ Report to His. Major, H.Q., Zagazig, April 19th., 1919, (A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.)

⁶² Attacks on the railway line were reported at Kafr Saqr and Kufur Negin on 25th., and 27th., March, and Zagazig Station was fired. (W.O. 95/4551 and Appendices 20 and 22) Telegraph lines were also raided by thieves. (A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.)

⁶³ March 30th., 1919. (W.O. 95/4551, Appendix 26.)

⁶⁴ Narrative of Operations...1919, p.13.

plain peasants to effendis (cf. attitudes towards the babus in India), and found this opportunity to demonstrate their opinions too good to miss. In the Zagazig sector, when villagers were assembled

A certain proportion informed us that they had never worked and most of these gentlemen had flash boots and socks. As far as possible they and other sulky parties went into the canal to do the dirty work and the fellahin pulled on the ropes on dry land...in one case £25 was offered to the men to let an extra flash gentleman off. I am afraid he went in overcoat and all.⁶⁵

It was in British interests to bring into ridicule and lower the prestige of the articulate and disaffected class of educated rural Egyptians. Not all Egyptians in Western dress were so humiliated. Political Officers accompanied this patrol and others like it to ensure that those members of the local élite who were sympathetic to the British (some civil servants and others of proven loyalty) were not put to work on the tracks.⁶⁶

The Colonial troops had gone about their work of pacification 'with a determination and thoroughness that soon brought peace and quietness to a turbulent community'.⁶⁷ In the Delta, the back of the initial revolt was broken by mid-April. The peasantry north of Cairo were a more 'discreet and reflective race' than their brothers in Upper Egypt, and in paying off scores were careful not

⁶⁵ Report on Repairing Railway between Zagazig and Mansourah, and Abu Kabir and Faqus, April 3rd., 1919. (A.W.M.F. 163/12 423.)

⁶⁶ ibid. For the special persecution of the effendi class see also Narrative of Operations...1919, p.16.

⁶⁷ History of the Canterbury Mounted Rifles, p.240.

to compromise their future prosperity.⁶⁸ Dependent as they were upon agriculture for their livelihood, they could not afford to inflict any serious lasting damage on irrigation works or railway installations, since they required water for their crops and transport to convey their produce to market.⁶⁹ The Khatatba Canal which supplied Alexandria with water was of such extreme vulnerability that patrols of the 1st. L.H.Sds. estimated it would take as small a force as ten men only an hour and a half to make a breach sufficient to drain it.⁷⁰ As it was of major importance in the irrigation of Lower Egypt, it significantly remained untouched. After the first outburst in which communications were attacked, wide-spread acts of sabotage ceased. Certain centres of disaffection remained, in or around the towns, and there were specific cases of law-breaking growing out of the general unsettled state of affairs, but the Fellahs, on the surface at least, adopted a conciliatory attitude towards patrols and resumed their everyday tasks. The March sowing of cotton for the November harvest had to be commenced where it had not been completed before events had disrupted the normal pattern of existence. Grain was now ready to be cut, and in May the valuable fodder crop, barzim, would need to be gathered in.⁷¹ Australian troops were scattered across the countryside. Disappointment at the delay in

⁶⁸ The Transit of Egypt, p.242.

⁶⁹ ibid.

⁷⁰ N.O. 95/4534. (Canal regulators were damaged near Tanta but this was a purely local manifestation aimed at unpopular landlords. (N.O. 95/4551, Appendix 20).)

⁷¹ For information concerning the agricultural year in the Delta see Annuaire Statistique, 1914, p.319.

demobilisation had been partially off-set by the excitement of active campaigning in the Delta, and their morale was high. The weather was good, there were tents for everybody, fresh rations were always available, and the policing action in which they were now engaged was varied and interesting.⁷²

Though there were still occasional signs of unrest and peasant demonstrations in some districts, the northern provinces as a whole wore an appearance of comparative calm.⁷³ An absence of definite acts of hostility was generally reported.⁷⁴ Throughout the Delta area natives were described as 'friendly, respectful and ready to help', or as 'quiet and working in the fields'.⁷⁵ Omdahs seem to have made every effort to ingratiate themselves. Lt. F. McGregor, 10th. L.H.R., serving in the Zagazig sector reported:-

At places where we halted to rest Omdahs were very hospitable bringing food in the shape of eggs bread and butter for the troop and green feed for the horses, and (they) always provided a guide.⁷⁶

It was an uneasy peace, however, imposed by fear. In the presence of superior force, the canny fellah effaced himself. At 'Gries (sic), though the inhabitants did not take any positive hostile action against a visiting patrol, their attitude was unfriendly and

⁷² Narrative of Operations...1919, p.22-23.

⁷³ Intelligence Summary, April 7th., 1919. (W.O. 95/4551); British Empire and Africa Report, No.CXV, April 15th., 1919. (F.O.L.)

⁷⁴ War Diary, 2nd. A.M.G. Squad., April 1919. (W.O. 95/4541); War Diary, 7th. L.H.R., April 1st., 1919. (W.O. 95/4540.)

⁷⁵ Miscellaneous materials on the Egyptian Rising, April 1st to 14th., 1919., in A.W.M.F. 183/12 423; War Diary, 6th. L.H.R., April 5th. and 10th. to 11th., 1919. (W.O. 95/4539); W.O. 95/4522.

⁷⁶ Report of mounted patrol, April 7th to 8th., 1919. (A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.)

they carried sticks throughout the duration of its stay.⁷⁷ On the surface, the whole population seemed to be quiet, but a strong under-current of anti-British feeling could be discerned.⁷⁸ It was remarked that signs of disaffection might only be suppressed for as long as patrols were in the immediate vicinity.⁷⁹ In the Simball-arein area where crowds had been described as 'very threatening' at the end of March,⁸⁰ the superficial attitude of the inhabitants was now one of friendliness and respect,⁸¹ but the hollowness of the pose was disclosed by a local notable in a careless (or arrogant) moment of mild intoxication. He told an Australian officer:-

We simply laugh at your patrol marching through the country. We are lying low just at present but if our men do not return from France with the result expected, England will have to take her chance of another war.⁸²

He stated that every man was armed, and that if hopes were disappointed at the Paris Peace Conference, the whole country would

⁷⁷ War Diary, 6th. L.H.R., April 12th. to 15th., 1919. (W.O. 95/4539) Similarly at Bekhum the population 'appeared hostile but offered no violence'. (*ibid.*, April 15th.) On the same day, however, in a district where British troops had not previously been seen, patrols of the 11th. L.H.R., Damietta, were stoned. A number of natives were killed. (*Narrative of Operations...1919*, p.19.)

⁷⁸ April 7th., 1919. (W.O. 95/4564.)

⁷⁹ Mit Ghamr Patrol Report, March 22nd., 1919. (A.W.M.F. 163/17 423.)

⁸⁰ W.O. 95/4522.

⁸¹ W.O. 95/4564.

⁸² Capt. F.C. Higgins, O.C. 'A' Squadron, 15th., L.H.R. to Bde. Major, H.O., Zagazig, April 19th., 1919. (A.W.M.F. 163/12 423.)

unite. 'We are 26,000,000 strong, so we can afford to get a few millions killed'. Britain might have starved Germany into submission, but Egypt was a self-supporting country and could not be brought down by the same method.⁸³

In other areas too, the helpfulness of omdehs was often more of an appearance than a reality. At Damhug, for example, though the omdeh 'expressed his wish to assist the English in every way', no concrete information was forthcoming.⁸⁴ Village headmen generally when interrogated ascribed all damage done in their areas to the work of outsiders and failed to produce local offenders.⁸⁵ It was particularly difficult to get at the facts in instances where telegraph poles and sleepers had vanished. In a woodless land at a time of fuel shortage, such loot was too precious to be surrendered easily, especially since the sunt trees which were of particular use in the construction of sakias had already been largely felled to satisfy the Army's war-time needs.⁸⁶ There were reports that telegraph poles had supplied the deficiency and were being used to turn water-wheels,⁸⁷ while on one occasion at least they were detected in use as the centre shaft to a yoke of oxen.⁸⁸ When eleven poles, complete with bolts, were found stacked in the village of Kafr el Sawaqi, the omdeh maintained they had been removed there for safety.⁸⁹

⁸³ ibid.

⁸⁴ War Diary, 6th. L.H.R., April 5th., 1919. (W.O. 95/4539.)

⁸⁵ Miscellaneous materials on the Egyptian Rising. (A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.)

⁸⁶ Egyptian Gazette, November 21st., 1917.

⁸⁷ War Diary, 2nd. L.H. Bde., April 11th., 1919. (W.O. 95/4538.); A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.)

⁸⁸ My Life with Experiences, photograph, p.203.

⁸⁹ April 7th., 1919 (W.O. 95/4564)

The combination of hidden disaffection with pretended friendliness towards the troops was a cause for anxiety and special Standing Orders were issued to minimise the risk of individual soldiers, lulled into a state of false security, being murdered.⁹⁰ Troops were forbidden to fraternise with the civilian population, or to enter towns and villages, especially at night, except in organised parties while on duty.⁹¹ It was stressed that nothing whatsoever was to be accepted from the natives and no food or drink was to be brought from them. There was, it was believed, a scheme afoot to attack the men in an underhand way.

The ringleaders of the present movement have concocted a wicked plan which they intend to execute as soon as circumstances permit. They are going to put poison or opium in water or fruits such as oranges and bananas, and offer the fruit to British soldiers on guard at different places in Cairo and the provinces.⁹²

There was already a history of similar crimes in Egypt,⁹³ and in Cairo there had recently been what the press described as a 'boom' in cases where victims were drugged with datura mixed with dates, and then robbed.⁹⁴ In the country areas there had been similar incidents with soldiers chloroformed and their rifles stolen.⁹⁵ Australian troops do not seem to have suffered in this way, although there was a suspicious encounter at Mit Yasid. Troops guarding

⁹⁰ April 1st., 1919. (A.W.N.F. 183/12 423.)

⁹¹ ibid.

⁹² Bde. Maj., 5th. L.N. Bde., March 27th., 1919. (A.W.N.F. 183/17 423.)

⁹³ B.M.S.P., Vol. (I), 1914. Egypt, No. 1. C8. 7358, p.327.

⁹⁴ Egyptian Gazette, March 28th., 1919.

⁹⁵ Britain and Egypt, p.95.

the railway bridge on the Benha-Zagazig line were approached by a native wanting to sell them 'sly grog' and offering to fight any man present for a wager of £5, seemingly as a means of gaining acceptance. They duly sent him off to be charged under Martial Law with the offences of attempting to sell alcohol to soldiers, and loitering near picquets,⁹⁶ but the Lieutenant in charge suspected him of being 'on this poisoning stunt'.⁹⁷

Whatever the true state of feeling among the fellahs, the Army had achieved its objective of containing all open and violent manifestations of disaffection. Order must now be maintained while the task of exacting retribution and punishing the guilty was accomplished.⁹⁸ To achieve the first it was thought necessary for the troops to make an occasional show of strength, particularly where there was any concentration of people.⁹⁹ Sgt. King of the 11th. L.H.R. describes such an operation at Mansourah where troops rode through the town 'with swords drawn just to let them know we meant business'.¹⁰⁰ It was imperative, however, that such displays did not appear excessively threatening. Where there already existed considerable apprehension, it was undesirable to increase the risk

⁹⁶ For the restrictions on selling alcohol to soldiers see Instructions to Brigade Police, Zagazig Sector, April 16th., 1919. (A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.)

See also the charge sheet against Moses Ibrahim, April 4th., 1919.

⁹⁷ Letter from Lt. Callow, attached to the above. (A.W.M.F. 181/12 423.)

⁹⁸ See Transit of Egypt, p.242.

⁹⁹ As at a local market, for example. See War Diary, 7th. L.H.R., April 19th., 1919. (W.O. 95/4540.)

¹⁰⁰ April 3rd., 1919. Mansourah was noted for its large unruly crowds. (Desert and Delta, p.59.)

of outright panic.¹⁰¹ Britain most earnestly desired to restore her image as the friend of the fellaheen and to re-capture that traditional support for the regime in rural areas that had been lost during the War and the early days of the uprising. Strict courtesy towards natives was enjoined on all ranks,¹⁰² and the men were made aware of local conventions, to break which, even unwittingly, would only arouse indignation in districts otherwise free of political discontent.¹⁰³ Such isolated acts of thoughtlessness as the test-firing of a new Hotchkiss gun by the 15th. L.H.R. near Sanafa, which served only to intimidate the natives and bring complaints from local Egyptian officials,¹⁰⁴ were to be avoided if the inhabitants of the country regions were to revert to lasting tranquility. Egypt's economy relied in large measure on her agricultural products and the restoration of normalcy to the farming community was thus of paramount importance. From now until their eventual departure for home, Australian troops were to share in the process of tidying up after the revolt, and the gradual resumption of agrarian industry throughout the Delta.

There were soon signs that their efforts were proving effective. By May 5th., railway repairs were well in hand, and with patrols policing the tracks to prevent further damage,¹⁰⁵ some

¹⁰¹ For the fear inspired in small Delta villages by the presence of troops, see History of the Canterbury Mounted Rifles, p.248; 'Causes of Friction between Troops and Villagers' in A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.

¹⁰² Standing Orders, April 1st., 1919. (A.W.M.F. 181/12 423)

¹⁰³ 'Causes of Friction', as above.

¹⁰⁴ Report of the 11th. L.H.R., April 10th., 1919. (A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.)

