WITH BOTHA'S ARMY

J. P. KAY ROBINSON

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BY

J. P. KAY ROBINSON

WITH INTRODUCTORY LETTER BY
GENERAL BOTHA

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To

EDWARD KAY ROBINSON

THIS COLLECTION OF SKETCHES

IS FONDLY INSCRIBED

BY HIS SON

THE AUTHOR

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PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE,
CAPE TOWN,
24th November, 1915.

DEAR MR. ROBINSON—

I have not had time to read through the proofs of your book "With Botha's Army," but a hurried perusal thereof has given me much pleasure. It contains an able and good description of the fine spirit which animated our army in German South-West Africa, and of the good humour which kept our men cheerful under most trying conditions.

I have pleasure in recommending your book to the public,

Yours faithfully,

WITH BOTHA'S ARMY

CHAPTER I

THE OCCUPATION OF LÜDERITZBUCHT

THE story of the campaign of German South-West Africa is written, plain for all time, across the sands of that amazing country, and an empty bully-beef tin, half-buried in the flank of a tawny sand-dune, is eloquent of most of its detail.

But this, of course, we did not know when, on the 11th of September, 1914, we packed our horses on the s.s. *Monarch*, and ourselves aboard the *Gaika* to await the dice-throw of Chance. It is true that we were more or less certain as to our destination, but it is equally true that our knowledge on this point was strictly unofficial, and therefore sinful.

Not that we greatly cared, however. Our optimism was a thing colossal. We were

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South-West Africa of which our navigators had lost all reckoning—and at the end of that grisly time the tall spike of a light-house stood out upon a black fang of rock and a white snarl of broken water, and we were told that it was Luderitzbucht.

There was magic in that intimation. Men who had not been sufficiently interested in things even to accept a chance-sent whisky-and-soda—these were the very worst cases—suddenly busied themselves in cleaning neglected rifles, and even, when they thought that no one was looking, in surreptitious feelings of the points of their bayonets.

Ah! Little did we know then of what was to follow. But the bayonets did come in useful for opening tins of milk, anyway!

After the lighthouse came what appeared to be a land-locked arm of the sea. That slid astern of us, and was followed by a more or less well-defined bay that ended abruptly in a conglomeration of tin and plaster, and red and green roofs. Luderitzbucht beyond any shadow of doubt! What exactly we expected I do not know. It seemed feasible that the place might be fortified and we braced ourselves.

Nothing seemed to happen, however. The *Astræa* dropped anchor at a quarter of a mile or so nearer the town, and that was all. The Reuter man, who used to write what we afterwards learned to call the "Luderitzbucht Society Notes," would doubtless have said that she trained her guns on the town. Perhaps she did. To us she merely looked supremely bored.

From one or two of the houses white flags that looked like table-cloths were hysterically waving. It was distinctly flattering, and I know that we felt immensely forbearing. Then some one saw the German flag that flaunted its garish challenge to us from the lighthouse, and we began to feel then as a German must, I think, when he ceases to be a German and becomes a Hun.

We landed at four o'clock in the afternoon. It was a very quiet affair. The few inhabitants who were to be seen about tried to look as if they hadn't noticed us, although we rather more than filled Luderitzbucht, and the Transvaal Scottish are a *little* obtrusive at times. There were a lot of ladies, however—ladies who did not look like ordinary inhabitants, and who stood on the verandas of the houses and smiled kindly

at us. We blushed by battalions and passed on.

We, the I.L.H., were assigned to quarters in what was called the "Diamenten Gesellschaft." When we got there it was dark, and we made ourselves as comfortable as we could—those of us that were not on guard—in a sort of donkey kraal. There were some fowls there, I remember, and we performed some quite creditable atrocities with our bayonets. Then—I never quite knew how started the whisper that grew and was flung from man to man and from troop to troop until the whole squadron knew it—"*Beer!*"

Beer. Yes! Dozens upon dozens of cases of it. Long, beautifully long bottles of pale, cool-looking Pilsener. The least said about it the better. Indeed, recollection is apt to be a little hazy upon the point. But this I know, that until the Headquarter Staff discovered that in tackling German South-West they had tackled an uncommonly thirsty proposition, and sent down wagons and took it away from us, every man of us looked at war, if not through rose-coloured spectacles exactly, at least through gold-tinted glasses.

Months later that same beer was retailed

back to us by Supreme Authority at ninepence the bottle! Why ninepence? we often wondered.

The first really distinct phase of the campaign was camels. They—there were three of them—wandered in one day out of the desert and were captured by the Rand Light Infantry. Captured! Yes! I think that is the word. The R.L.I., however, seemed vastly more impressed than were the camels.

There is no authentic record of how, eventually, the camels came to us, but we believe it was something after this manner:

Scene: *Company of R.L.I. seen vaguely through sandstorm. More vaguely still, three camels looming out of nowhere in particular.*

Company Colour-Sergeant to Company Officer: "Beggin' y'r pardon, sir! But about them three 'ummin' birds——"

Company Officer: Good God, man! How the devil should I know? Do I look as if I——? Oh, damn it! send 'em up to Headquarters."

Follows period filled in by more sandstorm, grunts of camels, and hearty British cheers, as news flies around that R.L.I. have routed entire German Camel Corps. Then—

Brigade-Major to Brigadier: "Ahem! Sir! Three camels have just turned up——"

Brigadier (*absently*): Ah! Just ask them to step in, will you?"

B.-M.: "Camels, I said, sir!"

B.: "What? *The devil!*"

B.-M.: "No, sir! Camels, sir!"

B.: "Camels! Good God! Where from?"

B.-M.: "They didn't say, sir! What are we to do with them, sir?"

B.: "Do with them? Um! Well—er, let me see. Um! Er! Oh! Confound it! give 'em to the I.L.H.!"

So we got them. And, until some eight months later, when the squadron left Luderitzbucht for Walvis, we kept them.

There was nothing very lovable about them. They bit us and they sneered at us, they frightened our horses and they smelt abominably. But they aroused the envy and the admiring interest of all the other regiments, and the nurses used to come up from the hospital to take photographs of them, and so—we kept them.

I omitted to mention the fact that the camels brought a native with them.

Nominally, no doubt, he was in charge of

them, but I do not think that he ever let the camels know it. He came to us as well, and he told us their names and a lot of other interesting facts. He said, for instance, that if you ejaculated "Hut!" and kicked them at the same time, they might go—"might," in this instance, was right!—and that if you said "'riwa!" with the same accompaniments they would get up.

They did, with a disconcerting suddenness that generally caught you as you were half way into the saddle. A word that sounded something like "Twitts," he further informed us, was the signal for them to sit down.

One of our corporals who was looked up to as an authority upon camels, because in his infancy he had ridden one at the Zoo, was placed in charge of them, and on the morning following their advent he and the writer and one of our lieutenants took them out—save the mark! they took us for a saunter round the town. We had a good deal of fun that morning, but I think the camels had more. Two of our party, I know, enjoyed themselves hugely when "Landsman"—he was the second biggest camel—tried to rub the corporal off his back against

some particularly atrocious German architecture.

To our great joy—the camels were behaving themselves for the moment—we met the whole of the Brigade Staff out for an airing, and, as might be expected of three camels in a very narrow street, attracted their attention.

For what happened to him after that our lieutenant himself was solely responsible. He was explaining to the most gorgeous-looking Staff officer exactly how one dealt with camels. "You see," he said, "when you want them to sit down you simply say 'Tootsie.'" (This was quite safe: they were already sitting down.) "And when you want them to get up you just lift your leg—like this—and you say 'Riw——'"

He had scarcely got the quotation mark out of his mouth when the vast bulk of the camel beneath him rose with the awful suddenness of an exploding mine and smote him violently aloft. How he managed to retain some sort of a hold I do not pretend to know. In civilian life he is a dentist, and perhaps that partly explains it.

Anyway, the rest of that morning's ride is lost in the memory of that lieutenant-

man hanging head downwards—his arms clasped around the camel's forelegs, and saying, in all sorts of voices of agonized protest and cajolery: "Tootsie! Oh, d—— you! Tootsie!"

It is not altogether easy to understand why war should be so much more impressive to the spectator at a distance than to the man engaged in it. Perhaps it is that the sense of personal detachment shows things in a clearer perspective, or perhaps, again, it is simply that the terseness of official cablegrams leaves so much to the imagination. Myself, I incline to the latter; but this I know: that the bulletins—we in German South-West were never exalted to the rank of the communiqué—which told the world of "the occupation of Luderitzbucht" conveyed a vastly more dramatic aspect of that feat than ever entered the philosophy of those who were merely responsible for it.

For us, indeed, those first few days in Luderitzbucht held more of humour than anything else. Our horses did not come ashore until September 21st—three days after our own landing—and, deprived thus of our sole justification, we loafed around

the town or indulged in foraging expeditions as the fancy took us. With the infantry, of course, it was far otherwise, and we were constantly being reminded of the war by the sight of them scuffling away at their trenches and blockhouses.

One of the features of Luderitzbucht was the number of its gramophones. Every house had one. I use the word "had" advisedly, because there followed a period—happily brief—when nearly every one of us included a gramophone in his personal luggage. We did not—indeed, we did not—loot them. We only borrowed them. Which, it may be said, is a difference with at least an air of distinction!

A squadron of gramophones, all playing at the same time, and all, of course, playing different airs—from eternal Wagner to the German equivalent for Harry Lauder—is a fearsome thing, and it is not, perhaps, to be wondered at that they quickly palled. The first note of their decline in popularity was struck, I think, when one night a voice was heard entreating any one—he did not care who—to swap him "a tin of milk for a gramophone, records and all!"

It was at about this time, too, that a brain

wave on the part of some Staff officer took the tangible form of what were known by the courtesy title of "surprise alarms," and the manner of them was thus: A message would be sent from Brigade Headquarters to officers commanding units to the effect that an alarm would be sounded that night. "The hour for the alarm," the message would add, "is left to the discretion of officers commanding." The utmost secrecy, too, was to be observed, as it was essential that the men should be taken completely by surprise.

The officer commanding unit would then, in the strictest confidence, of course, tell each one of his troop officers, and they, again in the strictest confidence, would inform their troop sergeants; from the troop sergeants it would filter through to the corporals, and the corporals would hand it on to the troops themselves. There, at least, the confidence was justified. The secret could go no farther.

Thus, when a "surprise alarm" did occur, its chief feature, in so far as we were concerned, lay in the well-simulated astonishment of our O.C. at the extraordinary rapidity with which his men had turned

out. Upon one occasion, however, he did most unfeignedly break down. An alarm had sounded. We were in our places, and "the old man" was about to address us in a few well-chosen words, when, to the surprise of nearly everybody, the throaty strains of "Deutschland Ueber Alles" fell upon our astounded ears. The culprit, it was discovered, was a man in No. 1 troop, and his subsequent explanation to the effect that the gramophone was a cheap German patent that went off like an alarm clock was, I am glad to say, received with some considerable coldness.

Nearly every one must be familiar with the fable of Æsop that tells of the untimely death of a herd-boy who played at alarms, of how his comrades wearied in time of the game, and of how one day, when cause for real alarm came, they took no notice of his cries for help, and he perished, and everybody turned round to everybody else and said, "I told you so!"

History, with us, very, very nearly repeated itself. Not, of course, that we should necessarily have perished. On the contrary, we should, in all probability, have gained an imperishable fame.

There had been a succession of these surprises, and when one night we were aroused without having been warned beforehand we were mightily disgruntled thereat, and by way of expressing our disgust, turned out as we had slept—the plutocrats and the more successful looters in pyjamas, and the others in absurdly inadequate shirts. Over these we had, of course, slipped our greatcoats and bandoliers, so that, in the darkness, we looked quite presentably warlike. Then, to our collective horror, we learned that this was no surprise alarm, that something had happened, or was going to happen, and for some quarter of an hour we stood in our blushing deshabille, and prayed fervently that there would be no order to saddle up. There was no order, and we went back to our blankets, chastened and deeply thankful.

No power of imagination can conjure up any approach to the mental picture of the squadron of us flaunting our indecency over the mocking sand-dunes for a day or more —as we might so easily have had to do. Even the enemy's camel corps would have blushed the blush of outraged "kultur"!

Our horses were landed on the afternoon

of the 21st. Poor beasts! Draggle-tailed, cut, and kicked about, they looked like ghosts of the animals that we had shipped at Cape Town only ten days before. If we had suffered to some extent on that memorable trip, what had they, packed like sardines in the noisome hold of a dilapidated sea-tramp! By the evening, however, hard grooming and ointment had worked wonders, and when, on the following morning, we led them down to the sea for exercise, they bore but little resemblance to the spectres of the day before. On the next day again they had picked up so wonderfully that we saddled up and exercised them. Gentle work at first; but on the 24th, when, for the first time, we mounted in "marching order," they looked fit for any amount of hard work. They got it—sooner than was expected!

CHAPTER II

THE REAL THING

ON the afternoon of the 25th the order came that we were to fall in at eight o'clock that night in heavy marching order, and with one day's rations each for horse and man. What did it mean? Was it the real thing at last? Questions elicited nothing. Our officers merely replied that they did not know—there was an order from Headquarters, and that was all.

So we waited, and an hour before the time saw us ready to the last little detail of filled water-bottles and rolled greatcoats. Eight o'clock came, and we fell in with our led horses and waited again.

"Sixty extra rounds of ammunition to each man!" The order came from somewhere out of the darkness, and one could feel the stir of relieved tension as its import went home to the waiting ranks. This was no foolery of surprise alarm! We were going

somewhere to do something, and the confused murmur broke into open jubilation. "Stop that talking!" A silence, then the same even-toned voice went on: "There is to be no talking—whatsoever! There is to be no smoking; any man caught striking a match will be dealt with—promptly!" Silence again, broken by the uneasy creaking of leather and the restlessness of horses. Some one was counting in a low voice: "Three, four"—I could just catch the words —"five, six. That's your lot!" and there followed the whispered acknowledgment of the man on my left as he slipped the packets of extra rounds into his wallets. My turn next, and then the turn of the man on my right, and so on, down the line.

"Charge your magazines with five rounds apiece." It was our troop officer who was speaking. A pause, then: "Ready? . . . Prepare to mount. Mount!" Followed a confused jumble as the lines of troops broke and surged and swayed and surged back again. Horses do not like night work, and are sometimes emphatic in expressing themselves.

Some one was in difficulties just in front of me. There was a sound of furious buck-

ing, followed by a smothered oath and a thud as the rider landed squarely on his back. Some one else—I do not know who he was beyond the fact that he stood on the ground and was shaking me by the hand—said: "Good-bye, old man. Good luck!" and—"By sections from the right. . . . Walk march!" and he had dodged out of the way of the wheeling sections and was gone.

With No. 1 Troop in the advance—they were to pay, and dearly, for that pride of place before we returned!—we filed off, troop by troop and section by section, into the waiting darkness.

It may in all truth be a small thing, this starting on a night patrol, but it must be remembered that to most of us it was the first taste of anything of the nature. None of us had any conception of where we were going, or why. The country was utterly unknown to us—we hoped vaguely that some one with us knew something. It was dark. There were presumably some German gentlemen waiting somewhere to receive us. We were half choked by a fine white dust that hung about our path, and it was—oh! the greatest fun.

Past the jail we rode, past the cemetery with its white mist of headstones, past the R.L.I. pickets, who turned out in amazement at the dust-curtained quarter of a mile of horses and men; past the flanks of great granite hills, and so into the open, where the ghostly half-light—it is never really dark in the sand-belts of G.S.W.—rioted with the imagination and made of sand-dunes mountains, and of mountains clouds that changed while you watched them into belts of trees where no trees could be, or disappeared altogether if you turned from them for a moment, and all the time the sound of our progress went up like the sound of a sea. Always it was with us, that muffled beat of hoofs, that was like the quiet lisp of summer seas as we ploughed through the sand, and the thunder of heavy surf as the squadron took the bare granite.

