

# The Senussi Uprising (1915-1917)

## Introduction

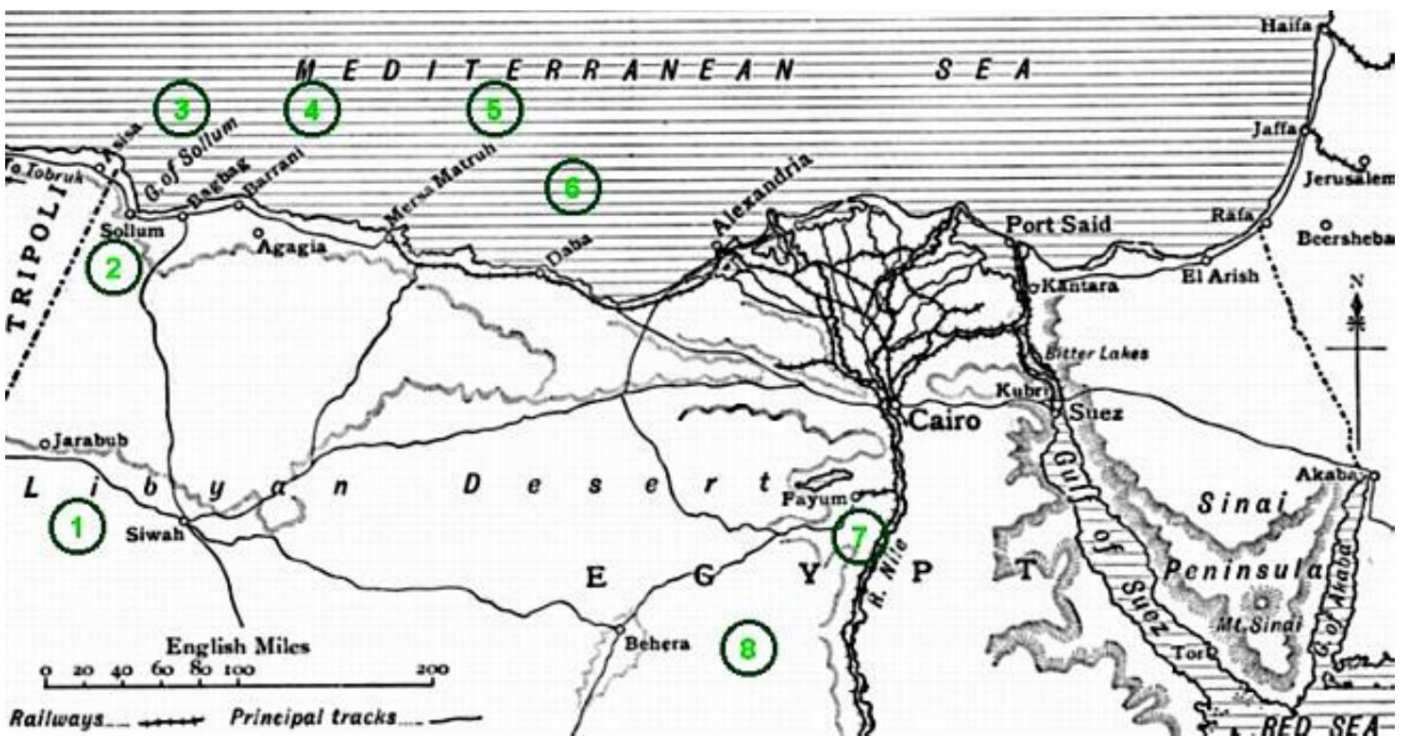
The Egyptian military contribution to the operations against the Senussi was, compared to the British, Australian, Indian, New Zealand and South African, quite modest.

Since the operations now took place on Egyptian territory, however, I have chosen to leave this article as part of the series on the Egyptian Army during the First World War, see Glimpses of the Egyptian Army during the First World War and the Defense of the Suez Canal.

## The Senussians

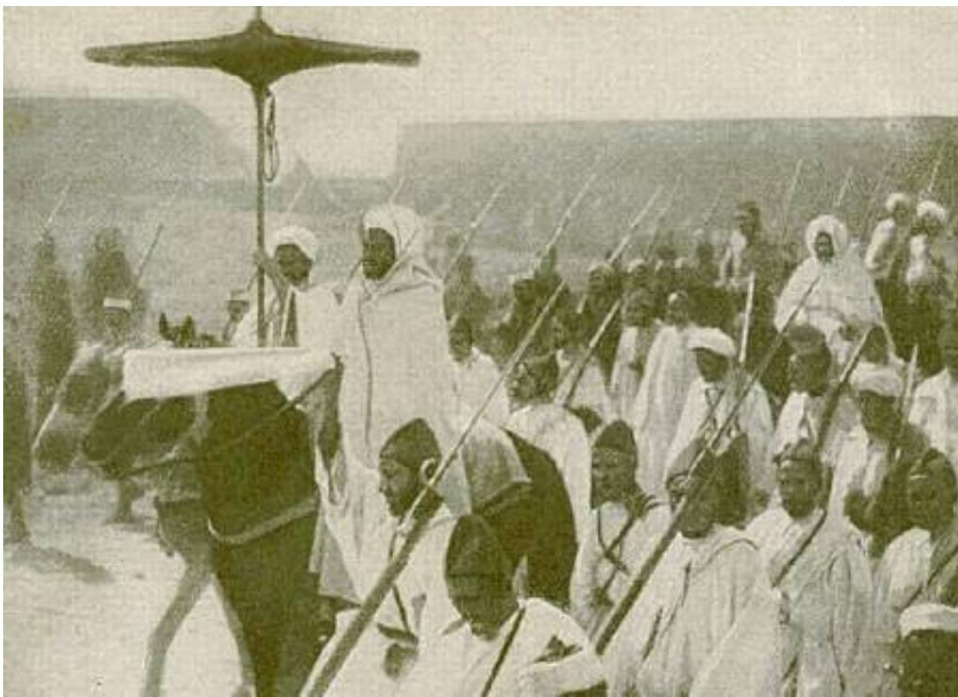
The Senussi are a Muslim politico-religious sect founded in Mecca in 1837 by Sayyid Muhammad ibn Ali as-Senussi, who assumed the title Storsenussi (Grand Senussi) 1). The sect became widespread in Libya, and to a lesser extent in Sudan and Egypt. The spread of the sect was supported by a number of religious haunts, called *zawiet* (monasteries, lodges) spread over large parts of North Africa.

Many of the sect's members were wholly or partly nomads and lived in the Libyan Desert, an area of approx. 320,000 m<sup>2</sup>, with i.a. the oasis towns of Jarabub and Siwa (Siwah) (Map 1, Point 1) as anchor points. The border with Libya (Tripolis) was only formally determined in 1924.



Map 1: The fighting in Egypt, February 1915 - May 1916.  
From FirstWorldWar.com.

From 1902 to 1913, members of the sect fought against French expansion in the Western Sahara and the Italian invasion of Libya from 1911, which led to the Italo-Turkish War of 1911-12 2). Subsequently, members of the sect were actively involved in the resistance to Italian rule and caused great trouble to the Italians; as late as March 1915 the Italian troops suffered a major defeat at Sirte 3).