¹⁰⁵ Sleepers were moved from the Delta Light Railway near Giza as late as June 11th., as a protest against the methods employed to collect working parties for the salvage of materials thrown into the canal during the original disturbances, an interesting example of disaffection becoming chronic through the mishandling of the situation. (W.O. 95/4468)

passenger trains were put back into service.¹⁰⁶ Restrictions on movement were partially lifted, although travel by native Egyptians was still subject to certain controls.¹⁰⁷ It formed part of the troops' routine duties to inspect travel permits and search vehicles¹⁰⁸ as well as, on occasion, mounting special picquets to prevent food being sent to the strikers in Cairo.¹⁰⁹ Regular reports were submitted, assessing the condition of the roads and the general state of communications,¹¹⁰ while guards posted on such vital links as bridges and ferries¹¹¹ not only protected installations, but gauged the mood of wayfarers.

To all intents the Army was now the true government of the Delta. It pursued malefactors, both common criminals and those implicated in the recent troubles, or assisted the police in their detection and capture. Since Egyptian courts were under suspicion of partiality,¹¹² it tried those apprehended and supervised their punishment if they were found guilty. It decided in disputes between Egyptian and Egyptian. Through it, the authorities in Cairo communicated with the peasantry. Daily patrols, strung out across the country, reported on the temper of the settled inhabitants and Bedouin alike,¹¹³ and continued the work of exacting collective fines imposed upon villages judged guilty of sabotage,¹¹⁴ and of

¹⁰⁶ A.W.N.F. 183/12 423.

¹⁰⁷ War Diary, 6th. L.H.R., April, 1919. (W.O. 95/4539.)

¹⁰⁸ Materials in A.W.N.F. 183/12 423.

¹⁰⁹ War Diary, 6th. L.H.R., April 21st., 1919.

¹¹⁰ A.W.N.F. 183/12 423.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*

¹¹² The Transit of Egypt, p.244.

¹¹³ Intelligence Summaries Nos. 30 and 31, Belbeis Sector, May 4th. and 5th., 1919. (A.W.N.F. 183/12 423.)

¹¹⁴ Materials in A.W.N.F. 183/16 741; Britain and Egypt, p.85 ff.

searching out and arresting further suspects or those in whose houses stolen property was found.¹¹⁵ On occasions when the police encountered a lack of co-operation in the pursuit of their enquiries, the threat of military backing could be used to bring their investigations to a successful conclusion.¹¹⁶ Senior Australian officers meanwhile found themselves assuming the unaccustomed role of Imperial administrators. Col. Mills, stationed at Mit Ghamr wrote:-

We are having a very busy time here. This area is about 25 miles by 45 miles and contains 23,000 people. Today our military court presided over by my 2nd. in command with three other officers has been trying some Gypoos for robbery. You see the whole country is under Martial Law and we have the right to try offenders if we think the native judges are not doing their work properly. Major Donovan who is president of the court and Bob Tree my adj(who) is prosecutor are up against lawyers and barristers trained in England.¹¹⁷

He himself broke up strikes, judged between the poor and their defrauders, 'kept an eye' on the military situation and arranged horse races to please the local population.¹¹⁸

The vigour and decisiveness with which patrol operations were carried out was commendable, but there was a certain lack of understanding and finesse which attracted criticism from higher

¹¹⁵ Intelligence Summary No. 29, May 3rd., 1919. (A.W.M.F. 193/12 423.)

¹¹⁶ W.O. 95/4402.

¹¹⁷ Letter, May 6th., 1919.

¹¹⁸ For the importance of horse-races as a means of consolidating the situation see The History of the Canterbury Mounted Rifles, p.248-249.

authorities. An unfortunate tendency was noted in the actions of the search patrols, which reflected an ignorance of or disregard for Egyptian political affairs. This ignorance was not confined to Australian troops alone, or even to the Army. Many English civilian residents of Egypt regarded all Egyptians with nationalist sympathies as extremists or revolutionaries, and troops seeking out offenders frequently fell into the same error. The constitutional pursuit of nationalist aspirations was completely legitimate, and, in a sense, practically the entire population could be described as nationalist. Units were advised that the proper objects of their investigations were not those men who simply advocated Egyptian independence, but 'those individuals who incited Government servants to desert their posts, and the mob to excesses', or had themselves participated in revolutionary acts.¹¹⁹ Moderate opinion must not be alienated by unreasonable harriving of its supporters. Similarly, the Military, and Summary Military Courts were advised that a greater use of subtlety in the allocation of punishments was called for. Presiding officers were cautioned that in passing sentence there were other considerations to be taken into account than the full display of the might of the law. The imposition of corporal punishment in conjunction with imprisonment was particularly deprecated as being too frequently meted out. Practical considerations rather than humanitarian promptings suggested that fellahen should be punished by lashes alone since it was undesirable to 'interfere with the harvest by withdrawing the fellahen from their labour'.¹²⁰ It seems likely,

¹¹⁹ For this paragraph see 'A Note on Nationalism', April 7th., 1919. (A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.)

¹²⁰ CI/3. Punishments. (A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.)

too, that there was growing awareness at an official level that the indiscriminate and excessive resort to flogging was counter-productive, and likely to attract adverse comment.¹²¹

To forestall any danger of a further and perhaps more serious armed uprising in the immediate future, two kinds of operation were now mounted. The first was political and propagandistic, the second of a more obviously military character. Though there had been abundant grievances to fuel the March conflagration in rural areas, the kindling spark had been set by members of the city-based Egyptian intelligentsia, notably advocates and students,¹²² whose efforts had imparted some kind of organisation to initial manifestations of discontent, and who had directed the attack on communications. The stress laid upon the role played by educated agitators from the towns in reports released through the press¹²³ helped to gloss over the degree of disillusionment with the British regime among the fellahs, and also obscured the true relationship between the agitators and those whose feelings they worked upon. The so-called effendis

¹²¹The Egyptian Association in Great Britain announced:-

The sentences which are now being passed by the Military Courts and executed by their agents on certain Nationalists of Egypt...can only and inevitably aggravate the sense of injustice which imbibes (sic) every Egyptian at present.

(P.O. 371/3716.)

¹²²'Note on Nationalism', see above; See also (W.O. 95/4551, Appendix 28.)

¹²³e.g. Advertiser, March 26th., 1919.

were not merely slick city operators, relying on their European clothes to impress ignorant villagers¹²⁴ for these 'students of religious institutions dependent on Al-Azhar...officials and officers' were themselves frequently the sons of fellahs, or of a country middle class closely identified with the people.¹²⁵ The contrast that was drawn between them and the peasantry in the press was largely a false one. With the failure of the revolt, however, resentment against the educated minority who had prompted the unsuccessful agitation began to grow among the cultivators who were now suffering under the effects of British retribution and the restriction of rail facilities for produce and passengers.¹²⁶ The administration sought to exploit this rift in the ranks of the opposition by verbal propaganda directed explicitly against the offendis and their attempts to raise funds for political purposes.¹²⁷ A special Proclamation against such collections was issued under Martial Law,¹²⁸ one of a whole series of linked proclamations designed to re-establish the processes of government and counteract the influence of political agitators by restoring confidence and good relations between rulers and ruled, while presenting events in a way

¹²⁴ Desert and Delta, p. 52-53. Jarvis Bey reflects the views of a certain class of British administrator who persistently jeered at educated Egyptians.

¹²⁵ The Fellahs, p. 26.

¹²⁶ Political Officer's report, May 1st., 1919. (F.O. 371/3717); British Empire and Africa Report, No. CXX, May 21st., 1919. (F.O.L.)

¹²⁷ W.O. 95/4468. Note especially the following:-
Verbal Propaganda. Political Officer's Report
 I have throughout been spreading the gospel of the Fellah and good Omda and Landowner class and (i.e. as opposed to) the offendi and I think it is already bearing fruit, as I see the opinion of the Fellah is veering round.

¹²⁸ May 17th., 1919.

favourable to the authorities.¹²⁹ To ensure that these proclamations had the maximum effect, they were distributed to all villages in any given area by small mounted patrols accompanied by an Arabic-speaking scout, whose presence ensured that the proclamation was properly read and posted.¹³⁰ The Light Horse carried out their share of this task with expedition and efficiency, and it was reported that the proclamations had a calming effect upon the populace.¹³¹ In conjunction with this campaign to spread positive propaganda on behalf of the Protecting Power, troops were also engaged in the searching out of seditious pamphlets and circulars, and of those printing and distributing them, or making seditious utterances.¹³² At Zagazig in the second week of April there seems to have been a spate of pamphlets, some aimed at inciting Egyptians to further efforts in the cause of national independence,¹³³ and some, rather surprisingly, aimed at gaining the sympathy of the Australians themselves. Whatever the effectiveness of the former, the latter were completely wasted. 'They called upon their brother Australians to join them in obtaining freedom,' wrote General Wilson, but 'the men

¹²⁹ W.O. 95/4468.

¹³⁰ Gadieh sometimes failed to post proclamations properly if they were not strictly supervised. (Materials in A.W.M.F. 183/12 423; W.O. 95/4539.)

¹³¹ W.D. 6th.; L.M.R.; April 26th., 1919. (W.O. 95/4539)

¹³² Patrol reports for April 24th., 1919 in W.O. 95/4539; Miscellaneous materials in A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.

¹³³ W.O. 95/4522 contains a translation of one of these leaflets which begins, 'Sons of the Nile'. Be not slaves when God made you free'.

laughed at these effusions as even our most rabid socialists refused to admit brotherhood with the native Egyptians'.¹³⁴

While this assault on the political solidarity of the Egyptian revolution was in progress, there was also underway a drive to deprive any future uprising of the means to pose a military threat. Though there had been a war-time ban on the retention of arms by native civilians, it was now suspected that guns were being secretly purchased, often from Bedouin who collected weapons abandoned on the old Sinai battlefields.¹³⁵ Though some arms had been brought in and surrendered voluntarily to the authorities,¹³⁶ for the most part they had to be searched out by mobile columns and patrols, whose efforts upon occasions revealed a disturbing concentration of weapons. Operations in the Damanhur district brought to light the fact that all shot-gun ammunition in the area was loaded with large slugs, much too heavy for the small game in the Delta, and obviously intended for anti-personnel use.¹³⁷ There were also reports of large numbers of fire-arms at Nediba and the agba of Kom el-Aranis.¹³⁸ Though there were minor successes in the search, a couple of native pistols and a service bayonet and scabbard from one village,¹³⁹ an army rifle and ammunition from another¹⁴⁰ and a revolver removed from the belt of a

¹³⁴ Narrative of Operations...1919, p.11.

¹³⁵ Materials on Egyptian Revolutionary Disturbances in A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.

Note: Some arms might come into the hands of the natives through carelessness on the part of the troops. This was particularly true of small arms which had been 'souvenired' in Palestine and were treated as casual possessions.

(Materials in A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.)

¹³⁶ A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.

¹³⁷ Narrative account of the work of the 5th.L.H. mobile column. (W.O. 95/4539.)

¹³⁸ W.O. 95/4539.

¹³⁹ May 19th., 1919. Patrol Report. (A.W.M.F. 183/16 741.)

¹⁴⁰ Patrol Report, June 18th., 1919.

Bedouin,¹⁴¹ no major caches of arms were taken, despite the use of spies to detect them.¹⁴² This probably indicated not so much the absence of arms as the efficiency of the indigenous warning system, and the suspicion that arms were being concealed, could not easily be dispelled even when the combing of an area had failed to reveal them.¹⁴³ On the whole this particular operation was a failure, though not from any lack of zeal on the part of the troops, who arrested even gaffirs for carrying the arms their position authorised.¹⁴⁴ The reasons for the failure were related to the conditions of life in the Delta. Arms were not merely required for use against the British in some hypothetical future uprising, they were an integral part of life in a community where murderous assault was a commonplace. They were fundamental to the fellah's existence, and as such were concealed with all the cunning they could muster.

There was no second uprising to reveal the extent to which the peasantry were armed, though as soon as posts considered to be unnecessary in the new state of tranquility were abandoned by their garrison, they were thoroughly destroyed and looted of their sand-bags and angle-irons by neighbouring villagers.¹⁴⁵ With the restoration of communications, the need for mounted troops was lessened,

¹⁴¹ June 6th., 1919.

¹⁴² A.W.M.F. 183/16 741.

¹⁴³ A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.

¹⁴⁴ Patrol report, 14th., L.H.R., June 18th., 1919. (A.W.M.F. 183/16 741)

See also Britain and Egypt. 85. ff.

¹⁴⁵ Intelligence Summary, No. 35. (A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.)

and men were increasingly freed for educational classes,¹⁴⁶ or on leave.¹⁴⁷ In Australia there were murmurs that the 'poor old Light Horse were still an afterthought with the powers that be',¹⁴⁸ and the men, counting over the long months since they had defeated the Turks, were heartily sick of their continuing service.¹⁴⁹ There could be no reduction in the military presence, since it was feared that agitators were biding their time, calculating on demobilization,¹⁵⁰ but reinforcements could be brought in from elsewhere, Britain could maintain her rule with her own troops. The Light Horse were at last to be allowed to go home.

In the suppression of the rural revolt, it is generally acknowledged, the Australians played a major role.¹⁵¹ The Official History records:-

The Australians and New Zealanders formed the great part of the British forces employed, and owing to their decisiveness, their mobility and their reputation, they were undoubtedly the dominant factor in temporarily restoring tranquility to Egypt.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁶ W.O. 95/4522.

¹⁴⁷ A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.

¹⁴⁸ Advertiser, April 22nd., 1919.

¹⁴⁹ My Life with Experiences, p.204.

¹⁵⁰ G.O.C. Egypt, August 22nd., 1919. (F.O. 371/3714).

¹⁵¹ Narrative of Operations...1919, p.21.

