CHAPTER XXII

THE EVE OF BEERSHEBA

In October the rival armies presented a contrast highly favourable to the invading force. On the British side a resolute, talented, and experienced commander headed an army of seasoned troops in the pink of condition, well fed, perfectly clothed, and adequately munitioned; an army happy in its task and its leadership, and kindled now with that flame of enthusiasm which more than half ensures victory. On the Turkish side the picture was painfully different. The High Command was, in Djemal's hands, inexperienced, divided in its counsels, uncertain in its aim, and irresolute in its actions; the Turkish army was ill-fed, wretchedly clothed, uncertain of its supply of munitions, low in spirit, and weakened morally and physically by a continual leakage of deserters.

Papers captured a year later by a yeomanry brigade at Nazareth gave a vivid picture of the Turks' unfortunate condition during the summer of 1917. They showed that von Falkenhayn, the German leader of the Baghdad expedition, was at dangerous variance with "the mighty Djemal," as Falkenhayn contemptuously calls the Turkish Governor of Syria. They also disclosed the degree to which Allenby's resolute work had disturbed and weakened the whole of the enemy's plans in the Near East. With the British strongly held, and, as it was hoped, decisively checked at Gaza in April, the Young Turk Administration at Constantinople, with their German backers and masters in full support, had resolved to bend their main energies to preparations for the recapture of Baghdad, which had been so brilliantly won by Maude. The undertaking was a heavy one, and called for as much of Turkey's already diminished military resources as could be spared from her many battlefronts. Berlin promised to support the undertaking with a reinforcement consisting of a German infantry brigade which was to be known as the "German Asiatic Column." The German brigade was, in the end, represented by only a few battalions eventually sent to the East. The armies (Sixth and Seventh) intended for Mesopotamia were officially named the "Yilderim

('Lightning') Army Group," and the operations in that area were placed under the command of von Falkenhayn.

Enver Pasha and Falkenhayn recognised that they could seriously menace Baghdad only if the Palestine front was maintained without adding materially to the Turkish army in that theatre. As the summer advanced, and Allenby was appointed to the British command; as the Turks learned—and they speedily did—of the strong reinforcements to the British army; and as it became clear that a serious offensive was contemplated, the Turco-German leaders were faced by a problem very difficult to solve. If they substantially strengthened their army in Palestine, they must abandon the expedition against Baghdad; if they risked an overthrow between Gaza and Beersheba, they would be threatened by a great advance of Chauvel's mounted troops, which might not cease until it reached Aleppo, cut the Baghdad railway, and threatened the Mesopotamia army with isolation and destruction.

Enver Pasha, in a telegram from Constantinople on August 23rd to Field-Marshal von Hindenburg, summed up the position in Palestine, and showed a sound appreciation of the danger threatened by Allenby. He pointed out that "the preservation of the Sinai front is a primary condition to the success of the Yilderim (Baghdad) undertaking." Djemal Pasha, he said, was satisfied that if his force at Gaza could be reinforced by one division he would be safe against any attack the British could make. Von Falkenhayn, however, did not agree with Djemal, but urged stronger reinforcements, and also recommended "that we on our side should attack the British, and, as far as possible, surprise them, before they are strengthened." At the same time von Falkenhayn was opposed to any reduction of the forces intended for the operations against Baghdad. Enver therefore asked Hindenburg to sanction the withdrawal from the Dobrudja of the VI Turkish Army Corps for service in Asia. This would ensure the safety of Palestine and make possible the attack on Baghdad. "For the moment my decision is," added Enver, "defence of Syria by strengthening that front by one infantry division, and prosecution of the Yilderim scheme." In conclusion, Enver expressed his willingness to take up again

von Falkenhayn's proposed attack on the British, should the prospects for such a venture be good.