Hour after hour we rode. No one knew the time, or greatly cared. A blanket of sea-mist came after, and wrapped us in its wet folds, whilst, ahead, a dull red glow in the heart of the darkness set us guessing at our objective. We had seen that same glow from Luderitzbucht on the previous evening, and had been told that the Germans

were burning railway construction works at Kolmanskuppe. "A night attack!" The thought tingled, and we rode on, keenly expectant, and as keenly conscious, now, that we were making a good deal of noise, and of what that might mean to us.

With the hours died that half-formed hope. We were too wet and sleepy and cold to care much what happened, and when, somewhere towards the dawn, the order came to dismount and ring our horses, we obeyed almost automatically. ("Ringing" horses consists in tying them, head to head, in a circle. In the ring thus formed the guard has every horse's head within easy reach of his hand, and one man may thus easily manage twenty or even thirty horses.)

This was done as well as our numbed fingers permitted, and we lay down to the most cheerless vigil I ever remember. The sea-mist had gone, and its place was filled by a wind that sobbed over the dunes and scourged us with whiplash sand, and we lay and burrowed under each other for warmth, and swore for the sake of the further warmth that we might get out of the swearing.

"Saddle up!" Never was order so welcome, and we sat up to stare through

sand-rimmed eyes at a dawn, steel-grey and pitilessly cold, but dawn for all that, and by the time that we had worked the stiffness and numbness out of ourselves sufficiently to be able to tighten the girths of our horses (one does not "off-saddle" when the enemy are presumed to be within a few hundred yards of one's bivouac), red day, like a bloodshot eye, was staring over a horizon of lilac-tinted sand-dunes, and we mounted and rode away into a riot of colour that grew more madly drunken with the light.

It is perhaps in some subconscious feeling that one is within reasonable distance of suddenly and violently attaining the ultimate end of things that there lies this fuller and keener appreciation of beauty than one knows at other times. Whatever the reason, however, it is there. I have felt it, and—I have watched others.

Sunrise found us in a world of amazing sand-dunes, and the silence and wonder of the place gripped us and held us. We watched great chunks of yellow and red sunlight flung from dune to dune, caught and held an instant on some bluff crest; then it was gone, and the sand that it had touched put on morning robes of violet and mauve,

and dunes farther on caught up the sun's vagrant glory and held it aloft and mocked aloud, and became grey and dead in their turn. Sheer witchcraft! Permission to smoke was given, and the magic of the place took the blue film that rose from the squadron and twisted that into beauty. Farther distances uplifted themselves to colour-drunken senses; fields of alabaster, rose-suffused and laced with faintest blue vein-work. Hills beyond, quivering with unnameable colour and——Hullo! What was this?

The squadron had halted and we could see men of the leading troops dismounting and creeping up the flank of a sand-dune. How slowly they moved. *Bang!*

The shot seemed to come from nowhere in particular, and nothing much seemed to happen, save perhaps that my horse jumped even more violently than did its rider. Who had fired? And why? I looked round at the man on my right for an answer, and found that he was looking at me.

Bang! This time it was undoubtedly one of our own men firing, for I distinctly saw the "kick-up" of his rifle. But at what? *Bang! Bang! Bang!* They were at it

merrily enough now. Two troops, at least, down to it on the top of the sand-hill. A man, some twenty yards to my left front, shouted something about getting under cover, and the top of a baby sand-dune, about midway between us, was smitten into fine dust by a something that whined as it went on, and we "got"—hurriedly!

Another ricochet cried overhead as we reached the cover of the sand-hill. One troop only was standing to its horses. The others were clustered thickly along the ridge. It was our troop that was "standing to," but no one seemed to be taking any particular notice of us, so we surreptiously handed over our horses and crawled up into the firing line.

Some four hundred yards away was a conglomeration of tin sheds and a small brick-built house. "What's up?" I asked of a man who was recharging his magazine. "Don't know," he replied laconically. "*I'm* chipping brickwork! Hullo! One of our chaps has got it!" A man in No. 1 Troop had slid a few feet down the slope and was holding his wrist. The blood was just beginning to trickle through between his fingers. A cigarette, I noticed, was still in

his mouth. "Only a scratch!" observed the laconic one. "But I wonder where they're firing from. They're not in the house, I swear!"

"There they go!" The shout was raised by some one at the far end of the line, and away down the valley, beyond the buildings, there appeared four figures on horseback, galloping all they knew. "Nine hundred yards!" snapped the man next to me as he readjusted his sights. Every one was firing now, and the sand was kicking up in little spurts all round the flying figures.

At fifteen hundred yards we gave it up, and a bend in the valley took the four from our sight.

Suddenly there appeared in the wake of the Germans a crowd of running figures, and the firing, which had died down, broke out anew. "Don't shoot!" some one shouted. "They're niggers!" and we held and waited. They were niggers, as we found when, half an hour later, No. 4 Troop had rounded them up—and pretty badly scared niggers at that. They seemed, however, after the manner of the African native, to be in nowise astonished at our not shooting them out of hand; though we learned sub-

sequently, that they had most emphatically expected to be destroyed—the Germans had told them so.

It was easy, when we reached the buildings, to learn how the Germans had eluded us with such perfect ease. Behind the tin sheds—one of them bore in large black letters the information that this was "Fort Grasplatz"—the ground sloped steeply to the valley below, and the sand showed us where their horses had been held for them until they had considered it was time to go.

It was all rather humiliating. If we had done this, or had not done that—we grew rather heated over the discussion—we should have got them. Very annoying! but we found some considerable measure of consolation in a breakfast of looted coffee, fancy biscuits, and Limburger cheese. There were some excellent cigars, too, in one of the sheds, and when, eventually, we mounted and rode away along the line (Grasplatz, in times of peace, was a railway-station), we felt quite large-minded on the subject.

Our officers, too, must have felt the humanizing influence, for we learned from

them, in snatches here and there, some of "the reasons why," of our expedition, and out of these snatches we pieced together a fairly consecutive whole. Our main objective, that of bagging the Germans at Grasplatz, had failed—we learned that. What actually we had accomplished was a big loop around Kolmanskuppe, and we were now returning to that place to meet the R.L.I., who had left Luderitzbucht some hours after us on the previous evening. We might see some fun on the way back, but it was very unlikely. That was all.

The railway line which we were following lies along the back of an immense outcrop of granite. To our left, at some miles distance, was the sea; to our right, the desert.

It was worth watching, that desert. Ghostly mirage stalked there, and little yellow sandstorms got up and scurried around among the dunes, and tried to hide the feet of the big purple hills of the distance. The sun was pleasantly warm on the high ground where we rode; we had had the nicest, politest little brush with the enemy—no one had been really hurt on either side—and now we were going home.

No 1 Troop, still in the advance, was covering the ground to our right front in extended formation. How queer they looked—men and horses seeming at that distance not much bigger than ants!

What the deuce were they up to, anyway? Some of them on the extreme right of the line had turned in and were galloping furiously. Idiots! working tired horses in that way! They ought to be—— *Bang!* Good Lord! again? *Bang! Bang!* How strangely the shots sounded, muffled and unreal.

But they were real. Look!

One of the galloping horses had collapsed suddenly, and lay kicking. Its rider picked himself up, ran forward a few paces, and flung down again. The troops on the railway line halted automatically.

A whistle blew and No. 3, just ahead of us, trotted off in a cloud of sand. No. 2 picked up a signal from somewhere, and moved off the line to the left. Still we waited, torn with impatience. Ah! A mounted figure rode out of the press of horsemen ahead. Followed the sound of a whistle, faintly heard, and our turn had come.

What a breathless scurry that was to where the "old man" was superintending affairs

with his very best parade manner. I can see him now, one hand thrust deep into a breeches pocket, a pipe clamped firmly in the angle of his jaw, and that damned enigmatical smile of his, half hid by the drooping moustache. I know, should he chance to read these lines, that he will forgive the adjective. Many phrases that are not included in the vocabulary of nice, polite people are sometimes used by common soldiers as terms of endearment, and anyway, his smile was — enigmatical. When he praised—occasions so rare as to be almost negligible—it was there. And it was there when he blamed, which, not unnaturally perhaps, he often did. When, as at the present, the squadron was under fire, the smile grew almost animated.

"Number four!"—the old man used to drawl his words of command as though he liked the sound of them—"Number four, action ri-ight!" We were down and were handing our reins to the horse-leaders before he had got rid of the order. "This way, men!" Our troop officer was scrambling down the slope in the direction of the firing, and we plunged after, charging our magazines as we ran.

"There they are!" Two horsemen were galloping obliquely across our front at about eight hundred yards range. They were unmistakably Germans, and we flung ourselves down and opened fire. At the third shot, fired I think by a sergeant who was sitting down to it a few yards to my right, one of the figures collapsed forward on to his horse's neck, but recovered and hung on somehow, and at about eleven hundred yards they disappeared behind the shoulder of a sand-hill.

The sound of an occasional shot still came up to us from the sand below, but the "fun" must be nearly finished, for No. 3 Troop, on the rocks above and behind us, had ceased fire. They knew, could see, what was going on, whilst we, who were within a hundred yards of what must have been, to judge by the number of shots we had heard, quite a brisk little scrap, could see absolutely nothing. We scrambled on, hoping desperately that everything was not yet over.

We were on the fringe of the sand now, and were beginning to see things. A man —I recognized him as belonging to No. 1— was there, walking aimlessly about. He

was hatless, he had no rifle, and he limped as he moved. A few yards beyond him was his horse, and from where it lay, a yard-wide spoor of blood ran down to the sand-hills, a full hundred yards away. "Mind the chap in the sand!" It was the hatless one who was shouting. "Oh, mind the chap in the sand!" There were several men "in the sand." As far as I could see they looked perfectly harmless.

One of them was lying flat on his back, with his legs and arms grotesquely outflung, and as I looked there occurred a phenomenon. From behind him there uprose a third hand and arm that waved frantically for some moments and then stopped and seemed to wait. Nothing happened, and the rest of the man that belonged to the spare hand and arm rose to his feet and stood with both arms upheld above his head—our first prisoner. Ah, well! The "fun" was over now, and we could turn and reckon up the cost.

At the edge of the granite lay a man—one of our men—shot through the heart. Another man was kneeling over him, his head down to the other's breast as if listening for sound of life. With one hand he had

commenced to loosen the other's collar; in the other he held, loosely, the strap of a water-bottle. They were brothers, these two men, and—they were both dead. Another—mortally and hideously hurt—was holding his wound with both hands. He was calling out too, I remember. A fourth was being carried up towards the railway line. His leg was shattered at a few inches above the knee, and as he passed he made some joking allusion to his "rotten luck"—he was the man wounded earlier in the morning at Grasplatz. Twenty minutes later they came down and told us that he, too, was dead.

One of the few kind things of war is the little time given to one to think. There are, of course, memories that one carries away—memories of men writhing in agony; of men whom one had known and liked making bestial noises while they died; of horses shattered and maimed, and looking pitifully bewildered in their pain. But the pictures are mercifully vague, blurred. The brain, at such times, is too drunken with excitement to do more than record the bare facts.

And of the remainder of that day, my memory can tell me no more than that, at

some hour after dark, we got back to Luderitzbucht, that it rained for some time (a fact unforgettable of G.S.W.); that some of the R.L.I. came up from somewhere and helped us to bury the Germans; and—that is about all. But stay! There is one other picture that is clear—that of a dark-moustached, debonair man lying propped up against a rock; blood mostly as to the breeches of him (he was shot through the thigh), and utter unconcernedness as to all the rest of him, from his cheery smile to the cigarette that he airily waved to illustrate some point or other to the man who was bandaging him. This was Captain De Meillon, Chief of the Intelligence. His grave is somewhere out there in the desert (he was shot dead some months later near the Aus Nek), and our easy task it is to keep his memory green; easy because —well! he was a fine soldier, but a finer friend.

CHAPTER III

SANDSTORMS AND CEREMONIES

THE burial-ground at Luderitzbucht affords striking testimony of Teutonic thoroughness. An area of some three hundred square yards in extent, it contains within its neat boundaries both cemetery and town rubbish-heap.

True, the cinder and empty tin half is quite distinctly marked off from the head-stone half—the "God's Acre" of a grim Lutheran humour—but, and it was not alone the suggested "ptomanic" connection between the two "departments" that influenced us, we objected, strongly, and perhaps not unnaturally, when, on the day after the fight at Grasplatz, we were told to carry our dead there.

It is not an aggressively cheerful place. One can picture the spirit of the Fatherland doing the goose-step over it, spurred heel gritting alternately in mounds of refuse

and on tombstone, saying: "Here—here we dump our waste material!"

"Better," we argued, "to let our men lie where they have fallen!" but convention, and a desire on the part of some commanding officer or other to ease himself of a neat tribute to our "gallantry," prevailed, and our first casualties lie now in mixed company.

We buried them on the afternoon of September 27th, and the whole of the Central Force came down to see us do it. We formed a hollow square around the graves. To the left of us were the R.L.I., and from somewhere in the murk of sandstorm in front of us the pipes of the Transvaal Scottish wailed dirgefully. "A sandstorm with a stomach-ache," some one called it, but we were grateful, all the same, for their help. To an outsider the scene would doubtless have been impressive to a degree. The sandstorm, the silent mass of khaki-clad troops surrounding the white-surpliced figure that droned of ashes and dust and was inaudible because ashes and dust choked the air into which he spoke, and because his surplice stood out behind him and cracked loudly in the grip of the buffeting wind;

the black, cumbersome German coffins, the Lutheran pastor who stood quietly behind awaiting his turn to bury the German dead —we gave them a military funeral, too— and the sobbing of the bagpipes.

Yes, it must have been impressive, but to us, who were so near to things, it all seemed vaguely unreal. They had died too quickly, these men, for us to altogether realize their going. C——'s name had been called out on roll-call that afternoon to attend the funeral parade, and C—— was there —in that long black box with the brass plates and flowered handles. It was all very uncomfortable and disillusioning, and we were more than glad when the last spadeful of earth had been beaten flat and the Scottish pipes awoke and lilted us back to camp on the heels of "Bonnie Dundee."

On the afternoon of the 28th we were ordered to hold ourselves in readiness for another night march to somewhere unknown, and eight o'clock in the evening found us again in the saddle. We knew more what to expect on this occasion. Rumour sprang up and told us that we were going to have another try to bag the "garrison" of Fort Grasplatz, and we were well content that it should be

were indebted to the enemy for
v vacancies in our mess, and, only
bly, we were anxious to settle the
score.

le night ride is very like another. There
e the same low-voiced orders, the same
ling out of extra rounds of ammunition,
the darkness was all-pregnant with just the same vague possibilities.

There was one difference, however. No. 1 Troop, somewhat to their disgust be it said, were second in the order of formation. They had been in the advance on the previous occasion and had suffered, in consequence. It was only fair, therefore, that some other troop should be given the lead. No. 2 took it, and the possibilities, and we moved off into the night.

We did not take the route that we had followed on the night of the 25th. Instead, we struck into the hills, where the squadron clattered over outcrops of bare granite where horses stumbled and men fell, where, at times, we wound in single file around boulder-strewn ridges, or scrambled breathlessly down slopes of rock and sand that were too steeply tilted to ride.

Sometimes—but this was when we had

forsaken the noise and clatter of the granite for the velvet silence of the sand-dunes—the section in front of ours would slither away down some unseen slope, and before we could pull up to consider the position we would avalanche down after them, the horses sliding on their haunches and the men hanging on somehow and anyhow, or, if they became unseated, tobogganing on their own. Not infrequently, when the squadron had safely negotiated one of these slopes, we would look back to discover one or more mounted figures vainly endeavouring to force their reluctant beasts to hazard the slide. A section in rear would then hand over their horses, double back to the sand-dunes, scramble up somehow, and then two of the men would link hands under the quarters of the animal that was refusing the plunge, and, at the instant risk of being kicked to glory, literally hurl the astonished beast forward and over the edge.

