

## Weird War II (Feb 2010 Campaign) – Volume 2

**Location:** Lydda (derived from the name: *St. Jorge de Lidde (Saint George)*, whom the city was named after when it was conquered in 1099 during the crusades, in honour of it being his birthplace. Population: Approx 20,000—18,500 Muslims and 1,500 Christians.



Approx 23 miles from Jerusalem (Division HQ), 42 miles from Cairo (Army HQ), 10 miles from coast  
Lydda Cavalry Brigade, CO: Brig. John Scot-Morgan (Royal Engineers), 2IC: Lt.Col. Edward Livingstone  
Inc. components of: Royal Scots Greys; 4<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> Dragoon Guard; 2<sup>nd</sup> Batt W.Yorks Brigade; Royal Engineers.

## The Journal of Corporal Jimmy McKie – Volume 2

### Monday 24<sup>th</sup> April 1939

Order to report to Capt. Carrington. He has a special job for us, since he doesn't think he can return us to our standard duties just yet due to the strange things we have reported.

**SITREP:** Maj. Shaun Dalbach, a Royal Engineer, has been captured by an Arab faction during a survey mission. A rescue mission sent to save him failed badly, but the Arabs have now offered to exchange him for Prince Zahir Jibrán. Unfortunately he is in prison serving 11 life sentences for murdering a bus full of Jewish people. We have been selected to quietly and unofficially make the exchange. Anything to do with this mission will be officially denied and if we fail we should not bother coming back.

The exchange is to take place at the Ottoman Fort at Oasis Gudha. We are to get there by taking the Prince from here to Jerusalem by train, and then the rest of the way by truck.

Assigned Squad:

- (Command) 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt Quentin Smyth (Huw)
- (2IC) Cpl Jimmy McKie (Me)
- Pte Jim Arnold (Richard)
- Medic/Driver: Pte Heart (joining in Jerusalem)
- Pte Owen
- Pte Eastern

We requisition additional supplies for this mission:

- Cudgels
- Torches
- Pistols (30 rounds each)
- Holdout Knives
- Binoculars
- Maps
- Extra Water Bottles
- Grenades (4 each)
- Lorry
- Tents, Bedrolls, Extra Blankets, etc

We derive a plan to disguise the Prince as a member of the Palestinian Arab Corp.

We go to the library to find out more about the Prince's attack on the bus. We find basic details and photos, but nothing special.

### Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> April 1939

At 8am we collect the prisoner and travel to the station. A whole carriage has been reserved for our use. We talk to the prisoner, he doesn't know where we are taking him or why; we tell him and he smiles.

We arrive in Jerusalem uneventfully and meet Pte Heart and the truck. We set off. Pte Heart drives, Smythe navigates, the rest of us in the back taking turns manning the top observation hatch. The route is approx 150 miles, partway by road and partway cross-desert.

We drive from Jerusalem to Jerico without event and then to a ford over the River Jordan.

Approaching the ford we see a man standing in the road near the ford. He is wearing robes and looks Arabic. We stop before the ford and Smythe asks the stranger how we might help him. He holds out a begging bowl and Smythe gives him some food and coins. He appears very grateful and gives Smythe some prayer beads in return. They don't look anything special, but Smythe keeps them and we get back into the truck and continue.

Crossing the River Jordan by the ford we progress through a swampy area and reach a crossroads in a small village. We take the right turn and continue.

Someway further on we drive through a village and Pte Heart notices a culvert across the road ahead of us has collapsed, making the road impassable. He breaks hard and we come to a stop just before the culvert.

We jump out of the truck in a standard pattern, Myself and Owen either side of the rear of the truck and Smythe at the front. I spot some suspicious wires hanging out of a nearby cart; yelling "trap" I dive to the other side of the truck for cover.

A bomb in the cart explodes, wrecking the lorry and badly injuring Pte Arnold, rendering him unconscious. I drag Pte Arnold to a wall and stabilize him, then machine-guns and rifles open up on us, hitting me once.

Meanwhile Smythe has taken cover in the culvert and returns fire, hitting one of our attackers. I join him in the culvert and drag Arnold in also. The fire-fight continues between us in the culvert, Pte Owen in the back of the truck and our assailants in one of the buildings. Lt Smythe gets hit and falls unconscious, seeing this Pte Heart tries to leave the cabin of the lorry to reach him, but gets shot and falls unconscious also.

Our attackers run away after we kill 6 of them. Scouting the area I secure 3 Thompson MGs and 3 Lee Enfield Rifles. I search the 6 corpses, finding nothing significant but they appear Jewish.

