

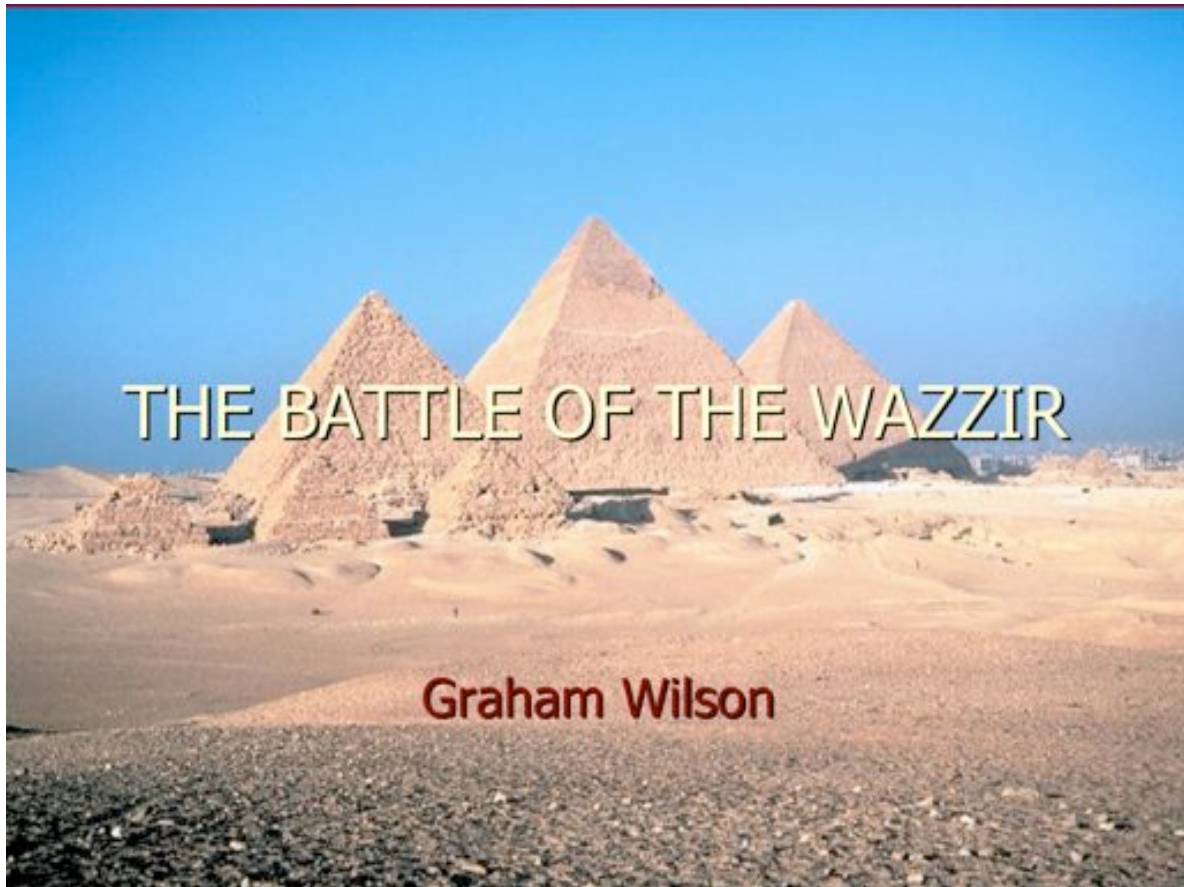


VOLUNTARY GUIDES BACKGROUNDER



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**INCIDENT AT RED BLIND STREET
THE TRUTH ABOUT THE BATTLE OF THE WAZZIR**

A paper presented to the Voluntary Guides of the Australian War Memorial - 4 October 2006

PJH

Graham Wilson

Graham Wilson serviced in the CMF and joined the Regular Army in 1971, serving for the first nine years in the Infantry. In 1979, he transferred to the Intelligence Corps where he remained for 17 years, retiring in 1996 as a Warrant Officer Intelligence Analyst. As well as service throughout Australia, he served overseas in Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, PNG, the USA, UK and Germany.

After retirement from the Army, Graham joined the Department of Defence as a civilian intelligence officer. In 2000-2001, he served as a civilian peace monitor on Bougainville. In 2001, he joined the Directorate of Honours and Awards, where he is now the Historical Research Officer.

Of Dog Bikkies and Dentists



ABOUT THREE WEEKS AGO, I WAS HERE AT THE MEMORIAL SHOWING SOME OVERSEAS VISITORS AROUND. IN THE GALLIPOLI A SECTION THERE WAS A GROUP OF PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN SITTING ON THE FLOOR BEING LECTURED ON THE GALLIPOLI CAMPAIGN. THE WOMAN PRESENTING THE TALK WAS A MEMBER OF THE MEMORIAL'S STAFF BUT I AM FAIRLY CERTAIN THAT SHE WAS NOT A MEMBER OF YOUR GROUP. ANYHOW, AS I WAS EAVESDROPPING SHE TURNED TO A DISCUSSION ON RATIONS, SPECIFICALLY ARMY BISCUITS, AND MADE A STRONG POINT ABOUT HOW HARD THE BISCUITS WERE. THIS LED TO HER ELICITING THE INFORMATION FROM THE KIDS THAT PROBABLY THE BISCUITS WOULD HAVE LED TO DENTAL PROBLEMS. THIS IS QUITE TRUE – THEY DID. HOWEVER, SHE THEN WENT ON TO TELL THEM, WORDS TO THE EFFECT THAT:

“THEY ACTUALLY HAD DENTISTS ON THE BEACH THAT THE MEN WHO BROKE THEIR TEETH ON THE BISCUITS HAD TO BE SENT TO SO THEY COULD BE FIXED UP.”

FALSE – TOTALLY, PATENTLY, DEMONSTRABLY FALSE.

- THERE WERE NO OFFICIAL DENTISTS ON THE BEACH AT ANZAC
- THERE WERE NO OFFICIAL DENTISTS IN THE AIF AT THAT TIME
- MEN WITH DENTAL INJURIES OR COMPLAINTS AT GALLIPOLI THAT COULD NOT BE HANDLED BY EITHER UNIT MEDICAL OFFICERS OR QUALIFIED DENTISTS SERVING IN THE RANKS WHO CARRIED OUT RUDIMENTARY DENTAL WORK IN ADDITION TO THEIR NORMAL DUTIES HAD TO BE EVACUATED TO LEMONS, EGYPT, MALTA OR EVEN ENGLAND.

WHAT'S THE POINT OF THAT LITTLE STORY?

WELL, WE NOW HAVE A WHOLE PRIMARY SCHOOL CLASS WHO HAVE GONE OFF WITH FALSE INFORMATION ABOUT THE GALLIPOLI CAMPAIGN IN THEIR HEADS. HUMAN NATURE BEING WHAT IT IS, SOME OF THOSE KIDS WILL PASS THIS BIT OF MISINFORMATION ON TO MATES, OTHERS WILL PASS THEM ON TO FAMILY MEMBERS, SOME OF THESE WILL PASS THE MISINFORMATION ON AND ALL OF A SUDDEN WE HAVE YET ANOTHER MYTH ABOUT THE AIF. AND THAT'S WHAT I'M HERE TODAY ABOUT – MYTHS.

THE STORY OF THE AIF IS IN FACT FULL OF MYTHS.

YOU'VE ALL HEARD THEM:



- SIMPSON WAS RECOMMENDED FOR A VC BUT DIDN'T GET IT BECAUSE IT WAS RECOMMENDED UNDER THE WRONG CATEGORY.
- MONASH WOULD HAVE BEEN PROMOTED TO OVERALL COMMAND OF THE BEF IF THE WAR HAD GONE ON INTO 1919.
- THE AIF FOUGHT THE FIRST WORLD WAR ON AN UNRELIEVED DIET OF BULLY BEEF, BLACK TEA AND BISCUITS
- THE MEN OF THE LIGHT HORSE SHOT THEIR HORSES AT THE END OF THE WAR RATHER THAN HAVE THEM HANDED OVER TO THE LOCAL POPULATION.

AND SO THERE ARE MANY MORE.



Cairo from The Citadel
Looking towards the Haret-el-Wasser

THE PARTICULAR MYTH I AM GOING TO ADDRESS TODAY IS ONE OF THE MOST WELL KNOWN INCIDENTS IN THE HISTORY OF THE AIF. THIS IS THE SO-CALLED ‘BATTLE OF THE WAZZIR’, AN EVENT, ACTUALLY TWO EVENTS, WHICH OCCURRED IN CAIRO IN 1915. THE ‘BATTLE OF THE WAZZIR’, WHILST ONE OF THE MOST WELL KNOWN INCIDENTS IN THE HISTORY OF THE AIF, IS ALSO ONE OF THE MOST MISUNDERSTOOD, ONE OF THE MOST MISREPORTED AND ONE OF THE MOST MYTHICAL. A FULL TELLING OF THE FACTS AND A STRIPPING AWAY OF LEGENDS AND OUTRIGHT LIES IS VERY MUCH IN ORDER. I HOPE THAT THE INFORMATION I IMPART TO YOU TODAY WILL BE OF USE TO YOU IN YOUR WORK HERE AT THE MEMORIAL.

BEFORE I LAUNCH INTO THE TALK ITSELF, I’LL TAKE A MOMENT TO MAKE CLEAR THE FACT THAT WHILE I HAVE REFERRED TO A NUMBER OF SECONDARY SOURCES IN RESEARCHING THIS PAPER, THE FACTS PRESENTED AND THE CONCLUSIONS DRAWN, ARE TAKEN FROM PRIMARY SOURCES – I.E. OFFICIAL RECORDS AND DOCUMENT HELD IN THIS VERY INSTITUTION.

NOW, I’M SURE EVERYONE HAS HEARD AT LEAST ONE VERSION OF THE STORY OF THE ‘BATTLE OF THE WAZZIR’ AND I’M JUST AS SURE THAT EVERYONE HAS HEARD OR READ AT LEAST ONE INCORRECT TELLING OF THE TALE. BUT, JUST FOR THE SHEER HELL OF IT, I’LL RETELL THE GENERALLY ACCEPTED THEME OF THE INCIDENT.

