

CHAPTER XVII

A STUNT FOR THE VICEROY

IN April, before it had got too hot, we had a visit from the Viceroy and Lady Chelmsford, accompanied by General Campbell, from Peshawar. The latter looked after His Excellency to begin with, while I was told to devote myself to the lady. After getting into the crow's nest above Shabkadr Fort to view the lie of the land all round, the programme was to motor to a blockhouse of regular British infantry, then one of Indian infantry, and finally one of Territorials. Tea was to be taken later with the Frontier Constabulary at Matta Fort, which was situated about one thousand yards in rear of the Territorial section of the outposts.

At the first blockhouse I had arranged a "stunt" with Major Clifton's armoured cars on the Mohmand side of the live wire. Some trenches were dug about eight hundred yards from the fence, and small targets put up to represent an enemy. The bottom of each trench was secretly filled with British soldiers dressed up as tribesmen.

At a given signal the three cars got going, and did some pretty shooting with Maxims and rifles, *on the move*. I had the Viceroy and his party just across the wire on the enemy side, and stopped the firing by a "G" on the bugle when we seemed to have had enough. On the cars ceasing to fire at the targets, out jumped wild parties of tribesmen from the trenches, waving standards, shouting, firing (blank!) and brandishing their rifles!

The soldiers, entering into the spirit of the affair, acted splendidly, and General Campbell's face for a few seconds was well worth seeing. The look of horror and consternation at what he thought for a moment was a Mohmand

surprise, and his glance of distress at me for not having taken better precautions, nearly choked me.

Lord Chelmsford looked rather astonished and somewhat amused, while Her Excellency, putting up her parasol, gasped, and opened her eyes very wide. Meanwhile the armoured cars, getting over the rough undulating ground with their Rolls-Royce chassis at a good pace, manœuvred to turn the enemy's flank, coming into action at some rocks and boulders, well over the heads of the imitation tribesmen, who then bolted with yells of scorn. It was quite a good little show, and Clifton managed it very well.

Meanwhile, I was dying for a smoke, but didn't see how I could get it in such exalted company, until a delay occurring with a motor breakdown, General Campbell took Lady Chelmsford off to look at a pet subterranean cook-house of mine, while the Viceroy, seating himself on a boulder, pulled out an old black pipe, and began to fill it. This enabled me to follow suit.

Now I had not been too comfortable about the visit to Matta Fort and the adjoining territorial blockhouse. There was some enemy high ground within two thousand yards, from which a good deal of sniping had taken place from time to time. It is true that the Mohmands, with superb insolence, had sent in word to the Chief Commissioner that they had decided not to interfere with the Viceroy's visit (!), but it did not do to take chances.

Sending a strong piquet to the high ground, the guns were hidden in the vicinity of this very blockhouse, to be ready in case of emergency, and also to assist the eventual withdrawal of the piquet. On entering the blockhouse a staff officer pressed a piece of paper into my hand. Covertly scanning it, I found it contained the information that a party of fifty Mohmands was approaching this piquet from the further side, and firing on them.

Whispering the news to General Campbell, I begged him to hurry things up a bit, and myself tried to hustle Lady Chelmsford in her rounds. But not a bit of it. Were these not Territorials? and hadn't her husband recently belonged to the force? She wanted to know about everything. She would inspect the rifle batteries. She insisted on seeing what kind of view the sentries got, etc., etc.

When, however, she mounted into a bastion and began

a leisurely conversation with a Northumbrian "look-out" on the value of his Zeiss glasses, I lost patience altogether and begged her to hasten. Her reply was that she was enjoying it immensely, and what was the hurry? I then told her bluntly about the Mohmand party, and that I wanted to get the Viceroy away quickly. At this she turned about like a shot, went down the awkward steps of the bastion at a double, and was soon outside.

But apparently she never said a word to Lord Chelmsford, for sitting alone with him at tea, he dawdled over it as if there were no need to get back to Peshawar at all. While I was dying to be rid of them, so as to whip out the guns and withdraw the piquet before it was dark.

The Viceroy's train left Peshawar at 10 p.m., and long before that I was able to report by telephone to General Campbell the safe withdrawal of the piquet with only one or two casualties. He told the Viceroy all about it at the station, and the whole party were greatly interested.