The lorry is a burnt-out wreck, so we set up camp in one of the more solid buildings, with Pte Owen posted as lookout on the roof, and make our 3 unconscious comrades comfortable.

Lt Smythe recovers consciousness shortly and, examining the map, tries to figure out where we are. He believes that we are about 8 miles from Jerico and 16 miles from Amman. He then talks to the Prince and, needing every hand we can get now, unmanacles him on his own recognisance to help us all stay alive.

Lt Smythe checks the prayer beads he was given earlier and they have crumbled into dust.

I search around for any other working vehicles or anything else of interest. I find a barn that has been barricaded shut from the outside and peering inside I see what looks like human bodies. I call "Hello" in arabic and get a muffled response so I unbarricade the door and go inside. Inside are about 30 people (the villagers) all bound and gagged. I start untying them and ask what happened. They report that they were all rounded up at gun-point by 12 gunmen last night.

The villagers have no motor vehicles, but do have a donkey cart and they offer to give us a ride back to Jerico.

In Jerico we get treated at the hospital and then report events to the local police station.

Inspector Branwell, of the Palastinine Police, we tell him we were ambushed whilst on patrol on the way to Amman. We give him the rifles we found and one of the MG's (keeping two for ourselves, Arnold takes one, Owen the other). He lets us telegraph a message back to Lydda and offers us the use of the station house to stay the night. The inspector offers Lt Smythe hospitality at his own house.

### **Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> April 1939**

Whilst waiting for reply from Lydda, I scout around and see what transport is available. Animals and carts are pretty common, motor vehicles are uncommon and thus expensive to hire.

At around 13:00 we get a telegram from Capt Carrington: "No vehicles available, make own way".

The cost of renting a truck and driver will be £2/day plus a £10 deposit. Pooling our resources we have enough cash for a few days hire, but not for the deposit. After some negotiations we disable one of the MG's and use it for the deposit with a couple of Lt Smythes gold coins.

We set off, the truck is a vintage WW1 German army lorry. We get back to the village at about 17:00 but the culvert is still a problem. The villagers have put some planks over that are robust enough for people and animals, but not for the truck. Alternative routes off the road look pretty poor and the truck driver won't risk them. We search around and find some heavier logs that we use to make a more secure crossing, but this takes a few hours to construct so it is getting dark when we finish so we decide to stay the night here.

Before setting watches and settling down for the night we talk to the police officer who has come from Jerico to investigate the incident, Sgt Lock. There were at least 12 assailants and they are still heavily armed.

### **Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> April 1939**

Morning arrives uneventfully. The villagers give us some food to eat and take with us, and then we set off again. By mid-morning we approach the town of Amman. The town is fairly busy but they make space for our truck so we get through and out the other side okay. We are now at the very edge of British jurisdiction, and realise that the oasis we are heading for is outside British control.

We now have to enter the desert proper and navigation becomes more uncertain, but we take our best shot and head into the desert. At approx lunchtime we go over a rise and see a large river that we realise must be the Jordan again. Looking at the map we think we are about 50 miles east of where we were aiming for, so we calculate a new course and set off again.

By mid-afternoon we are back on track. We spot in the distance a ruined castle that we assume is the old Ottoman Fort that we were told about. Pausing and surveying the castle with binoculars we can see some figures moving about in the fort. According to the map, the Oasis is on the opposite side and pretty close to the fort. We drive a very wide arc in order to give a wide berth from the fort and approach the Oasis from the other side.

We stop at a reasonable distance from the Oasis (the Fort is about 400 yards away from the far side of the Oasis) and split up into a foot patrol to approach the Oasis and the rest to guard the Prince and the truck.

Smythe, Me, Owen and Eastern are the patrol that approaches the Oasis. As we get closer we can see a modern British Army truck by the fort and 6 soldiers come out of the fort. Two of them get in the truck, the other 4 walk towards the Oasis to meet us. They are wearing British uniforms and are armed with standard British issue rifles along with a Bren Gun.

At about 30 yards from the Oasis 3 of them stop and dig in, leaving the 4<sup>th</sup> to continue to approach us. We mirror their action, leaving Lt Smythe to go forward to meet their guy.

Smythe's opposite number appears to be a Company Sgt. Major. He says he has been waiting for us and asks if we have the prisoner. Smythe detects a slight German accent and feigns ignorance about any prisoners. The CSM doesn't believe him and states that he will check our truck to make sure. Smythe tries to enforce rank and says "I don't think so!".

