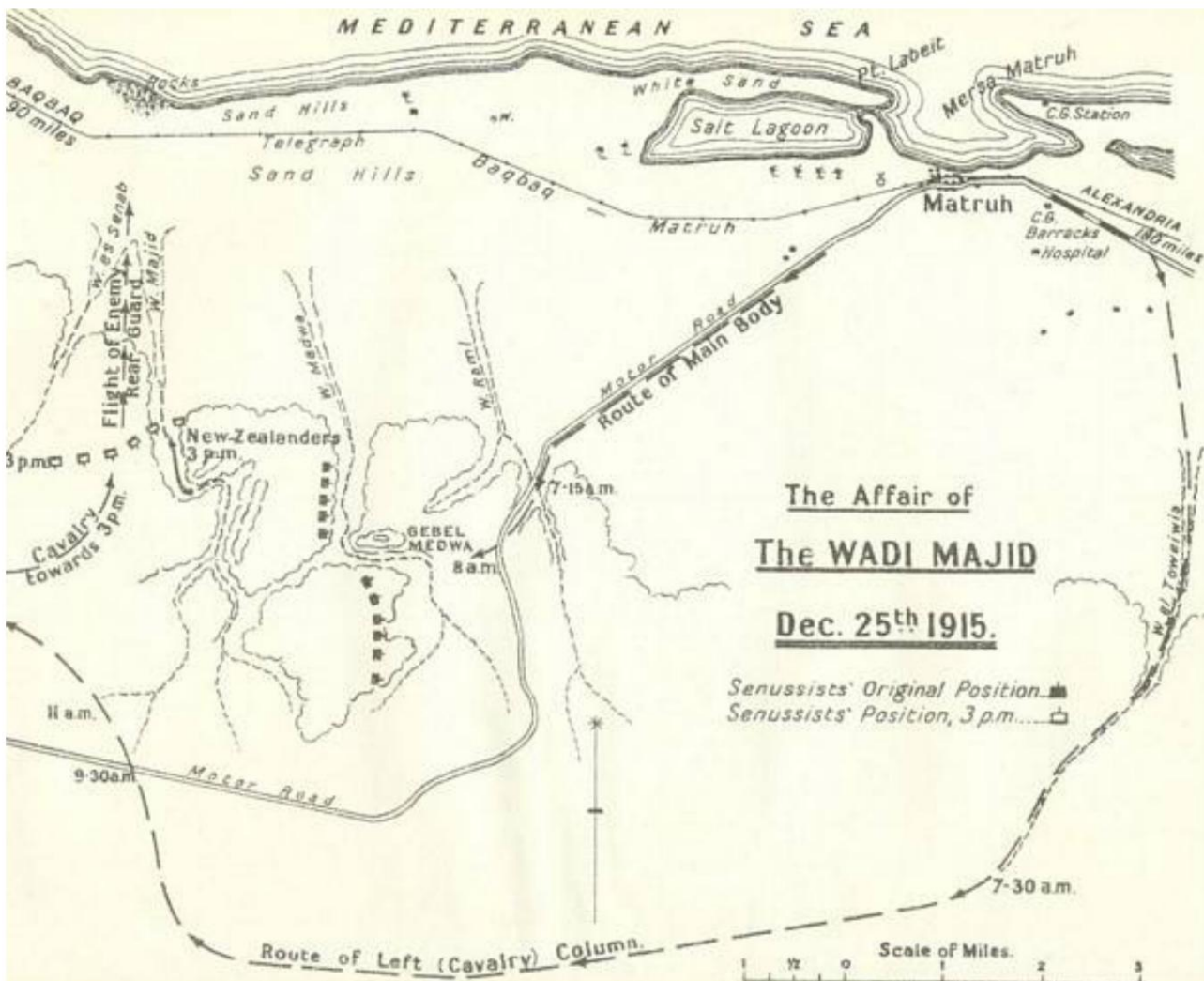


## The Skirmish at Wadi Majid (25 December 1915)

The Senussi units are concentrated again towards Mersa Matruh and based on aerial reconnaissance, the enemy force is estimated to consist of approx. 5,000 men, four guns and some machine guns. Half of the force was estimated to be from the Senussi's regular units.

Ja'far himself is quoted in Source 1 as saying that the force included three battalions (of approximately 300 men), four mountain guns and two machine guns, as well as numerous Bedouins from the tribes in the area. Ja'far describes the Bedouin as being loyal to the Senussi when the latter were successful, while immediately withdrawing from the fight when the Senussi were doing badly.

The Senussi regular battalion (*Captain Muhammad Amin Bey*), supported by a mountain gun (*Ahmad Mukhtar*) and two machine guns (*Captain Nihad Bey*), had been sent towards Daba (Map 1, Point 6) with a view to disrupting the lines of communication to Alexandria. However, the force gets lost in the desert and, after the skirmish, joins the main force.



Map 4: The skirmish at Wadi Majid, 25 December 1915.  
From Source 1.

The *Khedival Motor Road* marked on the map is named after the former Egyptian ruler who commissioned it. The road is described as being far from the common perception of a road, and in practice included an area from which larger stones had been cleared, so that this part of the terrain was easier to access than the surrounding area.

During the previous major and minor skirmishes, the Senussi have gained a great deal of respect for the English armored vehicles and their firepower. They therefore seek to place their positions in areas that are secured

of large boulders or inaccessible sandy areas.

The main English force (Right Column) advances towards the Senussi positions at Wadi Majid, while the cavalry (Left Column) is deployed in a far-reaching, immediate movement.