IN ITS BAREST OUTLINES, THE STORY OF THE ‘BATTLE OF THE WAZZIR’ GENERALLY GOES LIKE THIS:

'The Battle of the Wazzir'

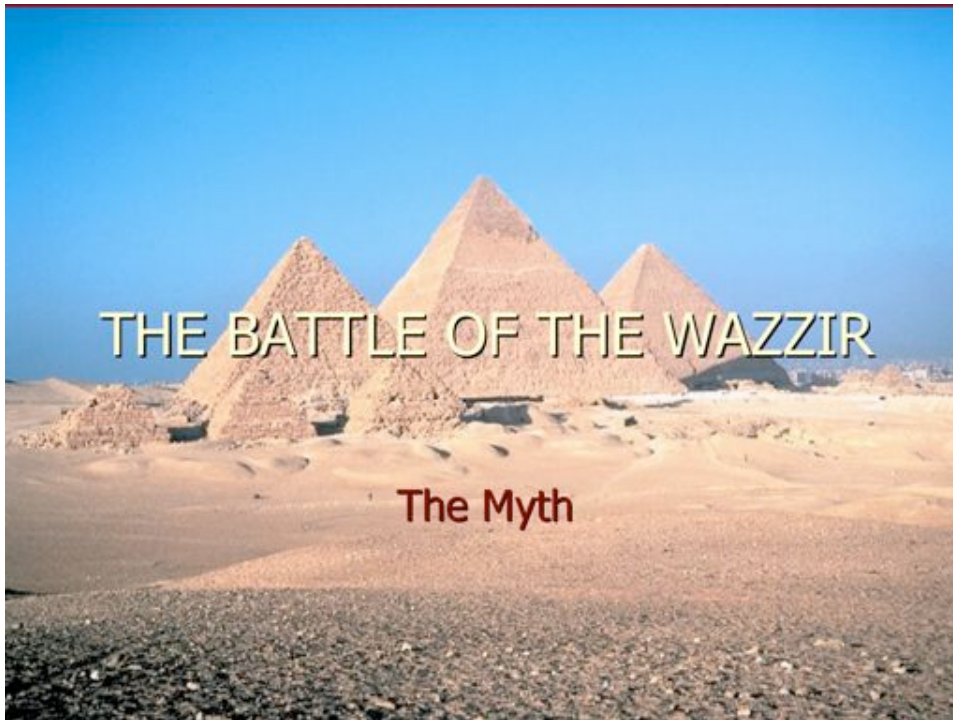


THE 'WAZZIR', MORE CORRECTLY KNOWN AS THE HARET-AL-WASSER, WAS, ACCORDING TO LEGEND, A MAJOR RED LIGHT DISTRICT IN CAIRO. IT ACTUALLY WASN'T, IT WAS JUST A NORMAL COMMERCIAL AND RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT THAT HAPPENED TO CONTAIN A NUMBER OF SEEDY BARS AND BROTHELS, WELL FREQUENTED BY MEMBERS OF THE AIF. THE STORY GOES THAT IN APRIL 1915, SEVERAL THOUSAND DIGGERS, OUTRAGED, AMONGST OTHER THINGS, AT AN INCREASE IN PRICES BROUGHT ON BY THE PRESSURE OF SUPPLY AND DEMAND, DESCENDED ON THE WAZZIR AND BURNED IT TO THE GROUND. THE STORY ALSO TELLS THAT DURING THE 'BATTLE' THE DIGGERS FOUGHT OFF THE CAIRO FIRE BRIGADE, WHO WERE ATTEMPTING TO FIGHT THE BLAZE, GOING SO FAR, WE ARE TOLD, AS TO CHOP UP THE FIRE-HOSES WHEN THEY WERE RUN OUT. VARIATIONS ON THE GENERAL THEME OF THE STORY ALSO RECORD THE AIF BATTLING THE CITIZENS OF CAIRO AND

LEAVING UNTOLD NUMBERS, SOME TIMES REFERRED TO AS HUNDREDS UNCONSCIOUS ON THE FOOTPATHS. WE ARE ALSO TOLD OF RUNNING BATTLES WITH THE MILITARY POLICE. EVENTUALLY, THE STORY GOES, THE RIOT WAS QUELLED BY THE ACTIONS OF THE MILITARY POLICE, DURING WHICH ACTION SHOTS WERE FIRED.

WHO HERE HAS HEARD OR READ SOMETHING ALONG THOSE LINES IN REFERENCE TO THE 'BATTLE OF THE WAZZIR'?

THAT SEQUENCE OF EVENTS IS ACTUALLY QUITE CLOSE TO THE ACTUAL FACTS. HOWEVER, THE NUMBERS INVOLVED ARE ALWAYS HIGHLY INFLATED. THE LEVEL OF VIOLENCE, CONFLICT AND DAMAGE IS ALWAYS OVERSTATED. AND THE REASONS FOR THE OUTBREAK WERE ACTUALLY FAR MORE SORDID THAN THE MYTHOLOGISTS WOULD HAVE US BELIEVE.



FROM MY POINT OF VIEW, AS A MILITARY HISTORIAN, THE MAIN PROBLEM WITH THE STORY OF THE 'BATTLE OF THE WAZZIR' IS NOT THAT IT IS SAID TO HAVE HAPPENED, BECAUSE IT DID, BUT BECAUSE IT IS TOTALLY MISREPORTED AND BLOWN OUT OF ALL PROPORTION. AT THE SAME TIME, AND THIS IS WHAT REALLY ANNOYS ME, IT IS HELD UP AS A SHINING EXAMPLE OF THE 'ANZAC TRADITION'. IN FACT, IT'S ALMOST REGARDED AS THE QUINTESSENTIAL ACTION OF THE AUSTRALIAN DIGGER – AN ACTION TO BE ADMIRERD AND VIEWED WITH PRIDE.

WE ONLY HAVE TO LOOK AT THE COMMENTS OF VARIOUS PEOPLE OVER THE YEARS TO SEE THIS.

'The Battle of the Wazzir' The Myth



FOR EXAMPLE, ON ANZAC DAY 2005, IN A SPEECH TO MEMBERS OF THE 1ST/15TH ROYAL NEW SOUTH WALES LANCERS, TAKING THE THEME OF THE ANZAC SPIRIT, CAPTAIN OF THE REGIMENT TOLD THE TROOPS, AMONGST OTHER THINGS:

‘YES THE BATTLE OF THE WAZZIR IS PROBABLY THE BIGGEST FIGHT IN A BROTHEL AUSTRALIAN SOLDIERS HAVE EVER HAD. THE SOLDIERS, SOME 2,000 IN ALL, ENRAGED BY A RISE IN THE PRICE DUE TO AN INCREASE IN DEMAND AS MORE SOLDIERS ARRIVED IN EGYPT, BAD DRINK AS THE ALCOHOL YOU COULD BUY WAS MOSTLY HOME BREW AND THE TREATMENT SOME OF THEIR MATES GOT WHO CONTRACTED VD, STORMED THE BROTHELS, SOME 8 STORIES HIGH, THREW THE BEDDING AND THE GIRLS DRESSES DOWN INTO THE STREET, SET FIRE TO BOTH THE HOUSES AND THE GEAR.’

HE ALSO TOLD THE TROOPS:

‘STRANGELY, NO WITNESSES AT THE SUBSEQUENT INVESTIGATION COULD RECALL THE NAMES OF WHO WAS THERE. PERHAPS IT WAS THE NEW ZEALANDERS?’

‘The Battle of the Wazzir’ The Myth



IN A SIMILAR VEIN, FORMER A REGULAR ARMY INFANTRY OFFICER NAMED SEAN RICHARDSON WROTE IN THE SYDNEY MORNING HERALD IN 2002:

‘AND FURTHERMORE, YOUR WORSHIP, ONE OF THE MANY FINE BATTLES FOUGHT BY OUR NOW MYTHICAL ANZACS WAS THE BATTLE OF THE WAZZIR, WHEREIN A SOLDIER WAS RIPPED OFF IN A WHOREHOUSE SO THE AIF WENT IN AND BURNT DOWN THE WHOLE CAIRO RED-LIGHT DISTRICT.’

'The Battle of the Wazzir' The Myth



PATSY ADAM-SMITH, IN HER BOOK ON THE AIF 'THE ANZACS' TELLS US THAT:

'ON GALLIPOLI I SOUGHT THE GRAVE OF ONE OF THE DIARISTS: FROM HIS DIARY I HAD REALIZED THAT HE TOOK PART IN THE 'BATTLE OF THE WAZZIR' WHEN 2000 TROOPS RANSACKED AND SET FIRE TO THE BROTHELS IN THE BEST KNOWN STREET IN CAIRO.'

IAN JONES, IN HIS VOLUME ON THE LIGHT HORSE IN THE TIME-LIFE 'AUSTRALIANS AT WAR' SERIES TELLS US:

'CAIRO'S NOTORIOUS RED LIGHT DISTRICT IN THE HARET EL WASSER – A STREET KNOWN TO THE TROOPS AS "THE WOZZA" – SAW A SPECTACULAR RIOT BETWEEN AUSTRALIANS, NEW ZEALANDERS AND THE CAIRO POPULACE, IN WHICH SEVERAL BUILDINGS WERE BURNT AND A GRAND PIANO WAS PUSHED OUT THROUGH THE CASEMENT ONTO A HOSTILE CROWD.'

AS RECENTLY AS 2003, IN THEIR CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED BIOGRAPHY OF HARRY MURRAY, GEORGE FRANKI AND CLYDE SLATYER WROTE:

'ON 2 APRIL 1915, THERE WAS A MAJOR DISTURBANCE IN CAIRO, THE SO-CALLED BATTLE OF THE WAZIR, WHEN 3000 AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND TROOPS RIOTED AND BURNT DOWN SEVERAL BUILDINGS USED AS BROTHELS.'

THESE QUOTES REFLECT THE GENERALLY ACCEPTED VERSION OF THE 'BATTLE OF THE WAZZIR.'