An animated discussion ensues between them as the CSM tries to persuade Smythe to surrender the Prince. The CSM claims to be from the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Palestine Regiment and is following orders from his superior officer. He says he has spent some time in Germany, which he says accounts for his accent. He repeats demands for us to hand over the Prince so that he can face punishment for his crimes against the British citizens in the bus. Smythe continues to deny that we have the Prince and refuses permission for them to search the truck.

The CSM signals to his men. His truck starts up and starts driving an arc towards our truck. Smythe asks him to stand down and withdraw his truck, the CSM refuses. We start to back up towards our truck and they

follow us. Their truck stops about 50 yards from ours and a roof-mounted Bren Gun is aimed at our truck, our foot patrol is still some distance away.

A fire-fight starts as their truck-mounted Bren Gun riddles our truck with bullets and we open fire. I try to take out the Bren Gun guy facing us on foot, hitting him twice but not taking him down. Smythe hits the CSM but he stays up too. One of their other guys is hit and does go down, as does the operator of their truck-mounted Bren Gun as Arnold shoots him between the eyes.

Their other Bren Gun wielder eventually goes down, the CSM stays up even though he gets hit at least twice more. He looks a little desperate now and tries to throw a grenades at Smythe, fortunately his aim is wide, who shoots again and the CSM finally goes down.

The driver of their truck tries to ram his truck into ours, but gets shaken by Arnold shooting him and stalls. He thinks better of the idea and starts to drive away and Arnold maintains fire on him and also shoots out a tire.

Meanwhile I have shot down the last of their foot-patrol guys, but 4 more figures have emerged from the fort. As these new 4 start to come in our direction Owen courageously sprints back to grab the Bren Gun from the guy we shot. I provide cover as Owen grabs the Bren Gun just before the new 4 reach him and runs back, it is pretty close run, but he makes it and we re-group at our truck.

Their truck swings around to pick up the 4 new guys, then continue to the remains of their foot-patrol and load them on board. They then gun their engine and head towards us at speed.

We take up defensive positions and get ready, with Smythe, Me, Owen and Eastern in a defensive line some 60 yards ahead of our truck. They open fire on us with the roof-mounted Bren gun whilst out of reasonable range of the shorter-range rifles we have. I return fire in spite of the extreme range and take a pot shot at their driver, hitting him.

Their truck stops as 3 of them jump out the back and go prone. The Bren-gunner riddles me with bullets and I black out briefly but manage to stay conscious. Returning fire again the Bren-gunner goes down, but I get shot again and fall unconscious.

I regain consciousness, apparently only a short time later, after Pte Heart treats my injuries. I learn that they surrendered shortly after I lost consciousness.

They have 3 survivors: their injured driver, an injured guy from their first foot-patrol and an unharmed guy who was one of the latest 4. Pte Heart treats their injuries also.

We find some cash (£6 and about 10 shillings worth of local currency), 2 Brens, 12 Bren magazines, ~750 rounds and 35 grenades. Our truck is damaged but still usable, their truck is immovable as its engine block took too much damage from the shots we fired at their driver.

Interrogating the prisoners they tell us that no-one else is left in the fort and that their orders came via the CSM. Their OC is a Major White who is apparently in Jerusalem and saw us as we left the train and got our truck. They were ordered to prevent any hand-over to the Arabs, although they have not seen any here yet. We gain sufficient evidence to be fairly certain that there are actually some Arabs behind the prisoner exchange; and that it was not a plot to get the Prince out of prison to face Jewish vengeance.

Thus we can reasonably expect that some Arabs will turn up for the agreed exchange.

We bury the bodies of the dead at the oasis, then scavenge parts from the wrecked truck to fix ours and keep the driver happy.

Smythe, Arnold and myself patrol up to the fort to check it out. It is derelict with most of the upper floors collapsed, leaving the ground floor as the main usable area. The entrance is in poor repair and requires

scrambling down through the moat and then up the other side to the main gate. There are 4 towers, one of which is reasonably intact and could be used as a vantage point for a lookout post.

A quick scan of the area suggests that it is empty, so we wave the others to come up to the fort whilst we conduct a more thorough search.

Our search of the fort reveals some intact rooms and stairs up to the intact tower, where we post a guard on lookout. There are stables, an outdoor well containing undrinkable water, a chapel, 3 rooms containing equipment from the hostile troops and an indoor well with usable water. The 3 rooms appear to have been used as a storeroom, accommodation for the CSM and a barracks for the men.

Interestingly, amongst the personal belongings in both of the rooms we find a recent German newspaper and a number of German magazines. Otherwise we find enough food for 12 people for about 3 weeks, fuel, water, ~5,000 rounds of ammo and personal kit.