On August 25th von Falkenhayn, in a despatch from Constantinople to German General Headquarters (in Europe), strongly urged the desirability of an attack on Allenby before the British leader had time to strike. It is obvious from this telegram that, although Turkey was so largely under German influence, Enver Pasha was not disposed to quarrel with the troublesome and influential Djemal, and that the latter's advice prevailed with the Young Turks. This fact Falkenhayn fully appreciated. "I am fully convinced," he said, "that as soon as it comes to a question of the expected attack on the Sinai front, or if the Fourth Army feels itself only seriously threatened, further troops, munitions, and material will be withdrawn from the army group, and Turkey's forces will be shattered. Then nothing decisive can be undertaken in either theatre of war. The sacrifice of men, money, and material which Germany is offering at the present moment will be in vain. The treatment of the question is rendered all the more difficult because I cannot rid myself of the impression that the decision of the Turkish High Command is based far less on military exigencies than on personal motives. It is dictated with one eye on the mighty Djemal, who deprecates a definite decision, but yet, on the other hand, opposes the slightest diminution of the area of his command. Consequently, as the position now stands, I consider the Irak (Baghdad) undertaking practicable only if it is given the necessary freedom for retirement through the removal of the danger on the Syrian front. The removal of this danger I regard as only possible through attack."

But Djemal was in the saddle in Palestine, as Falkenhayn admitted, and his opposition was due, among other reasons, to the fact that the scheme was urged by the Germans. Djemal, an indifferent soldier himself, was intensely jealous of German interference with his Syrian command. He appreciated German and Austrian assistance in munitions, aircraft, artillery, machine-guns, transport, and other technical services, which alone made the campaign possible; but he bitterly resented the presence and advice of Falkenhayn and other German leaders. Swollen with pride after the Gaza achieve-

ments, he was at this time gratifying his sensual nature by playing the part, in a very shoddy fashion, of a victorious Asiatic despot of the great full days of old. He lived and moved with some show of pomp, gave full rein to his passionate temper, and gratified his baser appetites. Strong at Constantinople, he was an ugly obstacle to German diplomacy, strategy, and tactics; maintaining his influence, he made impossible the safety of Palestine.

General von Kressenstein, now the commander of the Fourth Army in Palestine, in a letter written to Yilderim headquarters in September, gave a dismal account of the condition of the Turkish troops on the Gaza-Beersheba front. He deplored the constant desertions, and urged an energetic hunt for deserters between the battlefront and the Jaffa-Jerusalem line, and the punishment of offenders. He feared that this leakage, with its evil moral effect on the whole army, would increase with the coming of winter. He went on to disclose what was, doubtless, the main cause of disaffection among the troops. "The question of rationing," he wrote, "has not been settled. We are living continually from hand to mouth." He pointed out that "binding promises" had been made by the responsible higher authorities that from "now on 150 tons of rations should arrive regularly each day. Yet between the 24th and the 27th of September a total of 229 tons—or only 75 tons per diem—have arrived. . . . The Headquarters Fourth Army has received the highly gratifying order that, at least up to the imminent decisive battle, the bread ration be raised to 100 grammes. This urgently necessary improvement to the men's rations remains illusory if a correspondingly larger quantity of flour (about one waggon per day) is not supplied to us. So far the improvement exists only on paper. The condition of the animals particularly gives cause for anxiety. Not only are we about 5,000 animals short of establishment, but, as a result of exhaustion, a considerable number of animals are ruined daily. The waggons of provisions are incapable of operating, on account of the shortage of animals. The ammunition supply, too, is gradually coming into question, on account of the deficiency in animals. The menacing danger can only be met by a regular supply of sufficient fodder. The stock of straw in the area of operations is exhausted."

Von Kressenstein also pointed out that, when the wet season came, the railway would be interrupted "again and again for periods of from eight to fourteen days. There are also days and weeks in which the motor-lorry traffic has to be suspended." He consequently urged that at least fourteen days' reserve of rations should be deposited at dépôts at the front as early as possible.

Early in October, therefore, when Allenby was completing his arrangements for attack, the outlook for the Turkish army was indifferent. The enemy had a superb natural position, and clever and powerful artificial defences. But his leadership was chaotic, and his supplies were short and unassured. Had Allenby been opposing almost any other troops in the world but the obstinate, long-suffering, self-sacrificing soldiers of Turkey, his task might have been one calling for little more than a strong demonstration. But, as this and many other campaigns proved again and again, the Ottoman rank and file will fight doggedly and dangerously under incredibly bad conditions. The defending army between the sea and Beersheba was, with all its disabilities, still formidable. It was outnumbered by two to one by a force which was, by all recognised military standards, immeasurably its superior man for man and arm for arm. But, placed on its unrivalled defensive position, it would fight, as its leaders knew, with determination to the finish. There could be no greater tribute to the Turkish soldier than that the British High Command, with its daily contact and its superior intelligence, had no suspicion of the state of affairs revealed by the papers captured in 1918 at Nazareth; nor in the fighting which followed did the British troops realise that the foe who so strongly opposed them, first on the entrenched line and afterwards with his admirably maintained rear-guard, was in a plight which troops from the British Islands or the Dominions must have found fatal to their spirit and usefulness.

