Wavell Portrait of a Soldier

BERNARD FERGUSSON

WHEN Lord Wavell died in 1950, he left behind him an anthology of verse but no published diaries, no memoirs of his achievements in war or of his life as Viceroy.

And yet there are many, particularly those who served under him, who consider Wavell to have been the greatest British general of this century. He held the most difficult commands of the last war with courage and brilliance: at one time, while C.-in-C. Middle East, he was conducting operations on four different fronts simultaneously.

Bernard Fergusson was twenty-three, a subaltern in the Black Watch, when he was offered to Wavell as A.D.C. When they met, Fergusson said that he had never been an A.D.C. before and might make an awful mess of it. "Well," replied the other, "I've never had an A.D.C. before; I may make an awful mess of you." That was in 1934, the start of a friendship that lasted until Wavell's death sixteen years later, when he was Colonel of the Black Watch and Bernard Fergusson its commanding officer.

This book is more than a record of that friendship: it is a memorable portrait of a great soldier as he appeared to an officer in his own regiment. Wavell stands out from every page, a magnetic and wonderfully attractive figure.

Jacket design by Kenneth Farnhill

T. G. Ghelmardini

WAVELL
PORTRAIT OF A
SOLDIER

By the same author

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ETON PORTRAIT

THE RARE ADVENTURE (*Novel*)

LOWLAND SOLDIER (*Verse*)

WAVELL
PORTRAIT OF A SOLDIER

Bernard Fergusson

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Foreword

The official biography of Lord Wavell will be written by another hand. This present book aspires to do no more than to present a personal portrait of that great soldier as he appeared to an officer of his own Regiment. Lord Wavell was commissioned into The Black Watch ten years before I was born; and he had been in it as a "barrack rat" for ten years before that. I shall be grateful all my life for the fortunate chance that brought me into his orbit from the age of twenty-three until his death, when I was just thirty-nine.

The energies of the last few years of his life were devoted chiefly to the interests of the Army generally, and to The Black Watch in particular; and not least to The Black Watch of Canada, and the affiliated Regiments in South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. Part of the proceeds of this book will be devoted to The Black Watch Wavell Memorial Centre in Perth: a project which was launched, largely at the instance of The Black Watch of Canada, just as the book was being prepared for the press.

BERNARD FERGUSSON

Auchairne, April, 1961

Illustrations

The quotations which precede each section
of this book are from Wordsworth's
The Happy Warrior

I

Who is the happy Warrior? Who is he
That every Man in arms should wish to be? . . .

FATE did not spare the great Lord Wavell time to write his memoirs. In February 1950, some months before his death, he showed me some longish passages which he had already committed to paper; they dealt among other things with the controversial issues of Greece and Singapore. It is fully in character that while the reminiscences of other higher commanders have been pouring from the presses his own voice should still be silent; during all the ill luck that befell him, and after, he never spoke in his own defence.

All the same, had he lived he would have written. He had confided to me some years before the title with which his fancy was playing. It was *Reasons in Writing*, a phrase with which military readers will be uncomfortably familiar. Non-military readers may assess its undertones from the definition once given in a frivolous military book: "Reasons in writing are only asked for when it is well known that there are none to give."

Having made this confidence, Wavell turned to me and said: "Now, you're not to pinch that, Bernard."

This and other memories came flooding back on me when on the 24th May, 1950, I heard of his death. I was commanding the 1st Battalion of his old regiment in Berlin, and the news came just as I was leaving the Orderly Room for luncheon. A few days later, my father wrote to give me comfort; he was himself a retired full general, aged eighty-five and within a year of his own death; and he wrote: "I have suddenly realised that you knew him better than you know me." At first I was disconcerted; and then I realised in my turn that my father, as usual, was right. I had been abroad for most of my service; much of it had been under Wavell; I had served five times on his staff; and for the last four years he had been Colonel of the Regiment.

