

SOUTH PERSIA

SOUTH PERSIA RIFLES DURING THE GREAT WAR 1914 – 1918

The province of FARS in name, history and population has the best right to be regarded as Persia proper. The recent history has been one of incessant disorder and lawlessness. In 1911 robberies on the Shiraz - Bushire road reached their height. The British Government sent the 30th C. I. Horse to Shiraz to strengthen the consulate. In the same year the South Persia Gendarmerie was formed under Swedish officers. The Gendarmerie gradually improved and by 1914 order was restored on the Bushire - Shiraz - Isphahan roads. On the outbreak of War German intrigues led to the defection of the Gendarmerie. The British Consul and Colony at Shiraz were arrested in November 1915 and were not released until August 1916. In 1916 a force termed the "South Persia Rifles" was formed with Sir Percy Sykes as Inspector-General, the latter with Lt. Colonel Gough the new Consul, Lt-Colonel F. F. Hunter, Major H. H. Thorburn, 124th Baluchi Regt. 36th Mounted Battery, 15 Lancers and Pack Wireless section. They arrived in Shiraz about the end of November 1916. The South Persia Rifles met with a reverse at Dasht-i-Arjan in December 1916 and it was decided to obtain more troops and personnel from India. In December 1916 the following details left Karachi to join the South Persia Rifles:

Captain Williams	Engineering Service
2/Lieutenant Hill	21st Lancers
SubConductor Skinner	I.A.O.C.
SubConductor Rogers	I.A.S.C.

21 N.C.O.'s of British Units - Artillery, Cavalry and Infantry as Instructors.

On arrival at Bunder Abbas the ship anchored about 2 miles from the shore. On account of the shallow water passengers and baggage trans-shipped into lighters but even then these could not reach the shore - and everyone had to be carried by the boatmen for about 50 yards. We were met on the shore by Capt. R. C. Ruck, Commandant of Bunder Abbas and Sub Conductor Gypson I.A.O.C. who, for a few months, had been carrying out Ordnance and Supplies duty here.

Stores were continually arriving from India and orders had been received to prepare a convoy for Shiraz and one for Kerman.

A General H.Q. Staff arrived for the S.P.Rifles with Lt-Col. E. F. Orton A.A. & Q.M.G., Major Grant G.S.O. 1, Major Hamilton G.S.O. 11, Major A. S. Hay, Brigade Major, Major Hanson A.D.S.&T., Mr. Waterfield, Financial Advisor and numerous other Officers. The 16th Rajputs under Lt. Col Van Runner, the Burma Mounted Rifles, a mule Corps and a large Accounts and Audit Staff arrived. Amongst others to arrive were Sub Conductor Pepper and Sub Conductor Tayler I.A.O.C. In fact every day brought fresh arrivals until there was quite a large force assembled at Bunder Abbas. There was one casualty - Serjt-Major Wilson 21st. Lancers died through concussion in the head apparently having been kicked by his horse. He was found on the beach near the consulate and the horse was standing by - with its shoulder out. He did not recover consciousness.

A small column with Staff, personnel, stores, etc, left for Kerman to reinforce the Kerman Brigade of the South Persia Rifles.

On 27, February 1917, the first echelon under Lt. Colonel Van Runner left Bunder Abbas for Shiraz, the route decided on being Ginau, Tang-I-Zagh, Gakum, Saidabad, Katru, Niriz, Badeh, Shiraz.

The second and third echelons followed within a few days and the whole joined up at Saidabad.

At Bunder Abbas the A.D.S&T transferred me a horse, saddlery, line gear and a syce and the O.C. column detailed six of the 21st Lancers to assist on the line of march with the Ordnance stores, seeing the animals did not stray, drop their leads etc, and checking packages on arrival in Camp.

The transport consisted of 700 camels and 900 donkeys and also the Indian mules. The donkey transport was good; they use a straw palan and as a rule carry two maunds. The camels were not so good - they are supposed to carry 4mds each but unless a good type is engaged they will not do it. A number became sick and had to be shot. The camel drivers are inclined to over-load some animals in order to have some others spare for riding and then they have to be watched or they will pick up private loads from the villages. Along the route ration supplies such as sheep, goats, vegetables, dates etc, were purchased by the Supply Officer.

During the first ten days water was scarce and that procurable was brackish, on some days hardly any was available. The country is wild and desolate with small villages here and there and these are walled and have their watch-towers. It is surprising the number of abandoned villages along the route, some appear to be in a good state of preservation as regards the walls etc, but not a soul is to be seen. Epidemics no doubt account for a lot and also failure of the water supply. There are practically no roads but rather tracks made by the camel convoys, and these naturally connect with each village.