A low moon hung in the sky, and the dunes stood up in a soft golden radiance that was caught, here and there, in a gleam of elusive silver, and, here and there, smudged with inky shade where the flank

of some great sand-hill sloped steeply from the moon's path. Usually, our guides led us through the valleys of this great dune-field, but not infrequently, when our further progress was barred by some impasse of sand, we would take to the higher ground, to the crests of the dunes themselves, and our path would lie by crumbling lip and over hog-backed mounds where the white dust rose like a mist around us and the yielding sand gave knee-deep to our toiling horses.

Heavy work this, and the morrow might see us in desperate need of fresh horses. The troops ahead of us dismounted in response to some unheard command and we rolled out of our saddles, glad to ease the animals and to stretch our legs, cramped with long riding.

For how many miles we walked that night no one is likely to know, but although that experience was to be the first of many, and although we got used to it in the end, not one of us is likely to forget that first weary progress through the dune country. To say that we were not suitably clad for marching is to put it mildly. In addition to riding breeches, and leggings, and spurs, over which

tired men are apt to trip, we wore, each one of us, a military greatcoat, two fully loaded bandoliers (how those buckles hurt!), a filled water-bottle, a mess-tin that clanked mournfully to every movement, a haversack crammed with bully beef and ship's biscuits, and a bayonet that usually managed to get in between one's legs at awkward moments; in addition we carried in one hand a rifle that grew heavier as the slow miles fell behind, and with the other dragged at the reins of a horse that, being a horse, could not see the sense of the proceedings, and wanted, every hundred yards or so, to lie down and rest. When the order came to halt and "ring" our horses for what remained of the night, we were too far gone even to realize our relief. We just threw ourselves down in heaps and slept untidily.

Exhaustion and the bitter cold fought over our bivouac that night, and when grey-footed dawn came shrinking among the sandhills we were vividly awake, aching in bone and mind.

These things pass, however, and before the order to mount was given we had derived a certain amount of enjoyment out of the performance of our toilet, which con-

sisted of shaking as many pounds of damp sand out of our clothing as was possible without disrobing.

"Get mounted!" The "old man" had ridden past, and his was the mumbled order, the words bitten off as if his jaws were frozen —as they very possibly were.

Some of us, an inconsiderable minority, got into the saddle at the first attempt. The rest found, with a sort of numbed surprise, that sleeping on damp, cold sand is not conducive to that equestrian *élan* upon which, as a squadron, we prided ourselves.

One, G——, notoriously short in the legs, presented an amazing spectacle. He had contrived somehow to get about half-way up the side of his steep horse, and there he hung, like an unhappy limpet, breathing heavily, and trying, apparently, to mesmerize himself into the saddle. Men in happier positions than he strove to comfort him. One unmerciful suggested that he should start all over again, and another recommended the hand-over-hand method of swarming up the stirrup leather as being both safe and picturesque.

A really pitiful sight, too, was our dear old squadron sergeant-major. By virtue of

his exalted office he was the owner of the most imposing horse in the squadron, and for the few minutes before a friendly hand canted him up into the saddle from behind, the old gentleman, who was not as young as his attestation papers showed, and was, besides, nearly doubled up with cramp, looked as if he were going to break down, and, as our amateur Irishman said to me afterwards: "Not a blissed handkerchief among the whole squadron iv us!"

Our horses, poor beasts, were trembling with cold, but they moved off briskly enough, as if glad of the exercise, and by the time that we had struggled into some sort of formation they were going quite easily.

Our bivouac, although we had not known it, had lain on the very fringe of the dune-field, and a few hundred yards brought us out on to a hog-backed ridge of granite that to our right uplifted into larger hills, and to our left dipped down into a hollow on the farther side of which stood the block-house of our previous acquaintance.

We gasped with surprise, but there was no mistaking it. There, on the rusted corrugated iron, were the sprawling letters. We

spelt them out to make sure: "F-o-r-t G-r-a-s-p-l-a-t-z." On that moment of swift joy, there came an order, back-flung from somewhere in the advance, and we wheeled sharply to the right. We ploughed through a "vlei" of white sand. Another order—it sounded like a bark—and we tumbled out of our saddles and crawled, filled with an unholy joy, to a fringe of rocks, and waited.

The squadron went straight on, the "old man" riding a little to one side and in advance. We saw him signal, and watched breathlessly the miracle of precision that followed. No. 2 Troop wheeled half-right, No. 1 three-quarters left, No. 3 swept straight on. They were within a few hundred yards of the blockhouse now. Surely they would be seen! No! A hollow in the ground took them, and we breathed again.

Where were the others? No. 2 we could see. The men were dismounting and creeping up the flank of a ridge of rock. No. 1 had disappeared as completely as though they had never been, and we could only conjecture that they were somewhere in the piled rocks to the left of the blockhouse. Hullo! There was No. 3 again, on the sky-line, and far beyond the "fort."

The "old man" knew what he was doing, by Jove! Fort Grasplatz now lay in the centre of the squadron, and we snuggled down and blew specks of sand from the breeches of our rifles.

Our troop officer came and lay down beside me with a happy little sigh.

"They won't get away from us this time," he said, and focused his glasses on the buildings.

Below the crest upon which we lay the torn and twisted metals of the railway flung a new note of colour into the lavish scheme of sunrise. Teutonic thoroughness again! Every single section of rail was broken, the twisted ends sticking grotesquely up into the air, and below each a hollow in the sand showed where the dynamite had been placed.

We did not know then what that railway was to mean to us: of the months of waiting that were to be ours, while the engineers relaid the line and pushed it, bit by bit, painfully, farther into the desert; of the blockhouses that were to spring up beside its reconstructed length; and of the weary vigil that was to be the portion of the infantry throughout that campaign of thirst and blistering sandstorm.

For the moment all our ambition and interest in life was centred in that group of tin sheds across the hollow, and already we began to sense that ours had been a fool's errand; that "Fort Grasplatz" had not been re-occupied by the enemy, and that, after all, there was to be no "fun."

Two minutes later we were sure. A crouching figure appeared for an instant among the rocks on the farther side of the fort, and was gone again so quickly that it seemed like a trick of the eyesight. Another, and then another, and there, below the sheds, a group of three or four more.

"Don't fire! They're our fellows." The warning was unnecessary. In that clear light it was possible not only to see that they were our men, but also, in some cases, to recognize individuals.

"Look! There's old M——." (M—— was a sergeant of No. 3, notable chiefly, perhaps, for his dignity of manner.) At that distance, and on all fours behind a rock, he looked amazingly like a rabbit, and an infectious giggle from somewhere down the ridge was caught up by the line, and enlarged into open laughter.

A few seconds later M—— was seen to

be on his feet, making desperate efforts in the wake of a rush of men on the block-house. We saw them coerce the door with a rifle-butt, saw one man hoisted by a companion through an open window, and watched while what looked like a pair of boots was thrown out. Followed a shower of miscellaneous articles impossible to distinguish, and our officer rose to his feet, with the light of battle in his eyes. "Loot!" he observed shortly. "Get mounted!"

There is not much more to be said of our second attack on Fort Grasplatz. A note in my diary sums up the affair into the words, "Breakfasted on the remains of our previous loot," and that was really all that happened.

Our first month or six weeks in the German South-West saw several such "attacks," and we used to draw up programmes that told how "on October — D Squadron, I.L.H., will recapture Fort Grasplatz, under the management of Lieut.-Col. D—lds—n. All bioscope rights reserved!"

The "old man" really did seem to develop an amazing affection for surrounding those empty sheds. We, of course, used to humour him, and nothing could have

exceeded the gravity with which we would, time after time, follow him through a night march in pursuit of his hobby, nor surpassed the spirit with which we used to storm the fort under his benign approval.

On this occasion, however, the game was still delightfully new, and if we grumbled at all, it was mainly because No. 3 Troop had collared a case of tinned milk, and had omitted to share it round. It was in things of this kind that the war was brought home to us.

On our way back to Luderitzbucht we rode across the fringe of sand where the Germans had ambushed our advance screen only three days before. Of that brisk little encounter we had carried away a very vivid picture, and we were morbidly curious to see again the festoon of dead horses and to point out to each other where So-and-so had fallen, and where this or that German had lain.

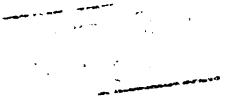
Here was the spur of rock beside which E—— had crouched while he shot the German who had shot his horse, and here, round this corner—— Hullo! Where were the horses, and—but this could not be the place, surely? And yet, and yet these were unmistakably the rocks behind which

the enemy had lain in wait for us. Then what in the name of all that was wonderful was this sea of sand-dunes doing here? Three days before this had been a level plain of white sand, and now——

We rode on, silent with wonder. No. 2 Troop, a hundred yards or so in the advance, halted, and we could see that the head of every man was turned to the right. They were staring curiously at something that we could not see, and we crowded in on the heels of their horses. Ah! So that was the explanation. From the flank of the straggling sand-dunes before us there protruded the quarters and stiffly outstretched hind legs of a horse.

A breeze that was to grow later into a pukka sandstorm was driving a fine mist of sand over the crest of the dune, and while we watched a steady, ceaseless stream of sand slid gently down its flank, and quite perceptibly added to the grave of the poor animal beneath. A week later, when we again visited the place, a contrary wind had sent the dunes back whence they had come, and the sun-dried, shrunken bodies of the horses blistered the landscape, plain for all to see.

Wander-dunen of the Germans, ye are fitly named indeed. In that grim desert land, where is neither beast nor bird, your wind-sown graves perform at least a vagrant office over poor carrion that lies by the way—grisly milestones that mark man's conquest of desert and of fellow-man—carrion untended else, till, bleached and dried by wind and sun, it moves to the lightest touch, and, finally, is broken up and frayed to dust and follows after the restless, changing winds, leaving only a pile of gleaming bones to mark the spot.



CHAPTER IV

SIGHTS AND SMELLS

THE week that followed upon our second taking of Fort Grasplatz brought us a passing interest in new arrivals: the Natal Carbineers, the Pretoria Regiment, the Kaffrarian Rifles, a battery of the Natal Field Artillery, the Eastern Rifles, the 1st Kimberley Regiment, and—it was whispered—a brand-new Brigadier with a brand-new Staff to match.

A bare note in my diary states simply that they came. Of the order of their coming is no mention, but then, not even official records, I believe, could have lucidly sustained the sandstorm that snarled over Luderitzbucht throughout the whole of that infernal week. Through it were caught glimpses, here and there, of herds of baggage-laden infantry being driven to allotted camping-grounds; of spick-and-span Carbineers striving desperately to maintain

the dignity of their spurs—and almost succeeding; of kicking mules and cursing drivers; strings of horses, wagons, guns, more drivers (still cursing), native scouts, poultice-wallopers (courtesy title of the S.A.M.C.), and all the rag-tag and bob-tail of our amateur army.

A hard-bitten company of the Veterinary Corps drifted down upon us, and asked if there was beer: they had heard——. We told them, Yes; there was beer, but there was none now. We were sorry. Whereupon, and without enthusiasm, they said that it didn't matter, and drifted away, still searching. Others, but these were of the infantry, forlorn units blown from all knowledge of their whereabouts, we found huddled under the lee of buildings. They bleated at us joylessly, and asked many questions. Was this a sandstorm? Were there many Germans about? and—but this was inevitable and unvaried—had we found many diamonds?

We would usually tell them that our kit-bags could hold no more, whereupon they would break down and beg to be taken back to their regiments. We did not, of course, entertain the slightest knowledge of

their regiments' whereabouts, but, as something was obviously expected of us, we would indicate variously all four points of the compass, and they would thank us effusively and merge away, one by one, into the muffled landscape.

Sandstorms, however, do not last for ever, and there came at last a day when the unchanged hills looked down upon neat acres of canvas and a new and startling activity. All of our immediate world was become a geometric pattern. Wagons, scores upon scores of them, stood axle to axle in a faultless precision that led the eye along ruled lines to ordered rows of water-carts and tethered mules. A group of these last had broken loose, and half a dozen mathematicians with long-handled whips were chasing them back into equational order. Beyond, again, right-angled horse lines and a criss-cross pattern of tents which was the Natal Carbineers' camp played with the Natal Field Artillery's 15-pounders at being an Euclidic proposition. Which, of course, was absurd.

It has somewhere been said that an Army represents the only true democracy. This is not true. Nowhere is there so nice a class

distinction as in the Army, and nowhere, perhaps, is that nicety so candidly maintained. We, the I.L.H., would not at that time have even dreamed of visiting the infantry, but we called upon the Carbineers because, simply, they were "mounted men," and as such our equals. Later, months later, out of the common thirst and the sandstorms —all men are alike in a sandstorm—there grew the reluctant conviction that active service brings to pass a sort of socialistic millennium in which regiments are judged only by their performances, and in which officers may at times speak quite respectfully to their men, and men almost respectfully of their officers. That the *moral* of the mounted man is usually superior to that of the "foot-slogger" may be attributed solely to the superior *moral* of the horse that he rides. This last is an epigram, but true.

The Natal Field Artillery, too, were on our visiting list, and we found them to be excellent fellows. We swapped lies with them; we pronounced their guns to be the loot of some museum — they were not, certainly, of the newest type — and we greedily borrowed all the newspapers that they had brought with them.

It was in the N.F.A. lines, by the way, one white-hot noon, that I almost tripped over the super-philosopher. He was Irish, which perhaps makes his philosophy the less remarkable, and he sate upon an up-turned soap-box and toyed with a dish of something that sounded like camp stew.

There was a sudden noise, the sort of noise that makes a grown-up say to a child: "You should put your hand before your mouth when you do that!" and I heard, rather than saw, the super-philosopher clear his mouth of some objectionable morsel. I looked round, and his pale eye closed with mine. "Praise th' saints!" he said, "thim ants have no bones into thim!"

Our interest in the arrivals did not last long. A new sandstorm blew up and swallowed them, and when, weeks later, it spat them out again, they had all but lost their identity as far as we were concerned. The infantry became known to us simply as "foot-sloggers"; the Carbineers, from a weakness for polishing their riding-boots, became "the Cherry Blossom Brigade"; and we, the I.L.H., were known to all and sundry as the "Illicit Liquor Hunters." I

do not think, however, that we should have minded so much if there had been any liquor left to hunt.

We were kept hard at work, too, and we soon learned that the "in-betweens" were more profitably to be spent in what we called "blanket-drill," and what our N.C.O.'s, when they were not indulging in it themselves, called "darned laziness," than in afternoon calls upon strangers who had so thoroughly taken upon themselves the colour of their surroundings as to have become as supremely uninteresting as ourselves.

The deep groaning noise that a trumpet makes at dawn, and which field-officers and poets call "réveillé," and turn over again and snore at, when, by some rare chance, they hear it, was to us the first note in a symphony of labour that was to last all day. Who has heard the howls of execration that uprise from a sleeping camp at its first note will appreciate the truth of what I say. The utter hopelessness of any resistance to its summons is, perhaps, what galls most. Turn you never so deaf an ear, you will still have the chilling conviction that some N.C.O., with more liver than bowels

of compassion, is waiting "outside" to mark you down as an absentee from roll-call.

Réveillé, roll-call, arms inspection, morning stables, alleged breakfast, stable fatigue, mounted squadron drill, watering and feeding horses, and musketry instruction took us by gentle stages as far as lunch-time. After lunch (save the mark! but is sand, disguised as Irish stew, lunch?), Swedish drill, sectional skirmishing on foot, and an odd quarter-master's fatigue or so thrown in, would lead us on to evening stables. That accomplished, we were at liberty—those, at least, of us who were not on guard for the night—to prepare our evening meal and to retire to our blankets, where, masters of ourselves at last, we could—the writer certainly did on one occasion—dream that one-eyed camels of malevolent aspect chased us through interminable leagues of sandstorm, and finally drove us into seas of greasy Irish stew, wherefrom emerged horrid shapes that lectured us on the care of rifles and the virtues of discipline.

