

Military Notes

How L./Cpl. Ben Arie Took the Island of Jumbo

A Dramatic Episode in the Abyssinian Campaign

When, in the course of the Abyssinian campaign, the Italians surrendered the island of Jumbo to the victorious South African and Imperial troops, a young Jewish soldier was the first white man of the South African Forces to cross the Juba River and land on Jumbo Island. This soldier was L./Cpl. Michael Ben Arie, of Cape Town, who was chosen by his Commanding Officer to row across the Juba to Jumbo, and demand from the Italians, who had hoisted the white flag, whether they really intended to capitulate. As this flag might have well been a decoy, L./Cpl. Ben Arie's task was not without danger to him, as everybody concerned recognised.

An account of the dramatic story of the surrender of the town and fort of Jumbo, and the notable part played by L./Cpl. Ben Arie in this exciting episode, has now reached us from an authoritative correspondent "Up North," and is given below. L./Cpl. Ben Arie originally hailed from Palestine. He is well-known in Cape Town, where he has lived for several years, and where, until joining up, he was particularly active in Zionist work.

L./Cpl. BEN ARIE, being Palestinian born, speaks a fluent Arabic. As this language is used by the natives of Italian Somaliland he was appointed official interpreter to Battalion Intelligence.

At the mouth of the Juba river there are two settlements, Gobwen on the south bank and Jumbo on the north. When Kismayo fell we attacked Gobwen but the Italians withdrew across the river to Jumbo, destroying the bridges behind them. Jumbo was heavily armed with many guns. It was our duty to hold the enemy's attention and to draw fire while other units of the brigade went upstream to find a crossing, consolidate it and throw over a bridge.

For six days we lay in the sand-dunes. The company to which Ben Arie was attached was on the extreme right flank, with the sea on their right side and the river ahead of them. They were there to prevent the Italians from crossing and making an attack on the rear of our forces and also to stop the Somalis from making contact with the enemy.

As I later learned, the other units of the brigade finally made a crossing at Ionte. The first night, after the Engineers had ferried over the advance company of a well-known Johannesburg regiment, the Italians attacked, only to be mowed down almost to a man. Within thirty-six hours the Engineers threw a pontoon bridge across the Juba and the stage was set for a full dress attack on Jumbo.

Crossing The Juba.

ZERO hour was set for Thursday morning. Our artillery, mortars and machine guns were to fire continuously while the other units moved along the north bank towards the fort. Everything was planned, the men stood ready at their guns, but not a shot was fired. At the eleventh hour the Italians ran up the white flag. (The reason probably was the Italians' realisation of the hopelessness of their position with a force—not as large as they expected—moving along the north bank towards

their undefended back door, and another force supported with artillery approaching them from the south. This position we did not realise at the time).

Once the white flag was hoisted it was our duty to parley. A soldier of the Italian Colonial Infantry appeared on the bank opposite to our positions near to where Ben Arie was situated.

The Officer Commanding the Company (now Major B. Wells) told Ben Arie to cross the river in a little boat and to find out what the Italian intentions were. In spite of his being covered by mortars and machine guns, Ben Arie's mission was dangerous as the Australians had several experiences in the Western Desert where the Italians used the white flag as a decoy.

Rowed by a Somali, he crossed the Juba. When he reached the Italian bank, he instructed the Infantryman to take him to the Garrison Commander from whom he demanded the surrender of the fort and town. Cpl. Ben Arie issued his orders in accordance with instructions he received by dint of much shouting and gesticulation from Major Wells, who waited impatiently on the far side of the river.

In terms of the surrender the Italian soldiers advanced to the banks and laid down their arms. When this ceremony was concluded the Italian Commander asked Ben Arie whether he was an Arab or an Italian. Without turning to the Somali who had acted as interpreter during the proceedings, Corporal Ben Arie replied, "Je Juif." ("I am a Jew.")

By this time many men of the regiment had made their way across the stream, some by boat and others by means of a cableway that existed a little way up stream.

But it had definitely been established that Ben Arie was the first man in the Imperial Forces to set foot on Jumbo Island and in accordance with the dictates of military tradition, "he took Jumbo."



L./Cpl. Michael Ben Arie

ROLL OF HONOUR

Death On Service

Lance/Corporal Max Ginsberg, of Johannesburg, has been reported killed in Egypt. He was the son of Mrs. S. Ginsberg, and the late Mr. N. Ginsberg, of 50 Height Street, Doornfontein.

Concert for the Troops

As usual, an excellent programme has been arranged for this Sunday's concert at the Jewish Guild Soldiers' Club.

This week's concert has been produced by Irene Margo and Wally Radford, and the concert party appearing are known as the "Musical Madcaps."

The Saturday night dances continue to be a great success, and all soldiers are welcome.

Military Medal for L.-Cpl. Joseph Wallis

THE Military Medal has been awarded to L./Cpl. Joseph Wallis for gallantry and devotion to duty in the campaign in the Middle East.

This young soldier, who is only twenty-four years of age, is the third son of Mr. and Mrs. A. L. Wallis, of 156, 3rd Avenue, Bezuidenhout Valley North, Johannesburg, and he is now in Egypt.

His courageous action in the field which earned for him the Military Medal has now been officially cited as follows:—

Lance-Corporal Joseph Wallis, 5th Field Company, S.A.E.C. (M.M.), was in the sub-section of the 5th Field Company of the S.A.E.C. which went forward to the 1st S.A. Irish. While the vehicles were going up to the forward slopes of Two Tree Hill they came under artillery fire. Orders were given to withdraw the vehicles under cover. Lance-Corporal Wallis brought out his own vehicle and then walked back under shellfire to remove a vehicle belonging to the infantry, whose driver had apparently not heard the order to withdraw the vehicles.

Lance-Corporal Wallis then went forward with his sub-section under Lieutenant Barker following the advance of the infantry. The sub-section was looking for minefields on the road. When the minefield on the left of the road was discovered owing to the first casualty in the S.A.I. being blown up, Lance-Corporal Wallis was the first man to get there. He dug with his bayonet until he found a mine, removed it and personally took it to pieces to discover how best these mines could be rendered harmless before removal.



L./Cpl. Joseph Wallis

This was a most courageous action, as the mines were home-made and Lance-Corporal Wallis had absolutely no knowledge as to how they worked and, as was subsequently discovered, most of the mines in this particular field were hairtrigger setting.

Lance-Corporal Wallis knew precisely the effect the mines had on exploding, as one of the casualties blown up was still lying there but, knowing it was essential to make them safe to handle, he unhesitatingly stripped the first one he came across.

MR. and Mrs. Wallis, the parents of L./Cpl. Joseph Wallis, have another son and a son-in-law on active service. The former is Private Jack Wallis, aged 29, who is also "Up North," and the latter is Private Henry Bergstein, who is now in Egypt.