**Right Column** (*Lieutenant-Colonel JLR Gordon, 15th Sikhs*)

- Buckinghamshire Yeomanry (one squadron)
- Notts Battery, Royal Horse Artillery (half battery) 1st
- Battalion, New Zealand Rifle Brigade 15th
- Sikhs (*Major G. Pennefather Evans*) 2/8th
- Battalion, Middlesex Regiment South
- Midland Field Ambulance (one platoon)
- Water Section, Composite Australian Army Service Corps  
(*Captain C. Reynolds*)

**Left Column** (*Brigadier General JD Tyndale Biscoe*)

- Staff and Signal Division, Composite Yeomanry Brigade
- Notts Battery, Royal Horse Artillery (Half Battery)
- Duke of Lancaster's Own Yeomanry (two platoons)
- Derbyshire Yeomanry (a platoon)
- City of London Yeomanry (two platoons)
- Hertfordshire Yeomanry (one squadron)
- Australian Light Horse (three squadrons)
- Yeomanry Machine Gun Section (three machine guns?)
- South Midland Field Ambulance (minus one platoon)

**Reserve**

- 2 cavalry platoons (unnamed)
- 1/6th Royal Scots (two companies and the machine gun platoon)

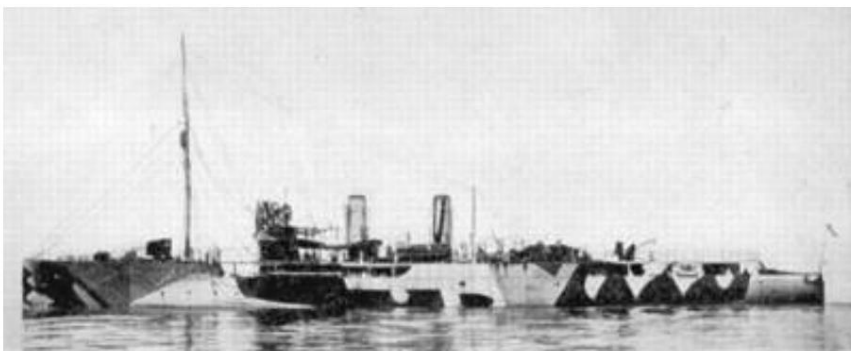
**train**

- 2/8th Middlesex Regiment (two companies for security)

Read more about the skirmish at Wadi Majid in the Composite Australian Light Horse Regiment (Source 11).

### Support from the Royal Navy

The operations along the coast were supported by the minesweeper (*sloop*) HMS CLEMATIS, which was of the Azalea class, a subclass of the Flower Class type (Wikipedia).



*HMS PRIMROSE, sister ship to HMS CLEMATIS. From the Flower Class (Jane's Fighting Ships for 1919).*

**Data**

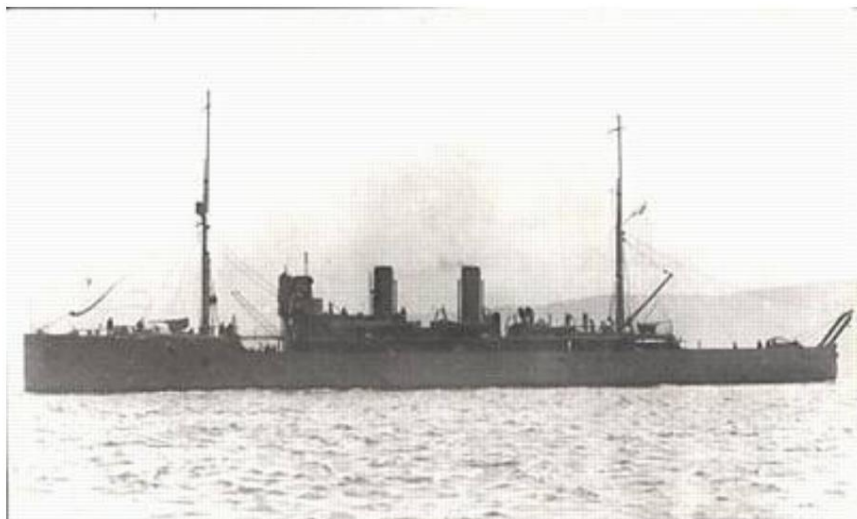
**The Azalea class**

|          |  |
|----------|--|
| Build    | 1915   |
| Armament | 2 x 4.7" guns or 2 x 4" guns<br>2 x 3-pdr anti-aircraft guns |
| Length   | Approx. 76 m   |
| Width    | Approx. 9 m  |
| Draft    | Approx. 3.3 m  |
| Speed    | 17 knots   |
| Crew     | 79 men   |

HMS Clematis patrolled along the coast to prevent further supply of weapons to the Senussi, and among other things during the skirmish at Wadi Majid on 25 December 1915, it supported the operations ashore by fire from its guns.

The shooting was carried out at distances up to 9 km [42](#). Source 3 refers to the shooting as *accurate and useful*, but not how the fire was observed/coordinated.

Ja'far Pasha describes the fire as quite violent, and with a great moral effect on the Senussi.



*HMS LILY.*

From Royal Navy Vessels (Clydebuilt Warships).

A sister ship, HMS LILY, which was of the Acacia class, also operates along the coast, i.a. in collaboration with an Australian camel company.

In March 1916, a smaller force was landed at Port Suliman (Port Bardia), where German submarine installations were destroyed. (Source 10)

# Restructuring of the Western Frontier Force

After the withdrawal from Gallipoli and the arrival of new units, the composition of the Western Frontier Force gradually changes and some of the improvised character disappears.



*Major General William Peyton.*  
From Source 10.