The enemy fully expected Allenby's offensive, and believed the blow would fall late in October or early in November. The Germans had little hope that the shock could be successfully resisted by mere passive defence. Djemal alone maintained that view. Enver listened first to the counsels of

Falkenhayn and then to the counsels of Djemal. Meanwhile the summer slipped away, and October was well advanced before Enver decided to divert substantial forces from the Mesopotamia expedition, and send them to anticipate and frustrate Allenby's assault by a Turkish offensive. But this decision came too late. The enemy's regiments were slowly trickling down over the congested railway and bad roads from Aleppo, and were still some weeks distant from the Gaza-Beersheba line, when the British commander was moving to the attack. Two Turkish divisions, the 19th and 26th, reached the front before the battle opened, and another, the 20th, was on the way; but these were quite inadequate to ensure the policy of active defence so strongly urged by the Germans.

But the main weakness of the Turkish situation was not in the enforced policy of a passive defensive. Neither Djemal nor the German leaders believed it possible for Allenby to fling in his chief strength on the Beersheba flank. Their utter ignorance of the British preparations on that flank is almost incredible, and is a fine tribute to the secrecy and energy which marked Allenby's effort. The Turkish dispositions in October, which were fully known to the British leader, showed that the blow was expected on the Gaza, or coastal, sector. The enemy's main reserve, made up of the 7th and 19th Infantry Divisions, was in camp behind Gaza. Allenby succeeded in inducing the belief that he would attack Gaza with his main force, combining the attack with a landing from the sea north of the town, so as to take the Turks in rear and threaten their communications. These miscalculations of the enemy were prejudicial in themselves, and the situation was further endangered by steps taken late in October to re-organise the Turkish forces. The Seventh and Eighth Armies, which were then brought into being, were not fully completed, and the new army leaders and their staffs lacked any such grasp of their commands as was to be desired in the crisis then pending.

Allenby's battle order was issued on October 22nd. The scheme outlined by Chetwode in June was followed in all its main principles. Chetwode, with XX Corps, was to strike at Beersheba from the south-west, while Chauvel, with two divisions of Desert Mounted Corps, was to assault the town

from the east and north-east. This combined assault was to take place on October 31st; but four days earlier the artillery of Bulfin's XXI Corps, on the left, was to begin bombarding the Gaza defences. This shelling was to be increased in intensity from day to day, and, in conjunction with navy activity from the sea, was designed to persuade the enemy that Gaza was Allenby's main objective. Two British monitors, armed with 6-inch guns and protected by French destroyers, were to shell the Gaza defences on October 30th and 31st. On the following day H.M.S. *Raglan* and the French battleship *Requin* were to bombard Deir Sineid station, a few miles behind Gaza, and other railway points. roads, and bridges in the neighbourhood; one monitor, armed with 9.2-inch guns, was to open on the positions at Sheikh Redwan.

During the few days before the battle two sham preparations were made for a landing on the coast about the mouth of the Wady Hesi. The navy pushed in and took soundings. A fleet of small craft appeared off Belah, in view of the Turks, and a body of British infantry was marched towards the beach just before nightfall. At dawn next morning the battleships opened a bombardment off the mouth of the Hesi, and the fleet of small craft had disappeared from Belah. The enemy's belief that Gaza was to be the scene of the real attack might well have been strengthened by this pretty game of bluff. At the same time similar steps were taken to prevent the enemy from bringing down his garrison troops from Syria. The scheme devised by Murray for use in Cyprus before Romani was revived. A great camp was laid out on the island, buoys put down to direct transports, preliminary inquiries made among local contractors for supplies for a large force, and other arrangements made that were sure to stimulate speculation and gossip among the Cypriotes. How far these schemes were successful it is not possible to say; but Allenby was achieving his purpose, and in the closing days of October the enemy was confident that Gaza was to be assailed by the full force of the British army. Even on October 29th—when Allenby's flank movement, despite all precautions, could be concealed no longer—the Turkish High Command recorded the following appreciation:—"An outflanking movement on Beersheba, with about one infantry and

one cavalry division, is indicated; but the main attack, as before, must be expected on the Gaza front." One strong factor in the deception of the Turks was undoubtedly the work undertaken by Chauvel's mounted troops on the Beersheba flank late in the summer, when vigorous reconnaissances, often a division strong, were carried close up to Beersheba, their purpose being to accustom the Turks to demonstrations there which had no serious aim.