Time is passing, and already no soldier with fewer than fifteen years of service can claim to have served with Wavell. He bequeathed to us an example of integrity and of the soldierly virtues which is unlikely ever to be surpassed. I am concerned only to record personal reminiscences, many of them trivial; the task of writing his life, as he wrote Allenby's, will fall to others. Madame Cornuel may have been right in general when she set down her famous aphorism about no man being a hero to his valet; my service with Wavell was more or less in the relationship of a valet, in good times and in sour, yet in my eyes his stature grew greater and greater. Even now, ten years after his death, he remains as vivid as ever. Only a few months ago I found myself standing outside the Fort at Sharja, on the Persian Gulf, where I had stood with him in 1941 as he inspected some local tribal levies; and I suddenly seemed to see again

that stocky figure, with the deep furrows on either side of his mouth and the twinkling eye.

The first time I met Wavell I had barely heard of him, except as the author of *The Palestine Campaign*. The occasion was my first Regimental Dinner, soon after I joined The Black Watch: it was at the Ritz, in 1931. I was one of the junior officers present, and therefore the last out of the ante-room into the dining-room. I sought with an anguished eye the last vacant chair. On my right was a strange officer whom I had never met, a subaltern called Brian Madden on leave from the other battalion in India; on my left was a grizzled and senior stranger. Even Madden couldn't tell me who he was; but he made enquiries down the table on my behalf, and finally told me that he was Brigadier Wavell, commanding the 6th Brigade in the Aldershot Command, who hadn't served with the Regiment since just after the war, but was "supposed to be good."

I waited in vain throughout the meal. Nothing happened till the end of it. I hadn't then realised that the eye nearest me was of solid glass, and that its predecessor had been missing since Ypres in 1915. As the port came round, the whole of my left-hand neighbour swivelled towards me, and said: "Good evening." I said: "Good evening, Sir. I think you know Major X, of the Y Regiment?"

"Yes," said Wavell. "I don't like him."

A year passed. Another Regimental Dinner was arranged at the Ritz. This time there were four officers

junior to me; I contrived to get into the dining-room before them; I wriggled my way in through the room, so as to sit among a few boon companions. It therefore fell once again to the latest-joined subaltern—an officer even shyer than I had been the year before, but who now holds two D.S.O.'s, the O.B.E. and an M.C.—to find himself next to this regimentally unknown Brigadier. His other neighbour was less forthcoming than Madden had been to me, and he fell back from sheer shyness on to undue dependence on the wine waiter. Wavell addressed him no single word. When we rose to drink the King's health, this hapless officer stumbled; flung his port over Wavell's shirtfront; fled the scene; and was found an hour later hysterical in the Hungaria.

In June 1934, we were in camp at Stobs, a few miles on the Scottish side of the Border. I was sent for by the Commanding Officer, who was a character in his own right. Frankie Chalmer, a descendant of the old Ayrshire family of Gadgirth, belonged more properly to the eighteenth than to the twentieth century. He loved, and knew a lot about, his claret; he was a superb shot and fisherman; he was a fine Latinist, and used to quote Virgil and Ovid; he had a D.S.O. and an M.C. from the first war; he had passed through the Staff College, a qualification which he treated with contempt; he had refused accelerated promotion twice; he had previously been a brevet-lieutenant-Colonel, which he regarded as a joke; and he had also been my Company Commander

at Sandhurst. I responded (as I had to) to his summons with my heart in my boots, wondering which of my sins had found me out; there was a wide choice. Colonel Frankie opened the bowling.

"I have here the best job in my gift that I have ever had," he said. "I can't think why I am offering it to you," he went on, "but I am. The finest officer the Regiment has bred for a hundred years is Archie Wavell. In March of next year he is getting command of the 2nd Division—the spot experimental Division in the whole Army. He wants an A.D.C. from the Regiment. I am going to send you. You will want to consult your father. You have got two days' leave. Tell your father that I think this is the best job I have ever had in my gift for a young officer, and that I think you ought to take it."

I whizzed over to and back from my father like a frightened shuttlecock. The message that I bore back from my father was to the effect that he had always disliked A.D.C.s, especially his own, but that for good or for ill he had delivered his son into the hands of Colonel Chalmer, and was resigned to whatever Colonel Chalmer might advise or decide. And I was sent down to England to be interviewed.