THIS CAN BE CONDENSED TO:

- AUSTRALIANS WERE THE VICTIMS
- THE ACTIONS OF THE AUSTRALIANS WERE RIGHTEOUS AND JUSTIFIABL
- THE ENTIRE HARET EL WASSER SECTION OF CAIRO WAS DESTROYED BY THE AUSTRALIANS AND NEW ZEALANDERS
- THE ANZACS BATTLED AND DEFEATED THE CAIRO MOB TO CARRY OUT THEIR WORK
- THE 'BATTLE' WAS NOTHING MORE THAN A JOKE AND AN EXAMPLE OF AUSTRALIAN HIGH SPIRITS
- THE ACTIONS OF THE AUSTRALIANS ARE TO BE ADMIRIED AS THE EPITOME OF THE 'ANZAC SPIRIT' AND THE SPIRIT OF THE DIGGER

Haret-el-Wasser (‘The Wazzir’)



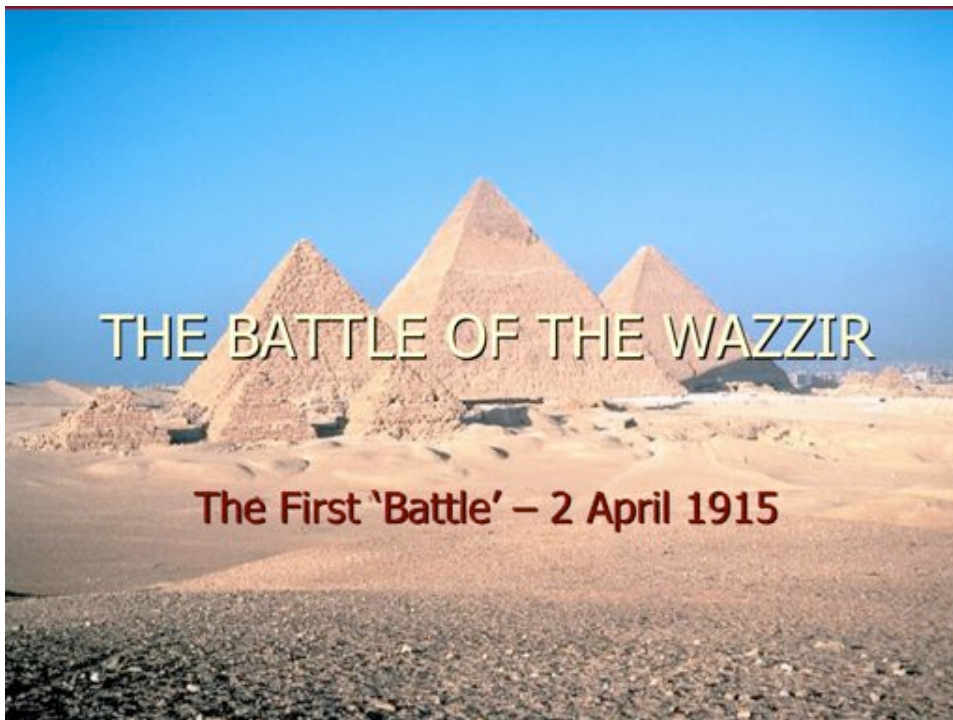
POPPYCOCK!

THE TRUTH IS FAR MORE PEDESTRIAN, FAR MORE SORDID, FAR LESS HEROIC AND RIGHTEOUS, AND CASTES ABSOLUTELY NO CREDIT WHATSOEVER ON THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY.

SEPARATING MYTH FROM FACT

THE FIRST THING THAT MUST BE UNDERSTOOD IN EXAMINING THE MYTH IS THE FACT THAT THERE WERE TWO 'BATTLES OF THE WAZZIR', THE FIRST ON 2 APRIL 1915 AND THE SECOND, FAR MORE SERIOUS THAN THE FIRST, ON 31 JULY 1915.

THE SECOND THING THAT NEEDS TO BE UNDERSTOOD IS THAT NEITHER OF THE 'BATTLES' WERE ACTUALLY RIOTS. INSTEAD, THEY WERE UNDISCIPLINED OUTBREAKS OF HIGHLY LOCALIZED DISORDER ACCOMPANIED BY SOME VIOLENCE.



THE FIRST 'BATTLE OF THE WAZZIR.

' LET'S NOW LOOK AT THE FIRST OUTBREAK, WHICH OCCURRED ON THE AFTERNOON AND EVENING OF FRIDAY, 2 APRIL 1915. AT THAT TIME, A LARGE PROPORTION OF THE AIF IN EGYPT HAD EITHER ALREADY DEPARTED FOR LEMNOS AND THEN, EVENTUALLY, GALLIPOLI, OR THEY WERE GETTING READY FOR IMMINENT DEPARTURE. SO MOST OF THE MEN IN CAIRO ON THE NIGHT AND AFTERNOON OF 2 APRIL WERE EITHER:

- MEN IN UNITS THAT WERE NOT WARNED FOR DEPARTURE FOR THE DARDANELLES
- MEN ON CONVALESCENT LEAVE FROM HOSPITAL OR JUST RELEASED FROM HOSPITAL
- OR MEN WHO HAD BROKEN OUT OF CAMP AGAINST ORDERS.

THE MYTH TELLS US THAT THE FIRST 'BATTLE' BROKE OUT AS THE RESULT OF A SEMI-ORGANISED OR EVEN, ACCORDING TO SOME ACCOUNTS, ORGANISED ASSAULT ON THE HARET-EL-WASSER BY A LARGE BODY OF AUSTRALIANS. THESE MEN, WE ARE TOLD, WERE OUTRAGED AT INCREASES IN THE PRICES OF FOOD, ACCOMMODATION, DRINK AND SEX.

TO SHOW THEIR ANGER, SO THE STORY GOES, THESE MEN BROKE INTO THE BROTHELS, THREW THE FURNITURE AND CLOTHING OF THE PROSTITUTES OUT INTO THE STREET AND SET FIRE TO THESE AND ALSO TO THE HOUSES, BURNING THE WHOLE DISTRICT TO THE GROUND.

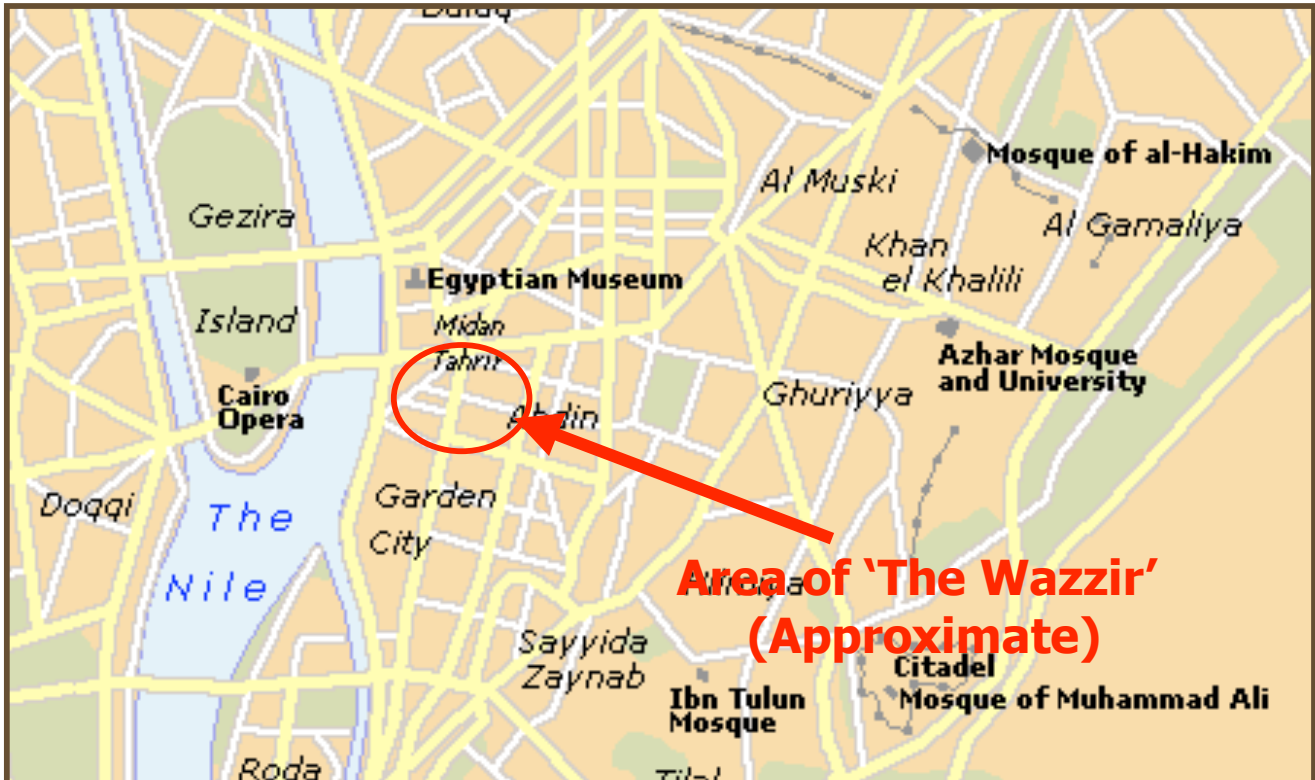
THE FACTS



UNFORTUNATELY FOR THE MYTH AND THOSE WHO WOULD GIVE IT CREDENCE, LIEUTENANT GENERAL SIR J.C. MAXWELL, THE BRITISH COMMANDING GENERAL IN EGYPT, ORDERED AN OFFICIAL COURT OF INQUIRY INTO THE AFFAIR THE VERY NEXT DAY (MAXWELL IS THE OFFICER ON THE LEFT IN THIS SLIDE).




THE COURT WAS PRESIDED OVER BY COLONEL F.E. JOHNSTON OF THE NEW ZEALAND INFANTRY BRIGADE, THE OFFICER IN THE LEMON SQUEEZER HAT IN THIS SLIDE. THE MEMBERS OF THE COURT WERE COLONEL JOHN MONASH OF THE 4TH AUSTRALIAN INFANTRY BRIGADE, WHO IS IMMEDIATELY TO JOHNSTON'S RIGHT IN THE SLIDE, AND MAJOR W.E. SMITH OF THE 1ST/4TH EAST LANCASHIRE REGIMENT, A BRITISH ARMY OFFICER.



ONE OF THE FIRST POINTS WHERE THE MYTH DEVIATES FROM REALITY IS THE FACT THAT IT DID NOT ENCOMPASS THE WHOLE OF THE HARET-AL-WASSER, BEING CONFINED TO ONE SIDE OF ONE STREET, RED BLIND STREET, WHICH IS DESCRIBED AS BEING 'A SMALL ALLEY OFF THE WAGH-EL-BERKA.'

