

## EGYPT'S STORIED CAPITAL

(By O.A.G.)

THERE are 260 mosques in Cairo and almost as many chapels. They are beautiful at first hand, for among them are some of the most exquisite examples of Arab architecture in the world; more lovely in the distance, when a forest of domes and minarets pierces a rich blue sky which never fashioned a cloud during the five weeks we were camped at Heliopolis, a suburb six miles from the city.

Coloured postcards, which were sent home in thousands by our soldiers during the last war, have done their worst with the sunsets over Cairo. No artificial medium could express their depth or brilliance. My first real sight of Egypt's capital is the one I most vividly remember. I saw it from the ramparts of the Citadel late one afternoon when the city was drowned in deep violet dusk from which soared slender minarets, ivory white, and delicately carved domes, like bowls of light. Even in full sunlight the view is superb. Remember that here was the site of the old fortress of Biblical times, since built and destroyed and re-built through the centuries. Now the city, old and new, stretches for miles from the slopes of the Mokattan Hills and from the Citadel ramparts one can trace its towers and ancient walls, its gardens and squares, palaces and mosques; the River Nile, studded with islands and branching in the famous delta twelve miles away. On the northern horizon are the pyramids, squat and blunt in the distance; to the east barren cliffs are backed by Egypt's eternal wastes of sand, some of which we ploughed through later during route marches.

### Fantastic Tales

My Arab guide, like all his race, a superb liar and an artful flatterer, poured out the most fantastic tales but, young as I was, I could not swallow them. Those guides are as much a part of Cairo as its smells and its enchantment.

We landed in Egypt in 1915, most of us seeing that fabled land for the first time. We were granted generous leave in the evenings and during week-ends, and few of us remained in camp. By swift electric train we made for the city, to become one with the restless mass of colourful humanity which flooded its streets and bazaars. All the races of the world have congregated there, but instead of losing their nationality each has retained character. Apart from the Cairenes, or native citizens, there are Syrians and Armenians, Levantines, Russians, Greeks, Italians, French and British, Nubians and negroes and Bedouins from the desert, numbering in all well over a million people.

### Heliopolis

Heliopolis, the modern city, was within walking distance of the New Zealand camps and contained much of interest, including a vast hotel which had been built originally to house a casino and

become a second Monte Carlo. But only when funds ran short did we stay there. Cairo, the great and mysterious city, the first great city of the world I had ever seen, was the magnet for thousands of New Zealanders and Australians camped about Heliopolis. Now the city echoes again to the sound of the Anzac voice; sons of 1914-18 veterans will play the same tricks on gharri drivers, and probably stage racing contests while the owners scream in protest, weeping bitterly the while.

### Fascinating Route Marches

Our senior officers were wise in their choice of route march areas while we did our training. They took us along the old Suez Road, past the towers built by Napoleon, now crumbling and left to bats and wandering Arabs. Sometimes we marched through fertile country, intensely green, to the Virgin's Well, there to look on the tree under which, according to tradition, the Holy Family rested on its flight into Egypt. This venerable sycamore, the second of its line, stands inside an iron railing. Close beside it a donkey walked an endless circle, operating the ancient mechanism, a sort of bucket chain, which lifts water from the well. Only the donkeys have changed through the centuries; all else is the same.

Standing not far from the Virgin's Well is an obelisk, 66 feet high, which was erected in the 12th dynasty. It is all that remains of the ancient Temple of On, or Heliopolis. Round it are green acres, divided into tiny squares like a patchwork quilt, each watered by canals from the Nile. Over a year later I saw the companion to the obelisk of On. We know it as Cleopatra's Needle, one of the ornaments of the Thames Embankment in London. Long, long ago, the Temple of On was the centre of sun worship and of great learning. Plato and other Greek philosophers are said to have visited the schools which flourished there when Heliopolis was one of the famous cities of the world. Of the actual city only drab mounds of rubbish remain to remind the visitor of departed glory, for ancient Heliopolis was ransacked to build the city of Cairo. Archaeologists have dug and sifted the ruins trying to find the answer to Time's questions. They are still searching, but only a few of the questions have been answered.