In all his orders Allenby insisted that Beersheba must be captured on the first day of the operations. Surprise and rapidity of movement were indispensable to success. If the enemy, with his extreme left lightly held, and his main force concentrated towards the sea on his right, could not be swiftly overwhelmed at Beersheba, he would have time to readjust his army, meet strength with strength at the threatened points, and perhaps maintain his line. The British plan was that, as soon as Beersheba had fallen, Bulfin, with troops of the XXI Corps, should attack strongly over the sand-dunes between Gaza and the sea; Chetwode, on the other flank, would then swing his divisions obliquely towards the north-west against the Turkish strongholds at Sheria and Hareira. Chauvel, with his mounted troops, was to push northwards on Chetwode's right flank, and, as a preliminary, seize Nejile, where there was a good supply of water; then, riding north-west, he must threaten the whole of the Turkish communications and menace the army round Gaza. Simultaneously with this second phase on the right, Bulfin, with the XXI Corps, was to throw forward his right, pin the enemy in the Atawineh district, and then hack his way through Gaza—an undertaking which should then be possible, owing to the expected rush of Turkish troops to meet the British advance on the east. The move of the XX Corps towards Beersheba at the outset left a weakly-held gap between Chetwode and Bulfin; to guard against a Turkish counter here, the Yeomanry Mounted Division, under Barrow, and the Camel Brigade, were to remain at Shellal in reserve.

To guard as far as possible against enemy observation, Allenby finally arranged for a constant patrol of airmen during the last week in October. The pilots flew in turn from early morning until dark, so that during this critical period the

German was allowed to see little or nothing of the preliminary movements of the British army.

Allenby, although a leader of autocratic temperament, at this time freely consulted all the best brains in his force. The final plans were the outcome of innumerable conferences between the Commander-in-Chief and his experienced corps commanders. Chauvel's mission, though it could be explained in a few words, was a difficult one, even for the great mounted force of veteran troops and seasoned horses under his command. He was by dawn on October 31st to have the Anzac and Australian Mounted Divisions on the east and south-east of Beersheba, ready to strike simultaneously at the town and at the old road that leads northwards along the top of the Judæan hills to Hebron and Jerusalem. He was to reach that position unknown to the enemy, with his horses fairly fresh from water and capable of at least one day's hard work without a drink. Water was, as it always had been since leaving the Canal, the main problem. Seven thousand camels were concentrated about Shellal to carry supplies in fantasses for the operations, but they were intended for the infantry. Chauvel on his long march must find water on the thirsty countryside.

After reconnaissance by small mounted bodies, it was decided that the only route open to his two mounted divisions was to march south-east from Shellal by Esani to Khalasa, fourteen miles south-west of Beersheba, and to Asluj, sixteen miles directly south of Beersheba. The journal of the Palestine Exploration Fund disclosed to General Russell (commanding the Desert Mounted Corps Engineers) that Khalasa, the Eleusa of the ancient Greeks, had been a city of some sixty thousand people, and that Asluj had also been a town of importance. Chauvel had, therefore, ordered a search for water at these places during the raid on the Asluj-Auja railway in May; as a result of this, it was estimated that ten days' work by the engineers would revive the old wells sufficiently to provide water for the two mounted divisions, and enable Beersheba to be assailed from the south and east.