In those days the Army still operated the iniquitous system of half-pay, whereby an officer was literally obliged between appointments to live on only half the emoluments due to his rank. The period might last for as long as a couple of years. Wavell had given up com-

mand of the 6th Brigade some months before; but his appointment to the 2nd Division, though already announced, was not to take effect until the following March. He was living with all his family in a large house at Windsor lent them by his wife's godmother, Lady Edward Spencer-Churchill. He met me with his car at Windsor station—bare-headed, in an old tweed coat and flannel trousers—and bore me off to luncheon in the bosom of his family. The only son and eldest child, Archie John, was on holiday from Winchester. My interview with Archie John, so to speak, was unsatisfactory.

"I hear you're fond of poetry," he said. "What do you think of T. S. Eliot?"

I answered that the only thing I had read of his was a poem called *Papyrus*, and that it hadn't meant much to me.

"That," said Archie John coldly, "was by Ezra Pound." He retired into a book, and spoke to me no more. The three daughters talked about their ponies, a subject on which I fared no better. But the whole family, obviously a very close-knit one, was charming to me. When Wavell drove me back to the station after tea, he asked me whether I was prepared to take them all on. He himself has recorded in his foreword to one of my books the dialogue that followed. Apparently I said:—

"I've never been an A.D.C. before, and I may make an awful mess of it." And he said:—

"Well, I've never had an A.D.C. before; I may make an awful mess of you."

So began a happy friendship which was to last more than fifteen years.

Aldershot today is only a ghost of what it was. In 1935 it was the hub of the military world. Including the outlying stations of Bordon, Blackdown and Woking, a complete Corps of two divisions lay in the Command. In the event of war the Commander-in-Chief would become the Corps Commander. The current C.-in-C. was a formidable figure who inspired a good deal of alarm: General the Hon. Sir Francis Gathorne-Hardy, whose wife was a sister of Lord Derby. I suspect that Wavell thought him old-fashioned, and that he thought Wavell rather revolutionary; but they admired each other extremely.

Wavell's 2nd Division comprised the 5th and 6th Brigades actually in the Command, and the 4th Guards Brigade, which consisted of the battalions doing London duties, and which assembled only for the manœuvre season. Chance had brought together among his subordinates a group of officers with dazzling futures. Among the brigade commanders were Colonel Arthur Smith, commanding the 4th Guards Brigade, who was destined to be Wavell's Chief of Staff during the Middle East days, and later C.-in-C. Persia and Iraq; Victor Fortune, $2\frac{1}{2}$ years junior to Wavell in The Black Watch, who was to be captured with his Highland Division at St. Valéry and to make an immortal name for himself as the most defiant of prisoners—he was knighted for his record in captivity; and "Jumbo" Wilson, after-

wards Field-Marshal Lord Wilson of Libya. His two senior staff officers were the future General Sir George Giffard and Philip de Fonblanque, who performed heroic feats during the retreat to Dunkirk and died a few days later from his exertions; Giffard was succeeded a year later by Eastwood of the Rifle Brigade. Among the brigade majors were Dempsey, Horrocks, and Cameron Nicholson, afterwards Adjutant-General. It was certainly an all-star cast. And they were such a delightful lot. Nobody was "on the make." In those days the most devastating criticism that could be made of a soldier was to say that he was "ambitious."

The total number of officers at Divisional Headquarters, including the Commander, was ten. (Thirteen years later, when I commanded a battalion in the same division after the war, the figure was eighty, though to be fair this included three or four officers whose appointments existed before the war, but were not then regarded as part of Divisional Headquarters.) One staff-captain sufficed for all our needs, and he only occasionally found it necessary to work in the afternoons. Units in those days enjoyed a great deal more autonomy than in this era of centralisation.

Wavell's ordinary day followed an easy pattern. I would appear at his house in the evening ("Give yourself some sherry"), with a map and a sheet of paper from each of the brigades, telling me what companies would be practising what form of training where and when. Wavell would select two or three which were near each other, and a rendezvous for the grooms and horses;

on my way back to the Camerons' mess, where I lived, I would pass the stables and give the necessary orders. Next morning at 8.15 I would pick him up in the car and drive out to the rendezvous; we would tell the car and grooms where to meet us, and spend a couple of hours watching troops.