We put the prisoners in one of the intact rooms and start talking to the Prince about why this fort might have been chosen as the handover point. He believes that it has no particular significance, just a convenient landmark on the border between the Arab Nation and the region of British control.

The lookout reports a group of about 24 camels and 16 riders approaching the oasis. We take the Prince up to have a look at the camel riders and he thinks that they look like his people.

We form a patrol with the Prince and head towards the Oasis, we hold the Prince at a distance whilst Smythe goes ahead to meet the riders. The leader of the riders holds a rifle and jewelled scimitar. They have Dalbach, but he has been heavily beaten and is unconscious. The Arab leader apologises for this, he says that he doesn't know the full details, as he only met the prisoner after he was asked to escort him to this rendezvous, but he understands that his masters were not as diplomatic as he would have been when the prisoner was not well behaved.

Smythe examines the prisoner and uses the photo we have of Dalbach to try and confirm his identity. He looks like Dalbach, so the exchange takes place and Pte Heart is called forward to treat him. Dalbach needs hospital treatment, but otherwise his injuries are not life threatening.

In further discussion with the Arabs before they ride off they say that apart from us they have seen a few occasional Brits, but no-one that looks German.

It is starting to get dark at this stage, so we prepare to stay the night in the fort. During the evening Smythe interrogates the 3 German prisoners and challenges them about the German newspapers and magazines.

The first prisoner (the uninjured one) says that he is a German Jew who joined the British army about a year ago. He is a member of C Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Palestine Regiment. They were ordered out here about 1 week ago (which was a day or two before we received our orders, so there has been a leak somewhere).

The second prisoner (the driver) is also German. He says that the whole of C Company, apart from officers, is German. They were ordered out here about a week ago for a 'special' patrol.

The third prisoner confirms the same information as the others. He joined up about 6 months ago and knew several men in C Company (including the second prisoner) from when they lived in the same town in Germany before they joined up.

### **Friday 28<sup>th</sup> April 1939**

In the morning we pack everything into our truck, burn the remains of the other truck, and set off towards home. We drive for a few hours and haven't reached Amman yet so figure we must have gone wrong somewhere. I figure that we need to head towards the east, following my advice we reach the outskirts of Amman after about half an hour.

The time is now 11am as we make our way through Amman. Checking our maps, and taking into consideration our injured men and the large amount of store, we decide to drive directly back to Lydda. The journey takes about 9 hours and passes uneventfully, so we arrive at around 21:00.

We park the truck up in a quiet area where it won't attract much attention or questions whilst Smythe goes to find Carrington. After debriefing, Carrington goes to talk to the Brigadier and then comes back to us. The truck driver is sent home, after unloading the truck and checking in all weapons and ammo. We are all then ordered to confine ourselves to our Messes until told otherwise.

### **Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> April through Monday 1<sup>st</sup> May 1939**

Confined to Mess. Promotions that arrived whilst we were away are confirmed for Pte Heart to L.Cpl. and 2nd Lt. Smythe to full Lt.

### **Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1939**

Carrington has us paraded in. Our mission is considered a total disaster. The prisoner rescued from the Arabs was not Dalbach but a civil servant called Donaldson who was kidnapped a short while ago, probably because he looked similar to Dalbach. The German soldiers were also genuinely members of the British army. As a result of this, we will face a Court Martial in front of General Barker on the 8<sup>th</sup> May.

We are asked for our preference regarding legal representation and our statements are taken.

### **Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> May through Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> May 1939**

Confined to Mess.

### **Monday 8<sup>th</sup> May 1939**

Our Court Martial starts.

Smythe is put on the stand first and questioned. We are all exonerated for our conduct over the first encounter (the village ambush), although pointed questions are raised over the matter of the Bren Gun and gold coins that have been delivered to Carrington by the truck hire company we used. All of the other detailed questions are all regarding the Oasis encounters.

The rest of us only face minor questions.

### **Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> May 1939**

The Court reconvenes and we are marched in to hear their findings.

- We are found innocent of manslaughter.
- The Oasis incident will be recorded as a training accident.
- In future, in order to avoid similar accidents, orders of special units will be circulated and briefed better.
- Lt. Smythe is found guilty of withholding evidence from the Police investigation of the incident at the village (due to not declaring all of the weapons we found). Smythe pleads guilty and throws himself on the mercy of the court, as a result General Barker declares that the sentence will be determined at a later date by Smythes' own C.O.

After the results of the Court Martial I try to appraise the value of our gold coins from the valley. It appears that they are worth about £3 each, which doesn't seem like much and is mostly due to the raw gold value. Historical artefacts such as these do not appear to have value other than to (maybe) museums, universities or the like (which are not common around Lydda).