How we longed for war, if only for its comparative peace!

Not all our days were grey days, however.

There came a period when each morning saw us, clad mainly in pipes and towels, taking our horses down to a landlocked arm of the sea, where the hills stood up in their glory around us, and where flamingoes, in their stately phalanxes, waded the still shallows or flung in broad-pinioned ease to some further sand-bank; where black seals bobbed greeting to us from the dipping waters, and where we could forget the sandstorms of yesterday and to-morrow.

Horses, we found, made excellent diving boards, and lent themselves, besides, to a type of chariot-racing that I have not met elsewhere. For this form of sport it is essential to have two horses, and it usually became one's painful duty, therefore, to borrow the mount of some other man, preferably a non-swimmer, when he was not looking, and then to make for deep water —where he could not follow—with as little delay as possible. Remained then only to so contrive oneself as to stand with a foot on the back of each animal, and to keep them swimming sufficiently near together to allow one to retain some sort of balance. Sometimes one would succeed, but usually, and in spite of extreme efforts, the contrary

beasts would swim more and more widely apart, until overtaxed powers of doing the splits would end in a ducking as ignominious as inevitable.

I remember an occasion when, after a long and tiring patrol, we had ridden our horses into the shallows to cool their legs, a school of ground-sharks suddenly appeared, almost literally, under their very noses. The White Knight in "Alice in Wonderland," who made his horse wear spiked anklets against the danger of shark-bite, must have foreseen some such contingency; but then, had he been with us, he would have fallen off, I feel sure, in the smother of spray and panic which the experience cost us.

One of our duties at this time was the providing of an escort to the water ration that left Luderitzbucht each morning for Kolmanskoppe.

The water was taken in mule-drawn trolleys along the railway line (we possessed no other "rolling stock" at that time) and as it was the sole supply of the two infantry regiments stationed there, extreme care had to be taken to prevent its being intercepted by a stray German patrol.

On October 7 No. 3 Troop had supplied the convoy, and we, whose turn it was to do so on the morrow, had spent the greater part of the day, in the sweet frame of mind that is bred by camp fatigues, and at four o'clock in the afternoon were waiting for the order to "break away," from a squadron drill that seemed as if it would never end. The other troops had dismissed long ago, and we asked ourselves with some bitterness why we should be kept out in the heat and sand playing at circuses, and all the while the sharp words of command stabbed through the curtain of dust that followed us, and punctuated our grumbling. "On the left fo-orm troop!" Some one, hand-jostled by a section in rear, cursed aloud, and we laughed as we went forward at the picturesque phrase he had used. "Sections right!" The sand-fog rose more thickly about us. Was this farce never going to end? "Ha-alt!" Ah! This was the order for which we had been waiting. The "dismiss" would follow, and there was still time if we hurried for a bathe before evening stables.

But our O.C. had apparently forgotten us. He was gazing with something of an air

of abstraction at a solitary horseman making towards us from the direction of the camp.

There was nothing really extraordinary in the sight of that figure (we could recognize him, by the big, upstanding grey that he rode, as the Colonel's orderly), yet something—his obvious hurry perhaps—made us forget our anxiety to be dismissed.

A minute later he had pulled up before our troop leader. "Colonel D——n's compliments, sir! and you are to report to him at once!" And then, in the confidential tone that orderlies learn from their constant association with the higher ranks: "Water guard, sir!" I could just catch the words: ". . . German patrol . . . one . . . chap wounded. . . . What's that, sir? . . . Yes, one of our fellows."

"Sections right! Wa-alk 'arch! Tr-r-ot!" There was life in the order this time, and there was life, too, in our quick response. The horses even seemed to be infected, and we had to hold them a little as we pounded along in the wake of the news-bringer.

"Steady, there! Ye don't want to ride

the sentries down, do ye?" The camp buildings had leaped out at us from the yellow haze of our own progress, and the corporal of the guard had flattened himself against a wall—just in time. We pulled up and rode in soberly. Men of other troops dashed at us and held our horses. "Lucky devils!" they said, and bade us get our bandoliers and rifles. From them we learned that a German patrol had lain in wait for the water convoy at a point some three miles up the line, had potted one of our men through the thigh, and had retired without our fellows being able to fire a shot in exchange, and now, we—"lucky 4," they called us—were going out to hunt them. "And I don't suppose they've gone far," one informed me. "I expect they'll be waiting for you, an' p'raps they'll shoot one of you. I know I hope they will—you lucky, lucky devils!"

Into the press of chaff and counter-chaff, and the excitement of straps and buckles, rode one, speaking with the large voice of small authority, and hung about with "the complete campaigner's outfit." Not a detail—if we except the camp-stretcher and the cork-mattress—was missing. Water-

bottle, haversack, prismatic compass, field-glasses, first aid outfit, and sand goggles—the White Knight again!

As a quick-change artist he should have commanded our ready admiration. As it was, he provided just that sobering touch of humour that we needed. "Goin' to take all week to get ready?" he queried with that heavy urbanity which N.C.O.'s and stage managers mistake for satire, ". . . passel o' ladies' maids!"

"Oh! you—you May queen!" I heard some one say, and the troop giggled helplessly as we swung into our saddles. "Number off from the right!" the order was barked at us.

"One"—"two"—"three"——. The fourth man was having trouble with his pony and was far too busy to think of mere numbers, and the White Knight glared down the line of us as if, in some way, just outside his comprehension, we were all to blame. "As you were!" he snapped—it sounded like "Zwear"! "Number off from the ri——" "No time for that now, Sergeant!" spoke the crisp voice of the O.C. from somewhere behind us. "Sections left! Walk march! Tr-r-ot!" and the quick dust rose

to the forward surge of horses and men, and we were off.

Five minutes later we had passed the outlying pickets of the Transvaal Scottish, and were kicking up the sand at a good hand-canter along the hill-girt railway line to Kolmanskuppe. There is a peculiar exhilaration in this form of sport (I cannot easily use the term "warfare" in regard to a game wherein all that is ordinarily known as "patriotism" is swallowed up and lost in a wholesome, primal, man's desire to hunt man—the royalest of royal game—for the sake, only, of the game's lust), and if in G.S.W. we were rather like the famous American hunter who had never been known to kill anything, but who "just hunted"—well, such little killing as did come our way proved conclusively that "just hunting" held all the breathless joy of the thing and left no—aftertaste.

For some miles we held our pace, and the heavy, springless sand through which we rode flung its yellow veil about us. There was the sound of wind in our ears, and the creaking of saddle-leather, a vague surging noise, as of a heavy ground-swell sucking through rocks, and, over all,

the choking, blinding pall of dust. An oath, back-flung from a leading section where a horse had stumbled, sounded smothered and unreal. Now and again an outcrop of bare granite would leap out to meet us, and the brief thunder of our passing would shout back from the echoing hills; then sand again, and its muffled tumult.

The valley became narrower, and a hint of coolness stole down the sudden shadows. All on a moment a swift hand plucked the sunlight from us, and the jaws of the hills closed suddenly about our path—closed, closed, until the ribbon of steel that we knew to be the railway line looked like a tongue lolling from the cleft grin before us. There was a silence in that place, and our horses pricked quick, apprehensive ears to it. "What a place for an ambush!" said some one of my section, and the angry "Don't be a fool!" of the man to whom he had spoken showed that three of us, at least, were thinking of the same thing. The click of a steel-shod hoof striking against stone, and—"click!" back would come the answer of the rocks; just the sort of noise that the bolt of a Mauser rifle makes when it is

drawn back to—— Well, speaking personally, I do not suppose that I should have noticed it if my horse hadn't jumped so.

It was here, or hereabouts, that our patrol had been fired on only a few hours before, and we had received no particular assurance that ours was not likely to be a similar experience. On the contrary, every breathing instant was pregnant with possibility, and, be it said, a sort of half-shrinking hope.

A barrier of great boulders, through which the line won a bare clearance, stood suddenly up against us. Just the place for an ambush; but nothing happened save, perhaps, that one was conscious more of one's own breathing after it was passed. A hundred yards or so farther on the hills to our right fell away in a great curve, and sheeted sunlight lay on all the place; orange, streaked with silver of drift-sand on the shining plain, while beyond, and high above all, white-faced crags swam on an opal-hearted mist. To our right a mad sunset flared above the purple-footed hills, and pointed long, scornful, shadow-fingers at us. Sunset? or drunken magic? Saffron there was, and duck's-egg green lying on amber; amber that dripped molten gold, and tipped with

splendid colour the peaks which stood up blackly against it; amber, shot with blush-rose and slashed with fierce scarlet: a breathless wonder that changed while we watched it—changed and deepened until all the painted sky was a blood-clotted glory.

Night had stepped into the valley in which we rode, and I was not sorry when my section was picked out for "flanking work," and we were sent at a sharp trot to the foot-hills and the sunlight. We were told to keep slightly in advance of the troop, and, as the broken nature of the ground allowed, about three hundred yards distant from the railway line, the idea being, of course, that should an enemy patrol be waiting for us among the rocks, we—"the advance screen"—would draw their fire, and so secure some measure of safety for our main body. A leading section was sent off to the shadow-land on the right of the line, and, looking back when we had ridden some hundred yards or so, I saw two other sections detach themselves from the main body, and drop back, to the right and left respectively, as a sort of extended rear-guard.

"As the nature of the ground allowed"!

The words were the letter of our instructions; the exclamation mark, as *Punch* might say, was ours when the first gentle slope that we negotiated jumped suddenly up into a hog-backed "krantz," that looked as if it might strain even a klipspringer. It had to be done, however, and we laid ourselves on our horses' necks and let them go at it. What a breathless scramble it was! Loose shale avalanched about us, and steel-shod hoofs slipped and struck, and struck and slipped again on the crisp granite, and just when it seemed to me that nothing was left but to dismount and pull my horse up after me, there was a last, furious straining of willing muscles, a plunge that shook my hat over my eyes, and the four of us were landed in a hard-breathing bunch on a sort of shelf of rock. A girth had slipped, and we paused while it was tightened, and looked back. The troop was halted—while we attained our position, I supposed—and as we watched, a figure rode clear of the others and signalled agitatedly to us to advance.

It was comparatively easy, from our elevation, to select a route that conformed measurably to our instructions and to the opposing

factor of our own instinct of self-preservation. Only comparatively easy, however, because distances that looked flat, or, at the most, but gently tilted, proved on closer inspection to be almost worth the serious consideration of an Alpine Club. But we managed to scramble along somehow. When possible, we even went farther into the spirit of our instructions, and rode in extended formation, but, although our horses displayed an amazing aptitude for rock-work, we usually found ourselves progressing in single file. Once, I remember, when a flat surface of rock tempted us to something approaching a trot, we pulled up only a few yards short of where the hill ended abruptly, and lay, piled about its own foot, hundreds of feet below. It was from there, too, that we first caught sight of the white buildings of Kolmanskuppe, some two or three miles away, but although it was a cheering sight, we went on from that place with much sedateness and circumspection. All serious thought of meeting the enemy patrol had vanished, of course, with that first glimpse of "civilization." Only one ordeal now remained: to get ourselves down, "that region of sunlight and breath-

lessness, to where, with the lesser hills, began the last phase of our journey.

One attempt landed us in a cul-de-sac of tumbled granite, another on a tongue of rock that would have proved perfectly negotiable if the tongue had not been bitten short, or if there had been a bridge across the forty-foot chasm that grinned up at us; but, eventually, by winding in single file round a spur of rock where a false step meant—as one of us said and giggled so much at, that he all but put his assertion to the proof—"more than a bad cold" for the man who slipped, we found a steep slope wheredown we tobogganed with safety and some amusement to ourselves, but not a little detriment, I think, to the tails of our horses.

The troop, we found, had taken courage of the less imposing scenery, and were just visible in a cloud of dust some half a mile ahead of us. Just outside Kolmanskuppe the railway line takes a sharp bend to the left, and as half a mile in the rear does not exactly correspond with the M.I. handbook's definition of an advance guard's position, we kicked up our tired animals and made a desperate effort, by cutting across

the angle of the line, to regain some measure of dignity. What the troop thought when, some ten minutes later, we reappeared in advance of them, I do not know. They looked rather indifferent, I thought, and when, soon afterwards, a ragged fringe of infantry appeared on the sky-line above us—Kolmanskuppe is on the edge of the desert proper, and looks as if it had been washed up by the sea of mountainous sand-dunes—and the troop, realizing apparently that there was really no need to follow its meticulous course along the railway metals, wheeled sharply to the right, we cantered down and, with all humility, tied ourselves on to its tail.

In the number of its houses, Kolmanskuppe is not a large place; in the extent covered by such buildings as there are it is quite considerable. An average distance of about one hundred yards between the houses, and the glaring monotony of their design stifles any desire on the part of the visitor unduly to prolong his tour of inspection.

In the ordinary sense we were not, of course, visitors, and besides, we had "done" Kolmanskuppe, more thoroughly than an

American tourist does Rome, on a previous occasion. Then, we had been actuated by other than guide-book motives, and now, its interest gone, the place was become an eyesore, and we wanted to go home. That, we supposed, was why we got the order to off-saddle.

The one picturesque touch in the picture was supplied by our three camels. They were there on some water-carrying pretext, and they recognized us from afar off, and came and stood to windward of us so that there could be no remote possibility of our not recognizing them.

We never seemed, somehow, to be able to get away from those three gaunt beasts. No matter the direction of our journeyings, we always met them sooner or later. We should not, of course, have minded if they had shown any signs of awakening affection for us, but they didn't. It was their sneering indifference to our presence that galled us most, I think. Had we been in the habit of thrusting ourselves upon them, this attitude would have been understandable, even commendable; but we didn't thrust ourselves upon them. They hatched deliberate plots to meet us in unexpected

places, and when we met they sneered at us, and besides, as I have said elsewhere, they smelt abominably. In very truth, Tartarin of Tarascon was not more haunted by his own camel than were we by our three.

The corporal who was in charge of them slouched to us from somewhere out of the desert—he was borrowing habits right and left from his camels, we often told him—and gave us the cheerful information that we were to convoy some wagons back to Luderitzbucht, which wagons, he added, were only then being off-loaded. Dusk was spreading like a grey blanket across the face of the sands, and the prospect of a night ride at the tail of a string of creaking wagons was not enticing. We asked him how he knew, and he retired into his newly acquired camelism, and went off to his uncouth beasts.

But he was right, and an hour later saw us—or heard us rather, for it was pitch dark—starting on such a ride as I hope never again to suffer. The road from Kolmanskuppe to Luderitzbucht is rendered distinct from the country through which it runs by means of white-painted paraffin tins placed at irregular intervals along its

alleged sides. That it does not otherwise differ to any marked extent from the surrounding country, is due less, I think, to the surveyor than to the country, which is mainly precipices and small but very knobby hills. I have since travelled that road in the daytime, and its unrelieved roughness—unless an occasional wallow in deep sand can be called relief—makes of it a thing to be remembered; but of that night, when our nostrils, and our throats, and our eyes were filled with the dust kicked up by close upon a hundred mules and half as many horses, and our ears were deafened by the harsh thunder of empty wagons bouncing into and out of deep holes and over fire-spitting granite boulders, recollection is a mere headache.

For the first half-mile or so—my section had now become the rearguard—we rode at some fifty yards behind the last wagon. We did this for several reasons: firstly, because the air was less full of dust at that distance; secondly, because we could more or less select our own pace instead of having, every now and then, to pull our horses back upon their haunches to avoid spitting them on the brake handle of a

wagon stopped suddenly, in its drunken career by virtue of collision with some more than usually imposing obstruction; and thirdly—but this I do not think was a real reason—because we had been ordered to do so.