¹⁵² Vol.VII, p.793.

Their efforts were, in fact, a military success. They could not have been otherwise. The disturbances they contained were easily dealt with, since there could be no direct confrontation between armed troops and a civilian population with only a few primitive weapons.¹⁵³ Military objectives were immediate and limited—the defence of European civilians, the restoration of communications and the suppression of public disorder. 'If nothing violent happens', observed one British official, '(the Army) consider that all is well'.¹⁵⁴ Australian troops had achieved those objectives, and so were complimented on their fine work by their military associates.¹⁵⁵

As a political operation aimed at maintaining the British presence in Egypt, however, the pacification of the countryside in 1919 was a failure. Though outwardly quiet, the rural areas were in a state of chaos.¹⁵⁶ Such order as was maintained was preserved only by the presence of the soldiers, and the force they exercised served only to make the British more detested.¹⁵⁷ Australian 'decisiveness' and the bloodshed that resulted from it,¹⁵⁸ could in

¹⁵³ Chestham to F.O., Tgm. 403, March 17th., 1919. (F.O. 371/3714.)
General Russell, C.O. N.E. Forces to Lionel Curtis, April 16th., 1919. (F.O. 371/3717.)

¹⁵⁴ Richard Wellesley to F.O., June 27th., 1919. (F.O. 371/3717.)

¹⁵⁵ Narrative of Operations...1919, p.17.

¹⁵⁶ Wellesley to F.O. (F.O. 371/3717.)

¹⁵⁷ Confidential report of Habib Antonius Bey, May 17th., 1919.
(F.O. 371/3717.)

¹⁵⁸ See Chapter VIII for a discussion on certain Australian actions which excited particular bitterness.

the long run act only against British interests by the bitterness it excited.¹⁵⁹ By the time the Light Horse Regiments sailed for Australia, Egypt had become an 'Eastern Ireland',¹⁶⁰ committed to a struggle against the British which would not be concluded until the last British soldier and official had left Egyptian soil.

¹⁵⁹ Cheetham to F.O., March 17th., 1919. (F.O. 371/3714.)

¹⁶⁰ Gen. Russell, (F.O. 371/3717.)

CHAPTER VIIIALLEGED ATROCITIES. AUSTRALIAN INVOLVEMENT IN SOME REGRETTABLE
INCIDENTS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCESSynopsis.

Introduction---the incident at Azisia---the incident at Bedrashein
---findings of the Court of Enquiry---a re-examination of the evi-
dence---refusal of Egyptian villagers to inform on each other,
policy of assigning collective responsibility for hostile acts---
the incident at Abu Akdar---Allenby's misleading report---attacks
on Australian troops---the incident at Saft-el-Malouk---official
reaction---Egyptian propagandists---attempts to censor information
in Britain---Egyptian cause publicised in France---propaganda cam-
paign gathers momentum---American reaction---factual basis to
propaganda---conclusion.

Chapter VII described the activities of the Light Horse reg-
iments during the pacification of rural Egypt in 1919, and ended
with a brief assessment of the long-term political effects of the
episode. The conclusions offered applied generally to the use of
the Army in the restoration of order throughout the countryside,
and showed how the pursuit of limited military objectives, while
apparently solving present difficulties, actually created problems
for the future. The following chapter deals with certain specific
incidents in which Australian troops were involved in the course of
containing the disturbances. It re-examines contemporary evidence
in an attempt to establish a true account of those incidents and
outlines their consequences. In so doing it questions whether their
occurrence may not make it necessary to assign a particularly signif-
icant role to the Australians in the creation of lasting bitterness.
Four occasions have been chosen for special study---the operations
carried out at Azisia and Bedrashein, the burning of Abu Akdar and
the affair of Saft-el-Malouk.

In the course of the search operations carried out during March, 1919, to find offenders, stolen goods or other incriminating objects, there were a number of ugly incidents. After the arrest of some Sepoys guilty of looting while looking for unauthorised arms, strict instructions concerning the conduct of searches were issued by the authorities¹ to forestall all future grounds for complaint. On two occasions, however, the behaviour of Australian troops was such as to provoke considerable outcry among native Egyptians, leading ultimately to the setting up of a Court of Enquiry. The operations carried out at Azizia (El-Azizieh) and Bedrashein (Badrashain) on or about March 23rd., 1919, were made the subject of official investigation. The omdeh of Azizia made the following deposition to the Giza Provincial Council:-

On the morning of March 23rd., at 3.30 a.m. a group of British soldiers knocked at my door (and) I was asked to hand over any arms that I had; the only weapon I had was a revolver² and I duly handed it over. Then the soldiers rushed into my house, breaking the doors and windows.

My wife and three daughters, the eldest of whom is only eight years old, were terrified and got under the bed-steads. The soldiers entered my wife's room and dragged her out by her hair. They did the same to my children.

¹G.S. 62,(W.O. 95/4468.)

²Omdes were allowed by law to possess arms as one of the privileges of their office. The office of omdeh was established by decree of March 16th., 1895. It was required that an omdeh own at least 10 feddans of land and be chosen from among the leading inhabitants of the village. The post was unsalaried, but in addition to the right to carry arms, omdehs enjoyed tax exemption and freedom from forced labour and military service (The Fellaheen, p.29-30)

The ear-rings of my children were forcibly snatched from their ears, tearing the flesh. My wife's necklace and bracelets, too, were snatched away, inflicting cuts on the neck and hands.

Then the troops ransacked my house, taking over three hundred pounds from my safe, as well as the remainder of my wife's jewellery, tearing up all my valuable papers; then they ordered us out of the house which they then set on fire. We were taken then to the houses of the Sheikhs of the village who were treated in exactly the same manner, their house(s) were also set on fire and their valuables taken.

The village crier was ordered to tell the people to leave the village and take their valuables with them as the village was to be set on fire.

When the people left their homes they were surprised to find the village surrounded by a cordon of troops, who at once opened fire on them, took their valuables, tore the clothes of the women, insulting them by touching their naked bodies; this sight was too much for me and I was overcome. I have not the slightest doubt that unfortunate women suffered the disgrace of the violation of their honour. The last sight I had of my native place was a mass of flames.³

Elsewhere he stated that when the people were being herded off, the troops had urged them to a quicker pace at bayonet point despite the noon-day heat, and that one soldier had taken photographs of their

³Report of Giza Provincial Council, April 19th., 1919. (F.O.371/3718.)

'pitiful condition' for pleasure.⁴ (This omdeh subsequently refused to return to his post.)

At Bedrashein trouble eventuated when a volunteer expedition consisting of convalescents from the 14th. A.G.H. sent to guard the local sugar factory and two parties from the 15th. and 10th. L.H.R. were put on to search the neighbouring villages for arms.⁵ Under Colonel Olden's orders:-

they were to commence a search using only such force as was considered necessary to ensure the success of the undertaking. If necessary a number of houses were to be burnt.⁶

In the event, not only was the village fired, but a number of fatal casualties were inflicted upon natives for acts of 'individual opposition',⁷ while the villagers afterwards asserted that there had been further outrages.⁸

The Court of Enquiry which sat to consider these incidents found that 'all the evidence was very contrary', for the Australians categorically denied that the robberies and abuse of women of which the Egyptians accused them had actually taken place.⁹ It was, the Court stated, impossible to say with accuracy what had really occurred, although there were one or two pieces of more solid evidence in the mass of contradictions. At Azisia, the search of

⁴Egyptian Circular, November 15th., 1919. (F.O.L.)

⁵History of the Australian Comforts Fund, p.267; Report of J.F. Kershaw, Legal Adviser. (F.O. 371/3718.)

⁶Report by J.F. Kershaw.

⁷Colonel Olden's report (F.O. 371/3718.)

⁸F.O. 371/3718.

⁹The following paragraph is taken from the proceedings of the Court of Enquiry as found in F.O. 371/3718.

the oudah's house had taken place in the presence of two policemen and their testimony indicated that while some poultry had undoubtedly been stolen, there had been no further theft. In all probability, no women had been hurt beyond having to submit to the indignity of being searched by soldiers,¹⁰ though the Court reached no more definite conclusion on the accusations levelled at Australian troops in this respect. The Court considered, however, that the officer (Capt. Lyall) who had mounted the operation at Axisia had been in error in the methods he had employed in the treatment meted out to the village, even if the more serious charges against his men remained unproven. At Badreshein, it was felt, the course of events had been so rapid that the men would not have had time to assault women as their accusers claimed, and a native police Sgt.-Major who had accompanied the troops did not support such an assertion. A native had indeed approached an Australian officer, Major Bell, at the time of the raid and complained that a soldier had taken £5 from him, but no positive identification had been made, so accusations of robbery could not be substantiated. On the other hand, Colonel Olden's order that huts and houses might be burnt in the search for arms was not justifiable, though some excuse for the action taken might be found in the numerous offences against property which had been committed in the area. Surprisingly, no investigation was made into the deaths and wounding of natives or the circumstances under which they occurred, and no significant disciplinary action was taken against the officers whose conduct of operations the Court had criticised.

¹⁰ Arrangements were later made for women to be searched by female agents appointed by the police. (See Chapter VII.)

It would seem that, on the whole, the proceedings of the Court of Enquiry were an honest attempt to get at the facts, though the failure to investigate the extent of native casualties and how they were inflicted seems negligent. At this remove it is difficult to assess the confused evidence with any hope of arriving at a more accurate conclusion than the probabilities advanced by the Court. In view however, of the charges made by Egyptian propagandists (particularly concerning the rape of women),¹¹ the circulation they received and the credence they obtained in some quarters, some re-examination is called for.

It is possible that the charges brought by the Egyptians were complete fabrications. This was the view of General Kyrie, who, in a letter to his wife referred to events at Arizia in a way which leaves no doubt that he thought the accusations made by the villagers reflected not so much their desire to obtain justice for genuine wrongs, as their wish that the Australian troops be withdrawn. He wrote:-

The Egyptians are all making terrible charges against the Australians in the hope that they will be sent away...Of course they want to get rid of the Australians.¹²

He cited the omdeh's story of the brutal theft of his daughters' earrings as an example of Egyptian invention, and since there is no record of any child being produced bearing the mutilations which would have resulted from such violence, his assumption in this instance would seem to be correct, especially since no other witnesses

¹¹ M.I.2 intercepted a 'telegram' from Zaghloul to the Italian delegation at the Peace Conference in which these incidents were described as the "destruction of towns (Bedrasheia Eubaba was an important local market (The Fallahsen, p.77)) and villages, together with 'the rape of 37 women in a village near Zagazig' (F.O. 371/3718)

¹² April 16th., 1919.

were forthcoming to support the cmdah's testimony on this point.¹³ Accusations that the troops interfered with women, however, do not rest on the evidence of one man, but on the testimony of many witnesses. The frequent appearance of certain circumstantial details in this evidence can suggest, of course, either that the witnesses had indeed seen the same thing, or that there was collusion.¹⁴ There is a further possibility. The Court of Enquiry stated that at the least, women had been 'frightened' by being searched by soldiers, but did not hazard any conclusions as to the extent of that fear or what its results might have been. There was a wide-spread conviction among the fellahsen that the troops wanted their women, and this aroused apprehension on any approach of the military.¹⁵ Soldiers patrolling native villages after the withdrawal from the

¹³ Stories of soldiers ripping off ear-rings in this way were almost traditional. They were applied to Turkish troops in accounts of atrocities in Palestine.

¹⁴ There is a third possibility. The original Arabic of the testimonies is now no longer available and it may be that the translator has given a spurious uniformity to the evidence by translating similar statements in exactly the same terms.

¹⁵ Sometimes well-meaning attempts to allay this fear misfired. Consider this report made by a Political Officer to the 10th.L.H.R.:-

A noteworthy instance of this occurred at el-Qaiag, where an officer wishing to reassure the inhabitants said, 'Mafish bint', meaning (as he understood it), 'I do not want any girls'. Owing to the ambiguity of the Arabic language, this remark, though obviously made in good faith, may easily have been mis-interpreted (since)...a riot ensued.

(G/847, April 15th., 1919. (A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.))

Dardenelles had noticed that the women always appeared to be very frightened of them.¹⁶ Obviously this fear must have been augmented by the circumstances of the raid. Without ruling out either the possibility that some offence was committed, or that the charges may have been got up for political motives, there is the further possibility that the charges levelled against Australian troops were not so much a deliberate fabrication as the result of the projection into actuality, at a moment of intense anxiety bordering on hysteria,¹⁷ of certain deep-seated fears of soldier behaviour deriving from the barbarism of past invaders. In addition since local morality demanded the highest standards of chastity from females and their virtue could have been compromised in the eyes of their jealous male relatives by manhandling by troops, though no rape may have taken place, the psychological effect of seeing women being roughly searched may have been the same. As regards looting and robbery, it is evident that some took place but since the Australian troops would have minimised its extent for obvious reasons and Egyptians tended to exaggerate in order to obtain the highest compensation no definite conclusions can be reached. Nobody during the Enquiry attempted to deny that the villages had been burnt by the troops.

A few days after the raids on Axixia and Bedrashein there was another serious incident involving Light Horse personnel at Abu Ahdar. In their efforts to find those responsible for hostile acts, the troops engaged in the work of rural pacification were frequently

¹⁶ 8th. Bty. Reminiscences, (S.P.R.)

