

**A FEW ROUGH NOTES ON THE CAMPAIGN IN WAZIRISTAN
MAY-AUGUST 1917**

from the diary of William J Strange

We left Jullundur under mobilisation orders at 10.45 pm by train on Wednesday 23 May and arrived at Mari-Indus on Thursday 24th at 2 pm. We had a good bit of work unloading trucks etc which lasted until 6 pm, after which we had a hot meal, stew and "char" (tea). After that we got our kits and then turned in for the night, on the ground.

Friday 25 May

Reveille 4.30 am, had breakfast, packed kits etc and then crossed the river Indus on steam ferry, half the battalion (420 all ranks) crossing at a time. We then marched about a mile to Kalabagh Railway Station, entrained and left there about 12 noon. The scenery was very pretty here as we were getting among hills. The heat was terrific and we were packed in like sardines, but we were supplied with hand fans, soda water and a block of ice to each carriage so we got along fairly well.

Saturday 26 May

Tank 5 am; here we had plenty of work, unloading the trucks and reloading again on to the bullock waggons. After that we marched about three miles to our camps (tents). Here we had more work unloading bullock waggons; after that was finished we were allowed to have some food, the first since 4 am, and it is now about 4 pm so you can guess we were pretty fagged out.

After that we were allotted to our various tents and were not long in getting to sleep.

Sunday 27 May.

More fatigue work until 12 noon and then we were finished for the day. Our Platoon were put on Inlying Picquet all night (myself included). Each Company supplies a like picquet all round the camp in case of an attack or alarm. This was quite necessary as were now in the enemy's territory and the Mahsuds had previously made a raid on Tank.

We also had orders from now onwards to always have our rifle sling tied around our body or to our arms when sleeping, as rifle thieves were always about.

Monday 28 May

Reveille 5 am. Battalion drill from 5.30 am to 7.30 am; after breakfast fatigue work to 10 30 am. Drill again 5.30 am to 6.30 am. Night in.

Tuesday 29 May

Ditto.

Wednesday 30 May

Route march 5.30 am to 8 am. After breakfast more fatigue work to 10.30 am, myself on Main guard at night for 24 hours.

Thursday 31 May

Main guard all day.

Friday 1 June

Battalion Drill 5.30 am to 8.30 am and again from 5.30 pm to 6.30 pm.

Saturday 2 June

Ditto.

Sunday 3 June

Making a road from railway station to camp, hard and warm work.

Monday 4 June

Ditto.

Tuesday 5 June

Pack up camp ready for moving.

Wednesday 6 June

Still packing up. 9th Platoon on Inlying Picquet until midnight.

Thursday 7 June

Battalion left Tank 2 am and marched about 8 miles along road to Zam Fort; arrived there 5 am. We intended having breakfast there, but firing was heard and news came through that a picquet of Ghurkas had been surprised and attacked by 300 Mahsuds; we at once fell in again and issued with fifty more rounds of ammunition and started off to the scene of the trouble. 'A' Company, who were acting as advance guard, were pushed on in front in open formation while the main body marched in column of route. As we were going along we passed several wounded Ghurkas staggering back to their Fort, some wounded in the leg, some in the face and arms. Soon we came to the place where the fighting was, but the Mahsuds were being driven back to the hills by the remainder of the Ghurkas and our advance Guard, 'A' Company. We had a long stop here and we saw some awful sights; dead Ghurkas and Mahsuds lay all over the place and one British Officer of the Ghurkas lay wounded, tended by the Doctor, but the poor fellow died later on. Now I come to the awful part of it. While we were halted here, some Ghurkas came out to bring in their dead and wounded and as they passed a dead Mahsud they would strike a match and set his beard and hair alight; some of them got their knives out and slashed away at them, cutting them terribly. Another thing I saw was a dead Mahsud who was knelt against a tree as if in prayer and he was all in flames.

All this I saw with my own eyes so I know it's true. One chap in our Platoon fainted right away.

Well that was our first taste of warfare and I can assure you it was not a pleasant one, but we started off again without any breakfast. We were now among the hills, so we marched along the river bed which was all stones, making it very hard marching. We trudged along for another 8 miles without any more trouble and we climbed a big slope on to a plateau and here made our camp; this was called Kirkee. We put up tents and after a bit of work we had some food, the first since early morning, and then turned in.

Friday 8 June

Reveille 3.30 am. Struck tents and packed up, had breakfast and at 6 am started on the march again on the river bed. Here we had to cross the river, which was about knee deep, about 40 times in ten miles it was so winding, and we arrived at Jandola about midday with sore feet and knocked up. Pitched tents and fatigue work and then food and rest.

Jandola was our advanced Base and it was here our Division concentrated.