Great Senussi Said Mohammad al-Abid moves into Benghazi, June 1915.  
 From Solving Troubles through Force  
 (Leadership of the Empire of Austria-Hungary during World War I).

Traditionally, Senussi relations with Egypt were peaceful, but Italy's entry into World War I on 24 May 1915 on the Allied side did its part to change this. From the German and Turkish side, everything was done, including good words and payment, to emphasize the problems of the Allies at Gallipoli and thus the possibility of the Senussi to achieve a similar situation in Egypt. The calls for an armed intervention in Egypt were supported by a number of Turkish military advisers, including was included in the leadership of the military units of the Senussi.

From 1902 to 1916, the post of grand senussi was held by Said Mohammad al-Abid, his nephew, Sidi Muhammad el-Idris, who was the rightful heir, not being old enough to assume the title 4) .

Sidi Muhammad el-Idris, who was friendly to the English, was from 1951 to 1969 King Idris the First of Libya.

### **Military units of the Senussi**

The Senussi's actual military units were organized in divisions of between 300 and 1,000 men.

Awlad Ali Battalion Staff

Great Senussien's bodyguard (Muhafizia) (approx. 400 men) Herasah Battalion

The regular Battalion (about 1,000 men) A mounted detachment

Bari'isa Battalion An artillery detachment (9 mountain guns)

Manfah Battalion A machine gun section (12 machine guns)

'Awaqir Battalion A training unit Tuareg and Tabu Battalion A training unit

Many sources collectively call the mentioned units the "regular units" or *muhafizia of the Senussi*.

Source 9, however, only uses the latter term for Storsenussien's bodyguard, and *regularly* only in connection with the battalion of 1,000 men. The term "regular units" is used given to distinguish the units from the Bedouin tribes that sometimes functioned alongside the Senussi.

The regular battalion was under the command of a Turkish captain, Muhammad Amin, and a number of Turkish

officers. Source 3 states that the regular battalion consisted of members of the Ibaidat and Bar'assa 5) tribes\_\_ who resided in Cyrenaica.

The other infantry battalions were under the command of local tribal chiefs or their sons; the battalions were named after the tribes that provided the soldiers. Several of the local chiefs had experience from skirmishes with the Italians (since 1911). A Turkish officer or non-commissioned officer was attached to the battalions as advisers.

Combat support and supply units were led by Turkish officers, as were a number of Turkish officers on staff. The sanitary service was very limited, but a few Turkish doctors were also on the staff.

Armament consisted of Turkish and captured Italian weapons. The Senussi also had their own "munitions factory" that produced up to 1,000 cartridges per day.

## Uniforms

The majority of the units are believed to have worn their traditional dress, just as the Turkish commanders often wore a burnus over their uniforms. The Great Senussi's bodyguard, and probably also the so-called regular battalion, were dressed in a locally made, khaki-colored uniform inspired by the Turkish field uniform, as well as khaki-colored wrappers and brown boots. The headgear was a kind of turban, the loose end of which could protect the lower face from dust and sand.



*Soldiers of the Senussi Army, Muhafizia, seen shortly after the Great War.*  
From Source 3.

The picture here, as well as supplementary material in Source 3, suggests that the bodyguard of the Great Senus, the muhafizia, were Africans, and not North Africans as it might otherwise be reasonable to assume.

In that part of the world, however, it was not uncommon to recruit Africans for such tasks, or to use slaves.

## Bedouins





*The Bedouin überrumpeln eine feindliche Abteilung.*

From a German postcard, published ca. 1915, and seen for sale on the Internet.

The regular units were supported by several thousand Bedouins, on foot, on horseback, and on camels.

The Bedouins generally used traditional weapons such as swords, spears and older model rifles; deserters were not uncommon, but also captured Italian weapons were used by the Bedouins.

### **The Turkish military advisors**



*Ja'far Pasha al-Askari, in the officer's uniform of the 1. Badisches Leib-Grenadier-Regiment Nr. 109.*

The Turkish government supported the struggle of the Senussi financially and militarily - with weapons, ammunition, military advisers and training. From February 1915, the military leadership rested with the Turkish colonel Nuri Bey, who was the half-brother of Enver Pasha, the real political and military leader in Turkey.

Colonel Nuri's second-in-command, and leader of the most important military operations against the British, was Major Ja'far Pasha al-Askari (1885-1936), who had received his military training in Turkey and

Germany.

A number of Turkish officers served with various German regiments; Ja'far Pasha served from 1910 to 1912 as a platoon leader at 1. Badisches Leib-Grenadier-Regiment Nr. 109 in Karlsruhe [6](#). —

Ja'far Pasha al-Askari later came - on the English side - to play a role in The Arab Revolt (1916-1918) together with TE Lawrence. Ja'far Pasha became the commander of the regular units of the Arab Rebel Army, and after the war later became the Iraqi Minister of Defense and Prime Minister.

A list with the names of some of the Turkish officers and non-commissioned officers who served with the Senussi is, among other things, discussed in Turkish Officers on the North African Front (Libya) during WW1 by Tosun Saral (Axis History [Forum](#)) [7](#). The force included 47 officers, 47 non-commissioned officers and 14 military officials.



*Enver Pasha (no. 2 from left in front row) with other Turkish officers and doctors, photographed in Libya, 1911.*

From Enver Pasha, his Te'ykilat-i Mahsusa and his Diary (A Gateway into History).

The list of names also mentions a command of the Turkish intelligence organization, Te'ykilat-i Mahsusa [8](#). —

Already in 1911, the first representatives from the intelligence organization came to Libya, under the leadership of the then Major Enver Pasha.

The officers who supported the Senussi in 1915 may well have looked like their predecessors.

## **The situation escalates**

During the spring and summer of 1915, the build-up of the Senussi's forces followed, just as everything was done on the official Turkish side to incite resistance against the English. Arms and supplies were sailed across the Mediterranean and landed in the dead of night at various places on the coast.



*Erkündigung des heiligen Krieges in Tripolis 9).* —

The ultimate spiritual weapon, Declaration of Holy War, is also drawn into the conflict.

However, the declaration does not have the intended effect, as it is not backed by the top Muslim clerics in Mecca.

The two central figures (in front of the flag in the center) may be Ja'far Pasha al-Askari and Said Mohammad al Abid.

Grand Senussien writes a letter to "brothers in spirit" as well as journalists in the Arab world and India, in which he describes himself as the Caliph of Mecca's representative in North Africa. In the letter, Grand Senussien calls on everyone to support the holy war.

One of the letters is intercepted by the English authorities, who seek to downplay the situation.

The head of the Egyptian Coast Guard in Sollum (Map 1, Point 2), Lt. Col. CL Snow, who is responsible for the defense of Egypt's border to the west, seeks to use his good relationship with the local population to reassure the area's Bedouin and thus form a counterbalance to the influence of the senussi.



*His Majesty's Submarine B-8, 1911.*

From a simultaneous postcard.



The submarine is of the same class as the B-11.