We were going down some unseen slope, I remember, when the change occurred. My horse was plunging a good deal, and I had to use both hands to prevent his getting away from me. The man on my right seemed to be having similar difficulty with his animal. Strange! they were all quiet enough a minute ago, and now—— "Look out!" The words were shot at me by No. 3 of the section as, with his horse completely out of control, he raced passed me into the darkness and the dust. "Rummy," said the man on my right, "I don't know what's the matter with the beasts. They're scared out of their lives, that I'll swear—Good Lord!" His ejaculation was spoken away from me, for his pony had swung suddenly about with a quick, frightened movement, and was now staring into the blackness from whence we had come. A ment later and my own beast had spun nd. We waited in silence.

"Where's T——?" said the other man suddenly. (T—— was of my section, and I seemed vaguely to remember that he had been riding behind us.) If my memory was right, then T—— was somewhere out there in the blackness, and the—the—whatever it was that was frightening our horses was out there with him. It was not a nice thought. We waited again, and I found myself wondering what it would sound like to call out T——'s name, when out of the darkness came the sound of a snort, followed by what seemed like the frenzied plunging of some heavy beast. Then a voice uplifted itself in earnest supplication, and the voice was the voice of T——.

He seemed to be calling upon the name of a god not altogether orthodox. I caught, here and there, strong expressions of his disapproval of some person or thing. The voice was growing louder and clearer, and it became obvious that T—— was being borne towards us at a high rate of speed. The pale sheet of the sky held him in silhouette for an instant, and then he flung down upon us in a perfect flood of invective.

I had never heard him talk quite like

that before. It was really, and almost literally, illuminating, and we reined aside in a sort of reverential awe to let him pass. He did so on the wings of some of the most golden eloquence that it has ever been my lot to hear. "Goddam!" I heard distinctly, followed by a string of words which I do not know how to spell; and then some fine but strictly censorable phrases, out of which I collected fragments that made a disconnected yet interesting whole. In this I was puzzled for some moments by the many variations of the word camel. "Camel!" I found myself saying, "camel!" when "Look!" said the other man suddenly, and I looked, and saw striding down upon us from the same pale sheet of sky that had held T—— only a few minutes before three gaunt, long-legged shadows.

"The camels!" said the other man, and I looked at him, and he looked at me, and what there was in that shrouding darkness to tell each what the other thought I do not know; but, as our frenzied horses waltzed and plunged away from the acrid fear behind them, we clung to our saddles with both hands, and rocked and choked

with insane laughter. Later, when we met T——, leading a dead-lame pony, out of the rocks, we broke out afresh, and between paroxysms, told him something of our admiring respect. Indeed, a man who could steer a madly racing pony through pitch darkness and over and between rocks, and at the same time conduct ably a rhetorical discourse on the (presumed) illegitimacy of camels and the moral degeneracy of men who ride upon them, well deserved some more tangible expression of merit than was held in mere words. Iron crosses have been given for less.

The remainder of that ride left to us only recurring fits of laughter, dust, and noise and darkness, and when the camels came too near, which, in spite of concise injunctions to them to go "to another place," they often did, spasms of wrathful and sulphurous abuse.

A note in my diary says of our return to Luderitzbucht: "Surprised to find myself looking on the beastly place as 'home'!"

But was there real cause for surprise?

CHAPTER V

ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS

NEVER, I believe, was there a campaign so casually regarded by an army as was the G.S.W. " affair " by the force that operated from Luderitzbucht.

Even in the first flush of our landing on German territory we looked upon it as merely a stepping-stone to the larger issue in Europe. For that we had volunteered. This was merely an irksome little duty to be performed *en passant*, a sort of preliminary canter to the race into Berlin. We believed that we were going to polish off the local brand of Hun in three or, at most, four months, and then, if we were not too late —and at that time we half feared that we might be—we would join in the scamper across the Rhine, or help to capture the " German High Canal Fleet " from the

of the more imaginative of us, in-

deed, went to some pains to draft a sort of Cook's tour of the war. From G.S.W. we would go on to German East Africa. Egypt and the Dardanelles would follow, and then —mere geography being sacrificed on the altar of our splendid optimism—we would enter Galicia from the south-east—or was it the north-west?—where General Botha would assume supreme command of a mixed force of I.L.H. and Cossacks, whom he would lead through Austria to the inevitable Berlin.

For most of this the corporal who was known as " O.C. Camels " was responsible. Time hung heavily on his hands, and at such odd moments as he could tear himself away from his smellful charges he would come to tell us that he had " just overheard the Colonel saying——," or " a ship has just come in, and the chief engineer, whom I knew some years ago at Dar-es-Salaam " (of lavish mendacity was the ' O.C. Camels '), " and he tells me that——." And then would follow some wildly improbable yarn, told with such earnest conviction that at least one-third of the squadron existed in a perpetual state of readiness to join Shackleton's South Pole expedition so as to

" go round the other way, and attack the Germans from behind," or to crawl to Windhuk on their hands and knees in the guise of a flock of sand-rats, or something else equally feasible.

At this time our chief grievance against the " authorities " (vague term embracing everything from the mismanagement of sand-storms to the shortage in the rum-issue) was that they never took us into their confidence regarding the conduct of the campaign. We were never told, for instance, when we got the order to " saddle up " whether we were destined for a mere patrol, or whether the long-looked for general advance had at last begun, or whether it was only another " surprise alarm." One deplorable result of this was that a man might just as easily forget his rifle when starting on an expedition as not. Indeed, we had an example of that on the day that we landed at Luderitz-bucht. I had noticed one of our sergeants looking a little more imposing than usual. A sort of forced dignity sat heavily upon him, and I was wondering as to the reason when there came to us an officer, who looked him up and down, as one man of fashion may quiz another who is without his cane or his

gloves, or whose trousers are without their customary crease. "Sergeant L——," he said, "where is your rifle?" A flush crept up the sergeant's sun-tanned neck, and his ears glowed hotly: "Please, sir, I left it on the ship, sir!"

And that on the first day of all! Small wonder, then, that we never, from first to last, learned to regard war as other than a somewhat uncomfortable pastime.

Thus when, on the 4th of October, the smallest of the small hours saw us being coerced from our blankets by the official toe of the corporal of the guard, we merely smothered him under a cloud of profanity, and turned over and tried to get to sleep again. But it was of no avail. He emerged again, pawing his way through the veil of obscenities, blindly, like a man who has been "gassed," and tempted us anew with the news that the Germans were even then surrounding the camp. We listened patiently until he had finished, and then some one told him with a wealth of lurid detail that there weren't any Germans in the country. "There were five originally,—and a little yellow dog," the voice went on to say, "but we bagged the five at Grasplatz, and if you

think you're going to get me up at this time o' night to chase after a Goddam poodle, you're mistaken ! "

I do not know who invented the " little yellow dog." He was always with us. Like the " Brer Rabbit " of the American negroes, he is a fable—the fable of " D " Squadron I.L.H.

But we knew that it was of no use, and within ten minutes we were flinging saddles on our astonished horses. I do not think that we altogether believed the story about the Germans ; but while there is any sort of hope there is no " grousing," and it was a moderately contented body of men that rode out into the first paleness of the coming day.

A brief half-hour later we were completely undeceived. Our troop leader halted us at the beginning of the gorge through which runs the railway line to Kolmanskuppe, and told us with a bluntness of speech and a total lack of consideration for our feelings which showed that he, too, regretted his blankets, that we were to " guard the kopjes along the railway line." " What for ? " I wondered, as I gazed up at the crags that cut blackly into the growing light behind

them. As far as I could see, they looked eminently capable of guarding themselves. "At about nine o'clock," the O.C. went on to say—it was then about three o'clock, by the way, and most infernally cold—"a water-trolley will pass on its way to Kolmanskuppe. At about five this evening, it will return. Until then no man is to leave his post, unless dam-well ordered to!"

For this, then, we had forsaken our blankets in the middle of the night; for this we had burdened ourselves with much extra ammunition and tins of bully-beef and jam. "Told you there wasn't a bloomin' German in the —— country!" said the voice that I had heard earlier; but this was when my section was dragging its horses up the scarred, rock-strewn flank of the hill that we were to guard, and the O.C. was away out of earshot, posting other sections on other hills.

There is little to be said of that first day spent on the hills. Recollection blends it confusedly with the memories of many other days spent in a like manner. For the first hour or so, I remember, when the hills swam in the pure light, when the air was good to breathe and tobacco was a

God's gift, our watch was pleasant enough; later, when the shade went and the flies came, and the rocks whereon we lay, or sat grew so uncomfortably hot that it was impossible to remain for long in any one position, and the writer even went to the length of pillowing his head on a nosebag and trying to sleep in the shadow of his horse, until the poor, fly-pestered beast tried to dance on him, and he got frightened and ran away; when the landscape rose on its hind-legs and waltzed in the shimmering heat, and our bully-beef resolved itself into a horrid mess of sinew and mystery floating in yellow grease—then the four of us, who liked each other well enough in ordinary circumstances, forbore all conversation, because it was too hot to swear, and sat and shied chips of granite at venturesome black lizards until the shadows came again, and brought with them a hellish discord of shouting and cracking of whips, which was the water-trolleys, and our signal to go home.

It was upon our return to camp on this day that we were told that the R.L.I. pickets had shot two Germans who had attempted to sneak into Luderitzbucht on

the previous night, but, generally speaking, the diary which I kept at this time shows in its almost discourteous brevity something of the boredom of manner with which we regarded the campaign in general.

"October 14-15-16," an entry reads. "Camp. Sand and flies in equal parts!" An entire page of it is given up to a description of a snake and lizard fight which was witnessed on one of our kopje-guarding expeditions, and October 11 is marked down as having been chiefly remarkable for a "stand to arms" that was suffered in the middle of the night because an enthusiastic sentry of the Pretoria Regiment mistook the rising moon for an enemy bonfire or something of the sort, and tried to shoot it.

During the latter half of October it became general knowledge that information was leaking out to the enemy. Certain houses, wherein dwelt Germans "on good behaviour," I know, were being watched. One of these "ticket-of-leave" Huns, I remember, had been retained by the authorities as a sort of sanitary inspector. He was a weird-looking little person with

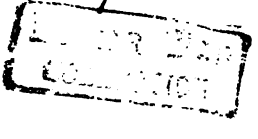
spectacles, and he used to ride about the town on a horse several sizes too large for him. One day he was gone, and his place was filled by a rumour that told how he had been sent to Cape Town to be executed as a spy. Whether this was true or not I am in no wise prepared to say, but anyway the mere story gave our sentries such a zest for their work that the R.L.I. succeeded on the same night in seriously wounding one of their own officers who was "visiting rounds."

At evening stables on October 17th—a day which only narrowly escaped being bracketed with the "sand and flies" entry of the previous three—we were told to draw our next day's rations in advance, and to see that our water-bottles were filled. Not a word was said to us of any kind of movement toward. "Ours not to reason why," nor even to suspect, and that, I suppose, was why an hour after dark found us with our horses saddled, waiting for the "surprise." We took leave to presume, with that fluent pessimism which marks the really good soldier, that it was going to be another attack on "poor old Fort Grasplatz." (Up to then we had captured

that historic place on no fewer than four separate occasions, and we were getting rather tired of it.) But when we were formally paraded, and told that the Natal Carbineers were to accompany us, or rather, seeing that they were the senior regiment, that we were to accompany them, we were quietly uplifted among ourselves, and looked forward to a new venture.

Nor were we altogether disappointed. We were told that our objective was a night march on a place called Elizabethbucht, where was a military post which we were to attack at dawn. From there we were to return in extended formation—with the four squadrons of Carbineers we would be able to cover a sweep of from ten to twelve miles of ground—to thoroughly "drive" the country back in the direction of Luderitzbucht, and to snap up any German patrols that might be caught in our net. To make things more certain the Transvaal Scottish were going to move out during the night to a distance of some three or four miles, there to await such stray enemy patrols as might be driven on to them.

It all sounded beautifully simple, and



although things did not turn out quite as we hoped, without that alluring programme before us we could not, I am sure, have sustained so cheerfully the night's work that was to be ours. It was bitterly cold. A knife-edged wind came and played with us among the rocks wherein we rode, and some time later, when we had forsaken the hills for the easier going of the sea beach (Elizabethbucht, which is some fifteen miles distant from Luderitzbucht, is on the coast), an ice-cold sea mist settled about us and soaked us to the skin. For some five miles we held to the coast, the call of sea birds in our ears and the taste of salt on our lips. Hills grew up again around us, and rocks took the place of sand. All sound else became drowned in the steady snarling of an ebb tide that sucked over some unseen bar, save once, when there came to us from somewhere out of the white-streaked waters a sudden noise of jabbering, like old men in heated argument, and which I now believe was a colony of black seals, but which then, in the darkness and the uncertainty of the night and our mission, sounded mightily uncanny.

At what hour we halted and "ringed"

our horses, I cannot say. The sound of the sea was gone, I know, and with it the soaking mist. But of that bivouac there are two outstanding memories, each as unforgettable in its way as the other. One was the spectacle, which struck us as being funny, of Carbineer officers walking about with stable lanterns in their hands looking for comfortable places to sleep in, and the other was of a voice that spoke to me out of the darkness, bidding me to sleep with him because he was cold, and, when I complied with the request, of a flask of brandy that was thrust into my hands, with a whispered injunction not to thank him "quite so loudly, because, you see, old chap, ours is a very thirsty squadron, and this flask is so little, so very little!"

Dear old M——! should you chance to read these lines, remember that if my thanks on that night were not over-effusive, and if, as you said, I did drink rather more than my fair share of the brandy, at least my gratitude is of a lasting nature.

We slept, or rather pretended to sleep, under the lee of a big rock, and there grew up during the night, and stuck into

my ribs, a lesser rock which I tried to uproot, but upon which I broke all my finger-nails instead, and my stable companion accused me of ingratitude and of rowelling him with my spurs. Dawn, however, came at last, and the order to mount: a grey dawn that showed nothing of the coming of the sun; just a spiritless half-light wherein rocks and sand and men took on a uniform dull hue. In all that landscape, we found to our surprise, we were alone save for a squadron of carbineers that was making off at a sharp trot at a wide angle to our own course. My section was sent ahead to a distance of some four or five hundred yards; flanking sections cut themselves away from the squadron and galloped out until they were abreast with us and at some hundred yards range, and we started. For hours, it seemed, we rode, before the sun's rim stepped out upon the curtain of far hills, and yellow, watery light quickened our shivering horses. Sand and rocks and scrub—we were to meet with real vegetation, for the first time, later on—scrub and sand and rocks—a wilderness that howled aud.

For slow miles the changeless horizon seemed to mock our progress. Ridge after ridge of rising ground promised new things and gave us the same old monotony—rocks and scrub and sand.

It must have been nearly eight o'clock—we had, anyway, for some time been discussing the breakfast that we were not going to get—when a sudden dip in the ground brought to our view a collection of tin shanties and a miscellany of diamond-working plant. The whole face of the earth was heaped up in mounds of gravel and sand, and between the mounds were hand-rotators and barrels and quaint-looking cylindrical sieves. The squadron halted while we went forward to investigate. Crowds of pigeons flew about us as I dismounted at the first open door, and went inside to investigate. A half-eaten meal, a glass with the dregs of beer in it, and a bed unslept in. That was all. The second hut told the same story of a hurried departure, and the third, and the next. "No Germans for us to-day, my boy!" said the man who had held my horse. "Never mind the Germans," said another; "I've found a tin of pine-apple!"

Half an hour or so later the hoofs of our horses rang sharply on the metals of a narrow-gauge railway line half-buried in the sand, and soon afterwards an official-looking tin roof grew out of the shoulder of a humpbacked sand-dune.

