

THE INDIAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

THE ADEN BRIGADE

In August 1914, the British forces in the Colony of Aden consisted of only two battalions, one British and the other Indian, and a cavalry troop of about 100 men, under the control of Brigadier-General James Alexander Bell. At the outbreak of the First World War, the British battalion, the 1st Battalion of the Royal Irish Rifles were recalled to Britain, leaving the defences in Aden very weak.

On the 5th November 1914, Britain declared war on Germany, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire, which included Turkey. There were two fronts opened between the British and Turkish forces - Sinai and Yemen. Aden with its strategic port had a border with Yemen, and the Turkish Army was stationed there and could attack Aden to disrupt Britain's vital sea route through the Red Sea and Suez Canal.

Aden was garrisoned by the 29th Indian Infantry Brigade commanded by Brigadier-General H.V. Cox, CB, CSI and they decided not to display aggression towards Yemen, but to treat Aden Harbour as a "defended port". This strategy lowered the British moral in the area and handed the Turks an opportunity to side with the Arab tribes in Yemen.

On the 19th November 1914, Britain attacked the Turkish post at Sheikh Saad and with the help of a naval convoy on its way to Egypt, drove off the Turkish defenders, captured six guns and other important equipment and destroyed the enemy entrenchments, wells and magazines.

In mid-1915, the Turks stirred up trouble amongst tribes outside the town of Aden and threatened the Sultan of Lahej. A British detachment was despatched but with the deadly summer heat and, water and ammunition transport problems, Sheikh Othman was abandoned to the Turks, who chose to halt there.

In late 1915, some troops departed to Egypt and the 62nd Punjabi Corps joined the Aden garrison. In October, the Malay States Guides arrived to join the garrison and the Port of Aden was now safe. A new policy of "active defence" was introduced, the British infantry and cavalry could match the enemy forces for short actions.

In the summer of 1916, the British-sponsored Arab Revolt in the Hejaz diverted the Turkish troops away from the Yemen, but some troops remained on the defensive. The British had built an eleven-mile-long defensive perimeter around Aden. They did not attempt to resecure lost territories and no major fighting took place after 1916. The Turks continued to hold territories in the protectorate until the Armistice of Mudros in October 1918 and the partition of the Ottoman Empire after the war.



Two "On Active Service" covers from Lieut. B.P. Fitzgerald Moore to his wife in Eastbourne, Sussex.

Both with the F.P.O. No.324 double circle cancel, dated the 2nd December 1915.

Also the "Passed by Censor. Indian Expeditionary Force No.7" red handstamp.



Top: Rated 2As with the I.E.F. black overprint.

Right: Rated 12As with the I.E.F. black overprint, also with the F.P.O. No.324 handstamp on the reverse, dated the 2nd December 1915.

Michael R Thompson.
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