In August, two English submarines are sent from Mudros to Alexandria to patrol along the coast to the west, thereby discouraging the Turkish vessels supplying the Senussi.

On 16 August 1915, the two English submarines, one of which was HMS B-11 [10](#)), anchored in the bay off Sollum ([Map 1](#), Point 3) - approx. 600 m from the coast - after a night of rough seas.

On the shore some natives and a group of Europeans who looked like officers were observed; the group waved a white flag.



*Naval Lieutenant Norman Douglas Holbrook.*

From Gallaher Cigarette Card No. 19,  
in the VC Heroes series,

st 1 Series (VC Heroes).

Sea Lieutenant Holbrook was later  
appointed Captain Lieutenant.

Naval Lieutenant Norman Douglas Holbrook [11](#)), who on 13 December 1914 with HMS B-11 had sunk the Turkish battleship [MESSUDIEH 12](#)), was the commander of the small submarine force, and he decides to row towards the coast to investigate the matter.

As he approaches the coast, he discovers that the people are armed, and the Europeans seem suspicious.

Sea Lieutenant Holbrook turns, the group now opens fire on the submarines, who immediately return fire with machine guns.

The sea lieutenant's dinghy sank and he must swim the last distance back to his ship. One English sailor was killed and three men, including Holbrook, were wounded. About the losses on the second, it is only rumored that a number of "Arabs" were hit.

An official protest was sent to Great Senussien, which deeply regretted the incident. He further explained that Italian naval vessels so often shelled the coast and that his people had therefore taken the submarine to be Italian...



*Ja'far Pasha al-Askari, disguised as Senussi [13](#)).*

However, there are still official relations between the Senussi and the British authorities, and during one such meeting - 30 September 1915 - Lieutenant Colonel Snow exchanges experiences with the Turkish officer, Ja'far Pasha al-Askari.

One of the points of conversation is the dealings with native soldiers, and Ja'far Pasha recounts the previously stated consideration of the Bedouin tribes' lack of discipline.

Lieutenant Colonel Show gets the impression from the Senussi units that there may be difficult opponents and that Ja'far Pasha seeks to settle the disputes.

However, the latter is completely wrong, as Ja'far Pasha al-Askari has just arrived in the area to do everything in his power to further the conflict...

### **The plan of attack**

The Senussi, and their Turkish advisers, plan for the operations against Egypt included an attack along two axes:

- Towards the cities along the Mediterranean coast, towards
- Alexandria Towards the southern oasis areas, towards the Nile.

On the Turkish side, a third, more southern, axis was hoped for, seeking to induce Sultan 'Ali Dinar in Darfur (western part of Sudan) to launch an attack against the province of Kordofan (in eastern part of Sudan), at the same time as the other attacks.

Whatever the aims of the local rulers with the hostilities may have been, the German and Turkish side wanted to create so much unrest that the British government had to tie up large troop forces in Egypt, thereby preventing their efforts elsewhere.

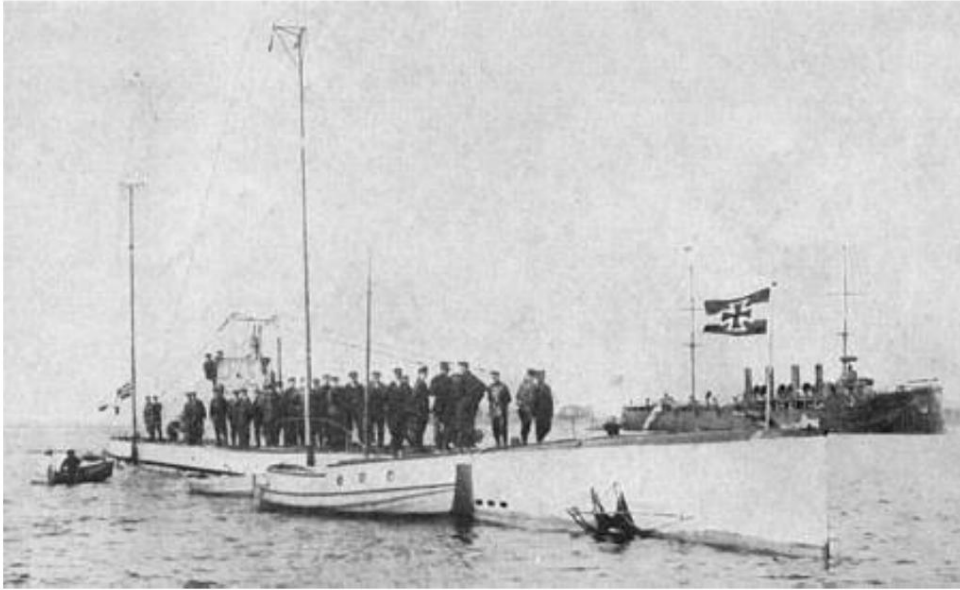
### **The situation is escalating**

In themselves, the Senussi may not have been a real threat to Egypt. The fear of internal unrest at the prospect of another holy war, and remembering the severe problems that Muhammad Ahmed al-Mahdÿ and his successor, Abdullah Ibn-Mohammed, had inflicted on the country from 1883 to 1899 14), [felt](#) from [\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_](#)



English side forced to intervene.

Additional incidents at sea do their part to prompt action ...



*The German submarine U-35, 1916.  
From FirstWorldWar.com.*

The German submarine U-35 [15](#), which i.a. was deployed in the transport of weapons and supplies to the Senussi, on 5 November 1915 sank the armed merchant ship HMS TARA (formerly S/S HIBERNIA) in the bay off Sollum.

Captain Lieutenant Kophamel then transported the 93 surviving crew members to Port Suliman (Port Bardia), approx. 35 km west of Sollum, and handed them over as prisoners to the Senussi [16](#). \_\_\_\_\_

On 6 November 1915, U-35 shelled two gunboats from the Egyptian Coast Guard, ABBAS and NUR EL BAHR, in the bay off Sollum. ABBAS sank and NUR EL BAHR was damaged [17](#). \_\_\_\_\_



*S/S HIBERNIA, later HMS TARA.  
From S/S HIBERNIA (Ship Facts).*

U-35 also sank, with cannon fire, the transport ship HMT MOORINA (3,159 t) [18](#) on 7 November 1915 while en route to Sollum.

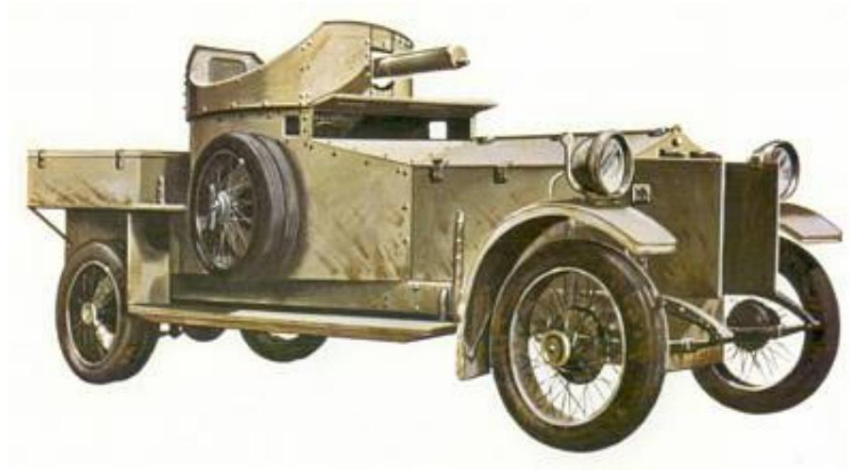
The cargo, consisting of more than 100 horses, was lost. The crew and a number of Indian soldiers who attended

the horses, were rescued and picked up by U-35.