¹⁷ Cases have been recorded during riots of convictions concerning the potential behaviour of an alien leading to hallucinations in which that behaviour seems an actuality. (The Psychology of Rumour, p.196.)

confronted by a wall of silence erected by the Egyptian villagers' traditional reluctance to betray one of their number to the governing power.¹⁸ Years of resistance offered to corrupt administrations and the need for mutual co-operation to maintain irrigation works,¹⁹ had made of each village a self-contained system, preserving its own against all outsiders, even neighbouring hamlets.²⁰ Those investigating any offences would be referred elsewhere, unless motives of personal revenge,²¹ sectarian jealousy,²² or the desire of an individual to ingratiate himself and advance his own cause in the future,²³ proved stronger than traditional loyalties. It was the need to overcome this silent opposition, as well as to deter the populace from acts of sabotage or aggression, that provoked the adoption of a policy of assigning collective responsibility, and of exacting punishment from an entire village for a crime committed in its vicinity.²⁴ When Allenby in his earliest proclamations announced his intention of implementing such a policy he was warned publicly by prominent Egyptians

¹⁸ 'It is most difficult to get an Arab to denounce another Arab, they seldom peach.' (Baron de Malortie, unpublished diary, 1881-2, quoted in Egypt Today, p.210.) See also The Fellaheen, p.80.

¹⁹ Cotton and the Egyptian Economy, p.357.

²⁰ The Fellaheen, p.79.

²¹ Vengeance was an important feature of life in rural Egypt. For examples of the various ways in which it might be taken see Egyptian Gazette, July 6th., 1917, August 14th., 1917, November 11th., 1917, September 9th., 1918 and numerous other instances in other places in this and all newspapers in Egypt.

²² For an example of this during the suppression of the uprising see W.O. 95/4402. Coptic station officials at Deir Mawas informed on some 30 Muslims.

²³ Letter from an informer, Mahomed Ali, against residents of the Itai el-Barud and Kefr-el-Sheikh (Kafr el-Sheikh) areas, offering his own services. (A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.)

²⁴ See Chapters VI and VII.

that the innocent would inevitably suffer with the guilty,²⁵ Later events would seem to suggest that while the authorities wished to make an effective threat, they desired that it should be carried out in its most rigorous form only after consultation and not as a matter of course.

At Abu Akdar, however, there was no prior consultation, When a Ghurka sentry was reported as missing in the area, General Rylie, who was commanding the 2nd. Light Horse Brigade and the Ghurka Rifles, employed two black trackers²⁶ to investigate his disappearance. They discovered that the man had been murdered and his body dumped in a canal. A punitive expedition was mounted, and when the local omdehs failed to produce the murderers, the Australians and the Ghurkas fired a village.²⁷ Rylie wrote:-

...we burnt the village
which covered about 18 acres and then got frantic
wires from higher authority not to do it, but
'finish village'.²⁸

Wires were, in fact, sent to all units on March 27th. with orders that villages were not to be burnt without permission from the Palestine L. of C. R.Q.²⁹ and later it was established that the only form of collective punishment to be carried out was by fines,³⁰ while the punishment of guilty individuals rather than indiscriminate action against whole localities was to be aimed at.³¹ Where an

²⁵ Egyptian Gazette, March 28th., 1919.

²⁶ I am unsure whether these were Australian aborigines, or Sudanese trackers as used by the Egyptian Police.

²⁷ Rylie, letter, March 29th., 1919; Report No. A/26/3, (A.W.M.F. 181/17 423.); War Diary, Aust. Mtd. Div. G.S., March 25th.-27th., 1919. (W.O. 95/4551.)

²⁸ Letter, March 29th., 1919.

²⁹ War Diary, Aust. Mtd. Div. G.S., (W.O. 95/4551.)

³⁰ W.O. 95/4402.

³¹ Note G/473, April 3rd., 1919. (A.W.M.F. 181/12 423.)

entire district was recalcitrant it could then be punished by compulsory requisitioning of supplies for the column sent to restore order, by seizure of agricultural produce (livestock, cereal and cotton) but not personal effects. The ultimate sanction was to be the cutting off of the water supply rather than the destruction of dwellings.³² The incident at Abu Akdar should not be repeated.

Despite the fact that Australian troops had been guilty of using excessive force on the three occasions described above, and that a British unit had summarily executed an oudah and four men after an unarmed detail working on railway repairs had been fired upon,³³ General Allenby circularised all units on March 27th. intimating his approval of the way in which the situation had been handled from the commencement of disturbances.³⁴ Later, he submitted the following report to the Foreign Office on alleged atrocities by British troops in Egypt:-

³² Instructions relating to the Imposition of Collective Fines, SC/C/131/13/19, April 15th., 1919. (A.W.M.F. 183/12 423.) For a description of the imposition of fine by requisitioning see the report of a British C.O. given in Britain and Egypt, p. 85 ff.

³³ This incident occurred at Shoubak (also variously spelt Shoubek and Chobak) about the same time as Australian operations against Bedrashein. The troops involved were the 1/5 Somerset Light Infantry and the Major commanding was court martialled and severely reprimanded. In defence of the troops' conduct it was represented that they 'were full of resentment against Egyptians on account of the brutal Dairut train murders and other attacks on unarmed soldiers' and angered by the delay in demobilization. (F.O. 371/3721.)

³⁴ Circular Memorandum (A.W.M.F. 183/17 423.)

Troops are said to have burned entire villages, raped women in the streets, shot and looted. In fact after prolonged provocation, destruction of railway materials and sniping, a search was made at night for arms. Portions of villages were accidentally set on fire, women were naturally frightened, but no more....Village fires are a constant occurrence regarded as (a) natural, if annoying feature of everyday life.³⁵

This is clearly an attempt to mislead by suppressing the degree of military culpability in the destruction of villages by fire. Allenby, who believed that the violent measures being employed to contain the revolt in Egypt did not constitute atrocities,³⁶ may have been seeking to stave off interference with his methods from London. At the Foreign Office a dry comment was made on the report that it was 'a curious coincidence if each of these three villages caught fire when the troops were there',³⁷ but Allenby was left to restore order in his own way. When, however, fines were being assessed upon those implicated in the destruction of railway lines and station buildings, that levied upon Axizia was set at £E.635.625 pt. as opposed to the

³⁵ May 5th., 1919. (F.O. 371/3716)

For the susceptibility of native villages to fire see The Fellahs, p.85 and the Egyptian Mail, June 15th., 1915. It is possible, in view of the extreme combustibility of native villages that Australian patrols did more damage than they intended but the reports of how fires broke out in the village of Axizia, as given by the O.C. on the spot and reproduced in the Egyptian Gazette, April 2nd., 1919 are deliberately falsified.

³⁶ 'People flogged or hanged or shot does not constitute an atrocity.'
(Allenby to F.O., May 28th., 1919. (F.O. 371/3717.))

³⁷ F.O. 371/3716.

more than £E. 2,000 imposed elsewhere, and it was stated that the punishment had been in part remitted because of 'the sufferings of the village at the hands of the Australians'.³⁸ It was thus finally publicly admitted that their conduct had been deserving of blame.

The fourth incident in which Australian troops were involved and which was denounced in some circles as an atrocity, occurred at Saft-el-Malouk on the night of the 12th.-13th. April. It was the result of a vengeance raid, strongly reminiscent of the one mounted at Surafand.³⁹ For Australian troops operating in Egypt during 1919, to the danger of death or wounding in open and violent clashes, there was added the risk of falling to a sniper's bullet, or of being overwhelmed by some sudden act of treachery by previously friendly-seeming natives. During March there were a number of these latter embassades, resulting in Australian casualties. On the nineteenth of the month, a post on the Zagazig-Ismailia Railway, held by one N.C.O. and three men of the 10th. L.H.R. was approached by what appeared to be a native wedding---'natives were beating drums and blowing trumpets'---a sight to arouse interest rather than suspicion.⁴⁰ When the procession neared the post, men sprang out from its ranks and attacked the troops, kicking them and beating them with sticks and the ends of their own rifles which had been wrested from them. Two soldiers managed to break away and telephone for help so that all were eventually rescued by a mounted troop, but not before their arms

³⁸ W.O. 95/4469.

³⁹ See Chapter IV, p.145-6.

⁴⁰ For this incident see Bgd.-Gen. commanding 3rd. L.H.Bde. to G.O.C. No.1 Section, March 20th., 1919. (A.W.M.F. 183/17 423.); W.O. 95/4556; W.O. 95/4551 and Appendix 15.

and accoutrements had been stolen and three of them reduced to a state which required the attentions of the field ambulance. The corporal's⁴¹ wounds were described as 'very severe, both jaws broken, skull fractured and numerous bruises on the body', and he later died of them. Then it was reported on March 21st., from the vicinity of Abu Akdar (where the Ghurka sentry was murdered a few days later), that a number of men had been lured into ambush and attacked, though possibly with the object of capturing their rifles rather than of slaying them.⁴² They had been told that they could obtain firewood for nothing from a village some two hundred yards south of their post (in view of the shortage of this particular commodity it is surprising their suspicions were not aroused)⁴³ and went down to collect it from a storage yard which had high double doors and was surrounded by a high wall.

There were some 40/50 natives in the yard and about 60/70 more outside. The three soldiers stopped in the entrance. Suddenly the two with rifles were hustled through into the yard, the third being left outside. The doors were slammed shut---one of the soldiers was knocked out by a blow on the head from a piece of wood; his rifle was seized; the second was rushed by 4-5 natives, who endeavoured to take his rifle. Meanwhile the man outside shouted for help and 5 or 6 of the guard ran over, burst through the door and found one soldier unconscious and the other fighting in the grip of 5 natives, while a sixth was about to strike him with a large stone.

⁴¹ L/Cpl. Ferguson, 10th. L.H.R. (Five natives were also killed.)

⁴² Report on conflict with natives near Abu el-Ahkddar, March 21st., 1919. (A.W.M.F. 183/17 423.)

⁴³ History of the Australian Comforts Fund, pp.267-268 describes how among other 'comforts' the Funds representatives distributed scarce fire-wood to the troops.

The crowd was easily dispersed by rifle fire and bayonet, with a loss of four killed and one wounded among their number. Of the Australians who had been trapped in the yard, one had serious head injuries, though the other was lucky to escape virtually unharmed. On March 24th., another Australian was wounded in a similar attack by outwardly friendly natives at El-Aslugi.⁴⁴

There was thus already a number of Australian casualties to be avenged when, at 2215 hrs. on the night of April 12th./13th. a patrol of Light Horse from the 2nd. Bde. was fired into from close quarters one mile south of the railway station in the vicinity of Saft-el-Malouk.⁴⁵ Their assailants were probably Bedouin. Two men of the 4th. L.H.R. were hit, and both subsequently died. It was the third time that Australian patrols had been sniped at in that locality, and in all, three men had been killed and five wounded. On this occasion the two men killed were old soldiers, 'very popular in their regiment, one of them having served on three fronts—Gallipoli, France and Palestine'.⁴⁶

What happened next may be pieced together from the on--the-spot account in the Brigade War Diary and later accounts in Foreign Office files. The news of the shootings quickly reached the main concentration of troops who were still in camp.

The Australian rank and file were furious and at once, ignoring their officers, leapt on their horses in the lines, and without saddles or bridles galloped off to the scene of the

⁴⁴W.O. 95/4522.

⁴⁵For this incident see W.D. 2nd. L.H. Bde., April 12th., 1919 (W.O. 95/4538); Memorandum on Saft-el-Malouk Incident, (F.O.L.); Intelligence Summary 15, April 15th., 1919. (A.W.M.F. 103/12 423.)

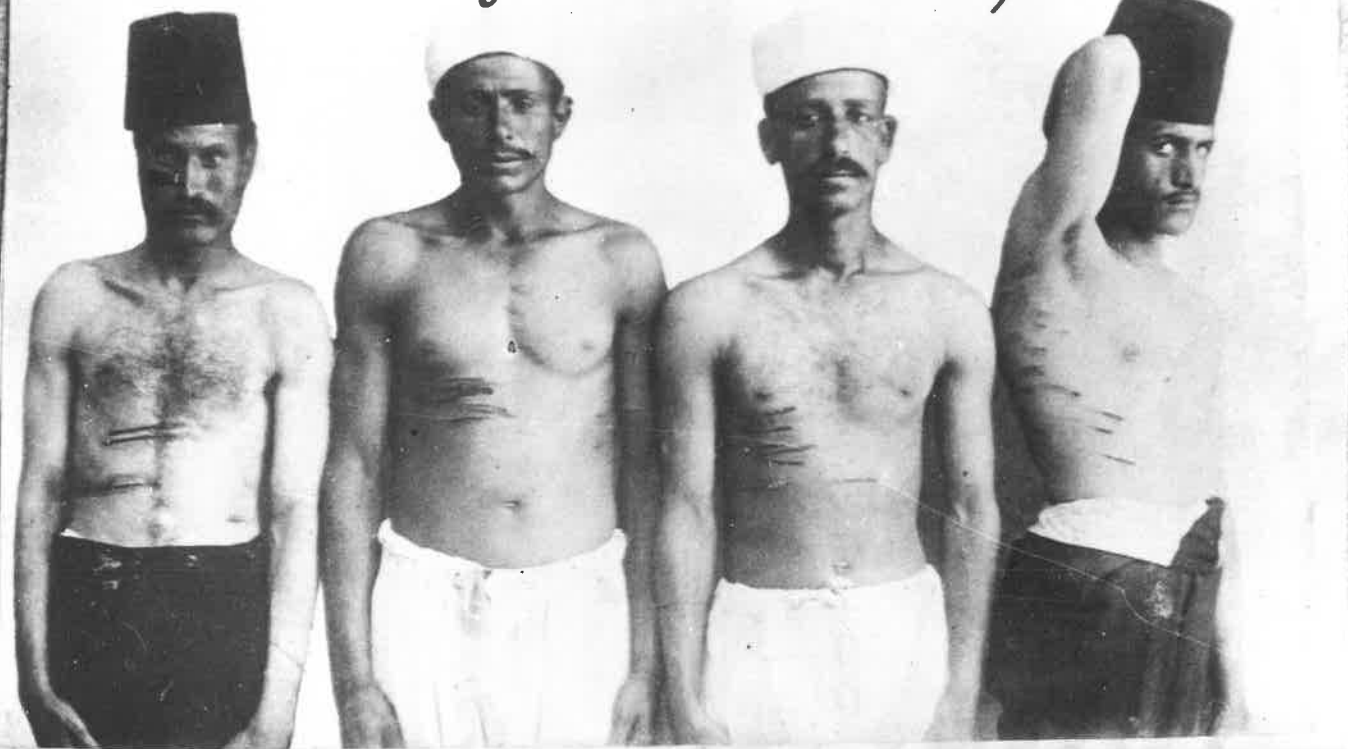
⁴⁶Reply in Annex 11. Files on Egypt in 1919. (F.O.L.)

