

The zone of contention: As a tanker moves peacefully through the Canal, Royal Air Force Vampires streak by on patrol.

MIDDLE EAST REPORT I

'Here We Stay'

Heavily reinforced, the Army in the Canal Zone has taken all necessary steps to avoid being "starved out, forced out or knocked out"

INEVITABLY, the emergency conditions under which the Army is living in the Canal Zone of Egypt has evoked comparison with conditions during the Army's last years in Palestine.

Soldiers are living behind barbed wire again. They must run the gauntlet of snipers, of throwers of vitriol, jam-pot grenades and tin-can bombs. Again there are wires stretched across roads at neck-height. Again Signals cables are cut.

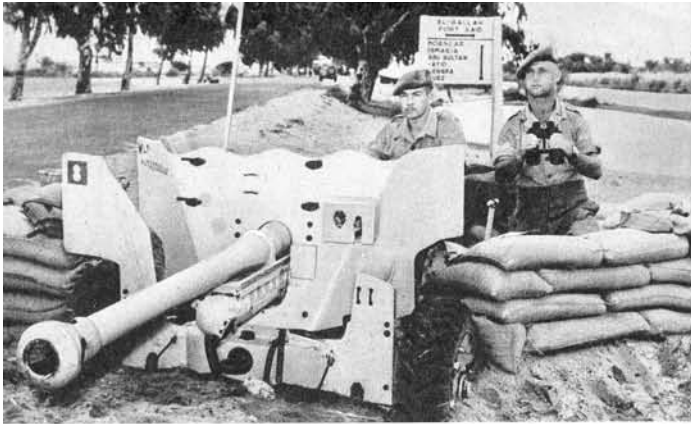
But there are also substantial differences. In Palestine there was no lack of civilian labour; in the Canal Zone most of the 42,000 Egyptians employed by the Army have been terrorised into unemployment.

In Palestine, too, it was the job of the Army, in co-operation with the Palestine Police, to maintain order among the civil population. In Egypt it is the task of the police to keep order among the 400,000 civilian inhabitants of the Canal Zone and the Army has only stepped in, for its own safety, where the police have failed. To avoid "incidents" it has denied itself the off-duty amenities of Ismailia, Port Said and Suez, to the distress of shopkeepers who, in Ismailia alone, are reported to have lost £70,000 of trade a week.

As usual, the British soldier has got down to making the best of the situation, along with the men of the

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Ready for trouble — a British field gun dug in beside a main road. All the names on the signboard have been in the news.



From Ismailia, families were evacuated to a rest camp at Lake Timseh. Here is Serjeant Alan Alfred, with wife and baby.

'Here We Stay' (Cont'd)

Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force. Servicemen acted, among other things, as harbour boatmen, mooring men, stevedores, public utility workers and labourers. They also had to do the more homely jobs which Egyptian labour had performed for the units. On top of this there were guards, guards, guards. And in the intervals, many of the men had to pack their families off home.

Aircraft and ships brought more soldiers to share the guards and the technical jobs, including men called up from the Supplementary Reserve. Maltese and Cypriot workers arrived to replace some of the defaulting Egyptians. From Kenya it was announced that an East African Pioneer Corps was to be raised to lend a hand on the Canal.

There was no shortage of fresh food, except vegetables. Early worries over the supply of beer have not materialised; there was plenty of petrol.

One result of the troubles was the appearance of "The Canal Zone News," a news-sheet publishing 10,000 copies three times a week. The reasons for its production were summed up in the first of a series of lively editorials, mostly on local events: "The Egyptian Government and its ministers simply cannot be trusted either to tell the truth themselves or to permit it to appear in the Egyptian papers, whether in Arabic, French or English."

And so the "News" gives a large proportion of its space to events in the Zone, reports which, to quote the editorial again, are "fully authenticated . . . officially approved and may be absolutely relied upon." There is a special feature of news for families, besides news monitored from the BBC and sport. Egyptian statements are published, sometimes under such headings as "The Untruth" or "Incredible Invention."

The "News" is edited by Army Education and printed by GHQ Printing Press. Each issue bears an assurance that only Service personnel are employed in its production. Beneath its title, the paper declares it is printed and published under the authority of the Commanders-in-Chief, Middle East, and beneath that it prints a Biblical quotation. Sample: "Nicodemus said, 'We know that thou art a teacher come from God.'"