After a couple of days out everything got in order and there was little trouble excepting each morning the Camels trying to get away without loads. With the issue of ration daily for men and animals of course the number of loads become less and less each day. The Camel men are quite robust although they do not appear to feed well. The principal food during the day is dates, pomegranates and water - and on arrival in Camp the usual gupathi or pan-cake which they cook very quickly using the camel thorn for fires. At each halt when there is a village they mostly have friends and feed with them. These men as a rule only travel between certain regular stages and at the terminal stage fresh transport arrangements have to be made. In the present case arrangements could only be made for the journey between Bunder Abbas and Saidabad in Sirjan District - about 220 miles.

A week was spent in Saidabad in making transport arrangements etc. The 2nd and 3rd Echelon joined there and were merged into one column.

At Saidabad the column was met by a Naib Nasirulla Khan who had been sent from Shiraz as a guide and also to give advice regarding the country, people, etc. He was quite a smart officer, well-educated and connected. He wore the uniform of the Gendarmerie - Colour sky blue, jacket with stand-up collar, cuffs white with gold panels, aiguillettes of gold, badges of rank in the collar, breeches with black strappings and gold lace stripes - jack boots and spurs - lamb skin cap with gold lace crown.

One day during our stay at Saidabad a small column arrived from up-country with quite a fierce-looking man in charge who had evidently been roughing-it for a time. He turned out to be Major Rich of the Indian Surveys who for some months had been on survey work in Persia. He stayed a couple of days and then passed on.

Also Serjt Cox, S.L.I., attached to the M.T. arrived from Kerman with a motor car for Shiraz. Serjt Cox had recently conducted a convoy of cars from Quetta via Dudzdap to Kerman for which he was awarded the M.S.M. He eventually left the service and set up in the motor line at Shiraz. He was killed at Kunar Takhtah on the Bushire - Shiraz road in 1924 - 25 as the result of a quarrel.

After leaving Saidabad the column travelled via the Salt desert to Niriz. The Niriz Pass was rather difficult for the motor car - it had to be man-handled with ropes but eventually arrived safely.

The Burma Mounted Rifles were an excellent force - the men were picked men of about 12 year's service and the ponies were very sturdy and active. They travel at a jog-trot and keep it up for hours and hours on end. Whilst the column was travelling through the valleys the B.M.R. vedettes would be on top of the mountains - still riding. The ponies are quite small - equipment special M.I. pattern with the M.I. pattern rifle bucket. The conditions in Persia suited them.

On arrival at Niriz fresh camels had to be engaged and there we met the North Country Camel with the long hair much larger than the general run. Sir Percy Sykes had also sent the S.P.R. Mule Corps to Niriz to meet the column and give any assistance necessary. The Mule Corps was in charge of S. Serjt Catto, I.A.S.C.

The O.C. column decided that all S.A.A. and gun ammunition with the rifles should be sent on in advance of the column to Shiraz with the S.P.R. Mule Corps escorted by a detachment of the S.P.R. Cavalry from Niriz. I was detailed to accompany and to also arrange for receiving the stores from the column on arrival at Shiraz. This journey was very pleasant being made by easy stages. We halted a day at Karameh in a house belonging to the Qavoam-ul-mulk and then had an introduction to the local Persian humman (bath).

On arrival in Shiraz we were met at the Brigade Headquarters by Lt. Colonel F.F. Hunter, Commanding Fars Brigade. One of the first questions the Brigade Commander asked was how much in rupees would it cost to equip an Infantry and Cavalry Regiment and cost of upkeep in equipment annually but this was beyond me without my books of reference. At the time the Brigade estimates for the S.P.Rifles were being prepared. A suitable building had to be selected as an Ordnance Depot as although stores had been arriving for months past they had simply been stacked in small store-rooms near the Headquarters Office. A building was selected in the town - there was a good-sized courtyard with store-rooms on three sides and surrounded by a wall 15 feet high situated next to the Chief Police Station and opposite to the Palace. The place was very old dating back to when Karim Khan was Shah and Shiraz the capital - about 200 years. Still there was no lack of funds and the Garrison Engineer quickly put it in a condition for occupation. The magazines were arranged in the Indian Infantry lines - about a mile distant.

The main column arrived after three days and were met by the S.P.Rifles with band etc, the bandmaster being a Sultan (Captain) and -generally mounted on a white donkey.

The Governor-General of Fars, H. H. Prince Farman Farma G.C.M.C. (an uncle of Ahmad Shah) entertained all British Officers, W, & N. C. O' s and Indian Officers at an 'At Home' in the Palace and the reception finished up with a fine display of fireworks. The Governor-General presented all British Ranks with a small framed photo of himself. The South Persia Rifles at this stage were in a very low state owing to the Gendarmerie finishing up with general corruption; the best men had left the district and gone to Teheran, Isphahan, etc, and to get a decent stamp of man was difficult.

The General Staff had a big job in re-organising recruiting - appointing officers - clothing - rations, etc quite a number of officers were appointed on the basis of bringing in a certain number of recruits – this method is sound as it is the custom for gentlemen of standing to keep their own retainers, these are mounted and armed in order that they may protect their houses, villages and property.