'The Wazzir'

Modern belly dancer
(Egyptian euphemism for prostitute)
(Sorry, couldn't find a picture of the 1915 version!)
This girl is probably from the former Soviet Union.



Caveat Emptor!
(Buyer Beware!)



Local residents cleaning up

THE COURT FOUND THAT THE DISTURBANCE IN RED BLIND STREET GREW OUT OF AN INCIDENT ARISING FROM TWO OR THREE DISGRUNTLED AUSTRALIANS TRYING TO EXTORT MONEY FROM SOME PROSTITUTES. THE MEN SAID THAT THE WOMEN HAD GIVEN THEM VD. WITH A FINE DISREGARD FOR THE MERCANTILE CONCEPT OF 'CAVEAT EMPTOR', THE MEN DEMANDED THAT THE PROSTITUTES REIMBURSE THEM FOR THE WAGES THEY HAD FORFEITED WHILST UNDERGOING TREATMENT FOR VD. THE PROSTITUTES THEMSELVES, OBVIOUSLY BELIEVING (WITH GOOD AND JUST CAUSE) THAT THE AUSTRALIAN SOLDIERS WERE GROWN MEN WHO HAD PURCHASED SEXUAL FAVOURS IN FULL KNOWLEDGE OF THE POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES, REFUSED. AT THIS, THE AUSTRALIANS BECAME MORE AGGRESSIVE AND AT LEAST ONE OF THE DEFENCELESS WOMEN WAS STRUCK DOWN BY AN AUSTRALIAN SOLDIER. THE WOMEN THEN RAN INTO THEIR BUILDING FOR SHELTER, ONLY TO BE FOLLOWED BY THE AUSTRALIANS WHO BROKE DOWN THE FRONT DOOR OF THE BUILDING. THEY THEN BROKE INTO THE WOMEN'S ROOMS AND BEGAN TO THROW FURNITURE AND CLOTHING OUT INTO THE STREET. NEEDLESS TO SAY, THE WOMEN, QUITE UNDERSTANDABLY, PUT UP A FIGHT BUT THEIR RESISTANCE WAS OF LITTLE USE AGAINST THESE 'BRAVE AUSTRALIAN DIGGERS.'

THE NOISE AND SPECTACLE OF THE ORIGINAL DISTURBANCE QUICKLY DREW A LARGE CROWD, LATER ESTIMATED BY THE SENIOR OFFICER OF EGYPTIAN POLICE AT THE SITE AS BETWEEN 5000-6000. HOWEVER, THIS OFFICER, AN ENGLISHMAN, BIMBASHI ARCHER, INSPECTOR OF 'A' DIVISION OF THE CAIRO CITY POLICE, ALSO TESTIFIED THAT AT MOST 300-400 MEN ONLY WERE ACTUALLY INVOLVED IN THE DISTURBANCE. THIS TESTIMONY OF THE

SENIOR CIVILIAN POLICE OFFICER AT THE SCENE IS IN SHARP CONTRAST TO THE GENERALLY ACCEPTED VERSION OF THOUSANDS OF DRUNKEN AUSTRALIANS AND NEW ZEALANDERS RAMPAGING THROUGH THE DISTRICT.

THE DISTURBANCE ITSELF, APART FROM ASSAULTS ON FEMALES, CONSISTED LARGELY OF THROWING FURNITURE AND CLOTHING OUT OF WINDOWS TO THE STREET BELOW. TWO FIRES WERE ALSO DELIBERATELY SET, IN TWO OF THE PROSTITUTES' ROOMS, AND SOME SMALL FIRES WERE ALSO LIT IN THE STREET. HOWEVER, ALL OF THESE FIRES EVENTUALLY WENT OUT OF THEIR OWN ACCORD. THAT WAS PROBABLY FORTUNATE, BECAUSE ONE OF THE FEW PARTS OF THE MYTH THAT COINCIDES WITH THE TRUTH IS THE FACT THAT ELEMENTS IN THE SMALL, HOSTILE PART OF THE CROWD ACTUALLY INVOLVED IN THE DISTURBANCE DID INDEED IMPEDE THE WORK OF THE CAIRO FIRE BRIGADE. HOWEVER, VERSIONS OF THE MYTH THAT INCLUDE STATEMENTS THAT THE CROWD 'BATTLED THE FIRE BRIGADE' AND 'CHOPPED UP THEIR HOSES' DO NOT ACCORD WITH THE TESTIMONY OF THE SENIOR (ENGLISH) FIRE BRIGADE OFFICER AT THE SCENE. SUPERINTENDENT BLAKE OF THE CAIRO CITY FIRE BRIGADE TESTIFIED THAT CERTAIN MEMBERS OF THE CROWD 'IMPEDED' THE WORK OF THE BRIGADE AND SEVERAL HOLES WERE PUNCHED IN FIRE HOSES WITH CLASP

KNIVES; IN ADDITION A SMALL AMOUNT OF DAMAGE WAS DONE TO THE FIRE ENGINE. BLAKE TESTIFIED THAT WHILE NONE OF HIS MEN WERE ACTUALLY STRUCK OR INJURED, HE DECIDED TO PULL BACK WHEN IT BECAME OBVIOUS THAT THE FIRES WERE GOING OUT OF THEIR OWN ACCORD AND WERE OF NO THREAT TO LIFE OR PROPERTY.

SO MUCH FOR THE MYTH OF THE ENTIRE DISTRICT BEING BURNED TO THE GROUND.

The First 'Battle of the Wazzir'



SO, WE DON'T HAVE A DISTURBANCE ENCOMPASSING THE WHOLE OF CAIRO'S RED LIGHT DISTRICT, JUST ONE SIDE OF ONE SMALL STREET. WE DON'T HAVE A SEMI-DELIBERATE OR EVEN DELIBERATE ASSAULT ON THE DISTRICT, SIMPLY A SPONTANEOUS INCIDENT. WE DON'T HAVE THOUSANDS OF MEN RAMPAGING THROUGH THE DISTRICT, JUST A FEW HUNDRED AT MOST. AND WE DON'T HAVE THE DISTRICT BURNING TO THE GROUND, JUST SOME MINIMAL FIRE DAMAGE TO TWO ROOMS.

NOW, WHILE NOWHERE NEAR THE WILD, UNCONTROLLED RIOT THAT MYTH AND LEGEND WOULD HAVE US BELIEVE, THE DISTURBANCE IN RED BLIND STREET WAS SEVERE ENOUGH TO WARRANT THE CALLING OUT OF REINFORCEMENTS. THE ORIGINAL INCIDENT OCCURRED AT ABOUT 1630. AROUND ABOUT 1655 THE ASSISTANT PROVOST MARSHAL OF CAIRO WAS ALERTED BY TELEPHONE AND HE ORDERED THE NEW ZEALAND PICQUET TO MOVE TO RED BLIND STREET.



HE ALSO ALERTED THE OUTLYING PICQUET AT KASR-EL-NIL FOR POSSIBLE MOVE. THE NZ PICQUET MOVED OUT AT 1715 AND THE APM AND BIMBASHI ALEXANDER OF THE CAIRO POLICE MOVED TO THE WAGH-EL-BERKA TO ASSESS THE SITUATION. ON ARRIVAL THEY NOTED THE SIZE OF THE CROWD AND, WHILE ASSESSING THAT

ONLY A SMALL ELEMENT WAS ACTUALLY INVOLVED, DECIDED THAT THE SECURITY TROOPS ON HAND WERE INADEQUATE. THEY DID NOTE THAT THE CIVIL POLICE, AS WELL AS SOME MEMBERS OF THE CROWD, WERE KEEPING THE VIOLENT ELEMENT OF THE CROWD AWAY FROM THE EGYPTIAN CIVILIANS WHO WERE WATCHING THE DISTURBANCE.

The First 'Battle of the Wazzir'



**British Yeomanry Officer
1914-1918**

THE APM CALLED FOR REINFORCEMENTS AND A MOUNTED YEOMANRY SQUADRON ARRIVED ON THE SCENE AT ABOUT 1910, ALONG WITH THE INLYING PICQUET FROM THE CITADEL.

The First 'Battle of the Wazzir'



**British Military
Police
The Citadel - Cairo
1915**

SHORTLY BEFORE THIS, A SMALL FORCE OF BRITISH MILITARY MOUNTED POLICE HAD CONFRONTED THE CROWD AND ATTEMPTED TO GET THEM TO DISPERSE. WHEN HOSTILE ELEMENTS OF THE CROWD ASSAULTED THE MPS WITH STONES AND BOTTLES A VOLLEY OF SHOTS WAS FIRED AT THE FEET OF THE CROWD IN ATTEMPT TO CAUSE THEM TO DISPERSE. WHEN THIS WAS UNSSUCCESSFUL, THE SENIOR NCO OF THE MPS DECIDED THAT HE DID NOT

HAVE ENOUGH MEN ON HAND TO CONTROL THE SITUATION AND THAT THEIR CONTINUED PRESENCE WOULD ONLY SERVE TO INFLAME THE SITUATION AND QUITE SENSIBLY ORDERED A WITHDRAWAL.

The First 'Battle of the Wazzir'



**British Soldier on Guard
Cairo - 1915**



**Shoulder Patch
42nd (East Lancashire) Division**

TWO ADDITIONAL BRITISH BATTALIONS WERE STOOD TO AND WARNED FOR POSSIBLE DEPLOYMENT, HOWEVER, THEY WEREN'T NEEDED. BY 2040 THE SITUATION WAS REPORTED AS ALL QUIET; THE SMALL FIRES HAD BURNED THEMSELVES OUT, HAVING CAUSED MINIMAL DAMAGE; AND THE LARGE NUMBERS OF MEN IN THE CROWD NOT ACTUALLY INVOLVED IN THE DISTURBANCE HAD LARGELY GOT CONTROL OF THOSE CAUSING THE DISTURBANCE. THEY ARGUED OR CAJOLED THE TROUBLE MAKERS INTO CALMING DOWN AND LEAVING THE SCENE.