Gali Guirguis
(notable)

Said Korim
(fellah)

Ahmed Osman
(notable)

Basili Guirguis
(Etudiant)



غالی أفندي جرجس

السيد كريم

أحمد يوسف عمران

بسیلی أفندي جرجس

Scenes de flagellations en Egypte
Scenes of lashing in Egypt

Men flogged at Saft-el-Malouk,

(F.O. 371/3720.)

crime with the object of themselves
punishing the villages neighbouring.⁴⁷

General Northwick and the Political Officer pursued them in a car, hoping that they would be in time to avert the massacre on which the Australians seemed bent.⁴⁸ Though three natives had been arrested by a patrol close to the scene of the murder within thirty minutes of its having taken place, they do not seem to have been subjected to the interrogation that their presence there at such a time would have justified. The sole reason given for their detention was that they were out after the 1900 hr. curfew imposed by Martial Law.⁴⁹ It seems that three possible culprits were not sufficient for the anger of the troops, who 'were in a very dangerous temper'.⁵⁰ All the male inhabitants of the surrounding villages were made prisoner and a Summary Military Court was convened. The majority of those arrested were given twenty lashes apiece for 'withholding information concerning the murders'.⁵¹ Since the Brigade Diary recorded that 128 cases were dealt with and disposed of in 3 hours,⁵² those punished

⁴⁷Reply to Annex II.

⁴⁸In the report of the G.O.C. West Delta Area, which appears to be a deliberate attempt to disguise the irregularities of the incident this is described thus:-

A strong patrol of 3 officers and 50 O.R. was sent out immediately to search the villages which lie in the immediate vicinity and reached Saft-el-Malouk at 0400. General Northwick accompanied this patrol. (Memorandum on Saft-el-Malouk Incident.)

⁴⁹Memorandum.

⁵⁰Reply to Annex II.

⁵¹W.D. 2nd. L.H. Bde., April 13th., 1919. (W.O. 95/4538.)

⁵²ibid. The entry states that this 'probably constituted a record for any court in Egypt.' The Memorandum differs in the figures. It records that 250 of the male inhabitants (those who 'exhibited the greatest treachery') were arrested and about 210 were sentenced to be flogged.

can scarcely have had any opportunity to divulge such information, and the operations of the Court were clearly directed towards an indiscriminate exaction of vengeance rather than the identification and punishment of specific guilty parties.

General Borthwick's action in setting up the Court was largely approved in official circles. There was recognition that the Australians required special handling when in such a dangerous mood, and that but for the General's prompt action in diverting their energies by the setting up of the aptly-named Summary Court, 'the villages would have been burnt and serious casualties resulted'.⁵³ The G.O.C. West Delta Area considered that, by a combination of firmness and tact, Borthwick had 'successfully met a very delicate situation which might have resulted in heavy casualties and damage to both innocent and guilty natives (which) would have been very prejudicial to the... political situation'.⁵⁴ Moreover, it was highly necessary to deter future sniping attacks on patrols if 'affrays between the Australians and natives, leading to much bloodshed, were to be avoided',⁵⁵ and the incident at Saft-el-Malouk was considered to have a valuable deterrent effect. There is no indication that any disciplinary measures were contemplated against the troops responsible, either to punish them for what had taken place, or to dissuade them from similar acts in the future. The Egyptians who had been flogged regardless of guilt or innocence, however, could scarcely be expected to feel grateful to troops because they had not been slaughtered and their villages burned.

⁵³ Reply to Annex 11.

⁵⁴ Memorandum.

⁵⁵ Memorandum.

If heavy casualties would have been highly prejudicial to the political situation, wholesale floggings could not do other than produce wide-spread and lasting resentment. Australian actions could damage Britain's position in other ways than by stirring up such resentment. Propaganda had played a larger part in the War which had just ended than ever before, and its potential was recognised by the Egyptian nationalists. As reports of German reprisals on Belgian franc tireurs and of atrocities committed on the civilian population of Belgium had been successfully exploited by the Allies,⁵⁶ so the Egyptians hoped that by depicting the British suppression of their revolt in the bloodiest terms, they would bring about a world-wide revulsion of public opinion against the Protecting Power. Elements hostile to Britain could be counted on to take up the campaign, as could socialists and others opposed to Imperialism, or those already sympathetic towards Egyptian demands for independence.⁵⁷ The dissemination of reports of atrocities committed by troops could also serve to offset the adverse effect created overseas by the news of the Deirut murders and certain manifestations of xenophobia.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ See, for example, the selection of cartoons appearing in Stallings, Laurence, The First World War. A Photographic History, (London, 1934). p.32. See also Australian recruiting posters in Robert Nelson, et al., A Pictorial History of Australians at War, (See Why West, 1970). p.85.

⁵⁷ Among these last there were representatives even in the British Army in Egypt. (See J. Jones, M.P., speech, March 24th., 1919. (Parliamentary Debates), and Daily Herald, letter from an 'English Soldier', March 29th., 1919.)

⁵⁸ See British Empire and Africa Report, No. CKVII, April 30th., 1919. (F.O.L.)

which could only weaken claims to the right of self-determination in the eyes of outsiders. General Allenby inclined to this view, stating that the 'grotesque legends' in circulation concerning the misconduct of British troops were simply a deliberate attempt to distract attention from the Times report on Deirut.⁵⁹ It is only fair to state, however, that the nationalists were not only moved by the desire to make political capital out of the events they reported, but also by humanitarian considerations, in that they wished the suffering inflicted upon their compatriots to be brought to an end.⁶⁰

At the beginning of April in London, where the left-wing Daily-Herald was already showing its opposition to the handling of events in Egypt,⁶¹ Sir Reginald Wingate expressed the need for caution and the careful censorship before they were published of all communique's dealing with the burning of villages, etc.⁶² Such a move, however, while it might delay criticism at home,⁶³ was powerless to counteract the activities of propagandists in other countries. In France, the left-wing press was open to Egyptians who wished to make their views known. Le Populaire published a

⁵⁹ Allenby to F.O., Sgm.798, May 16th., 1919. (F.O.L.)

⁶⁰ Aliy Kemal, Vice-President of the National Party, wrote privately to the Speaker of the House of Commons, March 28th., 1919, expressing his concern that dum-dum bullets were being used against Egyptians. (F.O.L.) Since this accusation was not being made publicly at that time, his motives can only have been humanitarian.

⁶¹ April 1st., 1919.

⁶² April 3rd., 1919. (F.O. 371/3714)

⁶³ F.O. 371/3717 contains a suggested Press notice which refuted in advance any attacks which might be made on the punishment of Saft-al-Malouk, and the bombing raids which had been carried out on other villages.

a letter from A.E. Sayed denouncing the undue severity of British reprisals,⁶⁴ and L'Humanité, in an interview with Sa'ad Zaghlul¹ who had gone to Paris after his release from Malta, contrasted the moderation of the Pasha with the pitiless way the British had repressed all manifestations directed against their rule.⁶⁵ In a debate on the Peace Treaty, the Socialist Deputy, Goude, introduced the subject of British atrocities in Egypt,⁶⁶ and it seems likely that Zaghlul¹ entertained hopes of a favourable reception for a similar statement of grievances which he presented to Clemenceau in July.⁶⁷ Clearly, Egyptian nationalists were determined to make as much political mileage as possible out of the atrocity issue.

The campaign gathered momentum, despite British assertions that it could easily be countered since the 'great forbearance and good behaviour of the troops (had) won the appreciation of all but the worst elements of the (Egyptian) population'.⁶⁸ In Paris the Egyptian Delegation were able to produce photographs in support of their allegations against the troops,⁶⁹ while across the Channel

⁶⁴ April 8th., 1919.

⁶⁵ Referred to in British Empire and Africa Report, No. CXVII, April 30th., 1919.

⁶⁶ Sir George Grahame, Ambassador in Paris, to Curzon, dispatch. (F.O.L.)

⁶⁷ Egyptian Circular, November 15th., 1919.

⁶⁸ British Empire and Africa Report, No. CXVIII, May 7th., 1919. For appreciative comment on the conduct of British troops, see Advertiser, April 12th., 1919; British Empire and Africa Report, No. CXXII, June 4th., 1919' Report on the Political Conditions in the Provinces, April 14th., 1919, and Allenby to F.O., both in F.O. 371 /3717.

⁶⁹ British Empire and Africa Report, No. CXIX, May 14th., 1919.

Egyptian activists were bringing their account of events in Egypt before a widening audience. A group calling itself the 'Egyptian Association of Great Britain', writing from the Imperial Hotel in Bloomsbury, put out a circular (officially described as 'scurrilous') in which it was asserted that British soldiers had 'burnt villages, murdered the inhabitants, violated women, and stolen money and jewellery...wholesale'.⁷⁰ On May 16th., the Times reported that allegations against British troops in Egypt had been raised in a Commons debate, where Mr Spoor, the Labour M.P. for Bishop Auckland, had brought up the accusations contained in the circular. It was felt that if a Member as staid as Mr. Spoor attached some sort of credibility to such statements, they were likely to be accepted as true by a wide circle.⁷¹ In any case, they received continuing exposure, as articles couched in similar terms appeared in English newspapers,⁷² and reproductions of extracts from American press reports were distributed in London.⁷³

In America some sections of the population were indeed putting on a great display of righteous indignation over events in Egypt,⁷⁴

⁷⁰ British Empire and Africa Report, No. CXX, May 21st., 1919.

⁷¹ Harmsworth to Curzon, May 16th., 1919. (F.O.L.)

⁷² e.g. 'The Egyptian Revolution', article by Mahmoud Pasha, Daily Herald, July 7th., 1919; Interview with Kyriakos Michail, Labour Leader, November 13th., 1919.

⁷³ Britain and Egypt, p. 84.
The Egyptian journalist responsible was eventually deported.

⁷⁴ Egyptian Circular, November 15th., 1919.

and this reached its journalistic peak about the middle of August,⁷⁵ although it continued well on into the Autumn. It was not, however, solely the disinterested outcry of offended morality which was being raised. Edward Price Bell of the London Bureau of the Chicago Daily News considered that there were enemies of England in the United States who were ceaselessly engaged in libelling British policy,⁷⁶ and these were making the most of the present opportunity. An obvious instance of this would be George Creal, author of Ireland's Fight for Freedom, who, rising to attack the oppressor of Irishmen and Egyptians alike, published a forceful article denouncing British atrocities in the New York Call.⁷⁷ Other factions, more concerned with the interior manoeuvrings of American politics and the preservation of isolationism, than traditional Old World enmities, were also at work. In London, Capt. Ormsby Gore spoke out in the Parliament against

Anti-British propaganda in the United States, worked up by anti-British agents throughout the United States, rarely using the Egyptians as one of their tools to try to smash the League of Nations and to do everything against (Britain) and President Wilson.⁷⁸

The chief opponent of the League to use events in Egypt for the basis of his attack thereon seems to have been Senator Borah, whose speech to the Senate on August 18th., attacked the British Protectorate and

⁷⁵ Atrocity stories appeared in the following papers: Pittsburgh Leader, August 16th., Milwaukee News, August 18th., Baltimore Star, August 18th., Boston American, August 18th., Syracuse Journal, August 19th. (This was after a speech made by Senator Borah. (See below.)

⁷⁶ Letter to F.R. Harris at the F.O., November 18th., 1919. (F.O.L.)
⁷⁷ October 7th., 1919.

⁷⁸ Parliamentary Debates, November 20th., 1919.

cited instances of atrocities during the suppression of the recent uprising.⁷⁹ This speech reflected possible Irish and Indian influence, as well as Egyptian, and its intention to discredit the League was evident. The undue dominance that Britain, through her Dominions, would exert, and the desire to keep the United States unsullied by the sordid power struggles of the European nations was at the heart of American opposition to the League, so moves to discredit British actions, and to expose the worst side of Imperialism, were a natural means of fomenting hostile opinion.⁸⁰

Though propagandists of one cause or another might embellish their accounts of events in Egypt to strengthen their case against Britain, there remained an undeniable factual basis for their allegations. For example, within the series of fantastic exaggerations read out by Boliah to the U.S. Senate, there was a hard kernel of fact---the burning of Azizia by the Australians. Privately, this was admitted by Foreign Office officials. Under notification of a Parliamentary question for November 25th., it was noted that:-

Unfortunately there is a substratum of truth in the allegations and the official enquiry,⁸¹ though showing that there was gross exaggeration, does not, and, under the circumstances, could not, prove conclusively that no regrettable incidents had ever occurred.⁸²

⁷⁹ Congressional Record, August 16th., 1919.