Wavell was a mad keen horseman, though he always denied that he was a good one; I was a bad one, and loathed every minute I spent mounted. He loved a gallop, especially through trees with his head close to his horse's shoulder; he called it "wooding." Once when we were "wooding" I nearly did an Absalom; I cut my forehead open, and my eyeglass went flying. Wavell pulled up, full of concern, and I explained about my eyeglass. Without it I was too blind to look for it. He had dismounted and was poking about the leaves, when he saw a party of East Yorkshires marching by; and called out:

"Corporal! Send over a file of men to look for my A.D.C.'s eyeglass."

The story spread, and took a lot of living down.

Another time, when we were galloping across country somewhere near Tunnel Hill, I was run away with. I covered a good half-mile before, sawing at my horse's mouth, I pulled him up. Wavell trotted alongside.

"It is more usual," he said, "for the A.D.C. to ride *behind* his General."

The rest of the forenoon we would spend in the office. Mine opened off his; and every now and then there would be a shout of "Bernard!" One of these

occasions is burnt into my memory, and will illustrate as well as anything his generous character.

A subaltern's pay in those days was 12s. 6d. a day, or about £230 a year. (A Major-General's pay was only £3 a day, or £1,100 a year; and Wavell had few private means.) I had an allowance of £150 a year, which was well below the average in my Regiment. When I went off to be A.D.C. to Wavell, I had saddled myself with a year-old car which I thought appropriate to the dignity of my new position, contracting to pay so much a month to the firm in London from which I had bought it. Inevitably I fell behind in my payments; and one day a man in a bowler hat put his head into my office, confirmed my identity, and announced that he had come to take away my car. Appalled, I begged him to wait a minute; asked Wavell's permission to leave the office to do a few chores; and drove my visitor up to the Camerons' mess and along to my quarters. There I gave him a glass of beer and prevailed on him to accept, in lieu of the car, a series of post-dated cheques.

I returned to the office, breathing again. I had hardly sat down, when there came a shout of "Bernard!" I went in, and Wavell said:—

"Who was that with you just now? Looked to me like a bailiff."

"It was," I said miserably, and told him my sad little story.

"I see," he said—it was always his phrase—and I crept out. I spent the next hour composing letters to my father and to Colonel Chalmer. It never occurred to me that I should not be returned to regimental duty.

I was sure it would be done with sympathy; but I could not imagine any General, even Archie Wavell, retaining as his A.D.C. an officer who was being dunned. An hour or so later there came again the cry of "Bernard!" I went in, and found him picking up his cap, stick and attaché-case.

"Drive me home," he said; and we climbed into my car—*the* car. I didn't venture a word; I was so unhappy, and felt that I had somehow disgraced him as well as myself. Half-way home he spoke.

"Are you in *very* deep water?" he asked.

I said no; I thought I would be all square in three or four months if I was tough with myself.

"I see," he said; and then, after a long pause, he added: "I think I could just about manage a hundred, if that would help."

Manœuvres with Wavell were always the greatest fun. In those days, when tanks were rare and manœuvres not too damaging to the countryside, large areas, extending perhaps over a couple of counties, were brought into play under the provisions of the Manœuvre Act. A number of officers were seconded for six months as Compensation Officers. They roamed the area, getting to know the farmers and land-owners, and sticking up "Out of Bounds" signs where the protection of crops or pheasant-coverts demanded it. They would watch jealously over the interests of the locals as well as of "the military," restrain soldiers from stealing eggs, and after the manœuvres were over would pay out com-

pensation in cash for the odd fence that was trampled down, or the odd gate left open. It was all done with the minimum of correspondence, and on the whole we were welcome to the lieges, and especially to the lieges' children.

Divisional Headquarters, expanded to its full war establishment and reinforced by a corps of umpires, would move out into the country for six weeks. The first year we were near Billingshurst in Sussex, the second at Lovedean, a few miles north of Portsmouth. Two large marquees served as ante-room and dining-room, and other tents were dotted all around. One evening of driving wind and rain, I had just left the dining-tent to go to the local cinema with a couple of friends, when the whole thing collapsed in a flurry of wet canvas and snapping poles. Archie Wavell crawled out, with mud all over his blue patrols, and still on all fours looked up at me through his eyeglass.