The "military post" which we were to attack! We reined in and looked around. The squadron seemed to be a long way behind, and we were only four; but curiosity is a more impelling factor than mere courage, and within a couple of minutes we were dismounted before a notice-board which told us in official black letters that this was the Elizabethbucht police-station! Some few fowls wandered in and out of the open door, and a brace of pigeons were flirting on the rim of a chimney. Military post! Pshaw! this was worse than Grasplatz! There was a thudding of hoofs behind us, and we looked round to discover the Colonel's galloper. "'The old man,'" he began, his eyes not on me, but on the doorway of the station—"'the old man' says ye've got to go and find the Carbineers!" "Where are they? Are they lost?" I asked, faintly sarcastic. "I don't know—an' 'the old man' don't

know—if they're lost, or if we're lost, but ye've got to go and find 'em." "But where are they?" I looked away to the barren horizon. "Don't know, I'm sure," he answered over his shoulder—he had dismounted and was stooping to the low porch of the building—"but 'the old man' says ye're to gallop like th' divil!"

I got into my saddle thoughtfully. Now, where on earth, in a wilderness of sand-dunes and rocks, might one reasonably expect to find Carbineers growing? They were not behind us, certainly, or we should have seen them. That left three cardinal points of the compass for me to choose from. To the left, and in front, unbroken sand-dunes met the sky in an ugly straight line. To the right, a glimpse of blue sea showed over the crest of some sugar-loaf sand-hills. That, at least, looked friendly, and I started off at a canter through the deep sand.

The Carbineers, I knew, might just as likely as not be in either of the other two directions that I had discarded, and I might be riding straight into the Germans that we had come all this way to meet. It was on the heels of this thought that

I realized, with something of a shock, that I did not particularly want to meet them—just then. A wide valley opened up before me, and I held straight down its centre in some vague hope, I believe, that I might be out of range of the hills on each side. It was not only the thought of the Germans that was bothering me. I might—the day of miracles not yet being past—I might even meet the Carbineers and they might mistake me for a German, and some of them, I now remembered having heard, were rattling good shots.

Even ordinary peaceable citizens in ordinary peaceable times have been known to remark on the extraordinary resemblances that one sometimes sees in rocks to men and dogs, and even to cattle. On this occasion I saw no dogs or cattle, but I saw dozens of men, all unmistakably Germans, and all in lethal attitudes. Of course they were only rocks, and I kept persuading myself of the fact, but once, I remember, when a prone grey figure that I had been watching for some half-minute or so seemed ever so slightly to change its position, and the next instant I heard a twanging rush through the air above my head, I ducked

on to my horse's neck and wondered for a moment where I was hit. On the next instant I looked back to find that a line of telegraph-poles had crossed my path and it was the wind in the low-hung wires that I had heard.

The valley down which I rode opened out into a waste of sand, and I became aware of a string of horsemen moving diagonally across my front. I cantered on for a few hundred yards, and watched them while they halted and faced round in my direction. It was impossible at that distance—fifteen hundred yards at the very least—to tell whether they were Carbineers or not, and as I moved forward I held out my hat in my right hand. This was the signal by which we were to distinguish friends from foes, and I waited anxiously for its acknowledgment and return. One —two—three hundred yards slipped past, and still they made no sign. Four hundred! This was getting serious, and I reined in to a walk. Five hundred! Ah! there it was! A man had ridden clear of the others, and—blessed sight!—he was giving the "All right" signal.

A few minutes later I was explaining

myself to an officer. "Colonel D——n's compliments, sir!"—and here, since the galloper who had sent me on that wild ride had not told me what "the old man" wanted with the Carbineers, I plunged recklessly—"and will you be so good as to link up with him, and—and commence the drive."

The end of my speech sounded lame in my own ears, but it seemed to be what the Carbineer officer wanted. "Right!" he said, "and where precisely, in all this large country, might Colonel D——n be found?" I indicated, vaguely, the desert whence I had come; a whistle blew shrilly, and the wide-strung line of horsemen wheeled half-right to the signal that followed, and we moved on again. Far below us, and to our left, the still waters of Elizabeth's Bay—as the new maps know it—winked in the sunlight, and a cluster of some half-dozen tin sheds stood out in clear relief against the white sand of its beach.

Nearer still, and running parallel with our course, was the narrow-gauge railway that we had met earlier in the morning. A mule-drawn trolley, guarded by some half-dozen horsemen, provided the only life

in the picture. "What's that?" I asked of a trooper who was riding next to me. "Prisoners!" he replied, and, seeing my surprise, added: "Non-combatants, of course; diamond-diggers, or something. One of 'em's a woman"—he paused and chuckled. "She came out o' one o' the huts with a flutter like a lot o' hens when we surrounded 'em this morning, an'—well, it was very early, y' know, an' old Stick-in-the-mud"—he indicated an officer who was riding slightly in advance of us—"he made us right-about while she collected herself." He paused again, and looked ruminatingly at the officer-man. "I never seen 'im blush before!" he concluded.

A group of specks appeared on a far ridge. "Are those your fellows?" "Stick-in-the-mud" had called out to me over his shoulder. "Yes, sir," I answered unhesitatingly, although, as far as I could tell at that distance, they were just as likely to be Germans. I was right, however, and within a quarter of an hour I was back in my own section.

From this time onward we did not seriously entertain any hope of meeting the enemy. Too obviously they had received

wind of our coming, and as the affair seemed destined to resolve itself into a picnic—well, we would treat it as a picnic! Thereafter, although we kept to our extended formation when the nature of the country allowed us to do so, save once, when the nearness of the sea tempted us from all semblance of military virtue, and we rode our horses into the breakers, we treated the whole affair as schoolboys treat a half-holiday.

For an hour or more we rode in the shadow of great hills, or picked a careful way down deep gorges, where bushes—actual bushes, with green leaves on them—brushed our horses' bellies, and clouds of yellow and white butterflies danced mazily away from the disturbance.

Hares were numerous here, and once a species of buck—a rhe-bok, I think it was—jinked away among the strewn boulders, and once, again, I saw a man dismount to put his heel on the ugly, squat head of a puff-adder.

Somewhere about midday, when, by dint of sheer ingenuity, we had managed to interpose a small ridge of hills between ourselves and the rest of the squadron, my

section spread themselves sumptuously over a repast of tinned pineapple and cold tea and bully-beef that was sufficiently melted to be impossible as bully-beef, but just tolerable, when spread on dry ship's biscuit, as a sort of butter.

When eventually we rejoined the squadron, we found that our subterfuge had really been unnecessary, as they, too, had lunched; but then, I do not suppose that we should have enjoyed our meal one half as much if we had eaten it honestly.

During the afternoon the hills disappeared and a field of sand-dunes spread itself across the face of the country and drove us to the easier going of the sea-beach. The Carbineers had gone from us—we vaguely understood that we were still in touch with them, but where or how we did not greatly care—and we idled along in perfect contentment of mind. Our path was hemmed with beauty on that afternoon. Pink-hued flamingoes gemmed the sand-banks; from the rocky islets whereon they drowsed black seals lifted inquisitive snouts to our passing, and now and again our horses would snort uneasily at the bleached skeleton of some immense whale.

Somehow, in G.S.W., landscape follows landscape with the abruptness of stage scenery, and when, suddenly, the coast-line curved away from us, a hundred yards or so of heavy progress through a tongue of the dune-field, brought us to a wilderness of small granite hills. As a background to these again were the larger hills, behind which, we knew, was Luderitzbucht.

A nearer sky-line became peopled with specks. One of them was waving a flag, but no one of my section understood the morse code, and we lost the message. The specks were the signalling section of the Transvaal Scottish, and a quarter of an hour later our horses were snorting and shying at kilted apparitions that arose upon all sides of us from the bare sand.

These, too, were the Transvaal Scottish, and I think that we gained a new respect for them on the spot. That a half-company of men—and I counted at least fifty of them—could lie in the path of a body of mounted troops and remain absolutely undetected until the horses were almost literally on top of them, was a lesson in the practical value of taking cover that is not easy to forget.

long have you been lying there?"

I asked of one. "Since about three o'clock this morning," he replied. I looked at the glowing sunset behind us, and proffered him my tobacco pouch—the only sign of respect within my power at that moment.

CHAPTER VI

A NIGHT RIDE, AND AFTER

A MILE-LONG tunnel of dust roofed with dim starlight.

That is really all the story of a night ride through the desert lands of German South-West Africa.

There are other things of course: hills that rim the vague earth round, showing like so many dark gaps cut out of the night; the sullen murmur of the sands; the brief outcry of bare rock overpassed; the wheezing of sand-choked horses; but all, muffled sight and muffled sound alike, are just vague impressions sensed rather than seen and heard.

Be your company one thousand men or but one score, you are aware only of those just ahead of you and of some few that follow after. Beyond the range of a murmured curse—and night service in an enemy country does not permit of emphatic blas-

phemy—is the barrier of dust and night. Only when the way lies over hills, and you may look down and see the dark snake of the column writhe out upon the pale sands below, or watch the constant firefly flicker that tells of stress of steel-shod hoof and naked granite, may you gain the peculiar courage of numbers. When you are in the desert proper, and the white sand lifts its curtain about you, you can be, almost dreadfully, alone.

There are incidents, too. The dismounted group that you pass, bending to the prone figure whose horse, perhaps, has fallen with him; the halt while some unsuspected scout rides in to report what you, gentlemen of the rank and file, will never learn; the low-voiced "Non-commissioned officers!" and the group which forms to listen to orders that you strain your ears to catch; the order to mount, and the undertone of laughter at the plight of some unfortunate whose horse "objects." Forgotten as soon as passed, it will be days before memory can shuffle these happenings into any sort of order, and weeks, sometimes, before they can be told.

On October 22nd was just such an ex-

perience. We were paraded at dusk, and after the usual harangue on the uncomfortable punishment which would be ours if we talked above a whisper, or so far forgot ourselves as to strike a match, we rode down to the Natal Carbineers' lines, and waited: waited while the men from Natal asserted their regimental seniority and rode away ahead of us; waited while some ambitious water-carts that had got mixed up with the advance were brought back again; waited while a troop of the Rand Intelligence Corps—the "Rest In Comforts" of our own strictly unofficial Army List—were tacked on to the tail of the column; waited while some wagons that had got lost were found; and finally, when patience had worn very thin indeed, were permitted to move off into the dust-choked darkness of another unknown quest.

When hope runs high, things little in themselves assume enormous proportions, and the wagons and water-carts were to us on this occasion what a straw is said to be to a drowning man. And we were drowning, drowning in a sea of despondency. A month of unremitting sandstorm, relieved, if that be the expression, by three or four

hopelessly blank expeditions, had reduced us to the condition, almost, of believing that there really were no Germans in the country. And now we were being sent out with water-carts and wagons. We had never had them before; therefore—our logic will not, perhaps be altogether clear to any one who has not experienced similar hopes and fears—therefore there must be Germans at the end of our journey.

Where, before, we had ridden all through the night, only, apparently, for the pleasure of riding back again on the following day, midnight, on this occasion, found us at Kolmanskuppe being guided by drowsy infantry pickets to horse-lines already prepared for us. This in itself was surprising, but the horse-lines were infinitely more so. "'Orse lines?—*bloomin' clothes-lines*!" I heard a scornful voice say. Poles, festooned with slackly hung wires—and these at an average height of about six feet—did, certainly, give to the place the respectable air of a laundry annexe, but they were better than nothing, anyway. We hung up our horses as best we could, and went to sleep in our spurs.

There is an art in sleeping in the sands.

We had long since discovered, for instance, that however cold the night, the sand held always something of the sun's warmth, and we used to scoop out hollows to the depth of six inches or so to sleep in. Usually, after half an hour or less, warmth and grace alike would depart from us, and we would be driven to further finger-stubbing searches after warm beds. A wakeful night, indeed, would often present a weird spectacle. Dark forms, heralding their uprising by soft curses, would emerge at intervals from the silent sands around, crawl on hands and knees for some few yards, burrow vigorously for a while, and then drop with a grunt into temporary silence.

I remember one occasion, when I slept with three or four others in a pit of our own digging, and was afterwards profoundly grateful to the bitter cold which had driven us to the expedient. During the night I awoke once or twice to a half-consciousness of a growing wind, and of some weight of sand upon my blankets that was not there when I turned in. "There'll be a proper sandstorm to-morrow," a sleepy voice had said, and I remembered afterwards how casual had been my agreement.

Dawn, on that morning, came in with a shout. There was a clanging of iron, a sound of devils' anvil play, and, with the realization, the swift onrush of some great thing that loomed upon us out of the sand-haze. I was sitting up trying to clear my eyes of caked sand, but instinct, or something quicker than myself, flung me down, and the same instant was filled with huge sound, and a hint, just a hint—nothing more—of tremendous pressure. When it had passed I sat up again to stare at the retreating form of a cylindrical water-tank which had bowled over us where we lay.

I have no idea of the weight of that tank. It measured, I should say, not less than twelve feet by five, and the wind which was chasing it across the territory was also whirling sand-drift before it at an easy sixty miles an hour. We were considerably impressed, and went to some pains afterwards to measure the inches of our escape. Our "surface-lines," we gathered, must, on the average, have been just about flush with the desert's face. I say "on the average," because one man there was of our party who spent a not inconsiderable portion of the ensuing week in nursing a knee that

had omitted to take cover with the rest of him.

The first half-hour or so of that morning presented an amazing spectacle. For the greater part of the time was nothing but sand and the savage wind, but at intervals the booming sound that had first awakened us would herald the passing of other water-tanks. Where they came from I know not, nor can I hazard any guess as to where they were going. They simply loomed out of the sandstorm to come, on the one hand, and were whirled into the yellow fog of sandstorm past, on the other. Later, when we had removed ourselves and such of our belongings as we could find to the comparative shelter of a line of railway trucks, we saw one of these cylinders trundling merrily along at an undreamed of pace. "Wonder how it's going to take the railway line," some one asked, and we watched breathlessly. At some hundred yards or so short of the line a drift of sand turned it in a sudden, savage curve in our direction, and for fifty yards or so it skated on one screaming rim; but the wind swung it plumb again, and its shrill clamour became a deep grumble. *Crash!* The three-foot bank on

which the metals gleamed seemed to jump out to kick the tank high into the air. For an appreciable instant it floated, and then it boomed to earth again, and a fresh wave of sandstorm rose to its impact, and it was gone from us.

Within ten seconds we were making for the spot where it had landed. Arrived there, we looked at each other in silence, and then proceeded solemnly to pace off the distance from the point where it had struck the bank. When we had done so, we remembered the earlier visitor who had stepped over us in the dawn, and we looked at each other again. In that appreciable instant during which the tank, looking like some snub-nosed Zeppelin, had seemed to float in the air, it had covered twenty-seven generous yards.

This has been a long digression, and is only pardonable as being to some extent expressive of the chaos of anecdote which dwells in the mind of the average sand-buffeted sojourner in the desert. Let him loose on one story concerning sandstorms, and he will strip his memory of all the other sandstorms that he has ever seen or heard of to make his one story presentable.

Even of myself I can say that I find it safe to write of things that happened in that campaign only when I have my diary propped up before me.

Dawn, then, on that October 23rd to which this chronicle must confine itself, found us half blinded by just such a sand-storm as that which I have described. There was no spectacular display of water-tanks, but the sand-blast was so pitiless that I do not think we should have minded much if the whole of the expeditionary force's rolling-stock had rolled down upon us. We built shelters—that is to say, we erected sheets of corrugated iron, borrowed hastily from the buildings on the heights above us, and called them shelters. We built them with their backs to the searching wind, roofed them, and weighted the roofs down with large stones, but some law of vacuum that we never quite got the hang of made whirlwinds in our doorways and drove us finally to the length of swaddling our faces in cloth. The ostrich of the fable, who buried his head in the sand, was not such a fool as our wise men have tried to paint him.

Our horses, poor beasts, turned their backs

to the searing blast, and were grateful to the nosebags which we hung upon them, less, I think, for the sake of the grain than for the protection that they afforded to tortured nostrils.