Shortly afterwards the line was taken over by other troops and I returned to Abbottabad, where I found the Nepalese contingents much advanced in training and the two mountain artillery and four Gurkha depots (of two battalions of 5th and two of 6th, all overseas) doing splendid work.

This is no place to discuss the tactics required for successful frontier warfare. Ruse and stratagem, however, are valuable at times, but when it is a case of *movement* you must see that you have the *antidote*, if things do not pan out exactly as you expected. The great Lumsden, the father of the Guides, was a past master in frontier artifice, but the tribesmen were much simpler than they are now, and many of his plans for deceiving them have been taken to heart and handed down.

For years they would never approach a piquet of the Guides isolated on a height, without the most extraordinary precautions. This because of Lumsden's ruse, at first very successful, of teaching the piquet to retire somewhat ostentatiously, only to assemble rapidly in the first dead ground. Approaching the top again the men would lie doggo just short of the crest, until the unsuspecting enemy, taking possession of it, was rushed with the bayonet.

It will always be a matter of regret to me that I was unable to ascertain with certainty the exact result of a

ruse at Michni during the Mohmand blockade. The blockhouse on my extreme left, and some half-mile beyond Michni Fort, was being subjected to continual sniping from vantage posts some eleven hundred to thirteen hundred yards away in tribal country.

It was held by a platoon of the 1st Royal Sussex and was a post I much wanted to move. Indeed it was while examining ground for a new site that I had to beat so ignominious a retreat through the barbed wire! We knew that the bands of snipers came from an adjoining village, visible from the blockhouse, and distant under three thousand yards from Michni Fort.

The sniping became so persistent that the men were hit if they moved outside, even to the cook-house along a communicating trench. The village had been partially destroyed by my predecessor some two months before, but re-occupied and repaired. Owing to a reported gathering close to, I was refused permission to go out and effectively raze it to the ground. Knowing that the tribesmen invariably collected all the lead they could find, to make up into bullets, etc., I gave the following orders:

A mountain artillery battery to move to Michni early next day with two armoured cars; the battery to "register" the village, but without trying to do damage, plumping the shell on a gentle slope *short* of the village, and very plainly visible with glasses from this end blockhouse. I arranged to go out myself to Michni from Shabkadr (about nine miles) with a larger cavalry escort than usual, after breakfast.

At 3 p.m. the armoured cars, the battery (including all the mules, but less the six guns and sufficient men to manhandle them), myself and escort, to return to Shabkadr, raising as much dust as possible. The battery commander to take up his post in the end blockhouse to control his fire by telephone when the right moment came; the guns themselves being then in a position of observation for indirect fire outside the fort, and quite invisible.

It will be hardly necessary to explain that my idea was to convey to the tribesmen the impression that we had finished our day's work, and, together with the guns, etc., had left Michni. I knew from former experience that all movements would be reported by their wonderfully rapid and efficient method of communicating news, by means

of spies and look-out men in every tree, and on every height.

About 6 p.m., as I had anticipated, all the men in the village turned out with blankets and any kind of vessel to collect the precious bullets. When they were really busy at their work, the battery commander let fly, and so rapid was his fire that, even with the old ten-pounder, he had twelve shell in the air before the first one reached its objective. Officers posted in the blockhouse with glasses declared that the firing was wonderfully good and the casualties extremely heavy. The Mohmands, however, would never admit this, though the fact remains that Number 43 Blockhouse—the one in question—was sniped no more.

There is nothing more fascinating than trans-border warfare. The wild and difficult country, the manly and hardy tribesman, the uncertainty regarding his movements, the element of surprise, the necessity for ceaseless vigilance, the calls that are made on the stamina of the troops and on one's own endurance, all tend to bewitch and allure. To try and compare it with trench warfare on the Western Front is, of course, ridiculous. One may be aptly termed a *hideous nightmare*, and the other a very *dangerous sport*.

The late summer of 1917 saw me transferred from Abbottabad to Army Headquarters again—this time as Inspector of Infantry for the South of India and Burma. As the area included all infantry in the Lucknow, Secunderabad, Mhow, Poona and Burma Divisions, as well as the Defended Ports of Bombay, Calcutta, Karachi and Madras, there was a considerable amount of travelling to be done by railway, by river and by road.