The Loyals descend on the village of Abu Gamus to search for arms. From these huts near Ismailia shots had been fired at British vehicles.



British troops and Egyptian police on the rooftops of Abu Gamus during the search of the village.

SOLDIER to Soldier

MANY an attempt has been made to take the British soldier apart and find what makes him tick (and that does not mean "tick" in the sense of complain).

What inspires the Gloucesters or the King's Own Scottish Borderers to make history on the lonely mountain ridges?

Mr. Eric Linklater (whose history of the Italian campaign is reviewed on page 28) has something to say on the subject. It was not a burning belief in an abstract political idea which kept the armies going in Italy, he suggests. "Throughout the British Army ideology was vague, unspecified and indifferently regarded." He might have added that hardly any soldier knew or cared what the word meant, and that ninety per cent would have spelled it wrongly. (For the record: it was one of Napoleon's words, meaning "science of ideas" or "visionary speculation," according to context.)

What kept the armies going, says Mr. Linklater, was just regimental loyalty, which was "usually strong enough to maintain, without advertisement of its aim or virtue, a cause that thinkers laboured to define and statesmen strove to glorify." The soldier who acquired a forceful sense of community with the Hampshires, or the Black Watch, or the East Lancshires, had perhaps a profounder knowledge of human requirement than many well-intentioned critics of our perplexed community."

MR. LINKLATER is not the first to put his finger on the spot.

To share that sense of community of which he writes it is not even necessary for men to have worn the same cap badge for years; some of the bravest of the Gloucesters were men newly joined from other regiments. At heart, all regimental traditions are the same tradition—the tradition of not giving in. Common adversity welds the old and new hands before anyone can say ideology.

It is tempting to picture an ideologist trapped on a mountain top, with the enemy closing in. Which would cheer him the more: the news that a band of fellow deep-thinkers were arguing about how (or whether) to rescue him, or the news that a British battalion of the Line, battle-tested, was advancing to his aid, for no other reason than that it had been ordered to do so?

None the less, the soldier *does* like to have some idea of why he is fighting. In the late war, when he thought about it, he probably decided that the general idea was to stop innocent people being pushed around; and, to this end, he was prepared to be pushed around himself. Today he has a good idea that the purpose of the campaign in Korea is also to stop people being pushed around.

NOT all readers of SOLDIER will have heard the news of the winding up of the short-lived base at Mackinnon Road, in the Kenya bush.

Five years ago Mackinnon Road was a disused aerodrome; by tremendous labours it was built up into the Tel-el-Kebir of East Africa; now for strategic reasons, it has been wound up.

To those who helped to carve this township out of the wilderness, who suffered the alarms and dangers inseparable from bushwhacking in Africa, the end of Mackinnon Road must be a keen personal disappointment. It is worth remembering some of the things the founders did. They bulldozed a path, 25 yards wide and 73 miles long, to the River Tsavo, and piped back snow-water over it (or rather under it, because the pipes had to be protected from elephant.) They set up pumping stations and power plants in the middle of nowhere. From the resisting scrub they hacked not only the foundations of giant sheds and store-houses, but sites for rail sidings, family bungalows, playing-fields. In due course wives and children underwent some of the excitements of pioneering in Africa.

For excitements there were. One day the whole camp seized its weapons to hunt down a full-grown lion which had wandered through a hut in broad daylight; it fell finally to an RSM's bullet. More recently a herd of elephant roamed into the camp. One beast broke from the herd, picked up an unfortunate Polish-born soldier, hurled him into the air and dashed the life out of him. The carcass of one elephant was removed by tank transporter. That was Mackinnon Road... It was also a camp liable to be assaulted, not only by big game, but by virulent hurricanes.

Well, it's not the first big camp the Army has built up from desolation and has had to abandon; there have been scores of them in peace time. But in years to come there will be many who will tell proud tales of how they built Mackinnon Road, just as doubtless there are men who still tell how they built Razmak, 6000 feet up in the hills of Waziristan.

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"Death to anyone who works for the British..." This poster here being viewed by Lieut-Gen. Sir George Erskine, who commands British troops, Egypt, was posted in Ismailia.



A British soldier inspects the baggage of an Egyptian woman on board a train entering the Canal Zone. Below: on guard in a signal box on the line which links the Canal Zone with Cairo.