There are protests again from the English side and they demand that the survivors be extradited, but without success.

As a final attempt to stop the conflict, the Great Senussi's nephew, Sidi Muhammad el-Ibris, is sent to the uncle to persuade him to release the prisoners and send the Turkish officers home. But despite the promise of a significant sum in gold, the result is a shrug.

In mid-November, a series of fire attacks are launched on the Egyptian Coast Guard's posts at, among others, Sollum, BagBag (BaqBaq) and Sidi Barrani (Map 1, Item 4). At Sollum, at least 300 senussiers participated.



*Rolls-Royce armored car, Model 1914* [19](#). [\\_\\_\\_](#)

An armored car squadron - the Royal Naval Armored Car Emergency Squadron (*Major Charles Lister*) - was sent to Sollum on 9 November 1915.

The plates on the top of the tower have been removed - a common measure in Egypt to counteract the heat.

## The conflict breaks out

The situation on the Gallipoli peninsula was quite uncertain, and the fear of unrest in the Egyptian hinterland meant that per 20 November 1915 creates the Western Frontier Force to meet the threat from the Senussi.

The starting point for the match was the choice between Sollum and Mersa Matruh (Map 1, Point 5), and the choice fell on the latter. The city was closer to the bases in Egypt and could be more easily supplied; of significant importance was also that the water supply in Mersa Matruh could be expanded to supply a larger force.

It was also decided that Daba (Dabaa, Dhabba) (Map 1, Item 6) should be a supply point for the forces, as the town could be supplied by rail.

As a consequence of the decisions, the positions west of Mersa Matruh are vacated. The bulk of the garrison in Sollum - 5 English officers and 12 men as well as 2 Egyptian officers and 90 men, reached Mersa Matruh on board the gunboat Rasheed on 24 November 1915. However, the tank squadron advanced overland.



*Egyptian field guns, perhaps of the 9 cm Krupp type.*

An outpost consisting of 1 Egyptian officer and 14 men does not make it back to Sollum in time and is captured by the Senussi.

Three Ford trucks from the armored car squadron and two Egyptian 9 cm Krupp guns must be left in Sollum, all in unusable condition [20](#)).

The Egyptian Coast Guard installations at BagBag and Sidi Barrani are also evacuated and the forces march overland towards Mersa Matruh. The armored car squadron must leave another 4 light trucks at Sidi Barrani.

Along the way, a larger force - 12 officers [21](#)), 2 cadets [and](#) 120 men - deserts from the Egyptian Coast Guard's camel corps, and makes common cause with the Senussi. The soldiers bring all their weapons and 176 camels. As a result of i.a. this incident the reputation of the Egyptian coast guard is not the best...

Correspondingly, English prestige among the local Bedouins declined considerably and many joined the Senussi.

## Western Frontier Force is created

Virtually all forces are deployed at Gallipoli and in the defense of the Suez Canal, which is why the number of available units in Egypt was limited. The force therefore initially became a somewhat improvised undertaking; most of the officers and soldiers had no prior combat experience and the English infantry battalions were still in training.

**Table 1: Western Frontier Force** (*Major General A. Wallace*)

### Composite Mounted Brigade

(*Brigadier General JD Tyndale-Biscoe*)

- Three mounted regiments, composed of commands from the 1st, 2nd and 4th Mounted Brigades (Territorial Force)
- A regiment of Australian Light Horse, composed of commands from the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Light Horse Brigades [23](#)) (*Lieutenant Colonel DR.H. Pelham, 10th Hussars*)
- 1/1st Nottingham Battery, Royal Horse Artillery, Territorial Force, and ammunition column [24](#)) [\\_\\_\\_](#) (*Major Sir Joe Laycock*)
- Supply units

### Composite Infantry Brigade

(*Brigadier General Sir George Bingham, Earl of Lucan*)

- 1/6th Bn. Royal Scots (Territorial Force) [25](#)) (*Lt. Col. AO Jenney*) 2/7th Bn.
- Middlesex Regiment (Territorial Force) [26](#)) 2/8th Bn.
- Middlesex Regiment (Territorial Force) (*Lt Col LC Dams*) 15th
- Ludhiana Sikhs [27](#)) [\\_\\_\\_](#)

(Lieutenant Colonel JLR  
Gordon)

- Supply units

### Combat Support and Supply Units

- A detachment from the Egyptian Military Works Department, as no actual engineer units were available Supply Trained from 1st Australian
- Division (Lieutenant-Colonel FH Francis, Australian Army Service Corps)
- Sanitary units.

The threat from enemy submarines means that you can only sail at night, and although Mersa Matruh was chosen as a base, the harbor is far from ideal. It could only be navigated by smaller vessels and the water supply did not allow too many units to arrive simultaneously.

The transport fleet initially consists of 6 smaller trawlers and two gunboats from the Egyptian coast guard; later the transport fleet was expanded with another 4 smaller steamships and another Egyptian gunboat, which was fitted out as a hospital ship.



1914. Le salut aux alliés - Infanterie Indio-Anglaise A salute to the allies - British Indian Army ©

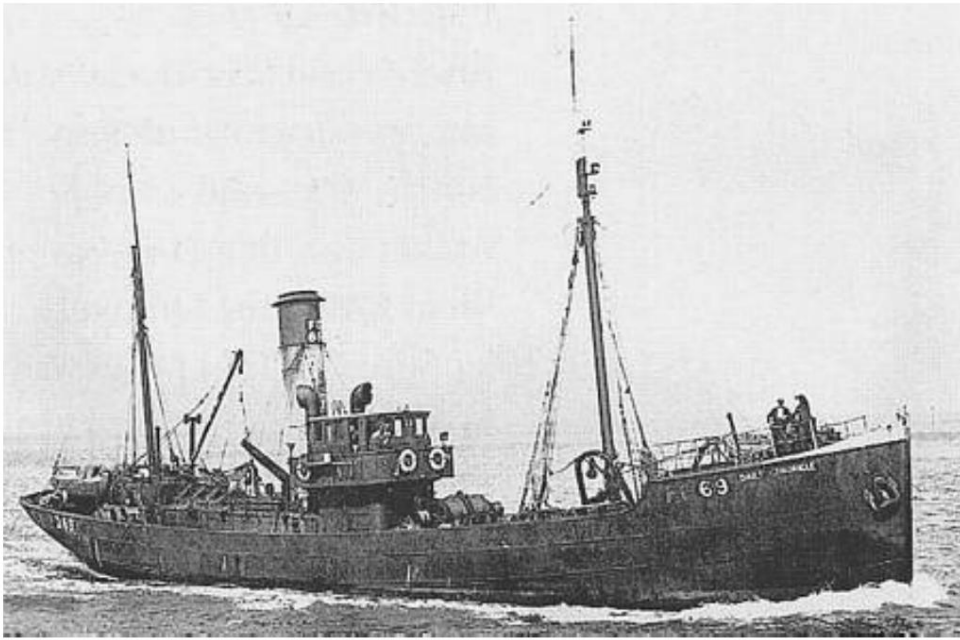
15th Ludhiana Sikhs, photographed in France, September 1914.  
From a simultaneous postcard.