### Armies Since the Dawn of History

Cairo has been the stamping ground of armies almost since the dawn of history. The Roman, the Turk, the Frenchman, the Englishman—each has played the part of conqueror—each has left his mark. Wise men are still sifting Egypt's sand, unearthing treasures from desolate mounds and ruined temples, slowly adding to their knowledge of ancient history. But not all the scarabs and quaint souvenirs so ardently merchanted by

Arab pedlars came from the ruins of Egypt; most of them were mass production efforts from Birmingham, we afterwards discovered.

### A City of Extremes

Cairo we found to be a city of extremes. There is ethereal beauty; there is unbelievable squalor; the most atrocious smells in the world issue from twisted streets and the bowels of the pyramids; distressing clouds of flies are a pest in the native quarters; perfumed gardens as picturesque as Dulac drawings face grand sweeps of boulevard, for the new city is French in design. From these broad, tree-shaded streets run tortuous alleyways where the houses almost meet overhead.

I have stepped from ankle-deep filth into a bazaar where all is cleanliness and the air is perfumed with cedarwood and musk, to drink from delicately fashioned cups, rich, bitter coffee offered by the merchant craftsman who plies his trade there. In that same filthy street I have watched the native milkman producing milk warm from his skinny cow as he went from door to door, leading the animal by a rope. I have walked out of a hotel which bore all the hall-marks of a palace into the dim cavern of a twisted alley to listen to the strangest music in the world. The tune was as twisted as the street. It went on and on, without beginning, without end, plaintively, as though it had begun with time itself and would go on to eternity.

### Strange Meeting

Some strange meetings have happened in the military camps. Men who have not seen each other since the last war have met again in khaki. Others have found relatives they have never known.

One of the most amazing meetings was one between a New Zealander who had travelled abroad and a man of French extraction. Years ago they lived next door to each other in Johannesburg, South Africa. Then they went their various ways — the New Zealander to continue his travels, which eventually brought him back to Wellington, and the Frenchman to wander until he finally reached New Zealand.

They never corresponded. Then, one day in Trentham, they met and recognised each other. Now they are in Egypt, members of the 1st Echelon of the 2nd New Zealand Division.

### Trentham Dental Hospital

The new dental hospital at Trentham Camp is now complete, and the old hospital has become the living quarters of the dental officers. Modern equipment has been installed, and the men receive first-class treatment from an efficient staff, which includes many of the best dentists practising in New Zealand.

## Personal

Lieut.-Colonel J. G. Jeffery, M.C., formerly officer commanding the 3rd Field Brigade, has been appointed area officer for the Otago Military District.

Major A. J. Moore, N.Z.S.C., has been appointed chief instructor at Burnham.

Major K. W. Fraser, who is well known in advertising and business circles in Auckland, has been posted to the 5th Field Regiment, New Zealand Artillery.

Squadron-Leader R. L. Sinclair, who until recently commanded the Wellington General Reconnaissance Squadron of the New Zealand Air Force, has been appointed to headquarters for personnel staff duties. He comes from Pahiatua.

Second-Lieutenant C. S. Pepper, the All Black, has been posted to the 7th Anti-Tank Regiment, and Second Lieutenant G. A. H. Bullock-Douglas, another All Black, to the 21st Auckland Battalion.

Second-Lieutenant R. J. Standford, formerly of Catts Patterson Advertising Agency, Wellington, has been posted to the 4th Field Regiment, New Zealand Artillery.

W. N. Mitchell, of the staff of the "Otago Daily Times," is with the units of the 2nd Echelon.

## TRAINING WIRELESS OPERATORS

### Union Steam Ship Company's Offer

The Minister of Defence, the Hon. F. Jones, states that he has received an offer from the Union Steam Ship Company for the free use of its school for wireless operators in Wellington. This offer provides for the attendance of eight to ten pupils at the school at one time.

The Minister said that he deeply appreciated this generous offer of assistance, as it would enable applicants for appointments as wireless operators in the Royal New Zealand Air Force to receive training in advance of the dates on which they would normally be scheduled to go into Royal New Zealand Air Force instructional schools. A number of men who otherwise might be delayed in being posted to other sections of the service would now be able to qualify as wireless operators.

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