Now I will tell you what constituted our Division.

Lines of Communication (General Baldwin's Brigade)	Fighting Forces (General Beynon in Command)		
	Divisional Headquarters	43 rd Brigade	45 th brigade
1 Squadron Alwar Lancers	Headquarters and Divisional Action	½ Squadron 11 th Lancers	½ Squadron 11 th Lancers
94 th Infantry Regiment Native	No. 35 Division Signal Company	2 Sections 30 th Mountain Battery	23 rd Mountain Battery
Indian Base Depot 1 Wireless Station	1 Wireless Station	1 Section 1 st Mountain Battery	11 th Company Sappers and Miners
1/24 th Baluchis Regiment	1 Troop 11 th Lancers	7 th Company Sappers and Miners	2/6 th Sussex Regiment
107 th Pioneers		1 st Battalion 54 th Sikhs	55 th Copes Rifles
1 Wireless Station Tank		1 Battalion 1 st Nepalese Rifles	2/1 st Gurkas
21 st Punjabis Regiment		No. 38 Brigade Signal Section	No. 38 Brigade Signal Section
Brigade Signal Section		No. 38 Brigade Supply Column	No. 38 Brigade Supply Column
Divisional Company Sappers and Miners		1/25 th London Regiment	1 Wireless Station

Saturday 9 June

Fatigues and guards.

Sunday 10 June

Quiet day, 9th Platoon on Inlying Picquet at night.

Monday 11 June

Bathing parade 7 am, after breakfast Fatigues, myself Kitchen Orderly all day. Issued with dose of quinine.

Tuesday 12 June

At 2.30 am sniper on hill fired at camp, nobody injured; battalion march out at 5.30 am, attack village and destroy crops and fought rearguard action coming back to camp: two native casualties. 'C' Company not in the sport as we were advance guard.

Wednesday 13 June

Left camp 5.30 am to picquet the heights, for Sappers and Miners who were making a road and camel track; returned 3 am, no excitement, no enemy in sight.

Thursday 14 June

Late Reveille 6 am, Medical Inspection 8 am, rested all day. 6 pm struck tents ready for moving in morning. 9th Platoon picquet the fort all night.

Friday 15 June

Brigade left Jandola 5.30 am, 'C' Company forming rear-guard, marched nine miles along river bed, crossed river 47 times. Arrive Hidriad Kuch 6 pm, built perimeter camp, had tea and turned in.

I suppose I had better explain a bit what a perimeter camp is. The camp is square, each Battalion is allotted a portion of the square and its duty, immediately on reaching a fresh camp, is to build a wall a certain length according to how much is allotted to it. The wall is built by placing large stones on top of one another in a long double line about four feet high and inside the wall we dig a trench a foot wide and one foot deep, to enable us to lie in it. The earth from the trench is shovelled in between the two rows of stones and, on the completion of it, makes fine head covering. Every night one platoon from each Company is found to man these trenches, find sentries certain distance from each other, say about 20 yards, and the rest sleep in the trenches, wet or fine and very often wet. These are called the Inlying Picquet.

Saturday 16 June

Brigade raid and burn village two miles and destroy crops, smash up everything we can and load up mules with all wood we can find as we are very scarce of fuel. This village is called Mamzall and where I got the Curio I am sending you.

Sunday 17 June

Battalion picquet heights for Sappers and Miners who are roadmaking; return at 5.30 am. All we had that day from the time we went out to 6 pm was half a loaf and tiny bit of fat salt bacon for breakfast.

Monday 18 June

Brigade left camp 5.30 am, marched over hills five miles, destroy five villages; very little opposition, one casualty 'B' Company from sniper on near hill. Return to camp 4.30 pm very tired. Pack up camp.

Tuesday 19 June

Left Mamzall 6 am and marched about three miles and came in touch with enemy. We did not have much fighting ourselves, as Sikhs Regiment were in front as advance guard: they dealt with the Mahsuds that day, our Battalion forming main body. Enemy give us trouble all the way to next camp, Barwand eight miles away. On arriving at camp, our Platoon were sent out on picqueting a hill, to drive off party of the enemy who were firing on camp.

We got on to our hill and opened fire on them and eventually drove them off, but we had one casualty, one man slightly wounded in the ear. We were relieved by Ghurkas about 5 pm so we went back to camp, had grub and turned in. Snipers fire at camp all night.