On the night of 24 November, a vanguard of 300 men from the force's most experienced unit - the 15th Ludhiana Sikhs - is dispatched to Mersa Matruh aboard three trawlers.

The battalion had extensive combat experience from the Western Front, and is highlighted in all sources for its effectiveness.

Over the next two weeks, the force is transported in stages to Mersa Matruh: the wells between Mersa Matruh and Daba also had limited capacity, so only smaller forces could simultaneously march forward overland.





*The trawler Daily Chronicle, owned by the firm TL Devlin Ltd., Granton.*  
From TL Devlin, Trawler Owners, Granton Harbor (EdinPhoto).

Source 7 mentions that D Company from 1/6th Bn. Royal Scots sails to Mersa Matruh aboard two *Granton trawlers* and an Egyptian gunboat.

The designation can either mean that the Egyptian trawlers resembled those the soldiers knew from their home town of Edinburgh, whose fishing and industrial port was Granton Harbor [28](#), or that they were printed vessels.

On 7 December 1915, the force, which numbered approx. 1,400 men, largely in place at Mersa Matruh, where Major-General A. Wallace now posts his headquarters.

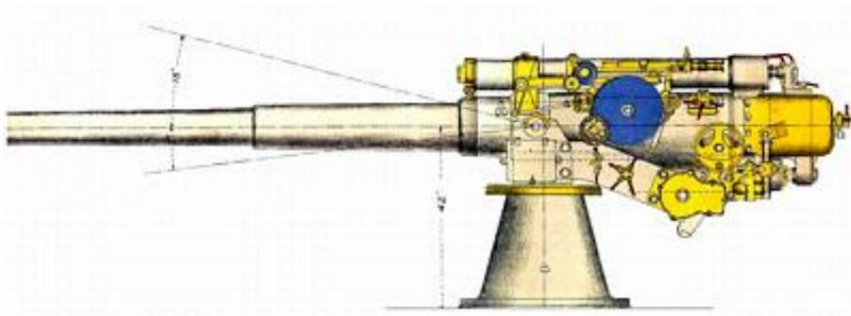
A small number of Egyptian infantrymen and artillerymen, whose loyalty was questionable, were sent away from Mersa Matruh.

## Reinforcements

The garrison in Mersa Matruh was reinforced from mid-December 1915 with:

- A Battery, 1st City of London Horse Artillery Battery, Honorable Artillery Company (*Major OL Eugster*) [29](#)
- 1st Battalion, New Zealand Rifle Brigade (*Lieutenant Colonel HT Fulton*) [30](#)
- Two 4-inch naval guns, manned by Royal Marine Artillery [31](#)) from Alexandria Four
- machines from No. 17 Squadron, Royal Flying Corps.

Source 8 mentions that the only transport vessel available to the Western Frontier Force - and which could also carry horses - was the S/S MISSIR [32](#)). When A Battery, the Honorable Artillery Company and its ammunition column is transported from Alexandria to Mersa Matruh in late December 1915, it happens in three stages.



4-inch Naval Gun, Mk VIII, in aftuge Model P2 33).

### Royal Marine Artillery

The pamphlets were set up to secure the harbor in Mersa Matruh against the threat from the German submarines.

Source 7 states that these are cannons in a stationary arrangement.



*"Ships of the air attack the "ship of the desert":  
British airplanes dropping bombs on a Senussi camel  
convoy laden with ammunition".*  
From FirstWorldWar.com.

### No. 17 Squadron, Royal Flying Corps

Four machines from No. 17 Squadron, Royal Flying Corps - two machines at Mersa Matruh and two machines at Hammam (about 60 km west of Alexandria) - supported the operations in the desert. The force is under command

of Captain, Lord George Wellesley 34). \_\_\_\_

The squadron was established at Gosport on 1 February 1915 35). It was sailed for Egypt in November 1915 and undertook its first operational mission on 24 December 1915 - a reconnaissance flight over the Sinai Peninsula.

Until July 1916, when the squadron was sent to Salonika, detachments from the squadron participated in the various operations in and around Egypt and thus operated over the Sinai Peninsula, the Libyan Desert, Sudan and the Arabian Peninsula.

During the time in Egypt, the squadron was equipped with aircraft of the type BE2c 36).

The illustration was drawn by Frederic De Harnen, and was featured on the cover of the Illustrated London News on 18 March 1916.

From the subtitle of the illustration it appears that it is based on information from an English officer. Despite this, the two machines appear to be of a somewhat older model than the squadron's BE2c machines.



BE2c, approx. 1916.

From a roughly contemporaneous postcard.

Despite the text, another possibility could be that the machines are Italian, but the 8 machines that were part of the units in Libya are described as being of the Henri Farman type, i.e. biplanes.

The back of the card contains the following information:

*"The BE2c biplane was designed by the Royal Aircraft Factory at Farnborough, and is fitted with an 8-cylinder air-cooled engine, for the design of which the RAF is also responsible. This machine has been very much in existence at the Front, at first (1914 and 1915) as a fighting machine and later for patrol, artillery, and photographic work. BE signifies Bleriot Experiment."*

### **Sanitary units**



*Soldiers of the South Midland Mounted Ambulance, 1909.*

From a postcard seen for sale on the Internet.

Source 1 lists the following sanitation units:

- 1st South Midland Mounted Field Ambulance (*Lieutenant Colonel TH Forrest*)
- South Midland Field Ambulance
- Nottingham and Derby Field Ambulance
- Yeomanry Field Ambulance
- 137th Indian Field Ambulance (*Major RM Knox, Indian Medical Service*).

The transport of the wounded often caused major problems, as the terrain did not always make it possible to get the ambulances far enough. The wounded therefore had to be carried long distances or transported on the ammunition wagons of the infantry or artillery.

During later operations at Sollum, Source 10 also mentions No. 16 British Military Hospital (*Lieutenant Colonel Lewis*)

## **Additional dispositions**

The High Command in Egypt is also sending a number of units to secure the supply lines and to deal with unrest among the local population.

To guard the railway line between Alexandria and Daba (Map 1, Item 6) (*The railway line marked on Map 1 as far as Mersa Matruh at this time only went to Daba.*), as well as patrolling towards the Moghara oasis (southeast of Daba), on 21 November 1915, a force consisting of:

### **To Daba:**

- 2nd Bn. New Zealand Rifle Brigade [37](#)) [15th](#)
- Ludhiana Sikhs, 1 company Bikaner
- Camel Corps (150 men) and an Egyptian machine gun platoon [38](#)) 1-2 armored trains
- equipped with 2 Egyptian 12-pounder guns, as well as a detachment from 1/10th Gurkha Rifles [39](#)).