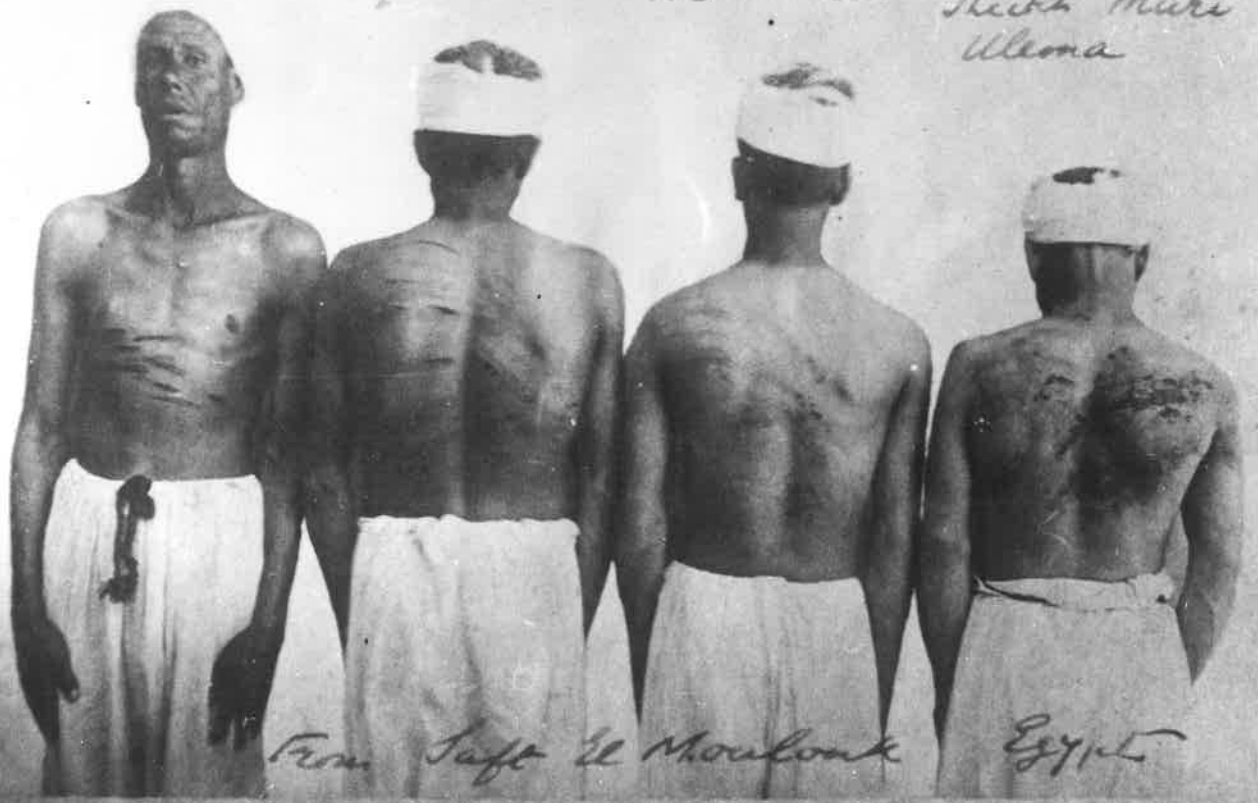
⁸⁰ Miss Durham's report, (see Chapter V, p.170-171) was later incorporated in the Record to serve the same end. (Congressional Record, October 30th., 1919.)

⁸¹ See above, proceedings of the Court of Enquiry.

⁸² 7.C. 371/3721.

Scenes de flagellation en Egypte
Scenes of lashing in Egypt.

Abou Sayed Kerim H. Jurem Sheikh Muri
Ulema



From Saft el Moulouk Egypt

مرسي عبده

السيد كرم

احمد يوسف عمران

الشيخ عبدالفتاح مرعي

Men flogged at Saft-el-Malouk.

(F.O. 371/3720.)

Australians had been responsible for four of the incidents which embarrassed the Foreign Office and provided anti-British elements with the basis of their propaganda. The Foreign Office could denounce as fakes the photographs of the victims of Saft-el-Malouk that were exhibited in Paris,⁸³ but the floggings had occurred. A British double agent could 'lose' valuable evidence of atrocities in Egypt which had been entrusted to him to take to the Delegation in France,⁸⁴ but villages had been burnt and bombed, and unarmed natives killed in confrontations with the troops.⁸⁵ Extenuating circumstances could be advanced for these 'troubled events',⁸⁶ but ultimately it had to be admitted that they had taken place.

Among all the actions of the British in suppressing the 1919 uprising in Egypt, the one that seems to have lodged most firmly in the memories of Egyptians until today is the burning of villages.⁸⁷

⁸³ British Empire and Africa Report, No. CXIX, May 14th., 1919. Two of these photographs are reproduced in this chapter.

⁸⁴ Report on Egyptian Delegation, May 10th., 1919. (F.O. 371/3716)

⁸⁵ 'Not two score British were killed in the revolt. The British killed over 900 Egyptians according to their own announcements. The relative losses betray an almost unbelievable ruthlessness in killing the unarmed natives.' (New Republic, September 3rd., 1919.) British casualties are given in F.O. 371/3718 as 33 killed and 116 wounded (Civil and military) as against approximately 800 natives killed and 1500 wounded.

⁸⁶ F.O. 371/3721. The extenuating circumstances cited were that the events were 'incidental to a time of great excitement' and had occurred when 'the whole of Upper Egypt was in revolt, when the railway lines were cut, when stations were unburnt, and one or two murders of British civilians had taken place'.

⁸⁷ Information gathered by asking Egyptians of all ages what they knew of the 1919 uprising and its suppression. (Cairo, May-June, 1975.)

Australian units were not alone in firing native settlements but, as this chapter has shown, they were involved in the most widely publicised incidents of that kind. Yet Egyptians do not remember that Australian troops were particularly responsible for this crime. It was against the British Empire that Egypt was struggling and it is Britain which bears the blame.⁸⁸ The bitterness stirred up in 1919 developed into a steady opposition which ultimately made Britain's position in Egypt untenable. The suppression of the revolt had made the regime secure for the moment but the methods of suppression had made its continued existence impossible, unless it were to hold the country down for ever by force of arms. There is some truth in the assertion that the Australian bayonets which herded the people of Azizia down a dusty road in the noon-day sun, were also hastening the British administration out of Egypt.

Were the Australians guilty of atrocities? Certainly there were many people around the world who thought that they had indeed committed 'heinous crimes' in Egypt. But the dictionary suggests that an atrocity is also a 'bad blunder'⁸⁹ and even the most charitable view of Australian actions during 1919 must admit that politically they brought disastrous results.

⁸⁸ The following comment was made by one Egyptian who was interviewed. A native of the Delta area, he was a high-school student in 1919. He said:-

Villages were burnt. We did not think of them as burnt by the Australians, but by the British, for were they not all under one flag?

(Cairo, June, 1975.)

⁸⁹ Concise Oxford Dictionary.

CONCLUSION

To introduce a parallel from another field of historical research, this thesis, like John Israel's book on student nationalism in China,¹ may be said to 'explore an academic wilderness'. Its sources are similarly scattered over three continents, unindexed and unexplored.² Though much time and all the author's ingenuity were employed in tracking down material, the suspicion must remain that much information might still be unearthed. This thesis cannot, then, claim to be in any way a definitive work, but rather a preliminary outlining of a field of research which future historians may wish to investigate more thoroughly. Its conclusions can only be provisional, and its usefulness rests rather in its delineation of an undeveloped area of study, and in the identification of possible sources.

Though a body of literature exists on the A.I.F. in the Middle East during the Great War, and the years from 1914 to 1919 have often been dealt with previously by historians concerned with Egypt, there has been no attempt to produce a coherent continuous account of the relations between Australian troops and Egyptian civilians in this period.³ It is hoped that the narrative offered in this thesis will supply this lack. The present account may be seen, as was suggested in the Synopsis, as falling into three parts, corresponding to three distinct periods; Chapters I-III dealing with that between 1914 and 1916 when both the infantry and Light Horse regiments were present in

¹Student Nationalism in China, 1927-1937, (Stanford, 1966).

²ibid., p. vii.

³Introduction, p. xvi.

Egypt, Chapter IV exploring the significance of the campaign in Palestine for later events in Egypt, and Chapters V-VIII being concerned with the Australian role in the causes of the uprising of 1919 and in the course of its suppression. In terms of the conclusions reached, however, it is more useful to see the thesis as being divided into two sections. The first, from Chapter I to Chapter IV is an investigation of attitudes, and the second (Chapters V-VIII) shows the effect of those attitudes as contributing to the disaffection which sustained the 1919 revolt, and as conditioning the behaviour of Australian troops in the riots in Cairo and the pacification of the rural areas.

In December 1914, Australian troops were disembarked in Egypt to strengthen the country's security at a time when it seemed that it might be threatened by the onslaught of an external enemy or an uprising of internal dissidents. Egypt's Suez Canal was an important link in communications between the lands of the British Empire, and in time of war the safeguarding of this vital channel for the passage of men and goods to Great Britain was a prime necessity. Australians played a minor role in the repulse of the initial Turkish assault upon the Canal, but their presence in strength was an insurance against any serious outbreak by pro-Turkish or anti-British elements behind the lines. The sensitive period when the Protectorate was proclaimed passed virtually without incident, largely it was believed, because of the steadying effect created upon the native populace by the sight of the A.I.F. European residents who had been in a state of anxiety since the beginning of the War, were reassured, while Australian troops, believing that all Egyptians were on the side of the Turks, regarded their inaction as a sign of

cowardice and base time-serving. The Egyptian economy (particularly that part of it which depended on the tourist trade and was now languishing) benefitted from the inflow of Australian money, though on their side, Australians felt they were continually being 'gypped', from individual soldiers bargaining in the bazaars to the military authorities purchasing goods and services on the open market in the regular commercial world. The conviction grew that all Egyptians were rapacious and untrustworthy in financial matters.

Australian troops had left Australia with a number of preconceptions about the coloured races. Now these pre-conceptions were re-inforced by their experiences in Egypt. Though they were exposed to an unrepresentative cross-section of native society, Australians came easily to believe that the lack of hygiene, dishonesty, ignorance and immorality they encountered in the streets of Cairo were typical of all Egyptians. The contrasts between Egypt and Australia confirmed the troops in their notions of white superiority, and in their admiration of their homeland. At the same time, the inferiority accorded to the Egyptians meant that native residents received little respect. Their status as human beings was lowered until it was possible for the troops to treat them often thoughtlessly and sometimes cruelly. Boredom drove the Australians to torment Egyptians, and as the long separation from home and the harsh realities of war on Gallipoli eroded the restraints of civilisation, so soldiers became increasingly violent in their conduct towards natives. The situation was aggravated by the peculiar structure of Cairo society, which threw the troops into contact with the more sordid aspects of Egyptian life, failed to provide them with healthy recreation, and emphasised their separation from

moderating domestic influences. In addition the differences between themselves, the British Army and Anglo-Egyptian residents, which Australians now perceived, strengthened their sense of group identity.

During the Palestine campaign there grew out of this consciousness of a shared identity, a fierce loyalty towards comrades, which placed the obligation to avenge their deaths above all other considerations. Experiences with the Bedouin, real or imagined, turned Australian contempt and mistrust for the Arabs into a violent hatred, while orders concerning the treatment of natives issued by the British authorities were increasingly ignored as political foresight was dismissed as weakness and ignorance.

The revolt which broke out in Egypt in 1919 was directed against the British presence in that country, but the wide-spread disaffection which it revealed had been considerably augmented by War-time conditions. The activities of the Army had stirred up resentment, and Australian treatment of native civilians and members of the E.T.C. and E.L.C. had contributed to this rise in discontent. In Cairo, where the presence of troops was more likely to provoke a riot than to restore order, Australian soldiers frequently exacerbated the situation by allowing their behaviour to be influenced by notions of what was due to their self-respect, rather than what would restore tranquility. In the country-side, the decisiveness shown by Australian units in restoring order earned them the praise of the military authorities who were satisfied by the rapid achievement of their limited objectives, but the political effects of the pacification campaign, were extremely unfortunate for the British. In the short term, the reports of the use of excessive force by troops were used

as a propaganda weapon by Egyptian nationalists and their sympathisers, and by all who wished to discredit Great Britain, for their own ends. Certain incidents in which Australians were the protagonists became the basis for much of this propaganda. In the long term, though the use of the military might restore the appearance of order, it could only create lasting resentment and bitterness and render the British position in Egypt permanently insecure. Again the 'strong methods' favoured by the Australians did much to foster discontent and confirm opposition to the Protecting Power.

The central theme of this thesis is that contacts between native Egyptians and Australian troops at the start of the War confirmed the latter in racial antipathies developed before they left Australia. Participation in the armed conflict, first on Gallipoli and later in Palestine, caused the normal standards of conduct in peace-time to be replaced by a new set of values in which physical violence became acceptable, group loyalty was of paramount importance, and all sympathetic understanding for members of out-groups was suppressed. Attitudes on race and war-time morality combined to influence the conduct of Australian troops during the containment of revolutionary disturbances in Egypt in 1919. Australian involvement in the campaign of pacification was characterised by an unimaginative and excessive show of force in which humanitarian standards to which the troops normally subscribed and long-term political considerations were subordinated to the immediate gratification of race pride and the personal exaction of revenge.

The thesis that Australians were racist at the time of the Great War is not original, and neither is the contention that in time of war

men perform actions that they would normally find abhorrent. In the context of existing writing on Australian troops in the Middle East between 1914 and 1919, however, both these points may still validly be made.