Delightful as it was to have the opportunity of visiting the south of India and Burma, which I had never seen, and interesting and instructive as the work would surely be, still, to leave Abbottabad and part with the Nepalese contingent, the six splendid depôts, and the two Gurkha battalions camped twenty-four miles away, was a great wrench. Besides, this was the separation from the mountain warfare school which it had been such a pleasure to visit occasionally.

At that time, in India, force of circumstances had greatly increased the number of troops under certain brigadiers until, what with Indian depôts of enormous

strength, British reserve battalions, newly-formed units, and odds and ends of every kind, brigadiers were sometimes responsible for as many men as were formerly contained in two or three Divisions. The Bangalore brigade, for instance, under General Iggulden, comprised at one time between sixty and seventy thousand troops, while affiliated to my so-called brigade at Abbottabad, in May, 1917, was the equivalent of five brigades, as below, with units scattered all over the place.

1. Abbottabad Brigade (three units at or near Abbottabad, one in the Murree Hills).
2. Third War Brigade (one unit Abbottabad, one Murree Hills, one Hoti Mardan, one Cherat, near Peshawar).
3. First Brigade Nepal Contingent (Kakul, near Abbottabad).
4. Second Brigade Nepal Contingent (Kakul near Abbottabad).
5. Forty-sixth (Reserve) War Brigade (one unit Dagshai in Simla Hills, one Nowshera, one Lahore Cantonment, one Fort William, Calcutta).

The last brigade was formed in case it was necessary still further to reinforce General Beynon's Waziristan Force. It was not eventually required and was never concentrated, but I was directed meanwhile to inspect each unit. The staff detailed belonged to other generals who, being themselves overwhelmed with work, did not at all see the point of parting with a single staff officer even for a short period. Eventually I cajoled one brigadier (R. E. H. Dyer, of Amritsar notoriety later on) into sparing the officer warned as brigade major (Major H. E. Weekes, roth Gurkhas), and we got round, with some difficulty, in about the hottest part of the hot weather.

It had been the abnormal increase in infantry strengths, especially in the south of India, and the enormous number of young soldiers in all stages of preparation, coupled with the difficulty of finding officers and others capable of instructing them, that had necessitated the appointment of two inspectors of infantry. My colleague in the north was Brigadier-General Gerald Christian, late of the Yorkshire Regiment. As inspectors of infantry spent a large portion of their time in the train—indeed, I

had to make journeys sometimes covering four and five consecutive days—we were allowed inspection carriages containing kitchen, pantry, servants' compartment, etc., besides accommodation for ourselves and staff. The first allotted to me was much too small altogether. Besides my staff officer, there was my wife as well as her maid and the cook, butler, dressing-boy and orderly.

Old Christian having snaffled the only bigger one available, I threw myself on the benevolence of Sir Lawless Hepper, over whose railway (Great Indian Peninsular) a lot of running had to be made. The result exceeded all expectations, for on my second tour I walked into a tourist car, at the broad-gauge terminus below Simla, over sixty feet long, with all sorts of bogie wheels, a kitchen, pantry, servants' quarters, dining-room to hold twelve, two four-berthed compartments, one coupé, excellent big bathroom and a smaller one.

It was one of the cars built for American tourists "doing" India, but who were tabooed during the war. Keeping it during the whole tenure of my appointment, we got quite attached to it. There were two drawbacks, however, one being that its size misled passengers into taking it for a refreshment car, and I was always meeting thirsty individuals in the corridor, at halting stations, looking out for a drink. Secondly, as many as twelve chairs in the dining compartment took up an awful lot of room.

As there was no intention of giving dinner parties, I got rid of these by handing over a pair to the stationmaster at the next junction, then two more further on and, finally, near the centre of India, a third pair. Thinking, on arrival at Bombay, that it was up to me to call and thank Sir Lawless, I drove to his office to do so, in a Government House car, between two inspections. This apparently amused him immensely, for he said to the military secretary:

"How extraordinarily punctilious General Woodyatt is. I did him a very small service by allotting him a tourist car, for which there is no use at present. He then takes the trouble at Bombay to drive up in the Governor's motor to thank me. Moreover, leaving chairs behind, out of his carriage, at half the stations in India, he sends me a wire each time to say where they are!"