In addition to the general Headquarters Staff - Brigade Headquarters etc, the South Persia Rifles consisted of:

- 5 Infantry Regiments
- 3 Cavalry Regiments
- 2 Artillery Pack Batteries
- 1 Artillery Field Section
- 2 Machine Companies
- 2 Field Company Engineers
- 2 Field Ambulances
- 2 Veterinary Hospitals
- 1 Brigade School of Signalling
- 2 Pack Mule Corps
- 1 Mule Cart Corps
- 1 M.T. Coy
- 2 Station Bands

The Armaments and equipment being;

- 75 mm. Mounted Guns
- 75 mm. Field Guns
- 311 Manser Carbines*
- 311 Manser Machine Guns

*These were later withdrawn from troops. It was stated that 50,000 Manser carbines were brought in to Shiraz to equip the Gendarmerie but only 600 could be collected after our arrival. Private followers, camel men, etc, were all armed with the Manser. Ammunition of all descriptions was obtainable in the Bazaars.

- .303-in M.L.E. Rifles
- .303-in. M.L.E. Carbine Cavalry
- B.L. 10-pdr Mountain Gun
- RML. 2.5-in Mountain Gun
- .303-inch Lewis Guns

The equipment was Persian and Russian in the first place but this was withdrawn and the following issued:

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| Cavalry | Universal Saddlery |
| | 90 Rds Bandolier |
| | Sword Cavalry P' 99 |
| | Carbine M.L.E. Cavalry |
| Artillery | Bandolier 70 Rds |
| | Carbine M.E. Arty |
| Infantry | M.E. 11. Pattern (Later this was withdrawn and replaced by the Bandolier Patt 03. |

The Web Equipt was not suitable the belts being much too large. Persians are small waisted.)

Tufangchis - or Road Guards were armed with every conceivable kind of rifle - they supplied their own and obtained free ammunition.

Mule Corps Local made equipment

The Mule Carts were made on the Russian type and four horses abreast were used.

The Pack equipment for Mules being:

Head Collar (Leather)

Breast piece (material)

Breeching (Leather)

Palan (Pack, saddle stuffed with pani grass

Surcingle (Leather)

Blanket

Overall Surcingle (Webbing)

Loading Rope

The load usually carried is approx. 4 Mds. There is one muleteer to three mules and he is responsible for the loading and unloading. When approaching the towns the mules are tied to the one in front ties to the one in front but usually they travel loose. Bhoosa is carried but as far as possible they live on the country. The camel equipment is very similar.

RANKS IN THE S.P.R.

Yarvar	Major
Sultan 1.)	
Sultan 11.)	Captain
Naib 1.)	
Naib 11)	Lieutenant
Aspirant 1.)	
Aspirant 11.)	Cadet
Vakil Bashi	Serjt Major
Vakil	Serjt
Sar-i-judi	Corporal
Tabin	Private

In the beginning of 1918 Mr. Wassmuss, previously the German Consul in Shiraz and afterwards the most active member of the German Jihad Mission in Persia, became busy and the tribes under the Il Khami Saulat-ul-Daulah rose in general revolt - all lines of communication to Bunder Abbas, Bushire, Teheran, etc were cut and the tribesmen gathered on the mountains enclosing Shiraz. (Refer to the appendix from The Statesman January 9 1932 for more information about Wilhelm Wassmuss - A German Scarlet Pimpernel The Man who Played a Lone Hand.)

The War news which filtered through was depressing at this time and all kinds of rumours were current. There were internal troubles in the South Persian Rifles and defection was rife. One night a machine gun section cleared off - gun and ammunition, men and mules - they were recovered about a fortnight afterwards, the C.C. Fort Khaneh Zinian and a Serjeant-Instructor were murdered and the bodies thrown down a well, the gates opened and the Fort given over to the tribesmen. The bodies were recovered by the Governor General and brought into Shiraz for burial. There were constant rumours of the arrival of aeroplanes and a landing ground was prepared, also of a force marching from Bushire and Bunder Abbas. Eventually the tribes were beaten off and communications re-established with Bushire. The Indian striking force en route from Bushire had arrived at Kazerun. An aeroplane arrived from Bushire and caused quite a sensation, as it was the first one to be seen in Shiraz.

There was great rejoicing in Shiraz on receipt of the news of the Armistice. Sir Percy Sykes entertained all British ranks at dinner in the Headquarters Mess and also announced his early return to England. This was followed by an -At Home- at H.B.M. Consulate to all the British Colony and Troops.

The Armistice had not settled the internal troubles in South Persia but they were all pushed into abeyance by the arrival of influenza which had travelled along all the trade routes wiping out whole villages - caravans wandered where the animals wished. Shiraz itself became a dead city - bodies lay in all nooks and corners and stacks of dead were in the cemetery awaiting burial - the jackals and dogs accounted for quite a number.