The First 'Battle of the Wazzir'



MOUNTED PATROLS WERE SENT OUT FROM THE CITADEL TO CHECK FOR ANY OTHER DISTURBANCES AND 112 NEW ZEALANDERS FORMED AS AN INLYING PICQUET AT THE CITADEL IN CASE OF NEED. THE KIWIS WERE NOT IN FACT REQUIRED AND AT 0030 ON 3 APRIL ALL TROOPS WERE WITHDRAWN FROM THE HARET-EL-WASR DISTRICT EXCEPT FOR NORMAL MP PATROLS AND A PLATOON SIZED PICQUET. THE PICQUET WAS WITHDRAWN AT 0130, LEAVING THE DISTRICT TO THE NORMAL MP PATROLS.

The First 'Battle of the Wazzir'



THE COURT OF INQUIRY, AFTER EXAMINING A LARGE NUMBER OF WITNESSES, CAME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT THE DISTURBANCE HAD ARISEN OUT OF THE INCIDENT IN WHICH TWO OR THREE DISGRUNTLED AUSTRALIAN SOLDIERS TRIED

TO EXTORT MONEY FROM SOME PROSTITUTES WHO THEY SAID HAD CAUSED THEM LOSS OF PAY DUE TO CONTRACTION OF VD. THE WOMEN REFUSED TO PAY, AND AT LEAST ON OF THEM WAS STRUCK BY AN AUSTRALIAN. THE 'RIOT' ENSUED WHEN THE SOLDIERS FOLLOWED THE FRIGHTENED WOMEN INTO THEIR BUILDING, DESTROYED FURNITURE AND CLOTHING, THREW MORE OF THE SAME OUT THE WINDOWS AND SET TWO SMALL FIRES IN ROOMS OF ONE BUILDING, AS WELL AS SMALL FIRES IN THE STREET.

The First 'Battle of the Wazzir'



Camp of 2nd Light Horse Brigade
Egypt - 1915



Brigadier General John Monash
Commander 4th Infantry Brigade



Maori Soldier Gallipoli

SEPARATE INQUIRIES WERE CARRIED OUT ON THE SAME DAY BY THE 2ND LIGHT HORSE BRIGADE, THE 4TH INFANTRY BRIGADE AND THE NEW ZEALAND MAORI CONTINGENT. THESE INQUIRIES ALL FOUND THAT NO MEMBERS OF THEIR PARTICULAR FORMATIONS OR UNITS WERE INVOLVED IN THE ACTUAL RIOT, ALTHOUGH A NUMBER OF MEN FROM THE FORMATIONS OR UNITS WERE NOTED AS HAVING BEEN IN THE VICINITY.

Court of Inquiry Findings Disturbance in Red Blind Street 2 April 1915



THE COURT OF INQUIRY FOUND THAT:

- THE DISTURBANCE AROSE ORIGINALLY FROM THE INCIDENT BETWEEN SEVERAL AUSTRALIAN SOLDIERS AND SOME PROSTITUTES
- 5000 – 6000 MEN WERE AT THE SCENE BUT AT MOST 300-400 WERE ACTIVELY INVOLVED
- DAMAGES TOTALED £1,749/5/0
- THE COST OF MAKING GOOD THIS SUM SHOULD BE SHARED BETWEEN THE AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND GOVERNMENTS, AT THE RATIO OF $\frac{2}{3}$ AUSTRALIA $\frac{1}{3}$ NEW ZEALAND.

15 SOLDIERS WERE KNOWN TO HAVE BEEN INJURED, FOUR OF WHOM SUFFERED GUNSHOT WOUNDS RESULTING FROM THE FIRING OF PISTOLS TOWARDS THE CROWD BY MEMBERS OF THE MILITARY MOUNTED POLICE. NONE OF THE WOUNDS WERE SERIOUS AND, ACCORDING TO THE FINDINGS OF THE COURT OF INQUIRY, WERE ALMOST CERTAINLY CAUSED BY RICOCHETS WHEN ROUNDS WERE FIRED AT THE FEET OF THE RIOTERS IN AN ATTEMPT TO DISPERSE THEM. CERTAINLY NO ONE WAS A BADLY INJURED AS THIS MAN HERE APPEARS TO BE.

THUS ENDED OF THE 'FIRST BATTLE OF THE WAZZIR'.



TURNING NOW TO THE 'SECOND BATTLE OF THE WAZZIR'. THE SECOND 'BATTLE OF THE WAZZIR' OCCURRED ON THE AFTERNOON AND EVENING OF 31 JULY 1915. WHAT WE HAVE TO KEEP IN MIND HERE IS THAT IN POPULAR MEMORY AND TRADITION, THERE WAS ONLY ONE 'BATTLE OF THE WAZZIR'. MOST PEOPLE DON'T REALIZE THAT THERE WERE TWO SEPARATE INCIDENTS THAT HAVE BECOME CONFLATED INTO ONE SINGLE INCIDENT IN THE POPULAR MIND.

AS WITH THE FIRST 'BATTLE', UNFORTUNATELY FOR THOSE WHO WOULD HAVE US BELIEVE THE MYTHS GENERATED OVER THE YEARS, THE SECOND BATTLE WAS ALSO SUBJECT TO AN OFFICIAL COURT OF INQUIRY CONVENED, AGAIN AT THE ORDER OF GENERAL MAXWELL, ON 3 AUGUST 1915.

THE COURT OF INQUIRY WAS PRESIDED OVER BY MAJOR GENERAL SPENS, COMMANDANT OF THE AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND TRAINING DEPOT. MEMBERS OF THE COURT WERE COLONEL LINTON OF THE 6TH AUSTRALIAN INFANTRY BRIGADE AND LIEUTENANT COLONEL MACKSEY, COMMANDANT NZ MOUNTED RIFLES BRIGADE DETAILS. IN ATTENDANCE WAS CAPTAIN Y.M. SPENCER-SMITH, THE BRITISH ARMY ASSISTANT PROVOST MARSHALL FOR CAIRO.

AS WITH THE FIRST 'BATTLE', THE COURT FOUND THAT THE SECOND HAD BEEN STARTED BY DRUNKEN, BULLYING AUSTRALIAN SOLDIERS, WHO FELT THAT THEY SHOULD BE RECOMPENSED FOR THE CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR OWN STUPIDITY BY THE SEX WORKERS OF CAIRO.

The 'Second Battle'



THE COURT FOUND THAT THE DISTURBANCE WAS CAUSED INITIALLY BY THE ACTIONS OF FOUR TO EIGHT AUSTRALIAN SOLDIERS WHO ENTERED INTO AN ALTERCATION WITH SOME PROSTITUTES. THEY ACCUSED THE WOMEN OF ROBBING THEM. FOR THEIR PART, THE PROSTITUTES RETALIATED THAT THE SOLDIERS HAD NOT PAID THEM FOR THEIR SERVICES. AS WITH THE FIRST 'BATTLE', THE GALLANT AUSTRALIAN SOLDIERS RESORTED TO VIOLENCE AGAINST THE WOMEN, AT LEAST ONE OF WHOM WAS STRUCK BY AN AUSTRALIAN SOLDIER. AT THAT POINT, AGAIN, THE WOMEN FLED INTO THEIR BUILDING, ONLY TO BE FOLLOWED BY THE SOLDIERS, WHO BROKE DOWN THE DOORS AND APPARENTLY ENTERED ROOMS AS THEY SAW FIT AND COMMENCED TO DESTROY FURNITURE AND CLOTHING. TWO BUILDINGS WERE SET ON FIRE AND THIS TIME THE FIRES ACTUALLY MANAGED TO TAKE HOLD, RESULTING IN THE DESTRUCTION OF FOUR HOUSES PLUS VARYING DEGREES OF DAMAGE TO SEVERAL OTHERS. THERE WERE, HOWEVER, NO DEATHS OR INJURIES CONNECTED WITH THE FIRES AND, AS WITH THE FIRST 'BATTLE', THE ENTIRE DISTRICT WAS CERTAINLY NOT BURNED TO THE GROUND.

ALSO AS WITH THE FIRST 'BATTLE', THE CAIRO FIRE BRIGADE TURNED OUT AND ATTEMPTED, WITH QUITE SOME GALLANTRY GIVEN THE SITUATION, TO DO THEIR JOB. AGAIN, HOWEVER, THEY WERE BARRED FROM DOING THEIR DUTY BY SOME OF THE UNRULY ELEMENTS OF THE CROWD. THIS TIME THERE WAS IN FACT SUBSTANTIAL DAMAGE DONE TO BOTH FIRE HOSES AND FIRE APPLIANCES. DESPITE THIS, MEMBERS OF THE FIRE BRIGADE TESTIFIED THAT A NUMBER OF SPECTATORS ATTEMPTED TO PROTECT THEM AND THEIR EQUIPMENT FROM THE VIOLENT ELEMENTS AND TO ASSIST IN FIGHTING THE FIRES. IN THE END, GIVEN THE DAMAGE TO THEIR HOSES AND EQUIPMENT, THE FIRE BRIGADE WAS FORCED TO PULL BACK. HOWEVER, BIMBASHI JONES OF THE CAIRO CITY FIRE BRIGADE TESTIFIED THAT HE RETURNED TO THE

SCENE WITH TWO FIRE ENGINES AT ABOUT 2145, HAVING BEEN ADVISED THAT THE CROWDS HAD DISPERSED AND HE WAS ABLE TO BRING THE FIRES COMPLETELY UNDER CONTROL, WITH NO HINDRANCE FROM ANYBODY.

The Myth vs the Facts



THE VIOLENT ELEMENTS OF THE CROWD WERE EVENTUALLY DISPERSED BY THE MMP, REINFORCED BY PICQUETS DRAWN FROM THE CAIRO AREA AND THE HARET-AL-WASSER AREA WAS QUIET BY THE 2030. AS WITH THE FIRST 'BATTLE', WITNESSES TESTIFIED THAT WHILE LARGE NUMBERS OF MEN HAD BEEN AT THE SCENE, ONLY A SMALL NUMBER HAD BEEN ACTUALLY INVOLVED IN THE DISTURBANCE. BIMBASHI ARCHER OF THE CAIRO POLICE WAS, NOT SURPRISINGLY, AT THE SCENE OF THE SECOND 'BATTLE' AS HE HAD BEEN AT THE FIRST. WHEN ASKED BY THE COURT HOW MANY MEN WERE ACTUALLY INVOLVED, HE TESTIFIED:

'ABOUT 25 OR 30 WERE ACTUALLY ENGAGED IN CAUSING THE DISTURBANCE.'