Wednesday 20 June

Pack up again and Brigade move off at 6 am to another camp, Ispana Raza; arriving here our Company had orders to attack a ridge held by a strong party of Mahsuds. We were absolutely tired out and had no water in our bottles, but we started out and attacked the ridge, finally drive the enemy off, and we gained the top and were at once met by a hail of bullets from the enemy who were now on another ridge opposite us. We opened fire on them, but they kept up a steady fire on us, when suddenly a bullet caught one chap of our Platoon in the leg; he was taken down and dressed. Soon after another chap quite close to me was hit in the head; he dropped to the ground and poor chap he died shortly afterwards. I helped to dig his grave and bury him next day. Another chap soon after was hit in the cheek. We still kept up a steady

fire on the enemy, and about 4 pm their firing suddenly ceased and we had orders to retire to camp. We were thankful enough as we were thoroughly knocked out. On returning to camp we met a party of the Sussex who gave us a cheer and better still gave us a drink of water each as we were absolutely parched. The next day the General congratulated us on our bit of work and said it was most helpful to the Division. We had a midnight attack on the camp; our Lewis guns opened fire on them and drove them off after a time. One mule killed only.

Thursday 21 June

'C' Company supposed to have a rest but had to go out about eleven o'clock to reinforce 'B' Company who were being hard pressed on a small scrap. Captain Paget of 'B' Company was seriously wounded in the face and one man killed and four wounded of 'B' Company in this scrap.

Friday 22 June

Left camp 5.30 am to picquet heights for convoy coming in, 9th Platoon on a picquet, fired on by snipers, nobody injured, back to camp 4 pm, on fatigue work until 7 pm. Quiet night.

Saturday 23 June

Brigade leave camp 5.30 am and march to next camp Bozi Khal, about 8 miles away, Ghurkas and Sussex picqueting heights for us. Ghurkas meet enemy and lost fifteen men, Sussex two men wounded. Men were wanted to go out at 10 pm to bring in wounded. Jim and I and four others volunteered, go out and bring in two badly wounded men, one die in morning. This was very hard and tiring work.

Sunday 24 June

9th Platoon on Outlying Picquet from 5.30 am to 6.30 pm, very little food and water all day, bully beef and dry biscuits. Brigade goes out, destroy villages and crops. Did some good work, no casualties, returned 7 pm.

Monday 25 June

Myself acting as sick corporal for week as Company is short of NCOs, sickness etc, my job having to make out a report morning and evening of the sick men and parade them before Doctor. Brigade goes out 6.30 pm 'strafing' and return about 4 pm, Mahsuds following and sniping all the way home. Sikh Battalion, who were acting as rear guard, had several casualties.

Tuesday 26 June

Rest day, surprise in store for us, double mail arrives after being three weeks without one. 9th Platoon on Inlying Picquet at night.

Wednesday 27 June

Another rest day for us. Mahsuds very quiet.

Thursday 28 June

Packing up ready for moving further up the line in the morning. Two men wounded while at Latrines. 9th Platoon on Outlying Picquet at night.

Friday 29 June

Brigade moves from camp at 5.30 am, march six miles to another camp, name unknown. At once built perimeter wall, after that pitch tents and various other jobs until 6 pm. Our platoon has night off for a change.

Saturday 30 June

'C' & 'D' Companies out to picquet for convoy coming in to camp with supplies. 9th Platoon on highest hill of course, myself detailed to take nine men to an advanced sangar which is occupied by Ghurkas. Got quite pally with Johnnies, exchange cigarettes for chippatis. These things are part of the natives' daily meal; they are made of crushed Indian corn and fried in grease; they are flattened out into the form of pancakes before cooking, by continual flattening with the hands. They taste very nice, especially when one is very hungry. The best chippatis are made by the Sikhs, who are the cleanest native troops, and we used to buy them from the Sikhs at two annas each.

Sunday 1 July

Quiet day, bathing parade, rifle inspection, 9th Platoon on Inlying Picquet, myself in charge of sentry group.

Monday 2 July

Reveille 4 am. Built extra wall round camp, as it had been garrisoned by native troops for some time. Mahsuds send in delegates to say they have had enough and wish for conference to talk of peace terms.

Tuesday 3 July

Conference held by Mahsuds and our G.O.C. and Political Agent. One of the terms is for them to hand over a certain number of rifles, service and otherwise, which they had stolen at different times. Terms, we understand, are favourable which naturally cheers us up a bit.

Wednesday 4 July

'C' and 'B' Companies picquet heights for convoy, arrive back 5 pm. Myself and two others on mule picquet all night.

Thursday 5th July

Rest day, bathing parade, 6 am to 7 am.

Friday 6 July

Outlying picquet 5.30 am to 7 pm. Quiet day except very hot.

Saturday 7 July

Mahsuds to send in 200 rifles in five days, otherwise we carry on with campaign. Myself with 24 others picked for guard of honour when the rifles come in.

Sunday 8 July

Special guard parade to practice 'present arms' etc; red tape of course.

Monday 9 July

Ditto.

Tuesday 10 July

Battalion drill for a change.