Many of the S.P.R. vanished, whether they died or deserted no one knew. All day long the Indian Troops

were burning their dead in the river bed. As this eased off so cholera and small-pox broke out in the town. The Medical Officers Lt-Colonel J.B.D. Hunter and Major J. Kernahan I.M.S. were run off their feet as were also the Indian Field Ambulances with Major Gibson, Major Illins, Capt. Porter and Capt. Briggs. Many of the British Ranks died and the small British cemetery consulate became a place of daily visitation.

Eventually events more or less adjusted themselves. Sir Percy Sykes left for India and handed over to I.G. to Col. E.F. Orton. A relief column was despatched to Abadeh where the tribesmen had surrounded the S.P.R. Detachment. This was in all respects a success. Lt-Colonel Fraser received the D.S.O. for the defence of Abadeh. The S.P.R. now entered into a period of intense training.

Col. Orton returned to India - handing over to Lt-Colonel W.A.K. Fraser. The 124th Baluchi Regt, 36 Mountain Battery 15th Lancers, 26th and 27th Light Cavalry, 16 Rajputs, B.M. Rifles all returned to India and the Barracks and posts were taken over by the S.P.R.

Lt-Colonel Fraser, Inspector-General, proceeded to Teheran to consult with the Persian Government as to the future policy of the S.P.R. and it was agreed to continue the Force with a Headquarters Staff at Isphahan, a British Officer to each unit and three Ordnance Depots - Shiraz, Kerman and Isphahan. Conditions of engagement were to be for four years and 6 months leave on full pay and re-engagement if satisfactory. All surplus personnel were evacuated to India and all stores not considered suitable for the S.P.R. were returned to India. The Artillery was moved to the Barracks previously occupied by the Indian Mountain Battery and the S.P.R. Arty Barracks handed over to the Ordnance Depot. Details from Kerman were despatched with stores, etc, to form the nucleus of a Brigade at Isphahan.

Then rumours of trouble in the Maglis in Teheran commenced to come in. The Inspector-General again went to Teheran and on his return orders were given to commence disbanding certain Units. The Isphahan details were recalled to Shiraz. Even this it was thought to be a temporary measure only but eventually definite orders arrived to disband the whole force and return all British and Indian personnel to India. All clothing and equipment were to be sent to Bombay via Bushire. Eventually these orders were carried out and on 20.10.1921 our final departure from Shiraz took place, the party consisting of:

Lt.-Colonel W.A.K. Fraser M.C., D. S. O, Inspector-General

Major A. J. Avison, D.A.A.G.,

Capt. A. J. Arthur R.E.

Sub Conductor J. Thatcher I.A.O.C.,

Conductor W. Skinner, I.A.O.C.

The escort consisted of 100 men who were to be disbanded on arrival at Bushire. On arrival at Kazerum the column was joined by Capt. J. Teague, M.C. and a few men of the 1st. Infantry S.P.R. During the journey we were well-treated by the local chiefs and on occasions were feasted in a style usually depicted in the pantomimes.

Whilst awaiting embarkation at Bushire the H.M.S. Renown arrived bringing Sir P. Loraine the new Minister for Persia. A telegram was also received from the Foreign Office, London thanking all ranks for their work in connection with the evacuation. The party embarked at Bushire on 2nd December 1921 and duly arrived in India.

ORDNANCE DEPOT - SOUTH PERSIA RIFLES. SHIRAZ

On arrival at Shiraz a suitable building was taken over. Prior to this all stores arriving had received by the Garrison Quartermaster who kept one general store for ordnance, clothing, etc. Stores had been arriving from India via Bunder Abbas and from Busra during the 12 months previous but no receipts had been granted. A few days after arrival in Shiraz two large sacks of vouchers were sent to the Depot marked 'presumably Ordnance' and amongst them were duplicate, triplicate, etc, copies with memos from Arsenals in India crying for receipts. No record had been maintained of the stores received - vouchers were not kept, simply a system of 'Chits' which were often lost and then there was no record. On taking over the stores it was noticed that the ledger balance in many cases was 'NIL' although there was stock. On enquiring, the Quartermaster said he only posted as he made issues i.e. 'Issued to 5 Infantry 100 Rifles' then -'Received by convoy 100 Rifles' - simple - vouchers from the Base and India were put on one side.

No stationery or books had been sent from India nor asked for. In the bazaar a printing press was discovered with English type so ledger sheets and vouchers and indent forms were printed to suit our purpose.

It was considered that the Ordnance Depot would become a permanent one for Persian Troops and therefore as far as possible all Persian personnel were trained with the object of having a sound foundation and to encourage reliability with a sense of responsibility also.