The former commander of the Western Frontier Force, Major-General A. Wallace, who had originally arrived in Egypt as commander of the 11th Indian Division, had long been suffering from the after-effects of an old wound, and under the impression of plans for a recapture of Sollum, submitted his resignation.

As the new commander of the Western Frontier Force, Major General William Peyton was appointed, who from 31 August 1914 to January 1916 had been commander of the 2nd Mounted Division, and had led these Yeomanry units during the Gallipoli campaign.

General William Peyton (1866-1931) [43](#)) had previously served in the Egyptian army, in Sudan 1896-1998. General Peyton was actually intended to be the commander of the forces that defended the oasis areas west of the Nile.

In January 1916, the 1st South African Infantry Brigade (*Brigadier General Henry Lukin*) [44](#)) arrives in Egypt from England and parts of the brigade are sent to Mersa Matruh. Also arriving here:

- A gun platoon from the Hong Kong and Singapore Mountain Battery [45](#)) \_\_\_\_\_
- A company of the Australian Camel Corps Elements
- of an engineer company from Kent (probably 1/1st and/or 1/2nd Kent Field Company) [46](#)).
- \_\_\_\_\_
- The English field hospital, referred to under Sanitary units, probably also joins January/February 1916.

The composite cavalry brigade is disbanded and replaced by the 2nd Mounted Brigade, from General Peyton's 2nd Mounted Division. However, some of the units are attached to the 2nd Mounted Brigade. Also, two of the squadrons of the Australian Light Horse are being sent back to their parent units, which are now being redeployed after the Gallipoli campaign. Later, the rest of the Australian units will follow.

The battalion which until now had been the anchor point among the composite units and the not fully trained British infantry battalions - 15th Ludhiana Sikhs - leaves from 28 January 1916 Mersa Matruh and is sent to India.

## The skirmish at Halazin (January 23, 1916)

The lead-up to this skirmish is reminiscent of the previous ... On the basis of aerial reconnaissance, a large enemy tent tenant is found approx. 40 km southwest of Mersa Matruh. The number of tents is estimated at approx. 350 tents (including Storsenussi's) and approx. 300 camels.

General Wallace quickly prepares to deploy his most mobile units, moving from Mersa Matruh on the afternoon of January 22, 1916:

### Right Column (*Lieutenant-Colonel JLR Gordon, 15th Sikhs*)

- Duke of Lancaster's Own Yeomanry (a squadron)
- Nottinghamshire Battery, Royal Horse Artillery 1st Battalion, New Zealand Rifles  
(*Lieutenant-Colonel HT Fulton*)
- 15th Sikhs (*Major G. Pennefather Evans*) 2nd
- South African Infantry 137th
- Indian Field Ambulance

### Left column (*Brigadier General JD Tyndale-Biscoe*)

- Staff and Signal Division, Composite Yeomanry Brigade A
- Battery, Honorable Artillery Company (Half Battery)
- Buckinghamshire Yeomanry (three squadrons)
- Dorset Yeomanry (a squadron)
- Hertfordshire Yeomanry (one squadron)
- Australian Light Horse (A Squadron)
- Yeomanry Machine Gun Section (three machine guns?) 1st
- South Midland Field Ambulance

### General Wallace's staff and reserve

- Signal Division, Australian Light Horse
- Surrey Yeomanry (two platoons)
- 1/6th Royal Scots (two companies)
- Royal Naval Armored Car Emergency Squadron (a detachment)

### train

- Composite Australian Army Service Corps
- 2/8th Middlesex Regiment (two companies for security)

The units march with the least possible personal equipment, which is why cloaks, blankets etc. carried on supply trucks.

| Distribution of supplies | 1st echelon (on "the man") | 2nd echelon (battalion/battery) | 3rd echelon (tree of the force) |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Per gun                  | 100 cartridges             | 100 cartridges                  | 100 cartridges                  |
| Per machine gun          | 3,500 cartridges           | 8,000 cartridges                | 8,000 cartridges                |
| Per cannon               | 100 grenades               | 110 grenades                    | 110 grenades                    |

At 22:00 a tenant is struck at Bir Shola (Map 2, Point 2). During the night it rains heavily and

the terrain becomes extremely difficult to pass. It is therefore decided to let the armored vehicles return to Mersa Matruh; it is feared that it may be difficult to get them back to Mersa Matruh without problems, as the few roads in the area will be too busy during and after the operations.



*Warriors from the Libyan Desert, 1923.*

From Expeditions to the Libyan Desert (Fliegel Jezerniczky).