Wednesday 11 July

Fifth day, rifles not arrived, have orders to pack up camp in evening to carry on strafing. 4 pm party of Mahsuds arrive with required number of rifles, special guard turn out at once and proceed to river bed where the ceremony is to take place; we do what is required of us.

Thursday 12 July

Whole Division receive orders to pack up at once ready for moving in morning.

Friday 13 July

Division starts back at 5.30 am and arrive at Hiadriad Kuch 3.30 pm. Raining hard all day, absolutely knocked up; issue of rum at night. I managed to get mine down somehow.

Saturday 14 July

Bathing Parade, rest day.

Sunday 15 July

Drum Head Divine Service, the first since we left Jullundur. I did not attend as I was put on as acting Sick Corporal for the week again.

Monday 16 July

Battalion picquet heights for Baluchis Battalion, 'C' Company rear guard, nothing doing.

Tuesday 17 July

Division leaves Hiadriad Kuch and march back to Mamzall (another step nearer civilization) arrive there 4 pm pretty well knocked up but smiling.

Wednesday 18 July

9th Platoon on Outlying Picquet from 6 am to 7 pm. No trouble from enemy.

Thursday 19 July

On Outlying Picquet.

Friday 20 July

Picqueting heights for Political Agent on his way to Sawak Plra (?) where Mahsuds are still inclined to be troublesome; left camp 6 am, return 4 pm.

Saturday 21 July

Battalion picquet heights for convoy, have very exciting time today. Two Companies of Londons in narrow gorge, when signal message comes through, that spate is rushing down river bank; Companies at once make for high ground, but not before the spate was upon us. A spate is a huge rush of water coming from the mountains, sometimes rising to a height of 12 feet in places. Well before our mule drivers could get all the mules up, the water was upon them; they just managed to swing the Lewis guns clear, but two of the poor beasts were carried away with nearly 2000 rounds of ammo and panniers etc.

There were also three or four natives carried away and most probably drowned or dashed against the rocks in the rush. It was a most anxious time and if it had not been for the signallers most of us would no doubt have been drowned; as it was, not one of our chaps were touched. We were glad enough when we got back to camp at 4 pm for we were absolutely knocked up. We had another dose of rum at night before turning in.

Sunday 22 July

Church Parade (drumhead) and Inlying Picquet at night.

Monday 23 July

Inoculation 9 am, 48 hours rest.

Tuesday 24 July

Rest.

Wednesday 25 July

Ditto.

Thursday 26 July

Battalion picquet heights for convoy. 9th Platoon on big hill. On getting to top of hill find one man missing; myself and Joyce go look for him, find him halfway down hill, knocked up; bring him up to picquet.

Friday 27 July

Nothing important from now to 11th August, only Drill, Fatigues and various other duties etc.

Saturday 11 August

Left Mamzall Camp 6.45 am, arrived back at Jandola 4 pm, marched 11 miles, knocked up.

Sunday 12 August

Left Jandola 6.30 am, farewell speech by General. Arrive Zam Fort 5 pm, 18 miles over hills, myself absolutely knocked up. I fell out with any amount of other chaps about 3 miles from Zam Fort, rode the rest of the way on camel. In my case I had a touch of sun, as I saw the Doctor at Zam and, my temperature 102 degrees, dosed with quinine, all 'tiki' next morning.

Monday 13 August

Left Zam Fort 6 am, arrived Tank 9.30 am; tents already put up for us near station; should entrain at 5 pm, but dam bursts and floods the place and washes away part of railway track, so we are delayed. Am sending snaps of the flood, they will give you some idea of it.

14, 15, 16 August

Living and sleeping in train while railroad is being completed.

Friday 17 August

Railway track finished, entrain at Tank for 10 pm.

Saturday 18 August

Arrive Kalabagh 4 am, detrained and cross Indus by steam ferry and march to rest camp at Mari-Indus near railway. YMCA at this camp, tea cocoa, lime juice and plenty to eat; very cheap, quite a treat, gramophone to pass away time. Entrain at Mari-Indus 9.45 pm for Jullundur.

Sunday 19 August

Arrived Jullundur 3 pm. Plenty of work unloading trucks, march to barracks where good meal awaits us. Of course reaching barracks we gave a rousing cheer for we knew where we were going to get a good meal and to get a good sleep, not on the hard stones of the river bed, or the top of a hill all night.

Well that finishes my diary on our Campaign in Waziristan; it is very rough I know and not half in it of what we have been through, as it is most difficult to explain the frontier way of fighting on paper so am afraid shall have to leave it as it is.

It was a most trying experience, but I am glad now I went through it, but do not want to do so again.

W. Strange
9th Platoon 'C' Company
1/25th London Regiment.