

## From the Cestrefeldian

Extracted by John Bennett (Heathcote 1955-1962)

*The Chesterfield Local Studies Library holds a comprehensive set of copies of the Cestrefeldian, covering the years from 1908 to 1966. As we approach the Centenary of the commencement of the First World War, it is revealing to review some of the articles contained in the publications from this period. The following three extracts are from the issue of December 1915, and begin with two paragraphs from the Editorial:*

When, a year ago, within a few weeks of Christmas, 1914, we were writing our Editorial Notes for the first number of Volume VII., we certainly hoped that Christmas, 1915, would see us living in peaceful times once more. But, sadly enough, the outlook is as gloomy as ever and Peace appears even further off than before. Many gallant lives have been laid down since last Christmas, and amongst them, alas, some of "those who have gone out from among us."

The present number is full of war topics of one sort or another, and we have to thank many of our friends on service for finding time to send us accounts of their experiences. We are proud to be able to record instances of duty well and nobly done, and we trust that these records may inspire the present generation of Cestrefeldians to "play the game."

*The second extract is from a contribution by an OC who went through the horrors of Gallipoli. His name does not appear against the article, and it would seem that he was limited in what he was allowed to say. Furthermore, his modesty probably does not truly reflect the reality of the situation:*

In a previous issue of the "Cestrefeldian" I gave a short account of my trials and troubles whilst training with the New Army, so here goes for an account of further trials and troubles whilst on active service. There must of necessity be a fair amount of the "ego" in this account, but I must ask you in your own minds to translate in many cases the "I" into a sort of editorial "we."

After eleven months' hard training we left England on July 2nd and set out for an unknown destination "somewhere in the Dardanelles." We sailed on the Aquitania, probably the largest vessel afloat, and our transport constituted a record in the world's history. It would indeed have been a rare prize for a German submarine, and true to their reputation they did not allow us to have it all our own way. No sooner

had our escort of Destroyers left us than the alarm was sounded and all hands were ordered on deck immediately, with life-belts on. This happened at about 5 a.m., and within a few minutes thousands of men were seen lining the boat-deck. The boat was taking a zig-zag course, and travelling at a great pace and no submarine could now hope to catch her. Their chance was lost, for the torpedo which they fired missed the boat by about 40 yards according to the machine gun officers and the ship's officers on the watch. It was, however, a very near thing. We stopped nowhere on the voyage out, passing Gibraltar and Malta and keeping very close to the N. African coast. On July 10th we stopped off an island in the Aegean Sea and on the next day we disembarked.

Here we bivouacked for a week. And a rare week it was! All water had to be carted for over a mile over roads which did not exist. Although the weather was fearfully hot we were only allowed to fill water bottles once by day and once by night—and then it was more like poison than water. That part of the food that wasn't eaten by flies and ants we ate ourselves. Similarly it may be proved—shade of Euclid—that that part of the ground which was not occupied by ants, grasshoppers, flies, beetles, centipedes and other insects which Keating's powder fails to kill, was occupied by us for a bed.

After a week of this we left on Destroyers for the island of Imbros, which is quite close to Achi Baba, in fact one could hear the roar of guns all day and night, and see the shells bursting quite easily. The other island was bad, but, ye Gods, this was worse. Here we were destined to spend three weeks. The chief recreation on this island consisted of watching the Ghurkas lop the heads of goats with one blow of their famous knife—the kukri. It seems a blood-thirsty recreation, but after all one had to get accustomed to the sight of blood. I had one really good day here—but oh! the night. I got leave for the day, and, accompanied by a native I set out on a pack pony and rode eight miles over the mountains to a Greek town—Paganyiah—the capital of the island. Arrived there I put up at a first-class hotel—a shed about as large as the cricket pavilion at school. The manager informed me he sold good English "Wheeskey"—so I had some. On the whole that wasn't a bad day, but imagine my feelings when I got back and found I had to go straight on night operations and attack a large hill which seemed a mere speck on the horizon. The words I used were few—but they had a world of meaning in them. Verb sap!

Three weeks on this island with its great heat, dust and insects were quite enough to drive us all to the verge of insanity and in this state on August 6th we received orders that on that night our division would go into action and have the honour of making a new landing. This new landing at Suvla Bay with its terrible consequences is now public property, so I may dwell upon it.

At 3.30 p.m. on August 6th, we were all safely aboard the Destroyers with two regiments on lighters ready to land first. We had two days' iron rations—so called, I

suppose, because the biscuits are as hard as iron—and packs. etc., were left behind, our haversacks being carried on the back.