As a preliminary to the advance of the infantry, the 8th Australian Light Horse Regiment had on October 25th seized

a series of low ridges near the Wady Hanafish. Here, on Hills 720, 630, and 510, the Australians dug small redoubts, facing the great enemy position at Hareira. This line covered the preliminary advance of the XX Corps, and for the first time gave the British permanent possession of a large tract of country which hitherto had been No-Man's Land. The Turks resented the intrusion, and early on the morning of October 27th fell, in greatly superior numbers, on a regiment of Middlesex Yeomanry of the 8th Brigade, who had taken over the line from the Australians. The yeomanry, who were dismounted, held Hill 630 with a squadron, and Hill 720 with three troops, and also had a post at El Buggar. On Hill 630, although assailed by a force estimated at 2,000, they resisted gallantly and successfully all day; but on Hill 720, where the enemy advanced 1,200 cavalry, supported by artillery and machine-guns, the defenders, after beating back two charges, were overwhelmed and almost entirely destroyed. In the afternoon the 3rd Light Horse Brigade and two brigades of the 53rd Infantry Division were sent forward in support, and the Turks retired, leaving the posts in British hands. The fine fight of the yeomanry had prevented the enemy from establishing himself in strength on ground where he might have offered an effective resistance to Chetwode's men in the days which followed.

By October 20th all was ready for the movement of Chauvel's and Chetwode's forces towards the right flank. Divisions and brigades which had been in camps towards the beach, began night-marches to the east, followed by working parties, which were to establish dumps and to develop water in the forward areas. Water in great quantities was carried by camels to Esani, and the Australian and New Zealand field engineers, assisted by the men of the Camel Brigade, engaged in the development of the water-supply at Khalasa. All troops marched in the dark, and during the day kept as quiet as possible in dry wadys and in the occasional pockets of the rolling plain-country. The camps which they had evacuated were left standing; fires were lighted in them at night, and lights burned in the tents. To the men of an army such tricks as these always appear futile, and are the subject of constant jest; but, as the campaign often proved, they invari-

ably deceive an enemy unless his intelligence is exceptionally rapid and accurate.

Chetwode's advanced brigades and the railway construction companies worked ceaselessly for a week in carrying forward the railways and the water-supply. By October 28th one branch of the railway towards Beersheba was completed to Imara, and carried thence to a point slightly north-east of Karm, while another branch was constructed from Gamli to Karm by Khasif. A supply of water was developed at Esani, Maalaga, and Abu Ghalyun, and 60,000 gallons were carried by night and stored in the old cisterns around Khasif and Im Siri for subsequent use by the infantry. On the night of October 24th Ryrie, with the 2nd Light Horse Brigade, moved from Esani to Asluj, as advance-guard to the Anzac and Australian Mounted Divisions. Both at Khalasa and Asluj the well-water was abundant and of good quality; but the masonry had been shattered to a considerable depth, and the destroyed wells were found filled with earth and great masses of concrete. The light horsemen of Ryrie's brigade, working in co-operation with the Australian and New Zealand engineers, carried enthusiasm and great energy into their task at Asluj. Throughout the war the Australian, in competition with the men of other lands, won a reputation as a remarkably clever and efficient labourer. At Anzac, in France, and in Palestine, he excelled in capacity to complete great tasks rapidly and well, and at Asluj it was so with the light horsemen. After a rough, dusty night-ride from Esani, strong working parties were turned on to the wells immediately after their arrival. Each man knew that the "zero" day for which he had been waiting so eagerly was close at hand, and that no move could be made against Beersheba until the demolished wells at Asluj were daily yielding water sufficient for many thousands of men and horses. As the clearing and sinking continued, the men worked up to their waists in mud and water. At the outset it was found necessary to send back the horses of two regiments to Khalasa; but by the 29th the wells were clear, with a strong and good flow; the necessary pumps had been installed; great lengths of canvas troughing and large canvas reservoirs had been established, and a limited supply of water was available for most of the men and horses

of Anzac and Australian Mounted Divisions. Allenby's thorough personal supervision of every important feature of his preparations was well illustrated by his visit to the well-sinking parties at Khalasa and Asluj; nor did the troops neglect to notice that the Commander-in-Chief had, at that critical, anxious time, covered the rough, dusty country between headquarters and Asluj. If they had worked cheerfully before his visit, after his coming and his warm applause of their efforts they were prepared to work and fight like demons in the service of this new leader, who, if he was a hard master, never spared himself.