This appointment brought us into contact with all sorts of kind and hospitable people, from governors of provinces to depôt commanders. We generally lived in the railway carriage, even during lengthy halts, except at big places like Bombay, Madras or Calcutta, where it would have been impossible. At Bombay and Calcutta—also Darjeeling—we enjoyed the hospitality, respectively, of Their Excellencies, Lord and Lady Willingdon, and Lord and Lady Ronaldshay. The Willingdons' popularity was extraordinary, and, loved and respected as was the Governor, this was nothing to the esteem and affection extended to his lady.

And no wonder, for, added to her charming and attractive personality, was such an energy and such persuasive force as to make her the object of devoted admiration to all her associates. No woman, I am sure, during the whole war, did more for the comfort, and to alleviate the sufferings, of our sick and wounded. Certainly no one had equal success to this end, in persuading people to part with their valuables, their money, and even their personal property.

We have the pleasantest recollections of our visits to Malabar Hill, Bombay, in spite of an atmosphere of very strenuous exertion in which one was obliged to live. The Bombay climate is not invigorating; a three hours' inspection in the early morning, followed by a second in the evening, takes it out of one; reports on units, if not written at once, are apt to accumulate, with consequent confusion. Yet the following actually happened on the night of the first day:

Lady Willingdon. "Now, what is your programme to-morrow?"

Self. "A very early start for Santa Cruz (fourteen miles from Bombay) and back about 10.30 a.m."

Lady W. "And then?"

Self. (Thinking of a cosy chair, in pyjamas, after a bath.) "Well, I've got reports to write and letters to answer."

Lady W. "How long will they take?"

Self. "Oh! I don't know—an hour and a half or so."

Lady W. "I see." (Then a call to an A.D.C. and I'd hear): "Lord —, have a car ready for the general at 12 noon to-morrow, and take him over the Freeman-Thomas

Hospital. As this takes some time, better lunch at the Yacht Club."

Now this hospital, named after their eldest son, killed in the retreat from Mons, occupied some enormous new offices, cajoled out of the owners by this resourceful lady, equipped by her genius, and managed under her personal supervision. It consisted of several storeys, each containing wards about six hundred feet in length, while the basement was a huge Red Cross store—all of which would have to be visited.

Lady W. "And what are you doing in the afternoon?"

Self. "Inspection of the Bombay Battalion, Indian Defence Force."

Lady W. "When will that be over?"

Self. "About 6.30 p.m."

Lady W. "I see." (Another call and I'd hear):
"Captain — You know His Excellency is opening a new Y.M.C.A. branch at 6 p.m., and then we go on to that Cinema rehearsal. Meet the General at — with a car at 6.30 and bring him on to the Y.M.C.A. hut."

Knowing I should be dirty, weary and tired, I had in perspective another vista of pyjamas and cosy chairs before changing for dinner. But I no more dared to think of raising any objection, than I would have dared to enter a lion's den.

To write a chronicle of this wonderful lady's activities in Bombay during the War would take a book by itself, and a very enthralling one, too. Did not the "Queen Mary's Home for Disabled Indian Soldiers" (a most useful and practical institution, and still existing), the beautiful officers' hospital in purple and gold (improvised in the Gaekwar of Baroda's Palace, and commonly known as the "Gilded Cage"), the many women's war societies, and a hundred other establishments in Bombay and Poona, testify to her manifold operations and her amazing energy?

It was the third visit only to Calcutta during my Indian service when inspectorship duties took me there en route to Darjeeling, where we were the guests of the Governor. What struck me at once was the earnestness and industry everywhere apparent in the civil government. With the exception of Lord Curzon, I had come across no high official who put in a longer and more methodical day than Lord Ronaldshay. Both at Darjeeling, and later on at Govern-

ment House, Calcutta, I was astonished at the amount of work he did, at the knowledge he possessed of Bengal and the East generally, and at the grip he appeared to have on all departments of his local government. Served by a military secretary who was a master of his business, everything went like clockwork, and they were very fortunate people who had the honour of being invited to be guests in Government House, Bengal.