At about five o'clock in the afternoon things began to happen. The sandstorm, after a final furious effort or two, died away as suddenly as it had come up in the dawn; coffee, made in some infantry mess in one of the houses, was brought down to us in great cauldrons; troop sergeants arose and told us to feed "and be —— quick about it!" and when we had stuffed ourselves with army-biscuits soaked in black coffee, a casual-looking train strolled round a bend in the line, and gave us a glimpse of General McKenzie and, along its dingy length, of a fresco of Staff officers and hospital nurses.

Handkerchiefs were fluttering to us, and we suddenly became conscious of the fact that our sand-encrusted state held something of the picturesque. Non-commissioned officers who up till then had been content to stare moodily at the sand suddenly became imbued with huge energy, and stood in heroic postures and shouted meaningless

orders at troopers who were too busy "doing their bit" to take any sort of notice, until a real order came from somewhere, and we fell in to listen to instructions.

"Water-bottles to be filled. Rations for horse and man for one day to be drawn. Rifles to be inspected. Greatcoats and blankets to be rolled up—and to be left behind."

"—— *to be left behind!*" H'm! it was going to be cold work then. But what did the cold matter? What did anything matter? We were not going to travel light for nothing. There was fun ahead. Joy!

We listened in a deep content, and when the order came for us to fall away, we did not wait for any more, but flung upon the quartermaster and demanded things necessary for the welfare of man and beast. We heaped our overcoats and blankets upon him, and contumely when he told us that the rum ration had not arrived.

Not, of course, that we really minded. The rum was of a particularly vile order, but it seemed to represent something that

we had left behind us when we "joined the Army," and we used to insist upon the issue, and when we had got it, we used to screw up our eyes and drink ostentatious silent toasts.

"Saddle up!"

The welcome command cut short our pretence at grumbling, and we seized saddles and bridles and rushed the horse lines. A quarter of an hour later we were paraded and inspected by the General. The scene, I think, may not have been altogether unimpressive. The dark mass of Carbineers were paraded in front of us, and the ridge above was black with watching infantry.

The dregs of a sullen, purple sunset brooded over the far hills, and the air, warm and pulseless, was oppressive even after the sandstorm. In any other country one would have said that "it looked like rain," but in that desert the thought even was not admissible. The slow light faded, and the spectators on the ridge became a ragged black fringe.

A knot of these, midway between ourselves and the Carbineers, raised a faint cheer. What was happening? *Ah!* There

was a stir and a rustle among the troops ahead of us, and we could see the dark column writhing out as squadron after squadron linked up and thrust forward. Our turn came, and with it the familiar smell of kicked-up dust.

The same order as before: Natal Carbineers—four squadrons of them—in front; ourselves next; then the Intelligence (why behind? I wondered); and then the dust walls closed upon us, and we—my section, that is, with those immediately before and behind us—were alone.

For some miles we kept to the railway line. Stettin, marked large on the map, but consisting in reality of a tin shed and a signboard, and nothing more—the place memorable where we had first run into the Germans—was passed while there was still sufficient light to see things. There was the spurred heel of rock whence the enemy had ambushed our advance, and there were still the dead horses—dark blots on the grey sand.

Nothing much in themselves, but of deep interest to men who had existed for nearly a month on the bare memory of that first brisk little skirmish among the desolate

sand-dunes. A mile or so farther on we passed Fort Grasplatz, looking now pitifully abandoned with its splintered door still swinging on twisted hinges, and the untidy litter before the store which we had rifled for food and drink. It had looked vastly different on that first morning when it had risen out of the sunrise to spit bullets at the ridge whereon we had lain.

Thus far, Grasplatz had represented the farthest point of our wanderings. We had paid several official and entirely uneventful visits to the place, and its attractions had long since palled. From now onwards was brand-new country, and the thought gave to the bare-shouldered hills before us something of a sinister lure.

It was somewhere among these black granite ridges, miles after we had forsaken the railway, that the darkness ahead was split by a sudden flash of white light, and before my horse had ceased to expostulate—on his hind legs—the deep-throated growl of thunder rose above the sound of our progress.

From then onwards, throughout the night, our way was lit by the streaked flame of

a storm that seemed never to get any nearer. Unsuspected hills stood up in instant silhouette against the glare, and were gone, and came again, and went. There was not a breath of wind, and the heavy pall of dust choked us as we rode forward. Dead-white walls, whereon each night-stabbing flash painted spots and catherine-wheels of shifting colour, shut us in, and the dull muttering of the night's wrath swallowed all sound else. The slow miles dropped behind, white sand gave place to red, and then the real darkness came, and with it the smell of rain. The horses smelt it, and one could feel the new life in them as they lifted their heads and opened wide nostrils to its coolth.

But the rain never came. Only the lightning woke the white sparkle of steel in the curtain of fine red dust that rose in swathes about us, and the mocking storm-god growled in his throat at our longing. Somewhere towards the dawn we off-saddled, and laid ourselves down for such sleep as we could find.

On our left hand, and seen only when the vagrant lightning threw its bulk into dark relief against the clouds, towered a red-

walled mountain of sand. On the other side of it, somewhere, we understood, was a place marked in capital letters on the map as "Rotkuppes." How far, or how near, we neither knew nor cared. We were too tired to strip ourselves of our bandoliers even, and we lay as we had ridden, hung about with all the uncomfortable accoutrement of the M.I., but it was a happy thought, all the same, to know that Rotkuppes was on the farther side of that hill. Capital letters must surely spell Germans, and we were really very, very keen.

A warm wind searched us out at dawn, and we awoke and saddled up under a sky of deep-bellied clouds that looked as if they needed only a push to make them rain. We wanted that rain almost as badly as we wanted the Germans, but in the meantime the Carbineers, still ahead of us, were on the move, and some one—he might have been our troop officer, or only a sergeant, so sand-obliterated was all his rank—rode swiftly down our lines and bade us hurry. I like to think that he was only a sergeant, though, because his language was not in any sense befitting an officer; but we were mounted and moving off before he had

got rid of the half of what he must have wanted to say, and it didn't really matter much, either way.

To our great surprise we had ridden only a few hundred yards when we were ordered to dismount again. The main body of the Carbineers moved off a hundred yards or so to our left, and halted. One squadron of them handed over its horses, and made for a lip of sand that ran obliquely across our front to the plain below. Others, among them the Intelligence men, were creeping up to the crest of red sandstone that towered up above us. To our right was open desert.

"Look!" said a man suddenly to me, "there's the General." It was true. He was there, kneeling down at the extreme left of the Carbineers festooning the ridge in front. Captain Botha, his A.D.C., and the son of South Africa's Prime Minister, was with him. Both were staring through field-glasses at something that was hidden from us by the shoulder of the hill, and while we watched I saw the General turn and speak swiftly to his companions. A moment later a Carbineer officer slipped down from the bank and ran, crouching,

in our direction. He was obviously excited, and we watched him curiously. Arrived in the hollow where we stood to our horses, he jerked himself upright, and waved his arms violently in our faces. For a moment I half feared for his mind, and then I saw that he was looking, not at us, but at the ridge behind, and I turned and saw, silhouetted against the sky, a group of ammunition pack-mules. At all times, as has been sung elsewhere, a mule is a mule, but when he is perched against a skyline, in full view of such of the enemy as may be within a ten-mile radius, he looks, sublimely, an ass. The man in charge of them was obviously interested in the behaviour of the officer in the hollow, for he stared curiously down at us. "Oh! you dam fool! you —— you dam fool! Who the blind blazes sent you up there? Come to h—ll out of it!" I heard the officer-man mutter—he did not dare to shout—but it was of no avail, and the pantomime might have gone on for some time had not a group of Carbineers who were lying in cover some fifty yards below the crest scrambled up and awakened the muleteer from his dream, and dragged and pushed

his reluctant beasts down the slope and into the hollow.

"Consider yourself under arrest!" The words were barked at the now thoroughly startled-looking custodian of the mules, and the officer turned and bolted like a rabbit back to the ridge.

"'D' Squadron! . . . get mounted!"

The order sent a quick thrill down the line, and we lifted briskly to our saddles. "Sections right! Tr-r-ot!" and we were off, swinging for the ridge whereon the Carbineers lay. The order came again: "Sections right!" and as we turned a rifle shot cracked in the dry air with the sound of a whip, and on the instant after the entire ridge blazed into a fury of rapid fire. Of the enemy we could see nothing—they were still hidden from us by the sand-wall—nor could we tell if they were firing back or not, although I can remember just how I glanced involuntarily to my right to see if any saddles of my troop were empty. A few seconds later we were in the open. The firing ceased with that one savage burst, but I do not think that we were conscious of the fact for some time afterwards.

Close under the ridge lay a white horse, its rider sitting up with both hands raised above his head. We were quite close to him, and could see that he looked more astonished than frightened. Some yards beyond these stood another horse, obviously badly wounded—its back humped and its head drooping. A figure in a blood-spattered grey uniform lay untidily beneath it. His right arm, smashed by a bullet, was doubled back from the elbow; the other seemed to be twisted under the body. One foot was still caught in a stirrup-iron, and the upheld leg gave to the whole wretched picture an air of horrid jauntiness that the white face of the wounded man made only more pronounced.

Then occurred the thing that was to make of tragedy (for even killing your enemy may be tragedy) farce. Our farrier-sergeant, a gentleman chiefly notable in that his tongue was as rough as his professional rasp, and whose place was anywhere but where he happened to be—at the head of the squadron—was seen to draw a large pattern Army revolver, and charge down upon the stricken German. For a moment we hovered in wonderment at his

manœuvre, but when we saw him rein in, and solemnly present his pistol at the unfortunate man's head, and heard him say, in what his victim must have considered quite unnecessarily loud tones: "Hands up! ye —— blaggard! Hands up! or I'll blow yer ——head through yer chest!" then, then we just collapsed. Our officers, even, forgot themselves and smiled, and we, pit and gallery, non-commissioned officers and men, yelled with laughter—a music-hall *tour de force*.

After that, the third and last group that we saw seemed superfluous, and, besides, both horse and rider were too obviously dead to be of much interest.

I have since come to the conclusion that war is not in any sense a refined pastime.

CHAPTER VII

BIG GAME, BUT SMALL BAGS

SOMEHOW, we seemed always to be playing on the outer fringe of war. One fierce little encounter only had there been—a sort of "appetiser" before the dinner that we were never really to taste; since then—nothing!

We had stalked blockhouses, surrounded forts, had even hurled ourselves upon military posts; but the blockhouses had invariably proved to be empty, the forts had borne the aspect of abandoned Kafir stores, and closer inspection had shown the military posts to be, as a rule, more post (usually with a notice-board on the top of it) than military. We suffered gladly the hardships of long night-rides to "destinations unknown," and when, as they invariably did, these expeditions ended in nothing, we made a jest of our curses and hoped for "better luck next time." But the next time was the same, and the

time after, and the time after that; and now after two long nights in the saddle, and a day of pitiless, scourging sand-storm, the great moment had come. "D" Squadron, I.L.H., had been sent out, with the acrid smell of cordite in its nostrils and the cold grip of battle in the pit of its stomach, at full gallop, to "do or die" against—three very badly crumpled Germans. It was really too funny.

This was not war. It was some new game of which, as yet, we had not quite got the hang. Gone from that moment were the last lingering shreds of any respect that we might have entertained for the campaign, as a campaign. But what, then, was it, if not a campaign? A picnic? Assuredly not! The hot-breathed sand-storms; the flies; and the water—or, rather, the want of water—denied the term with a brutal emphasis. No! it was a game of sorts, and for myself, I began to have a haunting suspicion that at some time, somewhere, I had been through it all before. Where, then? And how? For the life of me I could not remember.

"Seems pleased with himself," said a voice near me, and I looked and saw

General Sir Duncan McKenzie talking to our "old man," and smiling affably. A minute later he left and strolled over to a bunch of Carbineers standing to their horses at the base of the hill on our left. He chatted to the officer in charge for a few moments, and I could see him pointing towards the desert as though indicating some plan. "There," one could almost hear him saying, "there I will have such and such a troop posted; this squadron will move over there; that squadron will ——," and a wave of the arm completed the sentence.

And then I knew. Of course, it was not war, or anything like war. It was a partridge-drive. General McKenzie — his ruddy face, his snow-white moustache, and his general air of business-like geniality making of him the pluperfect country gentleman—was our host. We were the guests; there had already been one drive—not a very successful one—and now we were being assigned to our positions for the next.

Then occurred the thing that was to heighten to an almost absurd degree this appearance of a typical country gentle-

man directing a typical "shoot." Thus had I seen the thing happen, years before, in an English countryside.

The General had left the Carbineers, and was walking to some rising ground where he would better be able to overlook the "guns," when he swung suddenly half around, and stood for a moment as if turned to stone. For a moment only; then—and I have some six hundred and odd witnesses to support me, remember—he shook his fist at something or somebody that was hidden from us by the swell of the ground. Then he shook both fists, and then, as if he felt that the display was inadequate, he brought his lower limbs into play and actually danced a few steps. His voice came to us through the clear air, and—but, no! it would not do. He is a General; I was only a corporal, and anyway, it was not swearing; it was pure oratory, of a quality that should have bowed in silent shame and envy the head of any squadron sergeant-major within hearing. A breathless minute passed, and then—or so it seemed to us who were watching—there crawled out of the sand at the G.O.C.'s

feet an abject-looking officer-man. Host and blundering under-keeper; they faced one another for a few moments, and then the abject one drifted away on the flood of rhetoric to strand eventually on the sand-ridge behind which lay the three crumpled Germans with their dead horses. Arrived there, he shook himself and looked over. What he saw seemed on the instant to put new life into him, and he straightened himself and became a fair understudy of the exalted rage behind him. "What the hell d'ye think y'are?" we heard him ask. ". . . . blasted war correspondents? Come out of it, you—you banana-fed tourists!" This was a gibe at the men from Natal, and we chortled hugely among ourselves. A short minute later, when there appeared on the crest beside him a group of unhappy-looking Carbineers armed with kodaks that they tried in vain to hide behind their injured expressions, our mirth was helplessly open.

To them came the General. Mounted now, and at the top of his form, one short, staccato burst sufficed to place the entire group under arrest. A sweep of his arm seemed to include a troop standing to

horses some fifty yards farther on. The troop looked away with immediate ostentation, and the General turned to us. For a moment I thought that he was going to put us under arrest, too. "Colonel D-n-lds-n!" he began, "get your men mounted, and take them——" A wave of his arm indicated the sweep of hills to our right front, and then, as our C.O. swung to his saddle and rode forward to meet him, his voice dropped and I could hear only fragments: ". . . spoiled everything! . . . you will . . . men . . . ride like the devil!"

Five minutes later we were in the open, dust and the drum-thunder of hoofs upon us, and the song of wind in our ears. "Steady the pace!" a voice shouted, and the troop ahead seemed suddenly to lift back at us out of the sand-haze. For a moment, as we reined in, was a desperate confusion of sections driving through broken sections before them, and of troops as orderless as herds of panic-ridden antelope. A matter of seconds only, and then the broken back of the column mended somehow, and we swept forward again. But the pace was steadier.

It was a day of clouds. A sky, fiercely blue, was burning great holes in the sag-bellied vapour overhead, and the desert's face about us was fungus-blotched with shadow. Miles away to our right the hills that guard Tschaukaib stood up blackly against the white promise of the rain. Upon the knees of the red hills along whose marge we rode was a hint of greenery, and here and there, between the shifting cloud-shadows, the dead-white glare of the open sands below us was tempered with the same soft touch. The miles fled past us. Shadows stood out of the distances, became real hills, sidled past, and were gone. Once, there was a tree —the first we had seen in the country— and the wonder of it held every man of us agape until it became lost in the dust-haze behind.