"Just like rounding Cape Horn!" he said.

The first few weeks in camp would be spent in allowing the brigades a free hand to "work up," as the sailors would call it; and then Wavell would set exercises for them. The most memorable was Exercise "Golden Fleece." It was ingeniously devised to exercise the troops in the advance, the attack, the defence and the withdrawal, all in three days. The 6th Brigade were the custodians of the Fleece—a genuine sheepskin dyed yellow—which was hidden on the edge of Hurt Wood, on the Surrey-Sussex border. The Argonauts were represented by the 4th and 5th Brigades, who were deemed to have landed near Worthing, and who did a forced

march of some forty miles against a withdrawing screen of defenders. As they drew near the Fleece, in 6th Brigade Headquarters, the leading battalion was tipped off as to its exact location; and Wavell and I, with a huge Australian colonel in attendance as a spectator, rather guiltily went to watch the fun, looking as innocent as we could. There was a sudden burst of yells, as the leading troops of the Cameronians, led by a wild subaltern called Loopy McEwen (afterwards killed in Palestine), burst out of the trees and fell upon Brigade Headquarters. Loopy himself made directly for the Fleece; his men, true Cameronians, went for the Military Police who were guarding it, sat on their stomachs, and banged their heads on the ground. Inside a minute the Cameronians were gone, and the Fleece too, while the Brigadier looked disconsolate and the Australian colonel sank on to a convenient stone, splitting with laughter, and saying: "That was worth coming all the wye from Austrylia to see!"

Nor was all this just a private joke. Wavell had given strict orders that every man in the Division must have the legend of the Golden Fleece explained to him, so that he could take a real interest in what was going on. In the same way, on another exercise, when Wavell hired a large fleet of buses to carry a brigade from Reading to Petworth, the men knew that this was the first time that a major tactical move on wheels had ever been tried.

It is fantastic to reflect that this was only twenty-five years ago. The 6th Brigade was partially mechanised; it had, for instance, the only bren-gun carriers in the

British Army, which were being used experimentally by the Durham Light Infantry. One of the Gunner regiments (still called "field brigades") had mechanised towers, known as dragons; so that the Compensation Officers had the fun of plastering Hampshire and Sussex with large notices: "Beware of Dragons." Otherwise the Division was almost entirely on a horsed basis.

Once, years before, Wavell had manœuvred against a fellow brigade commander, and diddled him by the old device of "planting" a marked map covered with bogus dispositions. This officer had risen to the command of a rival Division; and the first year that I was Wavell's A.D.C. we were pitted against him on manœuvres in Sussex. Wavell was obviously plotting something: he had the look of a cat who knew precisely where the cream was hidden. At a crucial moment he sent for an officer of The Queen's Bays whose sense of humour had caught his fancy; it was the then Lord Knebworth, afterwards killed at Alamein—a long-legged, cavalry officer with a deceptively jaunty air. Wavell had ordered a map to be prepared which showed to the last degree of correctness exactly what his dispositions really were. Knebworth was to blunder his casual way close under the "enemy," to get himself captured, and to make clumsy and obvious efforts to rid himself of the map. The reaction for which Wavell was hoping was that General X would say to himself: "Old Archie's losing his grip. He's forgotten that he played this one on me once before. The one thing we can be sure of is that

not one single disposition shown on this map is genuine." Everything went according to plan; General X lapped it up; he took a horrible beating; and after the battle Wavell sent me round to The Bays' Mess with a bottle of champagne for Knebworth, as a reward for the convincing manner in which he had played the idiot boy. A bottle of champagne, or on occasion, a case of it, was Wavell's standard award.

Another time, a subaltern in the D.L.I., one Harry Fox-Davies, came to see me in some distress. He was a son of that Fox-Davies who twenty years earlier had put a fox among the ancestral pigeons of half the noble families in England, exposing their pedigrees as bogus; who reduced the number of families with claims to have come over with the Conqueror from something like forty to something like three. Fox-Davies had put up a paper to his commanding officer pointing out the principle, familiar today but almost unheard of then, that a handful of men at the heart of the enemy's communications could do damage out of all proportion to their numbers. His colonel had snubbed him, and sent his paper back.