CAPTAIN THORN OF THE 4TH LIGHT HORSE BRIGADE TESTIFIED:

'THERE WAS A TREMENDOUS CROWD OF MEN BUT THERE WERE ONLY ABOUT 25 WHO WERE CAUSING THE RIOT. ...THE REST WERE MORE OR LESS LOOKING ON AND OF COURSE, CURIOUS. I DO NOT THINK I SAW AS MANY AS A DOZEN (DRUNK).'

ALSO AS WITH THE FIRST DISTURBANCE, MANY OF THE MEN AT THE SCENE OF THE 31 JULY INCIDENT LENT THEIR ASSISTANCE TO THE MILITARY AND CIVILIAN AUTHORITIES IN ATTEMPTING TO CALM AND RESOLVE THE SITUATION. WE HAVE, FOR EXAMPLE, THE TESTIMONY OF RUSSELL BEY, THE ACTING COMMANDANT OF THE EGYPTIAN POLICE, WHO TESTIFIED:

‘I WENT DOWN RED BLIND STREET TO GET A GENERAL IDEA OF WHAT WAS GOING ON, AND AT THE BOTTOM THERE WAS ANOTHER CROWD OF ABOUT 12 OR 15 MEN AND THEY HAD GOT A FIRE ALIGHT AGAINST THE DOOR AND SHUTTERS OF A HOUSE, AND THEY WERE BASHING IN OTHER DOORS WITH PIECES OF WOOD. I SPOKE TO A DARK SERGEANT OF THE AUSTRALIAN FORCES, AND ASKED HIM COULD HE NOT CALL SOME OF THE MEN TOGETHER AND PUT THE FIRE OUT. I WENT DOWN THE STREET AND ON MY RETURN SOME TIME LATER, FOUND THAT THIS FIRE HAD BEEN EXTINGUISHED. AS IT WAS NOT DONE BY THE FIRE BRIGADE, I PRESUME IT WAS DONE BY THESE VOLUNTEERS.’

THE COURT OF INQUIRY, AFTER TAKING DETAILED AND EXHAUSTIVE EVIDENCE, FOUND THAT:

- THE ORIGINATORS OF THE DISTURBANCE WERE AUSTRALIANS.
- THE WEIGHT OF EVIDENCE WAS THAT MOST OF THE RIOTERS WERE AUSTRALIANS.
- THERE WERE POSSIBLY ISOLATED CASES OF LOOTING BY SOLDIERS OF OTHER NATIONALITIES.
- THE DAMAGES BILL TOTALLED £6,052/7/2.
- ORDERED THAT THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT WAS TO MAKE GOOD THE ENTIRE SUM.

THUS ENDED THE SECOND ‘BATTLE OF THE WAZZIR’.

ONE POINT I’D LIKE TO MAKE HERE ABOUT THE SECOND ‘BATTLE’ IS THE FACT THAT EVERY COMMENTATOR ON THE ‘BATTLE’ WHO TAKES THE TIME AND EFFORT TO NOTE THAT THERE WERE TWO INCIDENTS, FOR SOME REASON ALWAYS DISMISSES THE SECOND AS A ‘LESSER INCIDENT’. YET, AS CAN BE SEEN FROM THE SHEER MONETARY DAMAGE CAUSED, WHICH WAS SIX TIMES GREATER THAN THE ORIGINAL INCIDENT, PLUS THE DESTRUCTION OF A NUMBER OF BUILDINGS, THE SECOND INCIDENT WAS BY FAR THE MORE SERIOUS.

ONE INTERESTING ASPECT OF THE MYTH OF THE ‘BATTLE’ IS ITS TENACITY AND THE FACT THAT VERSIONS OF THE MYTH, RATHER THAN THE FACT, APPEAR IN SOME QUITE RESPECTABLE AND EVEN AUTHORITATIVE PUBLICATIONS.

The Myth vs the Facts



CHARLES BEAN

FOR EXAMPLE, CHARLES BEAN, THE OFFICIAL HISTORIAN, RECOUNTS THE TALE IN VOLUME ONE OF THE OFFICIAL HISTORY, BUT DISMISSES THE 'BATTLES' AS BEING THE EQUIVALENT OF 'UNIVERSITY RAGS'. HE ALSO SHIFTS A LARGE PORTION OF THE BLAME FOR VIOLENCE ONTO THE PRESENCE OF THE MILITARY POLICE.

THIS IS BEAN THE HISTORIAN GIVING WAY TO BEAN THE JOURNALIST AND BEAN THE CHAMPION OF THE REPUTATION OF THE AIF. BEAN'S RECOUNTING OF THE INCIDENTS LARGELY IGNORES THE FACTS. HIS ASSESSMENT THAT THE INCIDENTS ON 2 APRIL AND 31 JULY 1915 WERE ON THE SAME LEVEL AS 'UNIVERSITY RAGS' IS DISINGENUOUS AT BEST. HIS STATEMENT THAT THE BRITISH MILITARY POLICE WERE A 'RED-RAG' TO THE AUSTRALIANS SUGGESTS THAT BEAN THINKS THAT THE PERHAPS THE AUTHORITIES SHOULD NOT HAVE CALLED OUT THE MP'S. GIVEN HIS MILITARY EXPERIENCE, IT IS INCREDIBLE THAT BEAN WOULD THINK THIS, AND THE STATEMENT IS OBVIOUSLY MADE IN MITIGATION OF THE AUSTRALIANS' BEHAVIOUR – IF THE HATED 'RED CAPS' HAD NOT TURNED OUT THEN THE AUSTRALIANS WOULD NOT HAVE MISBEHAVED. THIS IS CLASSIC BEAN, PROTECTING BOTH THE REPUTATION OF THE AIF AND HIS STANDING WITH THE FORCE. EVEN HIS USE OF THE WORD 'POLICE' RATHER THAN THE TERM 'MILITARY POLICE' IS MISLEADING, AS IT WOULD EASILY LEAD AN UNEDUCATED READER TO THE CONCLUSION THAT FOLLOWING

THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE MILITARY POLICE, THE CROWD HAD THEN HAD ALTERCATIONS WITH THE CIVIL POLICE, SOMETHING THAT MOST DEFINITELY DID NOT HAPPEN. BEAN'S IGNORANCE OF THE FACTS IS QUITE INEXCUSABLE, GIVEN THE FACT THAT HE WOULD HAVE HAD FREE ACCESS TO THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE COURTS OF INQUIRY DURING HIS RESEARCH FOR THE WRITING OF THE OFFICIAL HISTORY.

The Myth vs the Facts

'A grand piano was pushed out through a casement window onto a hostile crowd.'

Ian Jones,
The Australian Light Horse, p.25



SIMILARLY, AS I HAVE PREVIOUSLY MENTIONED, IN THE VOLUME OF THE TIME-LIFE HISTORY OF AUSTRALIANS AT WAR DEALING WITH THE LIGHT HORSE, IAN JONES, IN HIS RECOUNTING OF THE 'BATTLE OF THE WAZZIR' TELLS US THAT 'A GRAND PIANO WAS PUSHED OUT THROUGH A CASEMENT WINDOW ONTO A HOSTILE CROWD.' THE PROBLEM WITH THIS STATEMENT IS THAT:

- THERE WAS NO 'HOSTILE CROWD'
- THE INCIDENT IS PURE INVENTION AS THERE IS NO RECORD IN THE PROCEEDINGS OF EITHER COURT OF INQUIRY THAT IT ACTUALLY HAPPENED

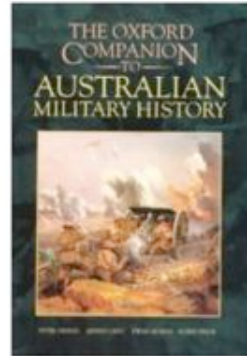
JUST LOOKING AT THAT PHOTO, I WOULD ASK YOU TO CONSIDER IF THE PURPORTED ACTION WAS EVEN PHYSICALLY POSSIBLE!

JONES, OF COURSE, WAS NOT THE AUTHOR OF AN OFFICIAL HISTORY. NEVERTHELESS, THE STATEMENT HE MAKES IN CONNECTION WITH THE 'BATTLE' IS INEXCUSABLE IN ITS FALSENESS.

WORSE THAN JONES ARE THE COMMENTS IN THE ENTRIES ON THE 'BATTLE' THAT APPEAR IN THE AUTHORITATIVE OXFORD COMPANIONS TO AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND MILITARY HISTORY.

The Myth vs the Facts

'THE MOST NOTORIOUS EXAMPLE OF INDISCIPLINE WAS THE FAMOUS BATTLE OF THE WAZZA, WHICH BROKE OUT ON GOOD FRIDAY 1915. DRUNKEN AUSTRALIAN AND SOME NEW ZEALAND SOLDIERS RIOTED IN THE BROTHEL DISTRICT, ASSAULTING EGYPTIANS, BREAKING UP SHOPS AND SETTING FIRE TO BUILDINGS, WHILE FIGHTING RUNNING BATTLES WITH THE MILITARY POLICE. A SECOND, LESSER OUTBREAK IN THE SAME AREA OCCURRED IN THE LAST WEEK OF JULY.'



SUZANNE BRUGGER

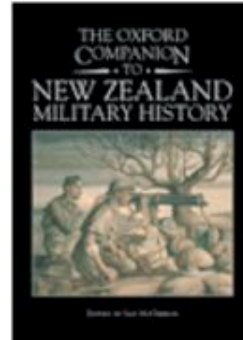
Oxford Companion to Australian Military History, p. 222

BRUGGER, AUTHOR OF AUSTRALIANS IN EGYPT 1914-1919, GETS HER FACTS WILDLY WRONG. AS WE HAVE SEEN, THE INCIDENT DID NOT INVOLVE 'THE BROTHEL DISTRICT' OF CAIRO, JUST ONE SIDE OF ONE SMALL STREET IN THE CITY. APART FROM THE STRIKING OF A PROSTITUTE BY AN AUSTRALIAN SOLDIER, THERE WERE NO INSTANCES OF 'ASSAULTING EGYPTIANS' AND CERTAINLY THERE WERE NO 'RUNNING BATTLES WITH THE MILITARY POLICE'. ALSO, AS WITH MOST COMMENTATORS ON THE 'BATTLES', BRUGGER FOR SOME REASON JUDGES THE SECOND, FAR MORE SERIOUS, INCIDENT TO BE A 'LESSER OUTBREAK.'