Shortly afterwards the hills ended abruptly, and a field of sand-dunes, all silver-soft in that soft light, shut us suddenly in. Here was heavy going indeed, but no slackening of pace. The old, familiar curtain of dust rose up about us and hid everything. Through it there came the sudden, shrill blast of a whistle, followed

by a sound of struggling. A voice cursed briefly, and some one, or it may have been two or three, laughed. A riderless horse plunged past us. "That's so-and-so's mare," a man in my section said. "Wonder why he's off?" A moment later and he—we, all knew. There was a sudden check in the sections before us—for all the world as though the troop had charged into an immense plum-pudding—and then my horse's hindquarters dropped away from behind me, and his head shot up into the clouds. I clung on grimly, and watched, with a sort of horrified fascination, the straining hindquarters of a perpendicular beast somewhat to my right, and, seemingly, miles above me. The animal was a strawberry roan, and I recognized it as H——'s mount, and I remember, too, that I wondered stupidly where H—— was until my own beast's head and rump resumed their normal horizontal relationship with a jerk that nearly shot me out of the saddle, and I looked up to find a very breathless H—— holding on to the bridle of a strawberry roan as scandalized-looking as himself.

We were on the roof of a sand-dune, and partly for curiosity's sake, and partly to tighten a girth which had slipped, I dismounted to peer over the edge. What the angle was of that steeply tilted wall up which we had ridden I do not know. And even if I did know, I would not write it here because I should not expect to be believed. The slope—call it that if you will—was not an inch short of forty feet, anyway, and it was as steeply tilted as—as a walking-stick; which information, I know, conveys less than nothing, and is therefore the best possible kind of information under the circumstances.

Surprises came quickly after that. The dune-field narrowed until it was less than a hundred yards across, and we became aware of three horsemen—mere specks in the white distance—making in our direction. They could only be Germans, and we rode cheerfully forward to meet them. There was little of order in our going. Some half-dozen men of my troop, separated from us by a gulf of deep sand, rode in a forlorn independence at some one hundred and fifty yards dis-

tance, and a group—unassorted—of men from other troops jogged sheepishly behind us, and tried to look as if they belonged. A riderless horse, treading stiff-legged on clouds of disdain, jinked loftily by as though the saddle slewed under its belly were a mark of honoured distinction conferred for the losing of its rider down some wall of sand.

There was a curious lack of excitement about the proceedings. The Germans were hidden from view for a time by a lofty dune that seemed to stand on the shoulders of its fellows. There was plenty of time, however. They were coming in our direction, so what need to hurry? We reined in to a walk, and finally, in response to an order, dismounted and strolled to a lip of sand overlooking the white plain before us. A vast plain it was, ringed about with hills. A distant sky-line was dotted with specks advancing in open formation, and a helio winked restlessly from somewhere on our left front. Nearer at hand, but still at some two thousand yards range, was a small group of horsemen, and from them, as we watched, came a sudden sputter of rifle-fire, but at whom they

had fired we could not say. Through field-glasses it was possible to see that one of their horses limped badly as it moved along. Our own three Germans—and it was impossible to avoid a feeling of proprietorship in regard to them as they rode trustingly towards us—were now within some six or seven hundred yards, and the soft "snick" of a rifle-bolt pushed home by some one near me struck a note that was all grim.

Nothing—I had almost said the "inevitable nothing"—was to happen, however. At five hundred yards the three caught sight of us, and reined in. For a few brief moments they gazed at us like startled buck, and then their hands went up in token of surrender.

Half an hour later, when we rejoined the Carbineers at Rutkuppes proper—the capital letters which had meant so much to us spelt, in this case, one dilapidated tin hut and a tarnished name-board—we found that they, too, had bagged a brace and a half of Germans.

Of the three, one was a heavy-faced man of middle age; another, a little person with round shoulders and heavy

gold-rimmed spectacles, looked like a student. (We learned afterwards that he had been a chemist's assistant in Luderitzbucht.) The third was a pleasant-looking boy of about nineteen. All three wore the corduroy uniform of the reservist, and looked vastly different to the scouting party which, at Stettin on September the 25th, had stood up to the squadron of us until they were all shot down with one exception, and that exception had only surrendered when his rifle was empty. I felt rather sorry for these men. With the exception, perhaps, of the boy of nineteen, they looked cowed and miserable. The little fellow with the gold-rimmed glasses was trembling violently—we were told afterwards that his hands had had to be forcibly pulled down, so anxious was he to emphasize the completeness of his surrender—and the heavy-faced man was twisting and untwisting his fingers, and he muttered occasionally to himself. An interesting sight even if a little nauseating.

Surrounding the prisoners was a dense crowd of Carbineers, and out of their gaping regard arose the touch of inevitable humour that marked everything that was

said, or done, or thought, in that pantomime campaign. Through the silence of deep interest that held the crowd came an awestruck whisper. "Golly!" it said. "What fierce-looking brutes!"

CHAPTER VIII

WAR'S GRIM JESTS AND MORALS

"WE sat down in the sand and played auction bridge, and the people at home called it 'war'!"

This, the least flattering, and certainly the briefest description of our campaign that I have so far heard, was said to me by a man of my squadron whom I met in Cape Town months after the word "German" had been wiped off the map of South-Western Africa. It is true that in earlier sketches I have emphasized the fact that we did little more in G.S.W.A. than play with war; but to call it auction bridge—well! to every man his own especial type of reminiscences, and perhaps—who can say?—the embittered one may have held bad cards.

The gambler (I cannot for the moment recall the less emphatic expression) may remember chiefly the strange conditions

under which he has revoked; your real, hardened citizen, on the other hand, may look back with a mild or wild surprise —the degree of his astonishment depending, of course, upon the degree of his hardness—to the outstanding fact that he learned in the desert to look upon mere water as a precious beverage; the mind of the small despot will dwell, to the exclusion of almost everything else, upon the corporal's or sergeant's stripes that were his, or upon the "favouritism"—a word dear to the patriot under arms—that kept him undecorated; while for myself I can say that by few things in that campaign of hard-edged ennui was I more impressed in the end than by the truth of an oil-painting which I saw in Luderitzbucht within a day or so of our landing.

A man, dying of thirst, blood-red as to the colour of him, and hideous hate and suffering as to all else of him, was lying upon a vivid orange sand-dune, and cursing with his eyes, and mouth, and feeble, outstretched arm a blue, smiling sea —the water that was of no use to him—that mocked at him from across a beach of purple-streaked white sand. The woman

who showed me the picture informed me that it was the work of a young artist who had given it to her when he left for Germany. "He did not care to take it with him," she said, and then, seeing me smile, added: "Ah! wait until you have been in the desert for a year, and then come back and look at it again."

It did not need anything like a year, however, for me to become convinced that the artist was right. What, exactly, brought about the change I do not know, but perhaps it was only the natural outcome of existence in a country wherein was no living thing save yourself and your fellows, and the men whom you desired to kill, and who desired to kill you; where was neither beast nor bird, nor any sound save the great soundful silence of the winds, the still music that could be heard sometimes in the purple and scarlet of dawn and dusk, and in the shimmering fury of white-hot noon.

At Luderitzbucht there is a devil-inspired mirage, which day by day paints across the sky a wonder picture of the sea. When first I saw it I sat down on the sand and thought quickly. Then I said to myself:

"How funny! . . . but of course it isn't! How could it be?" Then I looked again, and was not quite so sure. The word "mirage" rose glibly enough to my lips, it is true, but did anything that I had ever heard or read of mirages justify it? I asked the question of myself quite seriously.

Mirages are not common objects at home, and most of our knowledge concerning them had been gleaned from the fiction of a past generation. We had even vaguely understood of them that they were a species of "visitation" which manifested themselves only to people who were dying of thirst, and then only in the form of oases or other places where one could obtain drinks. We might have supposed, indeed, that they went out of fashion when drinking, as a pastime, came in. A mirage representing an American cock-tail bar would certainly be a tough nut for mere imagination to crack, and, anyway, I was not dying of thirst, or, even if I nearly was, the sea didn't tempt me, so that it did not prove very much either way.

A still, glassy sea it was, marbled with shoal-water, and staked with rocks, and

edged with a coquettish display of white foam, but in the endeavour to convey to others something of its impression upon my own mind I confess I find a difficulty in avoiding too lavish a use of the coloured phrase. As a matter of cold, sober fact—if there can be any sobriety at all in such a recollection—there was nothing clear-cut about this amazing sky-picture. Its horizon was all vague and formless—just such a horizon as one may see when looking at a real ocean on one of those days of muffled sunlight, when sky and water seem merged together in a shimmer of grey light. Its foam-faced rocks were a-haze with heat and distance, and at times there would grow upon the wide canvas dark patches that might have been caused by a sudden wind upon the make-believe waters, or—might not.

At Luderitzbucht itself the mirage was only occasionally, and then only very faintly, visible, but at Kolmanskuppe, some nine miles inland, it was almost a permanent feature of the landscape, and I have known men of the infantry regiments stationed there so lost to all sense of proportion and the fitness of things as nearly to come to

blows over the hotly debated question of the apparition's *status quo*; and I know of one man, at least, who staked a whole month's pay upon his conviction that it *was* the sea, and not any trick of desert-magic or chicanery of cloud, as his fellows asserted.

That the changed psychology of men who have been in the desert for a month or so is partly due to actual affection of the eye-sight I have little doubt. No man, surely, may spend any length of time in the blind, white glare of those desert-belts, where each morning finds him staring through sand-encrusted eyes at a colour-drunken dawn, and where, at noon, the high hills dance together in the flickering heat haze, and the flat lands quiver and swim across tortured sight, without, eventually, "seeing things," and, what is infinitely worse, believing in them.

Not every day was altogether bad, however. I have known as much as a whole week pass without a sandstorm really worthy of the name, and there were rare days, too, when a soft wind would blow up from the sea and with it a kindly old sea-mist which would help us to endure.

November the 14th will for ever remain a day memorable in the chequered annals of "D" Squadron.

At sunrise, or shortly after, we were disturbed from our usual contemplation of the sand about us by the sound of a motor engine throbbing on the still air. Around us the desert looked rather more illimitable than usual, and as bare of motor traffic as of icebergs. The east was afire with early sunlight, and out of it the deep drone of the engine beat down upon us in solid waves of sound. Louder, louder—a shadow dropped upon us from the skies, and fled away down the sands, and—"Look!" said a man suddenly, "there's an aeroplane!" He spoke in the conversational tone of one who would say, "Look! there's a rainbow!" and we all, as casually as one who would reply, "So there is!" turned and peered in the direction indicated by his outstretched hand. Why, at this point, we felt no particular surprise, nor sensed the faintest premonition of what was coming to us, I shall never know. A dark blur swam slowly across the sun's path; slowly, slowly—ah! The sudden murmur of voices sounded underneath the

engine's clatter, and the Taube, with wings a-tilt, stood out in clear relief against the blue flame of the sky. A confused murmur of interest broke from the watching groups: "By Jove! doesn't it look fine?" "Scouting, I suppose," "Wish I was up there." The Taube was turning in our direction. It tilted a little more steeply, hung so for a brief instant, and then the planes levelled themselves; there was a quiver or two, and some little rocking—as of a seagull balancing to a head-wind—the powerful exhaust of the engine roared down the still air, and—"Look out! he's dropping bombs!" some one shouted. Instinct, rather than sense of ourselves, scattered us like leaves before the wind. There was a sound above us like the savage cracking noise that is sometimes heard in the heart of thunder—a giant stuttering in wrath—and a sense of things dropping swiftly. There followed an instant when the sky fell upon us with a crushing weight of utter silence, and the earth held its breath. Then—the explosion was very near, remember—the firmaments shouted aloud in a thunder-clap of sound; and the four dimensions danced drunkenly

together, and all that we saw, we who lay where we had flung ourselves upon the sand, or who ran, not knowing why nor whither, was a feather-headed tower of dust that stood up and bowed gravely to us before it began to droop and drift away.

It is no easy thing, this piecing together of the fragments of memory wherewith to make a story—fragments of things seen swiftly, and, as it were, in a haze, and of things felt, for the most part, subconsciously. He who would paint such a picture must, above all, be honest with himself, and must remember, too, that he cannot attempt to retain on paper that dignity which he has cast utterly away in the sands.

From the middle of November onwards the aeroplane became a more or less regular feature of our lives, and by its aid we were enabled to reduce our weather forecasts to within the limits of an epigram: "If it blows—hell! if it doesn't—bombs!" Strangely enough, we preferred it not to blow.

Thirty seconds of bomb-dodging, we argued, was better anyway than twelve hours of burrowing in sand to escape sand,

and besides, once the panicky novelty of the Taube had worn off we found more of humour in its visits, and less of that empty feeling at the pit of the stomach which—as you apply it to yourself or to others—is called variously "excitement" and "fear."

For instance, neither excitement nor fear were present, but only laughter, choking and helpless, when, some weeks later, the airman disturbed us at Divine Service in the sands.

From the beginning of things we had always regarded that Sunday morning service as something of an imposition. In a country where there was no visible temptation, this *al fresco* salvation seemed to us a distinct waste of good leisure time, and we barely listened to the droning voice exhorting us in terms of the Old Testament to soul-heroics as forceful as out of date. Now and again some one in the neighbourhood of the pulpit—a colour-sergeant looking for promotion in both worlds, probably—would chant through his nose the opening bars of a hymn, and we would rise and shuffle our feet until the noise ceased and we could sit down again.

At what period of the service, whether

before or after the *De Profundis*, the interruption came, I am at a loss to say. I know that upon one moment I was looking at the ragged toe-caps of my boots and wondering how long they would last, and upon the next I was on my feet shouting into a chorus of hundreds: "Aeroplane! aeroplane!"

It was a biplane this time, and it was travelling at an immense speed towards us. There was no mistaking its objective. The hundreds of us massed together in one spot must have presented too tempting a mark, and the roar of its engine grew in our ears almost faster than our minds grasped the fact that Divine Service, for the day at least, was ended.

But was it? We still stood in something of the congregational order in which we had been paraded earlier on that morning, and there, on the impromptu pulpit, and looking like a black exclamation mark against the pale sky, still remained the surpliced figure which had held all but our attention for the full hour past. The form of subjugation to herd-principles which is known as "discipline" held us rooted to the spot. What would the padre do? We were under orders. He was the most tangible

expression of those orders in sight, and we watched him as sheep may watch the old bell-wether of the flock.

Our suspense was soon over. Twice the padre craned his neck and looked upwards at the 'plane, now circling almost directly overhead, and twice he looked down at the book in his hand. To me, watching, it seemed that he was debating in his mind some question of comparative values, which, taking everything into consideration, he might very well have been doing. One more upward glance he gave, and then, with an almost indescribably feminine grace of action, swept up the skirts of his surplice, and—there is no other expression for it—bolted like a rabbit.

The fact that no one was killed, or even injured, by the bombs that followed was completely lost sight of in the helpless laughter that held us at intervals throughout the remainder of that memorable Sunday.

What remains to be said of a campaign in which bombs during Divine Service made us laugh, and whereby those who took part gained nothing but an imperishable memory of thirst, and a robust and practical philosophy of the sort that made the Irishman whom I have quoted earlier in this record

"praise the Saints thim ants have no bones into thim!"

Listen to a group of us talking—I speak not of myself, of course, for I have talked much in these pages—and between the adjectives you will hear much of quaint trifles that do not, properly speaking, belong to war, and very little of the grim things that do.

A page of photographs, taken at random from almost any English weekly paper, will hold more of real war than the combined experiences of all of us could show, and therein, as you may guess, lies the key to our reticence.

You cannot photograph discomfort, or a sandstorm, or thirst, any more than you can photograph humour.

Ah! if you could, you would understand why the curse and the jest are the language of campaigns, and why this faithful narrative must convey a dispiriting sense of much continuously suffered and little occasionally achieved. It is the fault of war: for among the finished operations of war General Botha's drive of the Germans in South West Africa really stands out as brilliantly conceived, swiftly carried out, and emphatically successful.

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