AFTERWORD.

How far do the experiences of the years from 1914-1919 still continue to effect the way in which Australians and Egyptians regard each other? Without undertaking an elaborate survey only tentative general impressions can be offered, and even these must be qualified because it is impossible to gauge how memories deriving from the First World War have been overlaid, re-inforced or effaced by those of World War II.

It seems likely that extensive media coverage of the Arab-Israeli conflict since 1948 will have made most Australians more conscious of the Middle East as a whole than ever before, but not necessarily better informed about Egypt specifically, either as to its history and geography, or as to the nature of its inhabitants. General knowledge about Egypt is still probably largely limited to a catalogue of the Pyramids (in vogue at this moment because of the rising interest in the super-natural and extra-terrestrial), the Nile and the Suez Canal, plus a few (often fantastic) ideas about mummification, Tutankhamon and Cleopatra. Egypt's Islamic past is known only to scholars and tourists who may have seen its monuments in Cairo, while understanding of the country's political and social present seems rarely to extend beyond the names of Presidents Nasser and Sadat. Asked what he thinks of Egyptians, the Australian of today is still quite likely to refer to some anecdote handed down by a father, grandfather, uncle or great-uncle. The 'mischievous, tricky, night-shirted Egyptian'¹ of the bazaars appears time and again, stealing ancestral

¹Cairo, p. 224.

boots, hawking filthy post-cards and demanding 'Baksheesh'. Whether his image continues to effect the way in which Australians respond to Egyptians today is a matter for speculation; that it survives undiminished in Australian folk-lore seems certain.

Though Egyptian rioters destroyed the Light Horse memorial at Port Said in 1956² during the upsurge of anti-British feeling over Suez, the specific Australian role in the maintenance of colonial rule in the past now seems to be forgotten.³ Egyptians would appear to be at least as ignorant about Australia as Australians about Egypt. The results of an entirely informal investigation in which the question 'What do you know/think about Australia and Australians' was put to all Egyptians, from university professors to the laundry man, encountered during six weeks in Cairo in 1975, may be here cited. The opinion most commonly met with was that Australia was a long way away, and probably inhabited by wild tribes outside its cities. It was generally held that Australia belonged to Britain, since Australian troops had appeared in association with British forces in the past, and since the Australian flag clearly incorporated the Union Jack. Those Egyptians who were conversant with foreign affairs were considerably amused by the attempts of the then Labour Government to appear as non-aligned. There was some bitterness, especially among professionals, over attitudes towards would-be migrants in the past. Few knew that the 'White Australia' policy had been officially abandoned, since it was felt

²Major R.J.G. Hall, The Australian Light Horse, (Blackburn, 1968.) p.112.

³See the concluding paragraph of Chapter VIII.

that a thinly populated country like Australia would do more to relieve the pressures of the Egyptian population explosion, if it were not for its race prejudice. Where memories deriving from 1914-1919 seemed most likely to have influenced contemporary Egyptian ideas about Australians was, as in the reverse case, in the formation and continued existence of a stereotyped character in vulgar tradition. The image which continues to survive is of a physically enormous (this frequently caricatured in vigorous mime) figure, of gargantuan appetites and with a total lack of restraint which was not always condemned. If he was a bogey-man who left a trail of broken bones behind him, at least he was not too self-important to show he had a sense of humour. Despite his size and energy, however, he was a vaguely ludicrous object, being credited with little intelligence or efficiency.⁴ Once more, the persistence of an image may be noted, its effect on behaviour only guessed at.

⁴ Australian troops of the First World War apparently shared in the disarrangement turned upon the mules they sold on their departure. Big and beautiful, these animals seemingly needed twice as much food as the local variety to get through half as much work. The saying 'like an Australian mule' came to have proverbial force. (My informant remembered having seen a quotation in one of the many novels of country life which appeared in Egypt between the Wars in which this proverb appeared. Unfortunately, he could not place where he had seen it, and obviously could not comb such an extensive literature to find it.)

APPENDIX I

Some biographical details concerning authors of manuscript material (diaries, letters, etc.) quoted in this thesis.¹

ADAMS, A.J., Pte.

13th. Fld. Ambulance.

Born at Wolverton, Bucks., England. Educated at Wolverton County School, and Science and Arts Institute. Spent 3 years with the 1st. Bucks. Territorials. Migrated to Australia at the age of 22. At enlistment was working as a carpenter and joiner in Brisbane. A keen fisherman. He died of wounds after Pozières, August 9th., 1916, aged 28 years.

ADAMS, R.W.W., Sgt.

11th. Btn.

Born in Perth, W.A. Grandson of the Rt. Hon. W.P. Adams, one time Liberal Whip and Governor of Madras. Maternal grandfather was G.W. Leake, Q.C., whose father and uncle went out to W.A. circe 1829. He was educated at a preparatory school in East Molesey, Surrey, England, and at Rugby. Took up farming in W.A. at the age of 18, and at the time of his enlistment was a farmer at Katanning, W.A. He died on July 26th., 1916 of wounds received at Pozières. Aged 26.²

¹The rank given is that held at termination of service. Biographical information is not available for all soldiers quoted and is especially scanty for those who served in either the British or the N.Z. forces.

²Gammage states he was born in England. (The Broken Years, p.87) I do not know what records Dr Gammage consulted, but my information was taken in the first instance from the files accompanying the original manuscript, wherever located.

AITKEN, J.M., Lt., M.C.

Born at Bendigo, Vic. Educated at Kalgoorlie Central State School, W.A. Employed at time of enlistment as an accountant in Kalgoorlie. Killed in action on the Somme, August 10th., 1918, aged 27 years and 7 months.

ALGIE, Colvin Stewart.

Mtd. Auckland Btn., N.Z.E.F.

ALLEN, W.W.B., Sgt.

9th. Btn.

Born at Hamilton, Vic. in 1886. At one time a school teacher in Heywood, Vic. At the start of the War he was serving as a Military Staff clerk with the Australian permanent forces. He was killed in action at Anzac on April 25th., 1915.³

ANDERSON, A.J., Cpl., No. 1076.

4th. L.H.R.

Born at Rosebank Farm, Bellark, Vic. Enlisted January 7th., 1915 while he was farming at Mt. Egerton, Vic. Served in Gallipoli, Sinai, Palestine and Egypt and was killed at Damanhur on April 12th., 1919, during the Egyptian rising. At time of death was aged 25 years.

³Gammage states he died while a prisoner of war. (The Broken Years, p.41)

ARMSTRONG, D.G., Lt.

21st. Btn.

Born at Kyneton, Vic. Educated Kyneton Grammar School and Scotch College, Melbourne. Enlisted June 22nd., 1915 while employed as a bank clerk with the Bank of New South Wales. Killed in action at Broodseide, October 9th., 1917, aged 24 years and 3 months.

BARRON, W.

'A British Soldier'.

BEEKEN, J.

'A British Soldier'.

BERGWHISTLE, Ivor, Pte.

22nd. Btn.

One-time reporter for the Melbourne Age. Returned to Australia.

BRAIN, N.W., Capt., M.M.

Jeweller and Watchmaker of Parramatta, N.S.W. Returned to Australia.

BROWN, A., Capt.

49th. Btn.

Born in Manchester, England. Educated at Manchester Secondary School. Was a trooper in the Duke of Lancaster's Yeomanry for 3 years. Enlisted in the A.I.F. on August 25th., 1914, while farming near Brisbane, Queensland. Killed in action in North Russia while serving with the British expedition. Aged 28 years.

BRUNTON, A.A., C. Sgt.-Maj., No. 1665.

3rd. Anzac L.R. Op. Coy.

Born in England in 1883. At time of enlistment was working as an engineer in East Melbourne. Served first as a private with the 58th. Btn. (2nd. Reinforcements.) Returned to Australia, September 28th., 1918.

BURTON, F.J., Lt.

4th. L.H.R.

Educated in the state school at Nullan, Vic. Member of the 19th. L.H.C.M.F., Minyip, before the War. Enlisted August 22nd., 1914 while farming at Nullan. Killed in action at Beersheba, October 31st 1917, aged 23 years.

CALDWELL, D.W. (Wallace), Lt.

27th. Btn.

Born at Exeter, S.A. Employed at time of enlistment as a carpenter at Semaphore, S.A. He had an aunt in Alexandria. (Probably working as a nurse.) He was killed in action on the Fiers-Gueudecourt Sector on March 2nd., 1917, aged 23 years.

CAMPBELL, John Donald, Lt.

6th. M.G. Coy.

Born of Scottish parents at Essendon, Vic., in 1878. Farmed near Warrnambool, Vic. Enlisted on January 18th., 1915. He was killed in action at Paschendaele, October 9th., 1917, aged 39 years.

CHAMPION, B.W., Lt.

1st. Btn.

Held a commission in 19B area C.C.F. before the War. Resident of North Sydney, N.S.W.⁴ Enlisted May 11th., 1915 at the age of 17 having received parental permission because of the casualty lists from Gallipoli. Worked before the War as a dental apprentice. Returned to Australia, June 30th., 1918.

CHINNER, E.H., Lt.

32nd. Btn.

Born at Peterborough, S.A., January 15th., 1894. Educated at Prince Alfred College, Adelaide, S.A. Was a lieutenant in the Senior Cadets and C.C.F. Was working as a bank clerk at the start of the War. On enlistment at the outbreak of War he went from Fort Largs, S.A. to take a special course at Brighton, S.A., and afterwards for officer training at Duntroon in April, 1915. He then went to the Randwick Machine Gun School, and trained recruits at Mitcham, S.A. He was commissioned on October 7th., 1915, and died of wounds while in German hands on July 20th., 1917, after the fighting at Fromelles on the previous day. His life became the subject of a Y.M.C.A. pamphlet.

CLEARY, F.J., Pts. No. 4084.

17th. Btn.

Born 1876. An electrician of Annandale, N.S.W.

⁴I am indebted at this point and throughout this appendix to Dr Gammage for the biographical notes included in The Broken Years, against which I have checked my own material, and which I have used to supplement it.

COE, Henry John Frederick, Maj.⁵

12th. A.F.A. Bde.

Born May 24th., 1894. At time of enlistment a mechanical draughtsman of Malvern, Vic. Returned to Australia, May 10th., 1919.

COLES, Dr.

4th. L.H. Fld. Amb.

Native of Adelaide, S.A. At time of enlistment was a medical student. Returned to Australia, 1919.

COOPER, G.C., L/Cpl., No. 475.

No information to hand.

DONKIN, L.R., Pte. No. 817.

1st. Btn.

Labourer, from East Maitland, N.S.W. Killed in action at Anzac on August 15th., 1915, aged 23.

DUKE, C.R., Lt.-Col.

4th. Btn.

Enlisted as a private (No. 963) and stayed on in the Army after the War, finally retiring with the above rank. Appears in The Broken Years as Capt. C.R. Duke, M.C., 5th. Pioneer Btn., architect, of Orange, N.S.W. Born New Zealand, 1888.⁶

⁵ Gammage gives his initials as 'H.T.F.' (The Broken Years, p.29) but this would seem to be a misprint.

⁶ p66

ELLSWORTH, N.G., B/Sgt. Maj., No. 843.

102nd. Howitzer Bty.

Born at Creswick, Vic. Educated C. of E. Grammar School, Melbourne.

Was 11 years with the 9th. Bty. A.F.A. (Militia) A Royal Mint official in South Yarra, Vic., he enlisted on August 19th., 1914.

He died of wounds on July 31st., 1917, aged 31.

EVANS, M.R.

Australian L.H.

A member of a prominent family, he entered Hawkesbury Agricultural College just before the start of the War in 1914. He joined the Light Horse as a trooper.

GAMBLE, W.M.F., Capt., M.C.

7th. Btn. and 15th. L.T.M. Bty.

Born in Scotland in 1896. At time of enlistment he was a student living in Macleod, Vic. His father was Dr M.Gamble of Asylum Reserve, Kew, Vic.

GATES, F.J., Pte. No. 2410.

1st. M.G. Coy.

Born at Petersham, N.S.W. Educated at Petersham and Summerhill Public School, and Sydney Technical College. He was a lieutenant in the 36th. Btn. Senior Cadets and a member of the C.C.F. He enlisted on May 9th., 1915 while working as an engineering apprentice in Petersham. He was killed in action on September 19th., 1918, aged 21 years and 7 months.

GUPPY, A.L., C.Q.M.S, No. 201

14th. Btn.

Farmer from Benalla, Vic. Died of wounds, April 11th., 1917, aged 30 years.

HOBSON, B.C., R.Q.M.S., M.S.M., No. 613.

13th Btn. Returned to Australia at the end of the War.

JACKSON, H.M., Sgt. No. 1766.

13th Btn.

Born in Glebe, N.S.W. Educated at Sydney High School. Enlisted on January 28th., 1915 when employed as a builders' clerk. Died of wounds on August 15th., 1916 in an Advanced German Dressing Station after the fighting at Pozieres. Aged 23 years.

JACKSON, P.S., Pte., No. 164.

11th L.H.R.

Born at Grace Park, Hawthorn, Vic. and educated at Scotch College, Melbourne. A book-keeper of Kynuna, Queensland, he enlisted on January 16th., 1915. He died of wounds on April 19th., 1917, after the Battle of Gaza.⁷

KELLY, Des, Pte.

10th. Btn.

Born in Adelaide, S.A. His father was coachman to the Barr Smith Family. He was invalided from France to Tunbridge Wells, Kent, England.

⁷The enlistment number appears to be too low.

KING, Charles Leonard, Sgt.

11th. L.H.R.