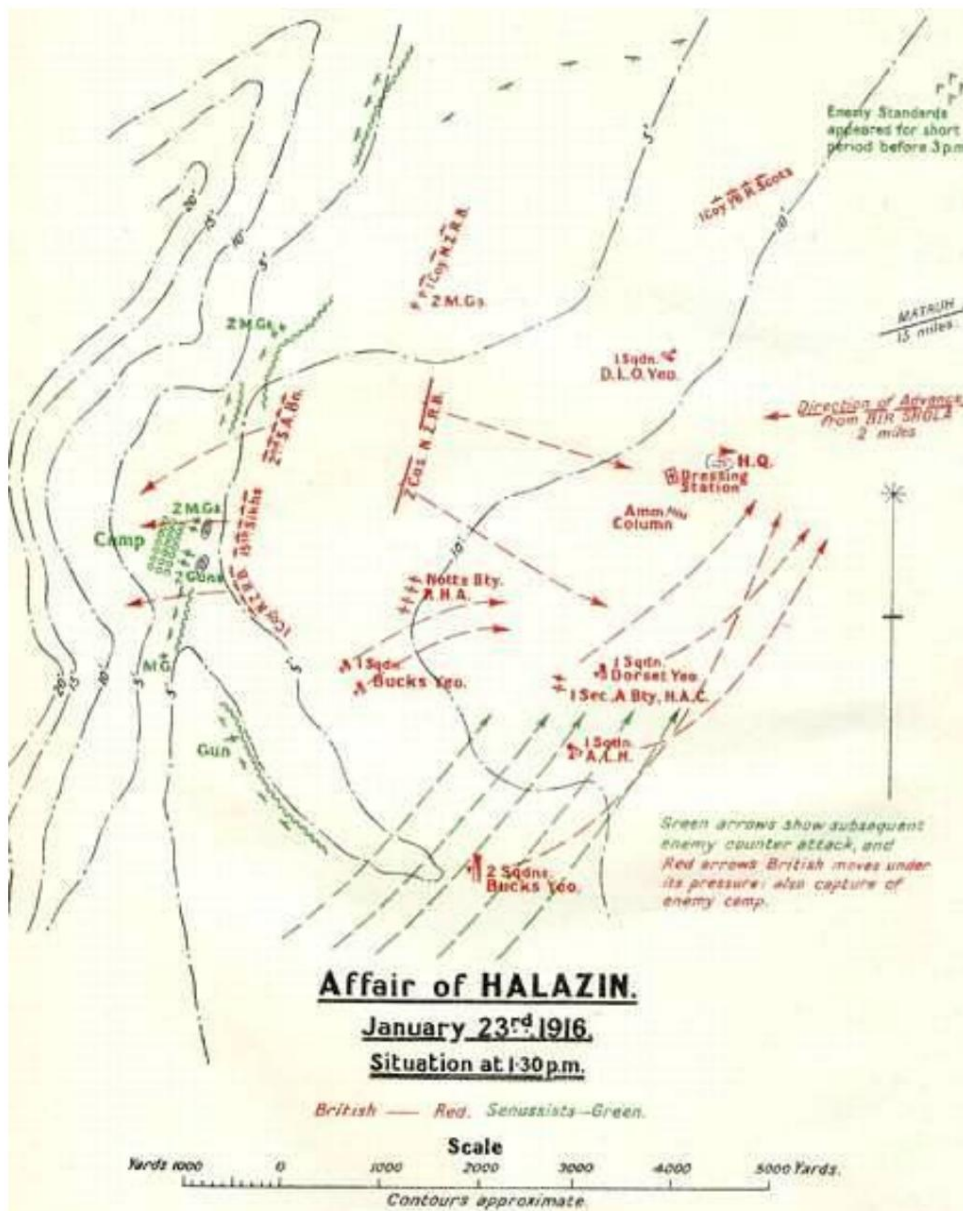
At dawn the force advances towards the camp of the Senussi, which is fixed as a compass direction. The train is left at the camp at Bir Shola.

At 08:30 the Senussi open fire on the front horsemen of the Left Column - A Squadron of the Australian Light Horse - reinforced by the Buckinghamshire Yeomanry and the half-battery of the Honorable Artillery Company.

Meanwhile, the Right Column deploys in attack formation, and advances at 10:00 with the 15th Sikhs in the lead, supported by the South African and New Zealand battalions. The target is the enemy center, but atmospheric disturbances (mirages) make it difficult at first to establish the Senussi's positions precisely.

The Senussi regular battalion, supported by two mountain guns and four machine guns, is in the center, while on the right wing a cannon and a machine gun are deployed along with other Senussi units. During the day, the right wing is reinforced with Storsenussien's bodyguard.

The shooting is accurate and effective, and as the terrain was largely without cover, it resulted in heavy losses on the English side. Several times the Senussi succeed in outflanking the English units, just as heavy fire on the right wing for a time forces the cavalry back.



Map 5: The skirmish at Halazin, 23 January 1916.  
 From Source 1.

On the advice of Ja'far Pasha, Great Senussie escapes from the camp, then heads south to Jaghub and later to Siwa (Map 2, Items 7 and 8).

At 14:45 the positions of the Senussi in the center are captured; the fighting subsides and the remnants of the Senussian units retreat towards a rocky area to the northwest.

The camp of the Senussi is captured and all tents are burned down. Too exhausted to pursue the enemy, the English forces spend a cold night in the area as the terrain prevents supply vehicles from reaching them.

The next morning there is no sign of the Senussi returning to the area and the force is withdrawn towards Mersa Matruh, via Bir Shola.

The wounded are transported back on stretchers, supply vehicles and artillery ammunition wagons. In the meantime, a field hospital has been established near Bir Shola, where the wounded are being treated. The force returned to Mersa Matruh on 28 January 1916.

**Table 1: The skirmish at Halazin - distribution of losses on the English side**

| Loss           | English losses |      | Indian losses |      | South African losses |      | New Zealand losses |      | Total |
|----------------|----------------|------|---------------|------|----------------------|------|--------------------|------|-------|
|                | Officers       | Crew | Officers      | Crew | Officers             | Crew | Officers           | Crew |       |
| <b>Died</b>    | --             | 3    | --            | 19   | 1                    | 7    | --                 | 1    | 31    |
| <b>Wounded</b> | 4              | 32   | 3             | 114  | 4                    | 102  | 2                  | 30   | 291   |

The losses of the Senussi are estimated at 200 dead and 500 wounded.