IN THE SAME VEIN AS THE AUSTRALIAN COMPANION, ITS NEW ZEALAND SISTER VOLUME TELLS US THAT:

The Myth vs the Facts

'DISCIPLINE REMAINED A MAJOR PROBLEM FOR THE FORCE (THE NZEF). THE MOST NOTORIOUS EXAMPLE WAS THE WAZZA RIOT ON 2 APRIL 1915: DRUNK AND BORED AUSTRALIANS AND NEW ZEALANDERS RAN AMOK IN THE BROTHEL DISTRICT OF CAIRO, ASSAULTING EGYPTIANS, SMASHING AND BURNING BUILDINGS, AND ENGAGING IN A RUNNING BATTLE WITH THE MILITARY POLICE.'



Author Unknown

Oxford Companion to New Zealand Military History. p. 153

ONCE AGAIN WE SEE, COMPARED TO THE FACTS CONTAINED IN THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE COURTS OF INQUIRY, WILD INACCURACY. THE TROOPS DID NOT 'RUN AMOK'. THE INCIDENT DID NOT COVER 'THE BROTHEL DISTRICT OF CAIRO'. WHILE THERE WAS SOME FIRE DAMAGE IN THE 2 APRIL INCIDENT, IT WAS MINOR AND WOULD NOT EQUATE TO 'SMASHING AND BURNING BUILDINGS.' FINALLY, AS WITH THE AUSTRALIAN COMPANION, THE STATEMENT IN THE NEW ZEALAND VOLUME THAT AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND TROOPS ENGAGED 'IN A RUNNING BATTLE WITH THE MILITARY POLICE' IS NOT AND CANNOT BE SUPPORTED BY THE FACTS.

ONE OF THE MOST PERSISTENT THEMES IN THE ORAL TRADITION OF THE HISTORY OF THE 'BATTLE OF THE WAZZIR' IS THE FACT THAT, ACCORDING TO POPULAR MYTH, EVERYONE GOT AWAY WITH IT.

CONSIDER FOR EXAMPLE THIS STATEMENT FROM THE SPEECH OF CAPTAIN STEWART OF THE ROYAL NEW SOUTH WALES LANCERS ON ANZAC DAY 2005, WHICH I REFERRED TO EARLIER:

The Myth vs the Facts

'STRANGELY, NO WITNESSES AT THE
SUBSEQUENT INVESTIGATION COULD
RECALL THE NAMES OF WHO WAS THERE.
PERHAPS IT WAS THE NEW ZEALANDERS?'

Captain J. Stewart, RAAC
Speech to 1/15 RNSWL 25 APR 2005



PATSY ADAM-SMITH TELLS US:

The Myth vs the Facts

'CAPTAIN ENTWISTLE RECOGNIZED NO MAN:
"AS FAR AS I COULD SEE THE MEN WERE NEW
ZEALAND PRIVATES." AND THAT MUST HAVE BEEN
RIGHT – BECAUSE EVERY OTHER MAN ON OATH
SAID THE SAME THING.'

Patsy Adam Smith
The Anzacs, p. 74



THESE TWO STATEMENTS, AND OTHERS OF THEIR ILK, ARE A MAJOR PART OF THE MYTH. THEY HAVE AN AIR OF SMIRKING ABOUT THEM, A SORT OF 'NUDGE, NUDGE, WINK, WINK' ASPECT AS WE AUSSIES ALL KNOWINGLY COVER UP FOR EACH OTHER. AS SUCH, THEY SLOT NEATLY INTO THE MYTH OF THE 'BATTLE OF THE WAZZIR' AS AN ADMIRABLE DEMONSTRATION OF THE SO-CALLED 'ANZAC SPIRIT'. THE PROBLEM FOR THE MYTHOLOGISTS, HOWEVER, IS THAT THE STATEMENTS ABOVE ARE EASILY DISPROVED. THE COURTS OF INQUIRY INTO THE INCIDENTS CLEARLY IDENTIFIED 34 SOLDIERS AS EITHER RING-LEADERS OR PARTICIPANTS. ONLY ONE OF THESE MEN WAS IMMEDIATELY RELEASED FROM CUSTODY WHEN IT WAS PROVED TO THE COURT THAT HE HAD TAKEN NO PART IN ANY OF THE DISTURBANCES. GIVEN THE CONFUSED NATURE OF VARIOUS DISTURBANCES AND THE FACT THAT THEY INVOLVED LARGE GROUPS OF MEN FROM VARIOUS UNITS, IN A CLOSE AND DARKENED AREA AT NIGHT, THE WONDER IS NOT THAT SO FEW MEN WERE IDENTIFIED

BUT THAT SO MANY ACTUALLY WERE! CERTAINLY WE CAN GIVE THE LIE TO THE MYTH THAT: 'NO WITNESSES AT THE SUBSEQUENT INVESTIGATION COULD RECALL THE NAMES OF WHO WAS THERE.'

THE 'BATTLE' IN PERSPECTIVE

AS CAN BE SEEN BY THE ACTUAL EVIDENCE LAID OUT, THE FACTS OF THE SO-CALLED 'BATTLE OF THE WAZZIR' DIFFER MARKEDLY FROM THE ACCEPTED 'FOLK VERSION' OF THE INCIDENT.

FIRST OF ALL, THERE WERE ACTUALLY TWO 'BATTLES' ONE. THOSE WHO HAVE RECOUNTED THE MYTHIC, LEGENDARY VERSION OF THE 'BATTLE' OVER THE YEARS HAVE EITHER BEEN IGNORANT OF THE SEPARATE NATURE OF THE INCIDENTS OR HAVE DELIBERATELY CHOSEN TO IGNORE THE FACT, ROLLING THE TWO INCIDENTS INTO ONE 'BATTLE'.

SECONDLY, WHILE THERE WAS SOME DAMAGE IN BOTH INCIDENTS, WITH THE DAMAGE CAUSED IN THE SECOND INCIDENT BEING THE FAR GREATER, THE DAMAGE WAS BY NO MEANS AS SERIOUS AS THE LEGEND WOULD HAVE PEOPLE BELIEVE. STATEMENTS SUCH AS RICHARDSON'S :

'THE AIF WENT IN AND BURNT DOWN THE WHOLE CAIRO RED-LIGHT DISTRICT'

AND ADAM-SMITH'S:

'2000 TROOPS RANSACKED AND SET FIRE TO THE BROTHELS IN THE BEST KNOWN STREET IN CAIRO'

SIMPLY DO NOT STAND UP TO EVEN THE MOST CURSORY EXAMINATION OF THE FACTS.

THOSE WHO CHERISH THE MYTH OF THE 'BATTLE' WOULD HAVE US BELIEVE THAT THE AUSTRALIAN SOLDIERS INVOLVED WERE ACTING IN A SEMI-RIGHTEOUS MANNER AND THAT THEIR ACTIONS SHOULD BE NOT ONLY CONDONED, BUT EVEN ADMIRER, AS A FINE EXAMPLE OF THE SO-CALLED 'ANZAC SPIRIT'.

The Myth vs the Facts



C.J. DENNIS

ONE OF THE MOST VEHEMENT PROPONENTS OF THIS VERSION OF THE MYTH, AND A MAN WHO I THINK ACTUALLY MUST SHOULDER A LARGE PART OF THE BLAME FOR THE GENESIS OF THE MYTH, IS THE POET C.J. DENNIS. IN LATE 1915 THE LARRIKIN POET WROTE A POEM ENTITLED 'THE BATTLE OF THE WAZZIR'.

The Myth vs the Facts

There wus Bill from up the Billabong, bo's dearest love wus cow,
An' 'oo lived an' thought an' fought an' acted clean.
'E wus lately from 'is mother wiv 'er kiss wet on 'is brow;
But they snared 'im in, an' did 'im up reel mean.
Fer young Bill, wus gone a million, an' 'e never guessed the game. .
For 'e's down in livin' 'ell, an' marked fer shame.

C.J. Dennis, from 'The Battle of the Wazzir'



IN THIS LONG PIECE OF TYPICAL DENNISIAN ARGOT, WE ARE INTRODUCED TO 'BILL', THE EPITOME OF THE CLEAN, HONEST AND INNOCENT AUSTRALIAN ABROAD. AS YOU CAN SEE FROM THE POEM, WHICH I STRONGLY RECOMMEND AS BACKGROUND READING IS ANYONE IS

INTERESTED IN FOLLOWING UP ON THE MYTH OF THE BATTLE, ACCORDING TO DENNIS 'BILL' WAS A LAD:

'OO LIVED AN' THOUGHT AN' FOUGHT AN' ACTED CLEAN'

DENNIS TELLS US THAT ON FALLING PREY TO THE EVILS OF CAIRO, 'BILL' IS REVENGED BY:

'A CROWD THAT AIN'T AFAID TO CLEAN UP 'ELL'.

The Myth vs the Facts



"Now, it started wiv some 'orseplay, if the 'eads 'ad seen the look,
Dead in earnest that wus underneath the fun,
They'd 'ave tumbled there wus somethin' that wus more than commin
crook,
An' 'ave stopped the game before it 'arf begun.
But the fellers larfed like school-boys, tho' they orl wus mor than
narked,
An' they 'ad the 'ouses well an' truly marked."

C.J. Dennis "The Battle of the Wazzir" from "The Moods of Ginger Mick"

THAT DENNIS BELIEVED THAT THE 'BATTLE' WAS PREMEDITATED IS SHOWN BY THE PASSAGE WHERE HE TELLS US:

'NOW, IT STARTED WIV SOME 'ORSEPLAY. IF THE 'EADS 'AD SEEN THE LOOK,
DEAD IN EARNEST, THAT WUS UNDERNEATH THE FUN,
THEY'D 'AVE TUMBLED THERE WUS SOMETHIN' THAT WUS MORE THAN COMMUN CROOK,
AN' 'AVE STOPPED THE GAME BEFORE IT 'ARF BEGUN.
BUT THE FELLERS LARFED LIKE SCHOOL-BOYS, THO' THEY ORL WUS MORE THAN NARKED,
AN' THEY 'AD THE 'OUSES WELL AN' TRULY MARKED.'