To maintain order among the population of the Fayum Oasis (Map 1, Item 7) and Wadi Natrun (approx. 70 km south of Alexandria), the following units were sent on 29 November 1915:



### To Fayum:

- 1/1st North Midland Mounted Brigade (Territorial Force) 1/1st
- Berkshire Battery, Royal Horse Artillery, Territorial Force

### To Wadi Natrun:

- One squadron Egyptian cavalry
- Bikaner Camel Corps (50 men).

To maintain order among the population of Behera Oasen (Map 1, Item 8), the following units were dispatched on 7 December 1915:

### Hosh Isa and Damanhur:

- An infantry battalion composed of commandos from units of the 29th Division 40) [\\_\\_\\_](#)

At the same time, the units had to ensure that the Senussi did not push out of the desert areas and into the Nile Valley.

## Skirmishes

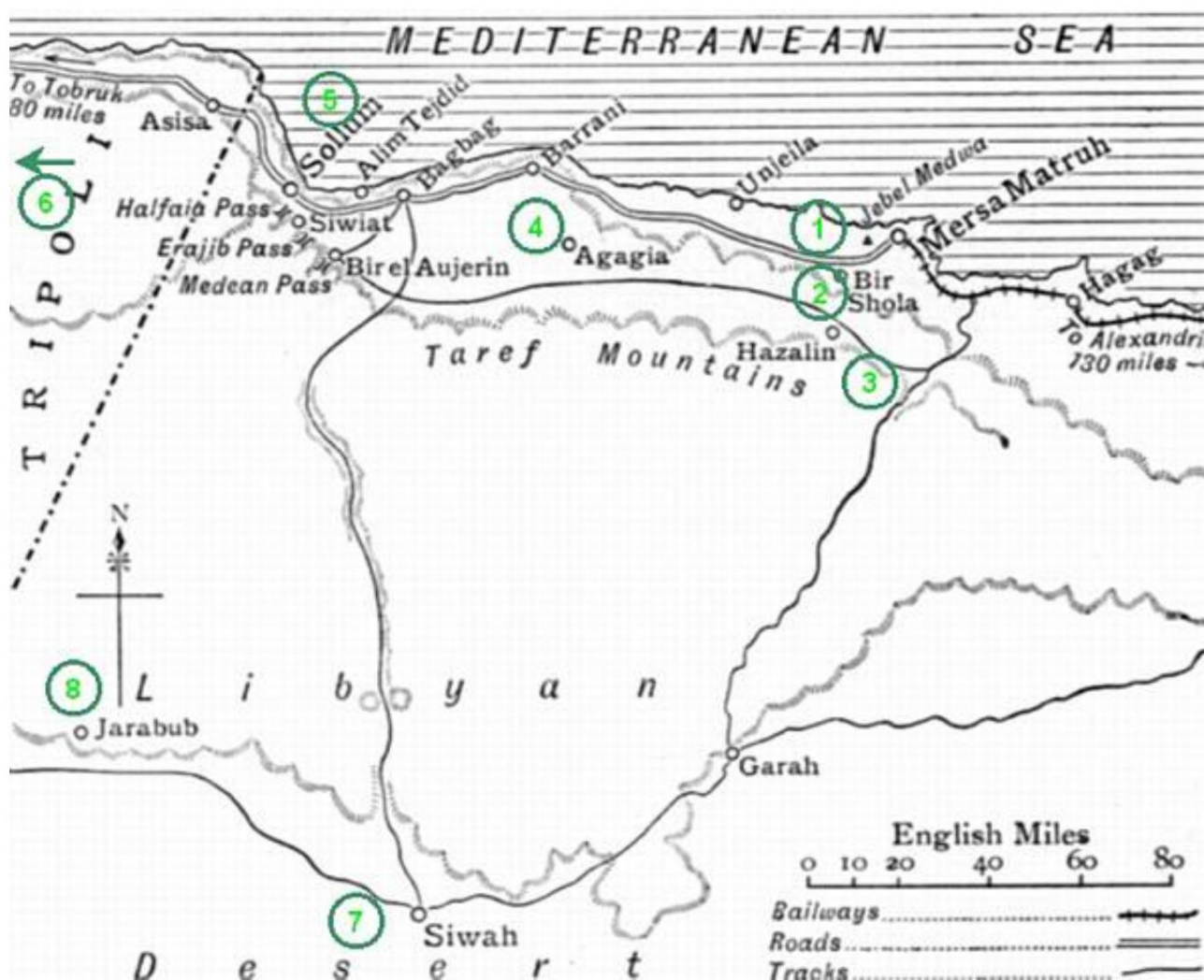
If the operations in Egypt are compared with other acts of war during the First World War, they are relatively modest, but were carried out under difficult conditions, both terrain-wise and logistically. The most important operations took place from December 1915 to March 1916 near the Mediterranean coast, interrupted by a month of January, when heavy rain and the resulting difficult terrain made military action largely impossible.

After March 1916, peace negotiations began with the English-friendly Sidi Muhammad el-Idris, who has now effectively taken over the leadership of the sect, while Grand Senussi Said Mohammad al-Abid and the last remnants of the Senussi military units sought refuge in the oases to the south, apparently to seek to carry out the second part of the attack plan.

The Senussi's prolonged conflict with the Italians brought peace negotiations to a standstill, but they resumed in January 1917 to finally end on 14 April 1917 with the signing of a peace agreement with the British government. The Senussi are allowed to retain control of Jaghbub (Jarabub), on the condition that they have no military units on Egyptian territory.

Time line	Event	See Map 2 Section 1
11 and 13 December 1915	The skirmish at Wadi Senab	
25 December 1915	The skirmish at Wadi Majid	Point 2
23 January 1916	The skirmish at Halazin	Item 3
26 February 1916	The skirmish at Agagiya	Item 4

14 March 1916	Sollum is reoccupied	Point 5
March 17, 1916	The prisoners from HMS TARA and HMT MOORINA are freed at Bir Hakim	Item 6
April 1916	Peace negotiations begin	--
3 - 4 February 1917	Operations against the Girba and Siwa Oases	Item 7
14 April 1917	Peace negotiations end - The Senussi are awarded Jaghbub	Item 8



Map 2: The battles against the Senussi, 1915-16.  
From FirstWorldWar.com.

## Senussi strike forces

While the English units were assembled, the Senussi and their allies from the Bedouin tribes extended their dominion over the area west of Mersa Matruh. After the escape of Sollum, supplies in the form of arms and ammunition arrived from Turkey by various steamers and sailing vessels. German submarines in the waters use the harbor as a base, secured by a mine barrier.