### **The recapture of Sollum is being prepared (February 1916)**

With the Senussi on the run, the commander in chief in Egypt, General Maxwell, decides to begin the recapture of Sollum. An actual sea landing is made difficult, as mines have been laid in the harbor in the meantime. It is decided instead that the operations must be carried out overland, with Sidi Barrani as a support and supply point. Major-General Peyton, now in command of the Western Frontier Force, initiates as his first action the establishment of a supply point at Unjeila, midway between Mersa Matruh and Sidi Barrani.

A column of 800 camels, secured by the 1st New Zealand Rifles (*Lieutenant-Colonel HT Fulton* [47](#)), is sent on 13 February 1916 towards Unjeila, bringing 28 days' rations etc. to a force of 1,400 men and 200 horses (and the 800 camels). In addition, a column of supply vehicles is dispatched from Mersa Matruh, secured by the 2nd South African Infantry.

### **The skirmish at Agagiya (26 February 1916)**

The most famous skirmish of the campaign took place on 26 January 1916 at Agagiya (Agagia), (Map 2, Item 4) c. 110 km west of Mersa Matruh. Here three squadrons of the Queen's Own Dorset Yeomanry (196 men in all) attacked a force of senussiers, under the command of Ja'far Pasha. The fighting effectively put an end to the Senussi's attempt to seize control of the coastal areas.





*Dorset Yeomanry attack the Senussi at Agagiya, 26 February 1916. After painting by Lady Butler; the rendering is found on the Internet.*



*Colonel Souter heading a charge of the Dorset Yeomanry against Ja'far Pasha's defeated army at Agagiya.*

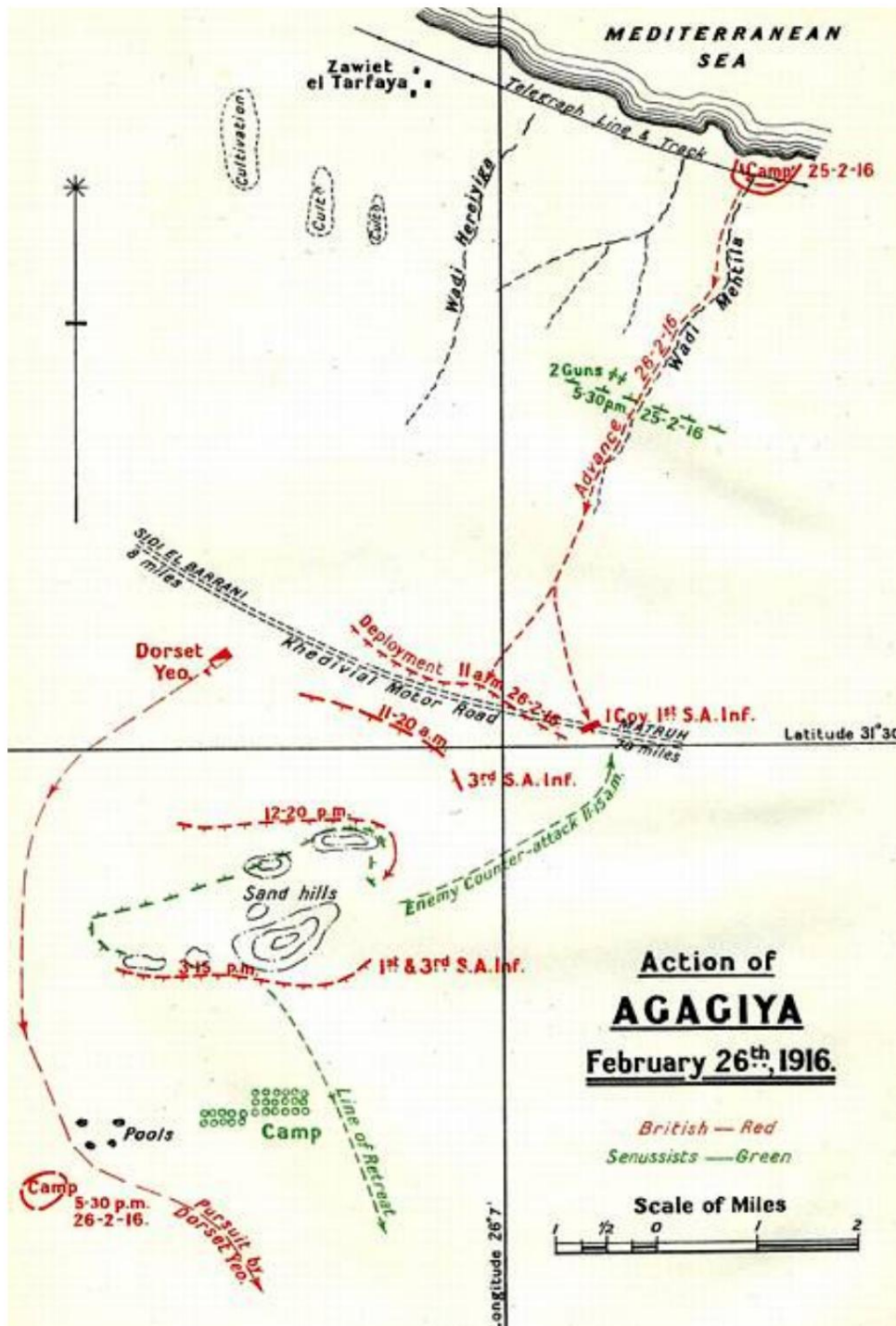
The plan was originally published in the book *Deeds that Thrilled the Empire*; here from Cranston Art.