A native of South Australia from a farming family, the pre-War drought had sent him to find work in Adelaide. At the time of his enlistment he was working as a draughtsman. He returned to Australia in 1919.

KING, Lydia Kate, Sister.

No. 2 A.G.H.

(Otherwise, Mrs Carter) Embarked for service overseas on November 24th., 1914 aboard the S.S. Kyarra. Left Egypt for Lemnos aboard the S.S. Sicilia, April 15th., 1915.

LOVE, James Robert Beattle, Lt., M.C., D.C.M.

I.C.C. and 14th. L.H.R.

Born in Killeter, Ireland on June 16th., 1889. He was at the time of his enlistment (November 9th., 1915) a missionary at Strathalbyn in South Australia. He had a chequered Army career. Entering the force as a private (No. 9341), he became a corporal on March 1st., 1916, reverted to private on May 5th., 1916, became first temporary corporal and then acting sergeant on December 15th. and 25th. of that year, and then reverted once more to private on February 9th., 1917. After these uncertainties he rose rapidly through the ranks. He was made sergeant on March 12th., 1917, temporary C.S.M. on June 19th., 2nd. Lt. on August 1st. and 1st. Lt. on November 1st. His service was terminated on April 6th., 1919.⁸

⁸Gammage gives his birth-date as 1899. (The Broken Years, p.145.)

McWHINNEY, Norman B., Pte.

23rd. Btn.

Born at Auburn, N.S.W. At the time of his enlistment he was a clerk in Hawthorn, Vic. He was killed in action on July 28th., 1916, aged 20 years.

MILLARD, R.J., Col., C.M.G., C.B.E.

A.A.M.C.

Born in Newcastle, N.S.W. on May 22nd., 1868. He was the Medical Supt. of the Coast Hospital, Sydney before the War. He rose to be the D.D.M.S. A.I.F. in 1917 and 1919.

MILLS, Arthur James, Col., D.S.O., V.D.

4th. Anzac Camel Btn. and 15th. L.H.R.

Born July 10th., 1884. At the start of the War he was a dentist in Parramatta, N.S.W. He joined the A.I.F. as a major on March 1st., 1915 and was posted to the 1st. L.H.R. He was transferred to the I.C.C. on November 2nd., 1916 and became 2nd. in command of the 1st. Btn., I.C.C. on February 7th., 1917. He was then transferred to the 4th. Btn. which he commanded 1917-1918, being promoted to Lt.-Col. on December 29th., 1917. He became the C.O. of the 15th L.H.R. when it was formed on July 1st., 1918. His appointment terminated on January 19th., 1920.

MITCHELL, G.D., Capt., M.C., D.C.M.

10th. Btn.

Born 1894. At the time of his enlistment he was a clerk, living in Taylors Road, Thebarton, Adelaide, S.A.

MORETON, L.G. Sister

A.A.N.S.

Educated at the Convent School, Daylesford, Vic. Joined the A.A.N.S. on June 12th., 1915 when working as a nurse in Melbourne. Died of enteric at Quetta, India, on November 11th., 1916, aged 25 years.

MORLEY, C.R., Lt.

5th. L.H.R.

Born at Mackay in Queensland on December 25th., 1894. He was working as a storekeeper at Tweed Heads, N.S.W. when he enlisted on September 21st., 1914. He became a L/Cpl. on October 18th., 1914 and acting Cpl. on March 13th., 1916. After being returned to Australia he left again as a sergeant with reinforcements on May 3rd., 1916. He became Sqdn. Sgt. Maj. on March 20th., 1917, 2nd. Lt. on July 30th., and 1st. Lt. on October 30th. He died of wounds on November 8th., 1917, after the fighting at Sheria, Palestine.

NICHOLSON, N.A., Capt.

14th. Fld. Ambulance Bde.

Born 1886. He was a grazier from Campbell Town, Tasmania. He returned to Australia after the War.

OVENS, G.H., Col.

A.A. & Q.M.G., A.N.Z. Training Dept.

RAIDNELL, G.A.

8th. Btn.

RANFORD, Clement

A.L.H.

A native of South Australia whose elder brother, Joseph Marmion Ranford also served with the Light Horse and died in Palestine.

RICHARDS, Thomas James, Lt., M.C.

1st. Fld. Amb.

Born Emmaville, N.S.W., on April 8th., 1883. He was a commercial traveller and miner of Charters Towers, Queensland, and Manly, N.S.W. An international Rugby player, he enlisted on August 26th., 1914. He returned to Australia on August 6th., 1918.

KYRIE, Sir Granville de Laune, Maj. Gen., K.C.M.G., C.B., V.D.

Born 1865. He was a grazier at Michelago, N.S.W. For further biographical details see Official History, Vol. VII, p.66-68.

SHANNON, William Floyd, Rev.

Chaplain.

SHEPPARD, W.H., Capt.

17th. Btn.

An insurance surveyor of Summer Hill, N.S.W. He returned to Australia on July 23rd., 1917 at the age of 27 years.

SHEPPEARD, Alfred Edward, Lt., M.M.

5th. Div. Sig. Coy.

Born in Dubbo, N.S.W. in 1891. Enlisted on July 20th., 1915 while

he was an electrical fitter in Newnes, N.S.W. Became a sergeant on October 24th., 1915 and was commissioned on January 19th., 1919. Returned to Australia.⁹

SPRINGTHORPE, J.W., Lt.-Col.

A.A.M.C. (3rd. Aux. Hospital.)

Physician of Armidale, Vic. Born 1855. Appointed Col. October 19th., 1914. Embarked November 28th 1914. Returned to Australia, February 5th., 1916. Re-embarked March 16th., 1916. Finally returned to Australia, February 1st., 1919.

WETHERELL, H., Capt.

5th L.H.R.

Born 1894. He was a farmer from Rylstone, N.S.W. He returned to Australia.

WILSON, Lachlan Chisholm, Brig.-Gen.

Solicitor from Brisbane, Queensland. For further biographical details, see Official History, Vol. VII, p.380.

YOUNG, T.L., Pte.

26th. Btn.

Born in Scottle, Lancs., England. Educated at Trent College, Derbyshire, and Cambridge. Came to Australia (Tasmania) via China. At the time of his enlistment (July 26th., 1915) he was a teacher in Perth, W.A. Died at Heilly on January 2nd., 1917 of wounds received in the Gueudecourt Sector. Aged 32.

⁹ Gamage gives his birth date as 1890. (The Broken Years, p.226.)

APPENDIX IIThe Battle of the Wassa

Reference has been made both in the Introduction and in Chapter III (p.110) to the riots which took place in the vicinity of the Wagh el Birkeh,¹ the first on April 2nd., (Good Friday), 1915 and the second a few months later on the last Saturday in July. The 'Battle of the Wassa' as the first riot came to be known is probably the most notorious incident of the entire sojourn of the A.I.F. in Egypt, but it is also possibly the one about which most confusion exists. Reports of the episode, heavily censored,² reached Australia at the same time as the news of the landing at Anzac, and were naturally eclipsed by it. Some information was sent back by soldiers in their letters home, but whether they were reproducing their own eye-witness accounts, or relaying their story second-hand, they offered only fragmentary impressions. An official enquiry was set up to establish the causes of the riot³ but its findings do not seem to have been widely published, and the account of its proceedings, if it still exists, must be either within closed files or filed in a non-obvious place. Descriptions of the 'Battle' appearing in published works after the War frequently seem to have telescoped the two riots,⁴ further complicating the task of deciphering what occurred and the reasons therefore.

¹For the topography of the city's brothel quarter see Cairo, p.219.

²C.J. Dennis wrote an account of Ginger Mick's participation in the battle apparently for inclusion in "The Moods of Ginger Mick", shortly after news of the incident reached Australia. The censor refused its publication.

³Egyptian Gazette, April 6th., 1915; Ryrie, letter, same date.

⁴See, for example, S.F. Hatton, The Yarn of a Yecman, (London, undated.) p.60-62.

The classic form of the story appears in a footnote in Vol. I of the Official History⁵, while an expanded but essentially similar version is given by Gammage in The Broken Years, (p.39-40). They may be summed up thus. Australian and New Zealand troops were sack- ing a brothel in the Haret el Wasser as a reprisal for the infection spread among soldiers by diseased prostitutes working in the area. They heard a rumour that other soldiers had been stabbed in a neighbouring house, and rioted, throwing the women and their bullies out into the street, and tossing their possessions after them. By this time the troops were in a highly excited state as a result of the bad liquor they had been drinking. They set light to the mattresses, furniture and clothing piled up in the street,⁶ and when the native fire brigade arrived began to man-handle them and cut the hoses. The intervention of the hated military police exacerbated the situation and when the 'Jacks', as they were called, fired over the heads of the crowd, the men turned on them and bombarded them with stones, bottles, etc. The M.P.'s withdrew, and some shops were looted and a Greek tavern burnt down. Order was finally restored by the Lancashire Territorials, who were popular with the Australians and whose presence would not of itself infuriate the Colonial troops. Bean dismisses this incident as very little different from a university 'rag'. Gammage, rather more realistically, regards it as revealing 'some of the worst aspects of Australian character'.

⁵ p.130, note 12.

⁶ Bean must be the only writer to have described the riot without mentioning the pianoes thrown out of upstairs windows.

The way in which both writers have described the riot tends to make it look like an isolated episode. It is true that both locate its origins in long-standing grievances against prostitutes, aggravated by rumour, but in the course of narrating subsequent events, this issue is subordinated to that of confrontation between Australian troops and the military police. Both Bean and Gammage seem to be discussing the 'Battle' in the context of Australian reaction to Army discipline, which forms an important theme in both their works, rather than as part of a continuous process of interaction with a segment of the civilian community, which is the way this appendix will approach it. By presenting the material in this way it is possible to show that the second riot resembled the first, not as Bean suggests, merely because the men of the 2nd. Australian Division wished to emulate the exploits of their predecessors, but because both were part of the same process.

The two riots deserve to be entitled 'battles' because they were the major clashes in the protracted street war, between Australian troops and the members of the local 'bullies' association.⁷ The latter, who were usually Greeks, had maintained internal order in the brothel quarter with some success before the War, but their resources were over-taxed by the influx of troops into Cairo at the start of hostilities.⁸ They were no longer able to ensure that

⁷ D.V. Anderson to Sir Edward Grey, September 2nd., 1915. (F.O. 371/2352)

⁸ For a description of the way in which the brothel system in Cairo worked and the reasons for its disorganisation at the start of the War, see Egyptian Service, various references throughout the text.

customers were protected from petty thieves within the brothels,⁹ or that elements with no respect for the ethics of their trade were excluded. At the same time, the troops, and particularly the Australians, were proving unmanageable by traditional methods. They refused to be parted from their money, and wandering through the Wassa as sight-seers, would enter brothels and leave without making the payment which even 'just looking' normally commands in such places.¹⁰ Given what is known of Australian attitudes towards authority, and their own opinion of themselves, it was inevitable that the troops should come into violent conflict with such an informal agency for maintaining order as the bullies' association.¹¹

The riots occurred against this background of general hostility but it is worth noting that in both cases the incidents became serious after the spread of certain rumours,¹² Among the Australians the rumours usually took the form of reports that soldiers had been attacked,¹³ but New Zealand troops were said to have taken

⁹ Robbery was cited as a major grievance of the troops. (F.O. 371/2352) What appears to be a rather fanciful account of such a robbery can be found in a manuscript by T.S. Smith (a one-time private in the 2nd. Btn.,) in the Sunderland Polytechnic Archives.

¹⁰ Cleary, diary, April 15th., 1916.

¹¹ It is an interesting comment on Australian racial attitudes that they persistently refer to the Greek bullies as 'niggers', (Campbell, letter, August 2nd., 1915) or 'Arab bludgers.' (H.M. Jackson, diary October 29th., 1915.)

¹² For the role of rumours in riots see The Psychology of Rumour, p.193 ff. Comparisons might be made with the Little Bourke Street riot in December, 1914, when troops attacked Chinese shops and their proprietors after unfounded reports of a bugler being kicked to death in the area. (Advertiser, December 21st., 1914.)

¹³ See the accounts of the first riot as given by Bean and Gammage. The following description of the start of the second riot is interesting in this context:-

Some...say that two soldiers were locked in a room and set upon by some niggers but they managed to get to the window and call for help.

(Campbell, letter, see above.)

part in the riots because of stories that the prostitutes treated the Maoris 'like niggers'.¹⁴ It is possible to speculate on the origins of these rumours. There had been persistent reports since about December 11th,¹⁵ of soldiers murdered in the 'low quarter', and these reports had been mentioned in the Press on the day before the Good Friday riot occurred. Though the rumours were officially discounted in the article which appeared, its prominent heading, 'Alleged Murder of Two New Zealanders in Cairo' could easily have provided the basis for fresh wild stories.¹⁶ The Press carried on the same day an account of an incident which was also the topic of general discussion, and out of which rumours that Maoris were discriminated against may have grown. One of the women in the Wagh el-Birkeh was said to have asked a Maori if it were true that his people were cannibals, and to have made a fuss when he kissed her.¹⁷

¹⁴At least, this was advanced as the reason for their being involved in the first riot. (Ryrie, letter, April 6th., 1915.)

¹⁵Egyptian Mail, April 1st., 1915. (The paper's 2nd edition of the day.)
See Aitken, letter, December 8th., 1914; Advertiser, January 29th. and February 1st., 1915.

¹⁶Egyptian Mail, April 1st., 1915.

¹⁷Messaggero Egiziano, April 1st., 1915.

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Caldwell, Lt. D.W.
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Champion, Lt. B.W.
Chinner, Lt. E.H.
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