Ja'far Pasha al-Askari was given command of the forces to advance along the Mediterranean coast:

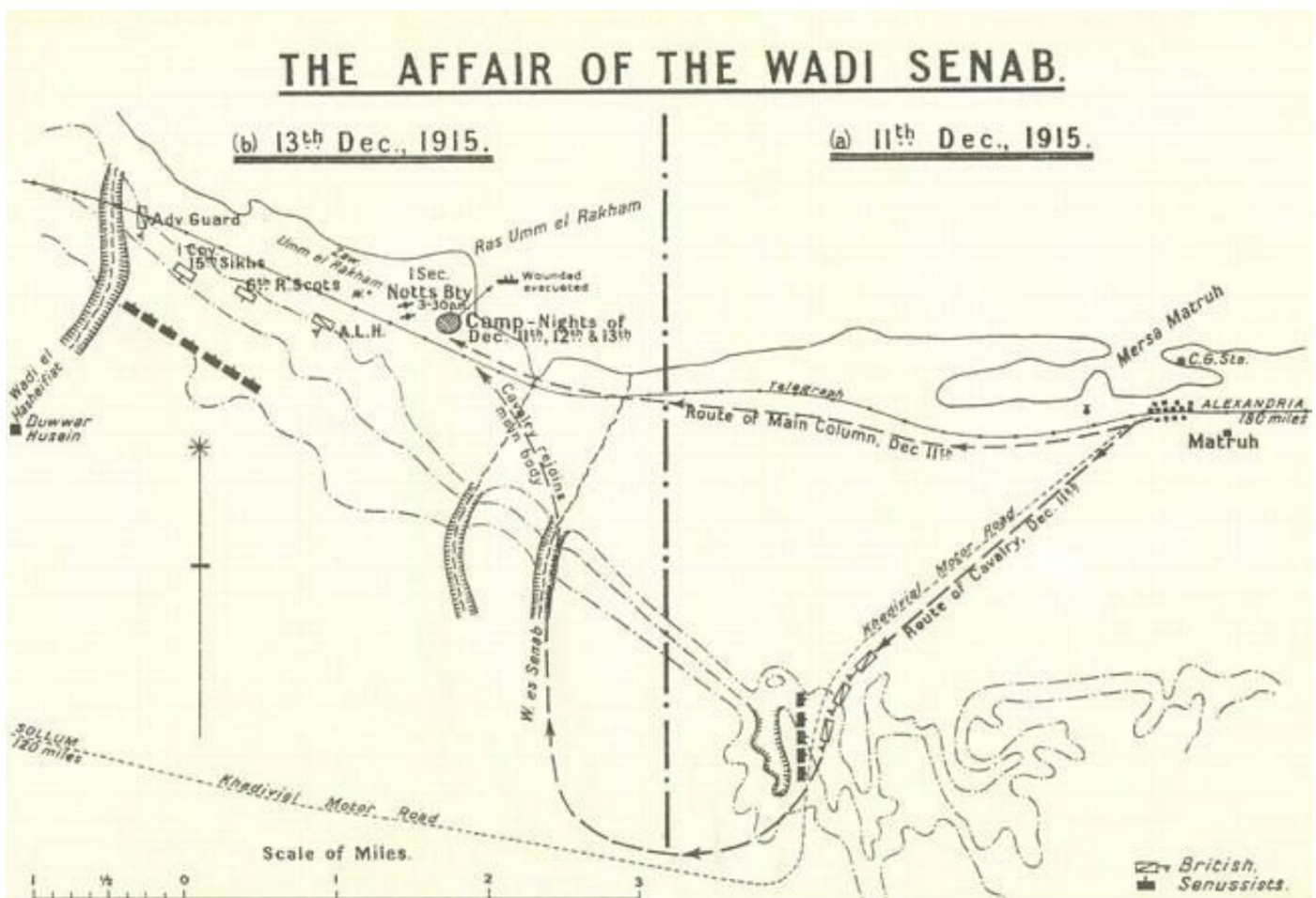
- A cavalry squadron (*Lieutenant Othman Arnaouti*)
- A Mountain Gun Battery (2 Pamphlets) (*Lieutenant Fawzi*)
- A machine gun company (2 Russian, 1 English and 1 Turkish machine gun) (*Captain Nihad Bey*)
- The Regular Battalion (*Captain Muhammad Amin Bey*)
- The Manfah Battalion (*under the leadership of the tribal chief*)
- Awlad Ali Battalion (*under command Muhammad Jibril Bey's son; with Sergeant Celal as military advisor*)
  
- The 'Awaqir Battalion (*under the leadership of the tribal chief; with Lt. Galip as military advisor*).

The other units other units, under Nuri Pasha, remained for the time being in the area around Sollum.

### The skirmish at Wadi Senab (11 and 13 December 1915)

In early December 1915 enemy units are reported near Mersa Matruh and General Wallace decides to strike at these forces. The forces are not sufficient for the great, but an effort is absolutely required, not least to restore English prestige in the area.

A force under the command of Lieutenant Colonel JLR Gordon, 15th Sikhs, is sent off from Mersa Matruh.



Map 3: The skirmish at Wadi Senab, 11 and 13 December 1915.  
From Source 1.

Lieutenant Colonel Gordon's units consisted of:

- 15th Sikhs (2 companies/350 men) 2nd
- Composite Yeomanry Regiment (three squadrons) (*Major JT Wigan, Berkshire Yeomanry*)
  - A Squadron, 1/1st Buckinghamshire Yeomanry

(*Captain Cheape*)

- A Squadron, 1/1st Dorset Yeomanry  
(*Major Reeve*)
- A Squadron, 1/1st Berkshire Yeomanry  
(*Major Foster*).
- Yeomanry Machine Gun Section (three machine guns)
- Nottinghamshire Battery, Royal Horse Artillery (Half Battery)
- Royal Naval Armored Car Emergency Squadron (four armored cars, three Ford cars and one radio car)
- South Midland Field Ambulance  
(an ambulance division)

The infantry march forward along the coast, while the other units are sent south. There will be smaller battles on the 11th between the cavalry and a force of approx. 300 Senussians from the 'Awaqir Battalion.



*Senussier captured by the Dorset Yeomanry.*  
From FirstWorldWar.com.

A Squadron of the 1st Australian Composite Light Horse Regiment (*Captain Hudson*) is sent forward from Mersa Matruh to assist the regiment, but the fighting is largely over by the time the squadron arrives.

The photograph may have been taken after the Skirmish at Agagiya, 26 February 1916

The English losses are: 16 dead (of which 1 officer) and 17 wounded (of which 2 officers). The losses of the Senussi are calculated at 80 dead and 7 prisoners.

Lieutenant-Colonel Gordon meanwhile advances along the coast and along the way the telegraph line along the coast is repaired using the 15th Sikh's signal equipment. In this way, contact can be maintained with General Wallace in Mersa Matruh. A plane drops a message that the cavalry is in battle. The lieutenant colonel can only support the cavalry with difficulty, as he is approx. 10 km away, and he correctly estimates that General Wallace will support the cavalry.

During the afternoon the 15th Sikhs encamp at Umm er Rakham, which the cavalry reach during the night. The cavalry's horses are very exhausted, and operations are not resumed until 13 December 1915. However, 25 prisoners are taken near the camp, as well as cattle and camels left behind by the Senussi.