The text of the plate reads:

*"As the Dorset Yeomanry galloped forward to charge the retreating enemy at Agagiya on the afternoon of February 26th 1915, three maxim guns came into action against them, but the men were splendidly led and faced the fire magnificently. When fifty yards from the enemy's position Colonel Souter gave the order to charge.*

*With a yell the Dorset's hurled themselves upon the enemy, who immediately broke. In the middle of the enemy's lines Colonel Souter's horse was killed under him, and, by a curious chance, his dying strides brought Colonel Souter to the ground within a few yards of Ja'far Pasha. Colonel Souter was alone except for Lieutenant Blaksley and Private Brown, who also had their horses shot under them. The arrival of a machine gun section, however, saved the situation.*

*For their gallantry and the distinguished services which they had rendered, Colonel Souter was awarded the Distinguished Service Order, Lieutenant Blaksley the Military Cross and Private Brown the Distinguished Conduct Medal."*



Map 6: The skirmish at Agagiya, 26 February 1916.  
 From Source 1.

The Dorset Yeomanry's attack is detailed on the website Queen's Own Dorset Yeomanry - The Western Desert (Source 13).

The site contains, among other things, following documents:

- A contemporary newspaper account: Charge of the Dorset Yeomanry - Unparalleled Bravery An extract
- from two letters from a platoon leader: Letters sent by Second-Lieutenant JH Blaksley Names of recipients of
- medals: Awards Names of the fallen: Roll of Honor
- Names of the wounded: List of Casualties.
- 

In addition, there are a number of photographs and maps.

See also About 1st South African Infantry Brigade, 1915-1916

The commander of the 1st South African Infantry Brigade, Brigadier General Henry Lukin, commands the following units:

**Attack force**

- 1st South African Infantry Regiment 3rd
- South African Infantry Regiment
- Dorsetshire Yeomanry (three squadrons)
- Buckinghamshire Yeomanry (one squadron)
- Nottinghamshire Battery, Royal Horse Artillery (Half Battery)
- Two armored cars

**Guarding the camp at Unjeila**

- 1st New Zealand Rifles I/
- 6th Royal Scots

The Senussi units consisted of the remnants of the Regular Battalion (about 400 men), the Manfah Battalion (about 400 men) and the remnants of the Awlad Ali Battalion (estimated 200 men), supported by a mountain cannon and three machine guns. Additional approx. 500 men were part of the force, but the individual departments are not identified.

By the time the Dorset Yeomanry launches its attack, the Senussi's strength is down to approx. 150 men and two machine guns, the regular Battalion and the mountain gun being ordered back during the afternoon.

**Table 2: The skirmish at Agagiya - distribution of losses on the English side**

| Loss    | English losses |      | South African losses |      | Total |
|---------|----------------|------|----------------------|------|-------|
|         | Officers       | Crew | Officers             | Crew |       |
| Died    | 5              | 27   | 1                    | 14   | 47    |
| Wounded | 2              | 24   | 5                    | 106  | 137   |

The English losses are all from the Dorset Yeomanry, while the South African losses make up the difference in total losses.

The losses of the Senussi are estimated at 300-500 dead and wounded. 39 prisoners, 60 camels and 40,000 cartridges were taken.



*Ja'far Pasha al-Askari, photographed in Sidi Barrani, after his capture.*  
From Source 9.

During the fighting, Ja'far Pasha was wounded in the right arm by a saber cut, and subsequently taken prisoner; two more Turkish officers were among the prisoners.

After capture and preliminary treatment aboard the gunboat (monitor) HMS HUMBER, Ja'far Pasha was taken to Cairo and interned in a prison camp at Maadi (Mead) in Cairo.



*HMS HUMBER.*

From Armored Gunboat (Jane's Fighting Ships for 1919).

HMS HUMBER was one of three vessels originally built for the Brazilian Navy and sailing on the Amazon River. The gunboats were taken over by the British navy in 1914 and the type was named *Humber Class* [48](#)).



*Ja'far Pasha disembarking, probably from HMS HUMBER.*

From Source 9.

From Ja'far Pasha's memoirs (Source 9) it appears that the senior leadership often disagreed about the strategy and that Colonel Nuri Bey regularly changed the plans.

It was thus Nuri Bey who ordered i.a. The regular Battalion left the area, leaving Ja'far Pasha with the small rearguard of approx. 150 men at Agagiya.

Ja'far Pasha's account of his time in the service of the Great Senussie is the only source that covers the situation from this side, the information cannot be confirmed from the other side.

### **Operations at Sollum (March 1916)**

The recapture of Sollum and the liberation of the prisoners from HMS TARA and HMT MOORINA are discussed in On British Armored Car Units in Egypt, 1915-1917.

After the defeat of the Senussi at Agagiya, their attacks have largely stopped, and only small units remain active, especially in the eastern part of the Libyan Desert. In early April, a large number of Bedouins, primarily from the Awlad Ali tribe, surrender in Sollum.