Units of the South Persian Rifles were treated as 'Peace' units and maintained ledgers etc. There was a large Accounts and Audit Staff and soon they were in their glory. The Indian Troops were under usual F.S. conditions. There was a deal of spadework to be got through such as connecting up vouchers from India with the stores - opening ledgers - checking stores in hand, arranging storage, etc, and before everything could be settled satisfactory the whole of the equipment in store and with the S.P.R. units had to be checked. A copy of the P.V. of S. Part 1 and 11 was brought from Ferozepore Arsenal and they were extremely useful in the preparation of Ledgers etc. The only establishment taken over for the Ordnance Depot consisted of 4 Armourers - ranking as officers - they proved to be good all round men and served until the S.P.R. was disbanded. A young man was enlisted as an 'Aspirant' (the lowest grade of the officer class) he had been brought up by a Dutchman and could speak and understand English - 20 coolies were taken on - part Persian and part Jews. The mixture was necessary as one would watch the other and also Persians will not work on Fridays and Jews will not work on Saturdays and it is necessary to work all days.

The Jewish labourers were good - they worked well and with a good heart and liked permanent work - the majority remained until the closing of the depot. Their pay was Krans 90 per month, equivalent to about Rs. 25/-/- to Rs. 30/-/-.

The O.C. Fars Brigade gave temporarily the service of a corporal of the 21st. Lancers. For the time being the stores were kept in boxes formed into racks.

In the Ammunition Store-room was a supply of every kind of S.A. Ammunition imaginable - Russian, German, Turkish French, English and local manufactures. Several thousand rounds of .303-in powder filled with zinc bullets. For a long time there was trouble with the ammunition on charge of the Units as it was quite common for the men to sell the Govt. .303-in ammunition in the Bazaar and purchase locally filled at

half the rate, which when fired, generally left the bullet in the barrel.

The hardest job was trying to get anything like method in the Units. The O.C. Units were temporary - Officers mostly from the Imperial Bank of Persia. Telegraphs etc, and up to the time of opening the Depot, they had been able to get any article from the store by giving a 'chit' whether for private use or otherwise so that when the Ordnance introduced an A.P. etc, it was not popular. Also the Units had been in the habit of purchasing any items necessary from the Bazaar even though a similar article could have been issued from the store - such as the equipment of the Cavalry was the 90 Rds. Bandolier but the O.C. wished for 50 Rds. Bandoliers - there was only stock of 90 Rds. so the O.C. purchased his requirements from the Bazaar paying, at an equivalent of over £1 each for a very inferior article. There were many such cases and it was not until the Inspector General cut off the Units imprest account that it was stopped and every item of equipment had to be obtained from the Ordnance Depot.

The following details arrived from Bunder Abbas and posted to the Ordnance:

Serjt Robins and 3 Sepoys	June 1917
*Armourer Nazar Ahmad Khan	August 1917
*Armourer Abdul Ghafur 75 C.I	February 1918
Clerks:	
Mr. Feelingstone (Clothing)	August 1918
Mr. Jones	September 1918
Mr. Basu	October 1918

*Both these Armourers were awarded the Meritorious Service Medal for their good work.

Serjt Robins had a very monotonous job for some months posting vouchers morning noon and night but eventually things began to get into order and to run smoothly except that always the O.C. Infantry units complained continuously of the old M.E.I.I. equipment. Pilfering was very rife as regards the stores sent by caravan - especially with regard to warm underclothing.

In May 1918, Major H.W. Gardiner R.A. arrived as D.A.D.O.S. to the Force with Sub Conductor Dwyer, Serjt Salter and 2 Sepoys as his staff. They travelled by forced stages from Bunder Abbas via Lars on account of the tribesmen rising against us

The position of the Ordnance Depot was considered unsafe being in the town and liable to be cut off and raided. Orders were given for it to be moved to a garden near to the Brigade Headquarters. The Mule Corps, Cart Corps and troops were requisitioned - the boxes closed and loose stores bundled and the Depot was cleared completely in the three days allowed for.

In October 1918 it was decided that "Clothing" should be taken over by the Ordnance. The S. & T. held practically no stocks in Shiraz as their procedure was to transfer the indent to the Base and then the stores would arrive by caravan addressed to the Unit. Arrangements were made by the D.A.D.O.S. for a six months supply of Clothing items for all the troops to be sent to the Ordnance Depot, Shiraz. Materials were to be sent for the S.P.R as they did not wear I.T. patterns. A Tailors Shop and a Boot Repair Shop were opened and Boot Repairs for all Units were undertaken. Owing to Shiraz being cut-off from Base the clothing of all ranks became very dilapidated and as soon as supplies commenced to arrive the Ordnance personnel had their hands full, the tailors were working 24 hours by 8 hours shifts and each item had to be

inspected and passed and all individual clothing for all Officers and British Ranks had to be specially fitted. Major Gardiner, D.A.D.O.S transferred Serjt Salter to the Depot to assist.

Of great assistance was the Persian Officer in charge of the Clothing Section - Sultan Jallal-ul-Din Mirza. He had previously served in the Gendarmerie and was one of the first officers to join up with the S.P.R. He remained until the Force was disbanded. He proved to be a capable man and always obliging.