During 12 December 1915 the force was reinforced with the 1/6th Royal Scots (two companies and the machine-gun platoon) as well as two more squadrons of the Australian Light Horse escorting another gun platoon from the Nottinghamshire Battery, Royal Horse Artillery. Additionally, a supply column from the Composite Australian Army Service Corps (*Lieutenant Thomas* [41](#)) arrives. —

Based on reports of the Senussi's presence further west, the force moves out on 13 December 1915 - two squadrons (Dorset and Buckinghamshire Yeomanry) in front, followed by a company from the 15th Sikhs and half a battalion from the Royal Scots. The second Sikh company and the Berkshire squadron are left to guard the camp. The three squadrons of the Australian Light Horse are initially held in reserve.

The main force of the Senussi is concentrated on a ridge to the south (see Map 3). Smaller units engage the front of the column and cut it off from the main force, which surprisingly comes under heavy fire.

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

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## Notes:

- 1) See Senussi and Sanusiya Order (Wikipedia) as well as Senussi (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1911)
- 2) See Italo-Turkish War (Wikipedia) and Treaty of Lausanne, October 1912 (Vincent Ferraro).
- 3) See *Le Operazioni Militari in Libia nel Sahara 1914-1918* by Alberto Rosselli (Società di Cultura e Storia Militare), which contains, among other things, a good map of Libya.
- 4) Said Mohammad al-Abids (1873-1933) and Sidi Muhammad el-Idris (1890-1983) From Libya (WorldStatesmen.org).
- 5) Bar'assa may be another spelling of Bari'isa, mentioned in connection with the Bari'isa Battalion mentioned in Source 9.
- 6) Read about the regiment in 1. Badisches Leib-Grenadier-Regiment Nr. 109 (Stadtwiki Karlsruhe).
- 7) From the book *On Yıllı Harbin Kadrosu 1912-22* by Colonel Ismet Görgülü, Ankara 1993, ISBN 975-16-0505-9.
- 8) See Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa (Wikipedia).
- 9) From *Großer Bilderatlas des Weltkriegs* by F. Bruckmann, Munich, 1915 (University of Wisconsin Digital Collections). The caption's use of Tripolis must be taken as synonymous with Libya.
- 10) See British B class Submarines (Wikipedia).
- 11) See Norman Douglas Holbrook (1888-1976) (Wikipedia), who was awarded the Victoria Cross in that connection.
- 12) For information on the coastal battleship MESSUDIEH, see Turkish or Ottoman Navy (Navies of World War 1) and Straits - British Policy towards the Ottoman Empire and the Origins of the Dardanelles Campaign, chapter 22 (Geoffrey Miller).
- 13) Image taken from the book *Mayada: Daughter of Iraq* by Jean Sasson, a biography of Ja'far Pasha al-Askari's granddaughter, Mayada al-Askari. See an excerpt of the book and its illustrations at *Jean Sassons*

Homepage. The photograph was taken on 27 April 1915 in Alexandria, where Jafar Pasha, disguised as a pilgrim on his way to Mecca, stopped on the way to Jerusalem, where he was supposed to meet with the commander of the Turkish IV. Army, Navy Minister Djemal Pasha. (Source 9)

14) The articles Muhammad Ahmad (Wikipedia) and Mahdist War (Wikipedia) provide a good introduction to this background.

15) See SM U 35 (Seiner Majestät U 35) (Wikipedia).

16) See HMS TARA (Anglesey-Mon Info Web) and HMS TARA (Gathering the Jewels).

17) See War in the Mediterranean - 1915 (Navies of World War 1). NUR EL BAHR was repaired and later appears in conjunction with TE Lawrence. See Seven Pillars of Wisdom by TE Lawrence (Project Gutenberg).

18) See Submarines sink four more ships; telegram in New York Times, November 11, 1915 (Encyclopedia Titanica). Source 10, apparently basing its information on German sources, lists MOORINA's tonnage as 4,994 t.

19) From *AFVs of World War One* by Duncan Crow (ed.), Profile Publications Ltd. Windsor/Berkshire 1970. See also On British Armored Car Units in Egypt, 1915-1917.

20) Some of the English vehicles that were left behind at Mersa Matruh and Sidi Bari are, however, brought into running order. (Source 9)

21) Source 9 lists the names of three of the officers - Major Muhammad Salih Bey, Captain Adib Effendi and Lieutenant Abu Zaid. Ja'far Pasha subsequently sends the Egyptian soldiers back to Sollum. Source 9 further states that the Egyptians later provided the Senussi with good support, e.g. during the fighting at Siwa Oasis in February 1917.

23) See About the Australian Light Horse, 1914-1916.

24) See About the Honorable Artillery Company, 1914-1916.

25) See About 6th Battalion, Royal Scots, 1914-1916.

26) See About 2/7th and 2/8th Battalion, Middlesex Regiment, 1914-1916).

27) See About 15th Ludhiana Sikhs, 1914-16.

28) See Granton, Edinburgh (Wikipedia).

29) See About the Honorable Artillery Company, 1914-1916.

30) See About the New Zealand Rifle Brigade, 1915-1916.

31) See A Short history of the Royal Marine Artillery (Royal Marines Museum) for a general discussion of regimented.

32) S/S MISSIR (768 tons), built in 1864 at the Barclay Curie & Co. yard. in Glasgow, belonged to the Khedivial Mail Steam Ship & Graving Dock Company. A post in the Great War Forum further details the ship's technical data. S/S MISSIR was sunk on 29 May 1918 by an enemy submarine, approx. 80 nautical miles northwest of Alexandria; 44 crew and passengers were lost. From British Merchant Ships lost 1917-1918 (World War 1 at Sea).

33) From the Royal Navy Handbook of the 4-inch Mark VII and VIII BL Guns, 1913 (World War One - The

Maritime War). The source's scan of the plate does not include the cannon muzzle.

34) See Lord George Wellesley, the later 5th Duke of Wellington (Wikipedia). The information on the command relationship comes from Source 10.

35) See no. 17 (Reserve) Squadron (Royal Air Force) and No. 17 Squadron, Royal Air Force (Air of Authority).

36) See Royal Aircraft Factory BE2 (Wikipedia).

37) Replaced in mid-December 1915 by the 161st Brigade. See 54th (East Anglian) Division, 1914-1918 (The Long, Long Trail).

38) May be the machine gun division of the Egyptian Camel Corps, which is mentioned in the Defense of the Suez Canal. See also About Bikaner Camel Corps, 1914-15.

39) The information about this Gurkha unit comes from Source 3, but the 1/10th Gurkha Rifles was at this time serving in Burma. It is either a clerical error, and it should probably have read 2/10th Gurkha Rifles, who served in Egypt; alternatively, a command from the 1st Battalion has been attached to the 2nd Battalion.

40) The incident is not mentioned in the divisional history *The Story of The 29th Division - A Record of Gallant Deeds* by Captain Stair Gillon, Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd., London 1925 (reprinted by Naval & Military Press in 2002).

41) Lieutenant Thomas was mortally wounded at Umm er Rakhm. At the head of 75 tree soldiers, he saves a stuck machine gun carriage from the 1/6th Royal Scots from falling into the hands of the Senussi. See Lieutenant Claude Edward Thomas (Australian Light Horse Association Forum).