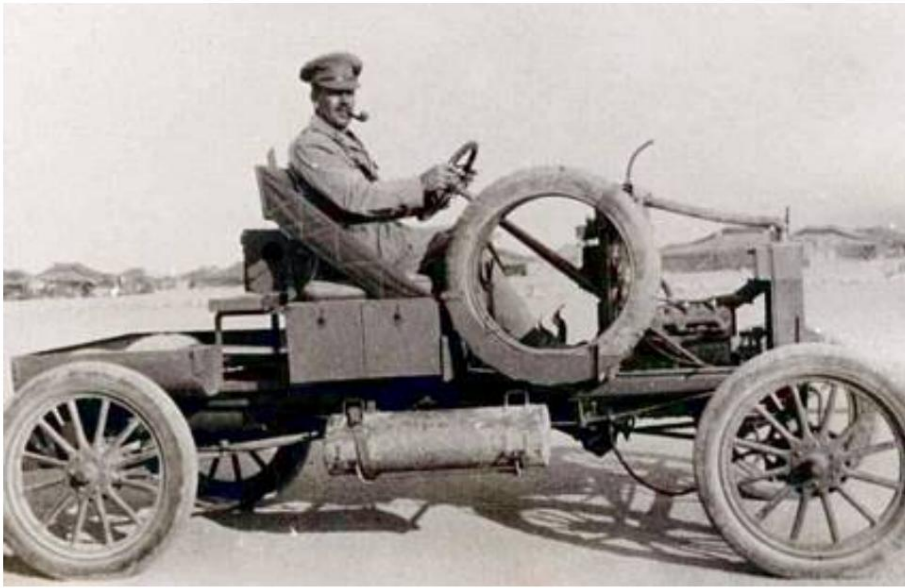
The garrison at Sollum consists from April to May 1916 of two battalions from the Composite Infantry Brigade (1/6th Royal Scots and 2/7th or 2/8th Middlesex Regiment), a camel company (the Australian?), a gun platoon (two pamphlets) from Hong Kong and Singapore Mountain Battery, an armored car unit and aircraft from No. 17 Squadron, Royal Flying Corps.

### **Operations in the eastern part of Egypt**

While the previous mentions of the operations against the Senussi have concentrated on the western part of Egypt, it must be mentioned that a number of units were concentrated in the eastern part to counter the southern attack of the Senussi here.

As such, there were no major skirmishes here, but many smaller confrontations between different patrols.

### **Operations against the Girba and Siwa Oases (February 1917)**



*Captain Claud H. Williams and a Ford Model T.*  
From Source 12.

The operations that finally put an end to the Senussi Uprising are discussed in *About English Armored Car Units in Egypt, 1915-1917*.

Captain Williams was attached to the light reconnaissance units - Light Car Patrols - and made extensive studies of the western part of the Libyan Desert before the fighting.

The result was documented in *the Report on the Military Geography of the North-Western Desert of Egypt*, which provided valuable information about the area that was largely unexplored or visited by Europeans.



*A Light Car Patrol in the desert.*  
From Source 12.

The report was published in 1919 and was classified until 1963.

Source 12 mentions the report and gives an exciting insight into the area's geography.

## **Closing**



*Grand Senusian Said Mohammad al-Abid.*

From the book *The Road to Mecca* by Muhammad Asad, Max Reinhardt, London 1954, seen for sale at Ctesiphon.

Although the uprising did not bring the Senussi the military victories or the uprising among the Egyptian population that had been hoped for, the real purpose of the German and Turkish support for the Senussi was fulfilled. Until April 1917, it was possible to maintain English, French and Italian units, with the size of 110,000 men, in and around the Libyan Desert, thereby preventing these units from being deployed on other front sections.

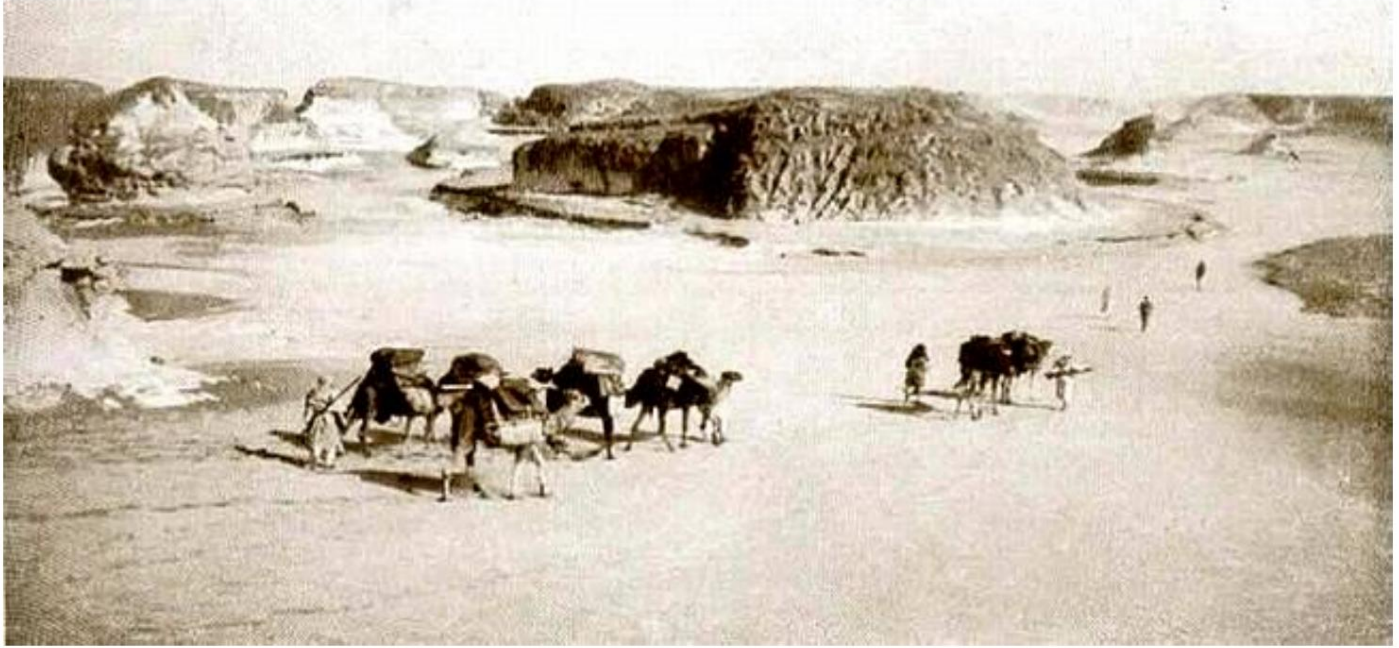
Sidi Muhammad el-Idris (the nephew) takes over the leadership of the sect and Said Mohammad al-Abid leaves Egypt in August 1918. On board an Austro-Hungarian submarine, he sails to Constantinople, where he gets a prominent place in the Turkish propaganda service.