DENNIS' POEM, IN FACT CONTAINS ALL OF THE ELEMENTS OF THE MYTH, INCLUDING:

- RIGHTEOUS PREMEDITATION
- JUSTNESS OF THE AUSTRALIAN CAUSE
- BATTLES WITH THE CAIRO MOB
- BATTLES WITH THE MILITARY POLICE

- BATTLES WITH THE FIRE BRIGADE, INCLUDING THE HACKING TO PIECES OF FIRE HOSES
- WHOLESALE DESTRUCTION OF THE WAZZIR DISTRICT
- SLY AVOIDANCE OF PUNISHMENT BY THE PERPETRATORS

DENNIS EVEN INCLUDES THE REFERENCE TO PIANOS BEING THROWN OUT WINDOWS AND THIS IS QUITE POSSIBLY WHERE JONES GOT HIS WRONG INFORMATION. FROM THERE IT IS A SHORT LEAP OF LOGIC TO SURMISE THAT DENNIS' POEM, WHICH IS BASICALLY A LITANY OF FALSEHOOD AND MISINFORMATION FROM START TO FINISH, MIGHT WELL BE THE ACTUAL GENESIS FOR THE ENTIRE MYTH. IN DEFENCE OF DENNIS, IT NEEDS TO BE UNDERSTOOD THAT HE WROTE THE POEM BASED ON SKETCHY INFORMATION SENT TO HIM BY A FRIEND IN EGYPT. IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE, AS AN ASIDE, THAT 'THE BATTLE OF THE WAZZIR' HAD BEEN INTENDED FOR PUBLICATION IN THE COLLECTION 'THE MOODS OF GINGER MICK' BUT WAS OMITTED ON THE DIRECTION OF THE COMMONWEALTH CENSOR, NOT BEING PUBLISHED UNTIL AFTER THE WAR. ON THE OTHER HAND, DENNIS NEVER RECANTED OR REILED FROM HIS MYTHIC VERSION OF THE BATTLE.

The Myth vs the Facts



'When they wandered frum the newest an' the cleanest land on earth,
An' the filth uv ages met 'em, it wus 'ard.
Fer there may be sin an' sorrer in the country uv their birth;
But the dirt uv cenchuries ain't in the yard.
They wus children, playin' wiv an asp, an' never fearin' it,
An' they took it very sore when they wus bit.'

C.J. Dennis, from 'The Battle of the Wazzir'

THE SHEER OUTRIGHT OCKER JINGOISM OF DENNIS IS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO COMPREHEND THESE DAYS. DENNIS MAKES MUCH OF THE PURITY AND INNOCENCE OF THE AIF AND, BY EXTENSION, AUSTRALIA. FOR INSTANCE, HE TELLS THE READER THAT THE MEN OF THE AIF HAD:

'WANDERED FRUM THE NEWEST AN' THE CLEANEST LAND ON EARTH'

The Myth vs the Facts

- 1904 – Royal Melbourne Hospital, of 100 consecutive post-mortem performed:
 - 34 syphilitic
 - 19 possibly syphilitic
- 25% of sick children in Melbourne 'tainted with syphilis'.
- 10% of all sick children in Melbourne syphilitic to some extent.

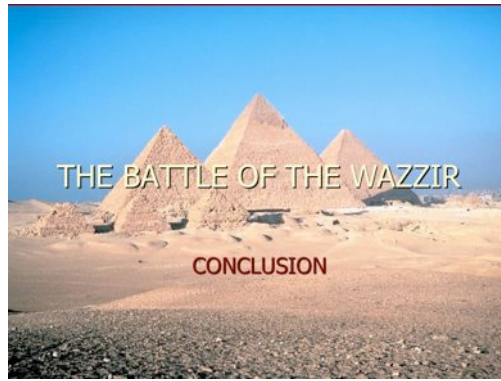
From Report of the Parliamentary Committee Appointed to Investigate into Death and Invalidity Caused in Australia by Venereal Disease, 1916

HOWEVER, A CURSORY GLANCE AT SUCH PUBLICATIONS AS THE 1916 PARLIAMENTARY REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE APPOINTED TO INVESTIGATE INTO DEATH AND INVALIDITY CAUSED IN AUSTRALIA BY VENEREAL DISEASE EASILY PROVES THE POET WRONG. THE REPORT RECORDS, FOR INSTANCE, THAT OF 100 CONSECUTIVE POST MORTEMES PERFORMED IN ROYAL MELBOURNE HOSPITAL IN 1904, 34 OF THOSE EXAMINED WERE SYPHILITIC AND ANOTHER 19 POSSIBLY SO. THE REPORT ALSO TELLS US THAT A PROMINENT MEDICAL PRACTITIONER OF MELBOURNE HAD TESTIFIED THAT 25% OF THE SICK CHILDREN IN MELBOURNE WERE 'TAINTED WITH SYPHILIS' AND 10% OF ALL OF THE CHILDREN IN THE CITY WERE TO SOME EXTENT SYPHILITIC. FROM THIS WE CAN SEE THAT CLAIMING THAT THE AUSTRALIANS WERE, TO A MAN, 'INNOCENTS ABROAD' WHO FOUND THEMSELVES UNFAIRLY, UNSCRUPULOUSLY AND FOULLY TAINTED BY THE FILTH OF THE EAST AND THUS JUSTIFIED IN TAKING THEIR REVENGE IS TOTALLY FACILE.

The 'Anzac Spirit'?



IN PERPETRATING AND FOSTERING THE MYTH, ADAM-SMITH, BEAN, DENNIS, JONES ET AL CELEBRATE THE SO-CALLED 'BATTLE OF THE WAZZIR' AS A FULLY JUSTIFIABLE ACTION AND A NOBLE EXAMPLE OF THE 'ANZAC SPIRIT'. FROM MY POINT OF VIEW, NOTHING, HOWEVER, COULD BE FURTHER FROM THE TRUTH, UNLESS THE 'ANZAC SPIRIT' INCLUDES BLAMING PROSTITUTES FOR VD CONTRACTED AFTER BEING TOLD IN NAUSEATING DETAIL OF THE PHYSICAL AND MONETARY CONSEQUENCES; ASSAULTING DEFENCELESS WOMEN; DESTROYING THEIR GOODS AND PROPERTY; AND IMPEDING CIVIL AUTHORITIES FROM CARRYING OUT THEIR DUTIES. I DO NOT AND NEVER HAVE AGREED WITH THIS. I HAVE NO TIME FOR ANY SOLDIER WHO, KNOWING FULL WELL THE POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF HIS ACTIONS, OF HIS OWN VOLITION ENGAGES THE SERVICES OF A PROSTITUTE, CONTRACTS VENEREAL DISEASE AND THEN BLAMES THE PROSTITUTE. EVEN LESS DO I HAVE RESPECT FOR ANY MAN WHO WOULD STRIKE DOWN A DEFENCELESS WOMAN, CHASE HER, FEAR STRICKEN, INTO HER HOME AND THEN SET ABOUT DESTROYING THAT HOME AND HER PROPERTY, OUT OF A SPIRIT OF SHEER, MEAN-SPIRITED, PETTY VENGEANCE.



THE SORDID INCIDENTS ON 2 APRIL AND 31 JULY 1915 THAT HAVE GONE DOWN IN HISTORY AS THE 'BATTLE OF THE WAZZIR' HAVE COME DOWN TO US, TOTALLY WITHOUT JUSTIFICATION, AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE 'ANZAC SPIRIT'. ALMOST ALL COMMENTATORS WHO RECOUNT THE STORY OF THE 'BATTLE' NOT ONLY GET THE FACTS WRONG, USUALLY WILDLY SO, BUT ALSO RECOUNT THE FALSE VERSION OF THE TALE IN TERMS OF AFFECTION AND ADMIRATION FOR THE ACTIONS OF THE AUSTRALIANS INVOLVED. THE FACT THAT SO MANY PEOPLE AND SO MANY PUBLICATIONS, SOME OF THEM HIGHLY RESPECTED AND AUTHORITATIVE, HAVE GOT THE STORY SO WRONG FOR SO MANY YEARS IS A TESTAMENT TO THE SHEER TENACITY AND STAYING POWER OF THE LEGEND.

VIEWED FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE COLD HARD FACTS, THE 'BATTLE OF THE WAZZIR' IS NOTHING FOR ME TO BE PROUD OF, EITHER AS A FORMER SOLDIER OR AN HISTORIAN. THE INCIDENTS THAT MAKE UP THE SO-CALLED 'BATTLE' ARE IN FACT QUITE SORDID AND EVEN CONTEMPTIBLE AND SHOW THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY IN AN INCREDIBLY BAD LIGHT. FAR FROM BEING THE HEROES OF THE OCCASION, THOSE AUSTRALIAN SOLDIERS INVOLVED IN THE ACTUAL PHYSICAL ACTIONS OF THE INCIDENTS WERE OUTRIGHT VILLAINS, NOTHING FOR ANY AUSTRALIAN TO BE PROUD OF. THE FACTS CLEARLY SHOW THAT THE PEOPLE WHO COME OUT OF THE 'BATTLE' WITH CREDIT ARE THE BRITISH MILITARY POLICE WHO ACTED WELL IN A DIFFICULT SITUATION, THE PICQUETS WHO BACKED THE MPS AND WHO ALSO ACTED IN A HIGHLY DISCIPLINED AND COMPETENT MANNER, A NUMBER OF THE MILITARY ONLOOKERS WHO MADE EFFORTS TO CALM THE SITUATION AND DISPERSE THE TROUBLE

MAKERS AND ASSIST THE FIRE BRIGADE, AND THE CAIRO POLICE WHO WORKED TO CONTAIN A DIFFICULT SITUATION AND ENSURE THAT THE LOCAL CITIZENS DID NOT SUFFER. AND NOT TO BE FORGOTTEN ARE THE TRUEST HEROES OF THE 'BATTLE', THE OFFICERS AND MEN OF THE CAIRO CITY FIRE BRIGADE WHO ON TWO QUITE DIFFICULT OCCASIONS STRUGGLED TO DO THEIR DUTY UNDER THE MOST TRYING OF CONDITIONS.

THE 'BATTLE OF THE WAZZIR' IS NOT A PROUD MOMENT IN THE HISTORY OF AUSTRALIA AND THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY. IN ORDER TO BE TRUE TO THAT HISTORY, I HAVE LAID OUT THE ACTUAL FACTS OF THE INCIDENTS HERE FOR YOU TODAY.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION.

I WOULD BE HAPPY TO TAKE ANY QUESTIONS.