Sub Conductor Dwyer was sent to Saidabad, Siryan - District to straighten out the Dump there. On arrival at Niriz he found the Indian Detachment almost wiped out - the British Officer having just died. He had the body cremated, collected the ashes and handed them over to the O. C. Unit at Saidabad.

Sub Conductor Jenkins arrived from Bunder Abbas. En route he had a strenuous month at Saidabad where all the stores for Shiraz had been dumped and the dump eventually became chaos. Sub Conductor Thatcher and Serjt Thomas arrived from Bunder Abbas in January 1919 and Sub Conductor Shorrocks arrived via Bushire in February 1919.

A convoy of equipment and clothing and officers shop stores from Bushire was brought in by Sub Conductor Waldram who was able to give all the news of the Bushire striking force. Major Gardiner, D.A.O.D.S. was recalled to India in April 1919 and his office was then absorbed into the Ordnance Depot. Serjt Robins and Serjt Salter and two Sepoys were evacuated to India for demobilization and the Depot settled down to re-organisation and Audits.

The Ordnance Depot was moved again to its original habitation, the clothing and boot stores remaining near the Brigade Headquarters owing to insufficient accommodation in the Depot.

In November 1919 Conductor Skinner proceeded to India on a months leave handing over charge of the Depot to Sub Conductor Jenkins.

On arrival at Bushire on the return journey the Indian Force was evacuating Persia and an arrangement had been made for all suitable items of clothing and equipment to be handed over to the S.P.R. and transferred to Shiraz. All items considered suitable were marked off in the ledgers by Conductor Skinner who then proceeded to Shiraz. Sub Conductor Thatcher was despatched to Bushire to take over, pack and despatch the stores. This was quite a busy time at both ends. Sub Conductor Jenkins proceeded to India on leave. All surplus stores not suitable for the S.P.R. were returned to India.

The S.P.R. Artillery Barracks was allotted as an Ordnance Depot. This was reconstructed – fitted with racks etc, and made a more or less ideal Ordnance Depot as regards accommodation etc. The large and dry stables made good bulk store-rooms for the clothing and after much heavy work the place began to look quite smart and businesslike.

The Inspector General inspected the Depot and was pleased with the results. Sub Conductor Thatcher was placed under orders for Isphahan Ordnance Depot. And then quite suddenly orders were received to disband the force - collect all arms and equipment and despatch everything via Bushire to Bombay. Equipment and stores from units were handed in daily, everything possible was packed and arrangements made to transfer all stores by convoy to Bushire. Captain Venters S.P.R. was despatched to Bushire to receive the stores and forward to Bombay. 5700 loads were despatched from the Depot, Book Value Rs.1,500,000. All explosives and ammunition were destroyed.

On 19.10.21 the Depot was handed over to a representative of H.E. the Governor General with all items of stores and equipment belonging to the Persian Government such as Pack and F.Arty equipment, Manser Machine Guns, Carbines, Tools etc, and the Ordnance Depot, Shiraz closed.

The strength at the date of dosing was:

British Ranks	3 W.O's
Indian Ranks	3 I.O.R's
Indian Armourers	2 I.O.R's
Persian Ranks:	
Sultan	1
Naib	1
Aspirants	2
Vakils	1
Tabins	10
Persian Armourers:	
Naib	1
Aspirants	2
Sar-i-jugi	1
Labourers	40

On arrival at Bushire all ledgers and accounts had to be balanced and audited and then transferred to the C.M.A, Quetta - this was done and all audit objections settled. The work of the I.A.O.C. personnel was highly appreciated by Sir Percy Sykes and subsequent Inspector Generals, and the Staff, as shown in the Despatches and also in the periodical inspection reports.

The Depot combined Ordnance Stores and Equipment Clothing, Boots, Garniture etc, and dealt with British, Indian and Persian Officers and Troops. Colonel W.A.K. Fraser, the Inspector General stated in his final report that the Ordnance personnel under Conductor Skinner were to be specially commended for their work in the evacuation of the stores, that it was one of the best performances of its kind he had ever heard of and that he had brought it to the notice of the Government of India the names of Conductor Skinner and Sub Conductor F. Thatcher I.A.O.C.

Conductor Skinner was in charge during 5 years of its existence having opened and then finally closed the Depot. He was highly commended for his work and recommended in despatches on three occasions for promotion to the Commissioned rank. He was also awarded the Meritorious Service Medal and the Order of the British Empire.

ORDNANCE ESTABLISHMENT AT SHIRAZ. PERSIA

D.A.D.O.S.