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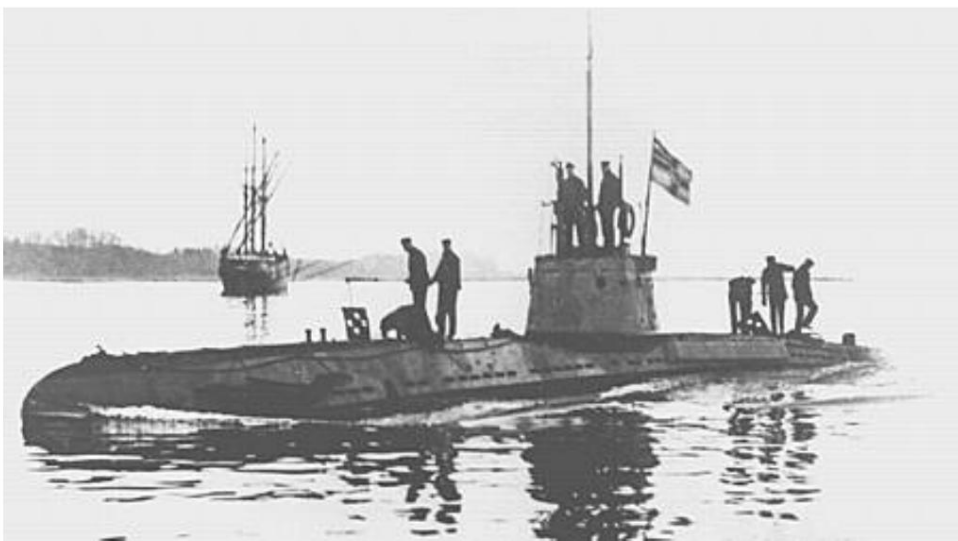
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- 11th Senussi Campaign, Composite Australian Light Horse Regiment (Great War Forum).
12. *Deserts, Cars, Maps and Names* by Jim Harold (from eSharp, Summer 2005, University of Glasgow)
13. *Queen's Own Dorset Yeomanry - The Western Desert / Agagia Campaign* (The Keep Military Museum).
14. *Operations against the Senussi in the Western Desert* (The Long, Long Trail)



*A glimpse of the Libyan desert.*

From *Die Welt des Islam - Von Marokko bis Persien* (Jaduland).

## **Postscript - About submarines and camels**



*The German submarine UC-1, which was of the same class as the UC-20.*

From SMS UB-2 (The Dreadnought Project).

At least two German submarines carried weapons supplies to the Senussi, namely the former minelaying submarines UC-20 and UC-37 [49](#)) that had been converted into transport vessels. The following fantastic story is connected to these boats.



In June 1918, UC-20, under the command of *Oberleutnant Heinrich Kukat*, transported a load of weapons from the Austro-Hungarian port city of Pola (now Pula in Croatia) to Misrata (Misurata), east of Tripoli in Libya.

The Arab leader who received the weapons expressed his gratitude by presenting the submarine captain with a special gift ... a camel! The captain, who was a Prussian, regarded the gift as received on behalf of the Emperor, and wished to bring it back with him, but how do you transport a camel in a submarine?

The first problem consisted of transporting the camel out to the submarine. As the weapons were landed using smaller rubber boats, it was not easy to sail the camel back in the same way. They therefore attached a rope around the camel's neck, and pulled it after an inflatable boat to the underwater boat.

The submarine now dived under the camel so that it could rest on the deck. After this, the submarine dived out again and the camel could now lie on the deck.

The voyage back to Pola now took place in such a way - and quite slowly - that at night the submarine sailed submerged, at periscope depth, pulling the swimming camel behind it, while in daylight it sailed submerged with the camel resting on the deck. A completely new experience for both parties!

From Pola, the camel was sent to Germany, and a total of three camels were to be transported in this way by UC-20 and UC-73.

Although the story sounds almost too fantastic to be true, it is said to have originated in a book written by one of the crew members of UC-20, Ernst Hashagen, whose memoirs - *U-Boote westwärts ! Meine Fahrten um England 1914-1918* - was published in 1931.

My source for the story is a post in the Australian Light Horse Association's Forum - The Story of the Underwater Camel.

Per Finsted

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## Notes:

42) The sources do not state how HMS CLEMATIS was armed. See British Naval Guns (NavWeaps) for possible types.

43) See Lieutenant-General William Eliot Peyton (Centre for First World War Studies).

44) See About 1st South African Infantry Brigade, 1915-1916.

45) See The Imperial Camel Corps Brigade.

46) See About British Engineer Units in Egypt, 1916-1917.

47) The force further numbered: a half-battery of the Nottinghamshire Battery, Royal Horse Artillery (half-battery), a platoon of the Dorset Yeomanry, a signal section, a sanitary element, a detachment of Egyptian Pioneers, and two armored cars.

48) See Humber Class (Battleships and Cruisers).

49) See UC-20 and UC-73 (Uboat.net) for data on the two submarines. See also the article The Central Powers submarines in the Mediterranean during WWI by Robert Derencin from the same source.