Towards dusk we steamed away past Achi Baba and Gaba Tepe and made tracks for the bay which has since become so famous. Every man was as fit as a fiddle, and quietly confident of a thrilling success. The effort was to be a surprise. Not a sound was heard on the boats as the Destroyers Bulldog, Beagle and Grampus each with a lighter lashed alongside and a trawler in attendance towing a string of cutters, and each loaded with its human cargo passed, before the evening glow dimmed on the summit of lofty Samothrace—the last sunset very many were ever to see.

Everything on the water was perfectly still, but on the land were the usual flares and the booming of guns.

At 10.30 p.m. we had crept into Suvla Bay, and even the anchor was lowered by hand so that no rattle of cable should give warning to hostile ears.

Almost immediately the lighters were off to land, and equally as soon were we all under fire. The lighters returned for us on the Destroyers quite early, carrying with them some of the dead and wounded who but a few moments before had left us. On to the lighter we rushed, and under moderately heavy rifle fire we had an unfortunate delay. To what this delay was attributable is not for me to discuss. In the end we all jumped into about five feet of water and waded ashore. It was now getting lighter, and as time was precious a bayonet charge was made up to Hill 10, where the fighting eventually became fierce. All regiments suffered heavily, and as day broke the shells then became much more numerous and did much more damage.

The fighting from Hill 10 onwards will soon be described in Sir Ian Hamilton's despatch, and I, therefore, leave it to an abler pen, but from August 6th to the evening of the 10th was a fearfully hard and trying time for all who took part in the memorable landing at Suvla Bay.

There are, however, one or two personal experiences which might interest some of those who read this article.

A particularly nerve-trying experience was on the night of August 7th. An attack on the flank was expected when we were endeavouring to capture Chocolate Hill. All the stragglers of the various regiments were collected together to go out as a detached post to guard the flank with a subaltern in charge. There was only one subaltern within ear-shot, and I was that one. With visions of a military funeral therefore, I had to undertake the job, and there really was some dirty work at the cross roads that night. However, I got out of it all right, but I'm afraid there was a great sigh of relief when that detached post was called in.

This experience, however, was nothing compared with the one which immediately followed it.

At dawn on the morning of August 8th I set out with Major Williams (since killed) and 12 men to join the battalion on Chocolate Hill. Unfortunately there are two Chocolate Hills, and the one we selected was naturally the one held by the Turks. Imagine our surprise when suddenly from a range of 20 to 30 yards we came under very heavy rifle fire. There were practically 100 yards between us and suitable cover, and out roared Major Williams "retire to cover." Now it is the duty of every officer to lead his men, and I can conscientiously say that no man ever led his men better than I did that day. No sprinter could ever have accomplished the distance in quicker time, and I was well in front. I remembered that song of Saxton's. "Oh we do travel on our line," for we really did travel that day. The Turks must have been very excited, for not one of us was hit, but to use a vulgarism every man thought "his number was up" on that occasion. There is unfortunately no truth in the rumour that I am to obtain the Military Cross for being so well in front!

Of course, life when in action is brimful of incident, and to relate everything one sees and experiences would take up a very large amount of the magazine, and the editor has already warned me on that score.

This rambling account, some of which was written in Alexandria, some on the Mediterranean, and some in England, must, therefore, be brought to a close with the hope that its readers will survive their boredom.

*.....and finally, on a lighter note:*

#### THE CHESTERFIELD ENCYCLOPAEDIA

In these martial times it is desirable that everybody should be acquainted with the everyday military terms, and we therefore make no apology for bringing before our readers the following definitions, extracted from the above work :—

ARMY.—A large body of men of several different varieties. These men do the maximum amount of work in minimum time, and live in a state of perpetual unrest and ignorance.

OFFICERS.—A section of the army (see above). The chief function of officers is to look nice and to annoy.

NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICERS.—Another section commonly known as N.C.O.'s. These N.C.O.'s are curious objects but are easily recognisable by the use of the phrase "you was," and the indiscriminate use of the letter "h."

PRIVATES.—The third and largest section of the Army, annoyed by the last (which see) and in a lesser degree by officers.

COOKHOUSE.—A place of evil odours, whence issues food of varying quality and quantity.

HUP.—A word of unknown origin signifying nothing. it is used in such phrases as "Slope hup," "Stand at hup," the meaning being "Slope arms," "Stand at ease."

HOWN.—Another variety of "Hup."

UNIFORM.—Any ill-fitting suit of clothes ranging in colour from fawn to grass green.

OFFICERS' MESS.—See "Cookhouse," the only difference being the larger number of greasy plates present.

CRIME.—Anything done by a private.

MISTAKE.—Anything done by an officer.

CAMP.—A large place entirely composed of mud.

CANTEEN.--A place of refuge for the weary.

PARADE.—An amusing game, played by officers, N.C.O.'s and men, and closely resembling "hide and seek" and "follow my leader."

BUGLE.—A musical (?) instrument played at all hours of the day and night.

BOREDOM.—A complaint experienced by every member of the Army.