Major H.W. Gardiner, R.A	May 1918 to April 1919
Sub Conductor W. Dwyer	May 1918 to October 1919
Serjt Salter	May 1918 to March 1919

ORDNANCE DEPOT

Conductor W. Skinner	January 1917 to December 1921
Sub Conductor H. Jenkins	September 1918 to May 1921
Sub Conductor J. Thatcher	January 1919 to December 1921
Sub Conductor J. Shorrock	February 1919 to December 1921
Serjt A. Robins	June 1917 to March 1919
Serjt H. Thomas	January 1919 to November 1919

SEPOYS

Sepoy Faiz Ali	June 1917 to August 1918
Sepoy Ghulam Haider	June 1917 to April 1919
Sepoy Nadir Khan	June 1917 to April 1919
Sepoy Inyatulla	April 1918 to May 1919
Sepoy Penda Khan	April 1918 to July 1921
Sepoy Habib Khan	January 1919 to December 1921
Sepoy Wilayat	January 1919 to December 1921
Sepoy Sulla	February 1919 to July 1921
Sepoy Chhoti	February 1919 to July 1921

ARMOURERS

Nazar Ahmad Khan B.M.P.	August 1917 to December 1921
Abdul Ghafur, 75th C.I.	February 1918 to December 1921

CLERKS

Mr. Feelingstone	August 1918 to December 1921
Mr. Jones	September 1918 to April 1920
Mr. M.M. Basu	October 1918 to June 1919

A GERMAN SCARLET PIMPERNEL

WILHELM WASSMUSS - A MAN WHO PLAYED A LONE HAND

"The death has occurred of Wilhelm Wassmuss, of the German Diplomatic Service who organised the South Persian tribes against Britain in 1915."

In these few words Reuter dismisses the passing away of a man who gained no little reputation in South Persia during the Great War. It is curious to note that the hackneyed adage "other times, other manners" is very apt in the case of Wilhelm Wassmuss. The member of the German Diplomatic Service is dead, but it was as Wassmuss, the SPY - all in capital letters - that I first heard of him in Bushire. Indeed, he was in the German Diplomatic Service, but it was not as such that he caused all the trouble he did in withstanding the British occupation of South Persia.

Little is known of the opposition that the British troops met with in the occupation of the island of Bushire and parts of the mainland. For, when a war was raging on several fronts in three Constituents, much importance could not possibly be attached to a comparatively small squabble near Bushire. The Persians had little to say in the matter. The Shah's seat of Government, Teheran, is indeed a far cry from the sandy plains of Bushire.

Arms and ammunition in vast quantities Wassmuss distributed among the turbulent and fierce raiders of the mountains, the Tangastanis, a people much akin in habit and profession to the borderers of the North-West frontier of India. As the rugged mountains of Scotland offered home and refuge to the followers of Roderick Dhu, relying on their claymores for a living, so the Tangastani has ever raided his more peaceable but richer lowland neighbour. Here was reproduced in the 20th century conditions which are read of in Scott's works. These Tangastanis swept down from their hill fastnesses upon the peoples of the plain and carried away their sheep. Despite their lawlessness, they have a code - the Tangastanis do not war on women.

GUERRILLA WARFARE

It was such a people, whose profession was killing, that Wassmuss, a lonely German among a strange people, mustered against the British. Still another people whom he brought on his side with lavish promises and no less lavish gifts of arms and ammunition were the dwellers of the hilly country bordering on Reshire, four miles from Bushire proper and accessible by sea.

His preparation complete and backed by tribes which delighted in war, Wassmuss challenged the British occupation. The British forces, far from large, found the task of taking the battle to the Reshire country difficult of accomplishment due to the guerrilla tactics of these people who were fighting on ground with which they were only too familiar. But attacked by sea, they gave way, and thus was quickly finished this phase of the opposition.

The fierce Tangastanis, however, led by their renowned chief, Sheikh Hussain, of whom more hereafter, were more than ready to redeem their promise to the German Spy that they would do all they could do to withstand the British occupation from being consolidated. They offered battle at a place called Ahmedi, some eleven miles from Bushire proper by caravan road. Here in the open plain, with crude trenches thrown up, the small British force met the Tangastani hordes, led by their gallant chief and the no less brave Wassmuss. Raiders born, they stubbornly held their position. In the midst of the battle Sheikh Hussain threw out the arrogant challenge to any British officer who cared to accept it for a revolver duel, on the result of which the fate of the battle would be considered as being decided. Needless to say, such a challenge could not possibly be taken up, though the brave and rash spirits chafed under the restraint.

The Tangastanis continued to fight as fiercely as ever, but raiders do not make for disciplined soldiers and individual spectacular acts of bravery or foolhardiness do not win battles. British discipline told and the Tangastanis lost many killed and wounded, but few captured. They asked for no quarter and gave none. The pressure of the British force became too much even for these rash fighters and they fled to their mountain homes, to which it would have been sheer madness to pursue them. The battle of Ahmedi broke up Wassmuss' following and made a fugitive of him. The British occupation was secure.