Perhaps the most enjoyable of all visits was to the Jhansi brigade as a guest at the house of the brigadier.¹ Enjoyable not only because of the kind hospitality of my hosts, but because he was the first general I had met, except my late divisional commander, who really understood the necessity of "training the trainer."

The method of instruction at Jhansi was a revelation, and I saw nothing else to equal it in India. At most places the utter lack of any system was the weak point. Depôt and other commanders were left to carry on as they thought best. Given a good man it was all right, for he followed the instructions compiled with such care at Army Headquarters. But many had no leaning towards training, and little experience. Here it was left to subordinates, while the real leader busied himself with administration and accounts, of which he had more than he could possibly manage.

General Poore had thoroughly grasped the meaning of "supervision, guidance and control." Every morning he was round somewhere infusing life and spirit into his many units. He had evolved an excellent system of progressive instruction, and being an expert himself with sword, lance, bayonet or rifle (as well as with bat and ball!), the "guidance" was of the greatest value.

He was the first man I knew to see that we must prevent training getting *dull*, and must do all possible to increase the interest and intelligence of the Indian recruit. His system included the novel and most successful experiment of "recruit teaching recruit," which at Jhansi reached a high standard of excellence. Whenever it proved a failure elsewhere, the system was at once blamed, whereas it was not the system that was at fault at all, but the method of supervision.

A very earnest soldier, a deep reader and a strong advocate

¹ Brigadier-General R. M. Poore, C.I.E., D.S.O.

for years of the *straight* sword for cavalry (which by the same token was finally adopted, and in its first "bleeding" went through the Germans like brown paper), it passes comprehension why his services were not utilised in the great war. Instead of that he was left to eat his soul out at Jhansi. A good thing for Jhansi, it is true, as it was impossible for such a man to vegetate, but very hard on the keen soldier.

His name will live long in India amongst trainers of troops, and I dare say he and Lady Flora look back on Jhansi with many happy memories—she because of the lives she brightened amongst British hospital patients and married families, and he because of the memory of thousands of well-trained recruits who owe their efficiency to him.

Burma was a revelation. Nothing that has been written about it, nothing one is told, can in any way convey to the mind the real wonders of the province. The gorgeous beauty of Maymyo,¹ the fairy lakes in Rangoon, the grandeur of the defiles of the Irrawaddy, the splendour of the golden pagodas, the glorious sunsets on the lagoons of Moulmein, together with the gaily-dressed, flower-bedecked, happy, cheery people, combine to make an impression that will last for ever.

Our stay was all too short, and we wished it could have been four months instead of four weeks. I might, indeed, have gone farther up the river to Myitkyina and also have visited the ruby mines. But, being on duty and not on a pleasure trip, it did not appear justifiable to put Government to so much extra expense for the little good I could have done at either place. The same nuisance of a conscience stopped a visit to the Assam hill station of Shillong with only a single depôt. This was a place, too, reported so charming, that I had long wished to see it, and is the only hill station in the whole of India I have never been to.

The great disadvantage of my large area was, it contained no places to speak of where troops were quartered at a high altitude, making it feasible to inspect in the hot weather before the rains. From May to July, travelling by rail is very hot, while sojourning in a stationary railway carriage

¹ A high plateau forty miles from Mandalay and the summer head-quarters of the local government. Called after a Colonel May. In Burmese "myo" denotes "place of" and is equivalent to "abad" or "pur" in India.

is quite impossible. Pointing this out in March, 1928, with the proposal that my area should include the Fourth (Quetta) Division, I was told that I ought to rest a bit at present, but my suggestion would be favourably considered.

Hearing nothing for some weeks, and pressing the C.G.S. for a decision, he asked me to come and see him in three days' time. At my interview he informed me that, as the Derajat¹ independent brigade on the North-West Frontier was to be increased by the addition of the Multan infantry brigade, and as a senior officer was required to command, I had been appointed to it and should join by the 1st May, vice General Beynon, transferred to command the 16th Division at Lahore.

¹ Local name of plain between river Indus and Sulaiman range of mountains. Tract includes and derives its name from the three Deras—i.e. Dera Ismail Khan, Dera Fatch Khan and Dera Ghazi Khan.