Chauvel reached Asluj with Desert Mounted Corps Headquarters on the afternoon of the 30th, and arrangements were completed for the night ride of about twenty-five miles, which was designed to place the six brigades within striking distance of Beersheba at dawn. General Allenby's plan demanded that the town should be captured and the enemy's left flank crushed within twenty-four hours of the move from Asluj; the horsemen were thus faced with a great day's fighting, following a night in the saddle over exceedingly rough country. But Chauvel could have had no misgivings about the capacity of his troops. In the sheer quality of their grand young manhood, in their brigade and regimental leadership, in their experience gained over eighteen months' hard fighting in all sorts of rough conditions, the men of the 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades and the New Zealand Brigade were then without peer among mounted troops engaged anywhere in the war. Of the Australian Mounted Division, the men of the 3rd Light Horse Brigade were veterans like the Anzacs; and the yeomanry of 5th Mounted Brigade, if their performance in Sinai had not been altogether satisfactory, were now, under sound leadership, to be counted as first-class British cavalry. The 4th Light Horse Brigade had fought convincingly at the second Gaza engagement.

Both the 3rd and 4th Brigades were under new leaders. Meredith, who had commanded the 1st Brigade with so much distinction in its critical fight at Romani, and had afterwards led the 4th, had been invalided home to Australia, and was succeeded by William Grant, of the 11th Regiment The new brigadier, like so many

of Australia's commanders in the war, was a Queenslander. A surveyor and pastoralist from Darling Downs, he had learned on the wide plains that bush-craft which made him famous in Sinai as a guide on night marches over the maze of sand-dunes. Somewhat more excitable and impulsive than most of the light horse leaders, Grant possessed the temperament for the exploit, to be narrated later, which was to give lasting distinction to his name. On October 30th Lachlan Chisholm Wilson, who since the beginning in Sinai had led the 5th Light Horse Regiment with marked sagacity and dash, took over the lead of the 3rd Brigade from Royston. The departure of the heroic South African, who was given leave to return to his home on urgent personal business, was deeply regretted by all ranks. Fiery and reckless in action, and with a personality generous and lovable, Royston won a place in the hearts of the Australians not reached by any of their own light horse leaders. Wilson, like Grant, was a Queenslander, but he was not a countryman. A Brisbane solicitor, he was an outstanding example of a number of Australian city men who won distinction in the light horse. His days had been spent chiefly in law-courts and offices. Grant, tall and wiry, was the accepted type of the Australian countryside; Wilson, short and round, carried the stamp of the man who had lived a sedentary life. Wilson's appearance and bearing were always in contrast to the confident, dashing, picturesque men he led. He was shy in manner and very sparing of speech; but his quiet figure concealed the spirit of a great master of horse, and between the time of his promotion to brigadier and his dramatic, unpremeditated dash through Damascus as the vanguard of the British and Arab armies a year later, he became marked as a leader capable of handling a command far more important than a brigade. Like nearly all the light horse leaders, he had learned his soldiering in South Africa, where he had served as a trooper.

As the great force streamed eastward during this week, it seemed inevitable that the enemy must learn of the movement. The nights were illuminated by a moon almost at the full, and the dust-clouds arising from the columns could be clearly seen for miles. Chauvel's two divisions alone demanded a huge convoy of supplies and munitions. On the

night of the 28th a transport column six miles long moved from near Tel el Fara, by Esani, to Khalasa and Asluj. It contained upwards of 300 four-wheeled vehicles, in addition to thousands of camels and other pack animals; but, impressive as it was, it represented only a unit in the vast machine which Allenby was now setting in motion. The field management of this transport for the Desert Mounted Corps on the flank, and in all the subsequent operations in Palestine and Syria, was in the hands of Lieutenant-Colonel W. Stansfield.[1] who before the war was a subordinate officer of the Queensland State Railways. Stansfield displayed between Kantara and Aleppo an organising talent of the highest order.

While the 2nd Light Horse Brigade was working on the wells at Asluj, the Australians met for the first time a detachment of their allies, the Arabs of the Hejaz. This party, a few hundred strong, was under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Newcombe, one of the few British officers engaged at this time in romantic and hazardous exploits with the picturesque men of the desert. Newcombe was to move on Chauvel's right flank, and, after the capture of Beersheba, to harass the retreating enemy on the road to Hebron. The light horsemen greeted the Arabs with keen curiosity. Remarkable stories of their successful adventures against the Turks had come across country from the south-east. Many places of importance had been captured in the Hejaz; but lack of sufficient explosives and skilled engineers, together with the great superiority of the Turks as fighting men, prevented the isolation of Medina. As fast as the Arabs demolished sections of the railway, they were restored by the Turks, who, so long as they were a few hundred strong, and possessed machine-guns, had nothing to fear from the wild men of the desert. Lieutenant-Colonel T. E. Lawrence[2] then developed his famous campaign of harassing the enemy's communications over prolonged stretches of railway. Many troop-trains in motion were blown up by bombs, whereupon the Arabs would swoop down from the ambush, and destroy or capture the passengers. This "national pastime" appealed