SHEIKH HUSSAIN

A word about Sheikh Hussain. An Arab, his father, had come to the country with a slender following and not so much by force of arms as by treacherous dealings gained the ascendancy over the petty chiefs of Tangastan. His son, Sheikh Hussain, a warrior at the time of the British occupation some 55 years of age, tall of stature, broad of limb, as energetic as ever he was in his youth, strong and fierce, spread terror with his lightning raids, even going to the extent of levying toll from the Khan (Prince) of Ahmedi, whom he subdued in battle. His name alone inspired terror, for Persian mothers put refractory children to sleep by whispering to them "Sheikh Hussain amaï - Sheikh Hussain is coming. His fame as a fighter went far and wide in South Persia and his reputation of a man who ever kept his word in a killing matter became proverbial. With all his great qualities as a fighter, he was nevertheless treacherous; his plighted word was not to be trusted by friend or foe.

In a country where a knife-thrust or a pistol bullet decides the most trivial of quarrels, Wassmuss gained no small reputation as a fearless fighter and his feats of horsemanship were the talk of the people. A huge figure of a man, he spoke Persian and its Bushire or Shiraz-dialects even as a native, and difficult, indeed, would it be for anyone to recognise him in a crowd of Persians for he had also adopted the country's style of dress.

Many were the efforts made by the British to capture him, but all proved fruitless, for he was as elusive as the Scarlet Pimpernel. He had organised some sort of wireless service - messages of which were intercepted by the British station, but the stations themselves were never discovered - and the irony of it was that Wassmuss used this wireless of his to send occasional messages to the British about his activities. Through this means he gave information of his arrival at or departure from a place and continued to play the

grim game of hide and seek with perfect impunity. One morning a message would come from Bushire of his presence there; in the next day or two Wassmuss would announce his arrival in Shiraz. A fearless rider, for whom the difficult mountain passes from Bushire to Shiraz held no terrors, his journeys between these two places, some 150 miles apart, riding night and day with evidently changes of horses supplied on the route by his friends, called for unusual horsemanship and endurance.

OUT OF THE TRAP

Consequently he became a figure almost legendary to the Persians, and it was these feats and his open-handedness -how he got the money remains a mystery - that made of him the mystery spy of South Persia. Some believed that no such man as Wassmuss existed; others thought that the activities credited to one man must really be the work of many. At all events, he won his way into the hearts of the Persians, who likened him to their own ancient national heroes and would never be instrumental in his capture by the British.

But the occupation had restored to the Khan of Ahmedi his lost dominion, and here was the treacherous Arab, Sheikh Hussain, now a friend of Wassmuss. The Khan invited him to his fortress and the German came apparently, as the Khan thought, without the least misgiving in his mind. The Khan made ready to betray his guest and sent word to British Headquarters in Reshire. The cordon of British soldiers placed around the Khan's fortress drew nearer and the question was Could Wassmuss Escape?

The story told me by the Khan himself is plain, though mystifying. "Wassmuss sat with me," said the Khan, "drinking tea that night and the cordon ever tightening around us. Suddenly he left me and I never saw him again. At that time I thought he had fallen into the hands of the Feringhee. But no. The German had escaped. He left a message written in one of the rooms of the fortress that he hoped to see the British in Shiraz in the next few days."

AND OUT OF THE GAOL

Sheikh Hussain, jealous of men openly acknowledged as brave by the people, was finding the fame of Wassmuss somewhat dimming his own. He never took kindly to the praise of others – did he not have his only son killed because his people said that the boy could be a greater man than his father ever was? - and now he moved. With his characteristic treachery he set about to betray his ally. Be it said that the British had offered inducement to none to effect Wassmuss- capture by any questionable means. The Khan of Ahmedi had acted on his own initiative; the Arab chief also acted on his own. Wassmuss had successfully eluded the British, but he was no match for the low cunning of Sheikh Hussain. He fell duly into British hands and was lodged in a room in Reshire, which was heavily guarded night and day. The caged lion proved very tame and apparently reconciled to his captivity.

Then the astounding news came through one day, sent by Wassmuss himself - he was on his way to Shiraz on the mountains. Headquarters could not believe this to be anything but a hoax. The captive's room, doubly padlocked and made secure, was entered, but Wassmuss was not there. The sentries were promptly put under arrest, pending further enquiries. A close search of the room revealed a tunnel in the sandy floor. Wassmuss had been helped to liberty by his Persian friends outside who had with great labour dug a long tunnel to his room of captivity.

A NAME IN PERSIA

How far the stories current in South Persia of Wassmuss, the Spy, can bear the light of close investigation, I cannot say, but in my wanderings for some three years from Bushire to Shiraz and in the neighbouring country I picked up takes from the mouths of Persians of the man's doings. They always spoke in great admiration of him. The Khan of Ahmedi supplied me with some details, while the betrayal by Sheikh Hussain I was told by the Arab himself, who seemed to consider it as something which redounded to his honour in that he was able to circumvent a man whose cunning and elusiveness were talked of with bated breath by the natives of South Persia.

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