[1] Lieut.-Col. W. Stansfield, C.M.G., D.S.O. Asst. Dir. of Supply and Transport Des. Mtd. Corps, 1917/19. Railway employee; of Brisbane, Q'land; b. Todmorden, Yorks, Eng., 19 Nov., 1877.

[2] Lieut.-Col. T. E. Lawrence, C.B., D.S.O. Adviser on Arab affairs, Middle East Division, Colonial Office, 1921/22. Historian; b. Wales, 15 Aug., 1888. Died of injuries, 19 May, 1935. (Changed name by deed poll in 1927 to T. E. Shaw.)

greatly to the district tribesmen, who were always prepared to fight for a price paid down in advance in British gold, provided that all the odds were on their side. A more ambitious enterprise was the rushing of the port of Akaba by a force under Lawrence, in July, 1917, which cleared the way for the indefinite extension of raids along the railway northwards towards eastern Palestine.

Lawrence's unexpected and impressive success at Akaba had a remarkable effect upon these emotional tribesmen. This singular young Englishman had already won an influence such as had never hitherto been enjoyed in modern times by an alien over the reserved, suspicious men of southern Arabia. An Oxford don, he had as a youngster gone to Syria to gratify an exceptional appetite for archæology; he had quickly acquired a remarkable mastery of the Arabic language and dialects, and, moved by a passion for adventure and a love of power, had dipped deeply into the higher politics of the Turkish Empire. Fascinated by the mediæval splendour of the Arab people, he dreamed of a modern revival of the race, and before the outbreak of war had established himself in close personal touch with the men of the Hejaz. When the war began, he hastened to Cairo, and was employed as a subaltern in Maxwell's Intelligence Branch. His deep and intimate knowledge of the Arab people soon attracted the notice of his superior officers, who marvelled at the amazing career and the wisdom of this fair, slight young man with the gentle voice, pleasant manners, and drooping shoulders of one accustomed from boyhood to pore over books. They found it hard to believe that this soft-looking student of twenty-six, who was conspicuous, to those who did not know him, chiefly because of his carelessness as to his military dress, could possibly have any influence among the Arabian tribesmen.

After the fall of Akaba the activities of the Hejaz men grew bolder and wider. Feisal, one of the sons of Hussein, commanding the Arab Northern Army with Lawrence, Newcombe, and other British officers, raided the railway frequently and vigorously up to Maan and beyond. As the campaign continued, the strange influence of Lawrence became more and more pronounced. The northern tribes were usually

jealous and suspicious of the men of the Hejaz, but the genius of the young Englishman, and the irresistible power of his gold, brought tribe after tribe to the assistance of the Allied cause. The personal risk was small, and the pay was high. The Arabs everywhere received in place of their ancient muzzle-loading weapons modern rifles and great supplies of ammunition; the flow of gold gave them riches, and the raids promised them easy plunder. Some of their swoops were remarkably successful. In September, 1917, Lawrence destroyed a bridge and derailed a train on the railway near Maan, killed two German officers and sixty-eight Turks, and took eighty Turks prisoner. The larger Turkish garrisons at Deraa, Amman, Maan, and Medina were never in danger; but the enemy was vexed and harassed over hundreds of miles of precarious communications, and was compelled to move his forces and supplies, even on the railway, in large and strongly protected parties.

The men who rode into Asluj with Newcombe were typical of all the Arabs afterwards met by the Australians during the war. Tall, lithe, handsome, black-bearded fellows, they rode their camels and ponies with an easy grace; armed to excess with service rifles, knives, and swords, they impressed the Australians with their fierce, war-like appearance. The light horsemen had yet to learn their fighting quality, but were pleased to know that in the coming battle they were to have allies on their flank who showed such promise as irregular campaigners.