Fox-Davies brought it to me, and asked me whether I could not somehow shove it under Wavell's nose; and I did, though feeling something of an intriguer. Wavell sent it back to me, with no comment other than a scribbled "Thank you." But several months later, on manœuvres, he sent for Fox-Davies in mid-battle, and gave him a role, there and then, and without any previous warning to brigade or battalion commander, in line with Fox-Davies's thesis. From the Director's

point of view—Gathorne-Hardy's—it ruined the whole exercise; but the Umpires could not fault what had been done, and we all got back to barracks a day earlier than was intended. It was to Harry Fox-Davies that Wavell referred, though not by name, in his foreword to my own *Beyond The Chindwin*. Wavell sent for him again from Cairo in 1941, and entrusted him with a similar task in real life. Fox-Davies was then a sick man; but he went on the venture, which was successful, and died on it.

Wavell was one of the first soldiers to take flying seriously as a means of getting about; and No. 4 Army Co-operation Squadron at Farnborough were delighted to find that they had his patronage to the full. He exploited their resources on every possible occasion, which included flying to Melton Mowbray to try out a charger at the Remount Depot, and to somewhere else to attend the funeral of an aunt. Once he was to fly down to Salisbury for some military occasion. It involved calling for him very early in the morning, and his soldier servant had overslept. He was in a bad temper as I took him to the airfield. There we met a young soldier, Tommy Whitaker of the Rifle Brigade, seconded to the Royal Air Force as a pilot, who produced a map and outlined the route they would follow.

"Are *you* going to fly me?" said Wavell, in an early morning growl.

"Yes," said Whitaker: "Do you mind very much?"

Wavell looked at him sharply, laughed, and said:

"Not much." He returned that evening in the best of form, expatiating on what a good trip he had had, and what a good chap Whitaker was. He enlarged on this theme during dinner, when one of the guests was the squadron commander.

"Splendid fellow, your Whitaker," said Wavell. "On the way home, he asked me if I'd like to do some aerobatics, and when I said yes, he looped the loop, did a 'falling leaf' and a couple of spins and a power dive. It was one of the best afternoons I've ever had."

Next morning Whitaker rang me up from his quarters to tell me that he was under arrest for taking liberties with his distinguished passenger. I found the situation delicate; but in the end I told Wavell, who rang up the squadron commander and asked him to disregard their conversation of the night before. The hint was taken, and Whitaker was released from durance. Thereafter Wavell always asked specifically for his services as pilot, and they were usually accorded. When they were, aerobatics were always included in the programme, but never again reported.

On one set of manœuvres, No. 4 Squadron was trying out the potentialities of the Rota, fore-runner of the helicopter; on another, a civilian firm which was trying to market a handy low-winged monoplane, the Klemm Swallow, put a machine at Wavell's disposal. Wavell made the fullest use of both, in person and vicariously. I myself totted up five passenger-hours—much more than it sounds to the layman—in one or other of these aircraft, at Wavell's behest, carrying messages or making reconnaissances, and enjoyed myself in the

process. Unfortunately the Army was far less air-minded than Wavell; not until the war was well advanced did we have such means of transport; nor afterwards for several more years.

He was far ahead of his time in preaching closer cooperation between the Services; he told me in 1935 that he saw no reason why an Air Chief-Marshal shouldn't command at Aldershot, or a General take on what was then called the Air Defence of Great Britain. "We might get some new ideas."

Only twice in my life did I see Wavell really angry: both occasions were during the war, and both justified. He was sometimes irritable in the early mornings, as every General has the right to be. Once was on manœuvres, and I was the victim. We were in a wood near Ripley in Hampshire. Wavell and I were each in bell-tents ten yards apart; a hundred yards away was a large truck, fitted up as a Command Vehicle—this was then thought to be a revolutionary idea—and known as "The Busy Bee." At 4 a.m. I was aroused by the Staff Captain, saying: "Wake up: we're moving."

I woke up the servants, and went to Wavell's tent; he was already up, and had gone over to the Busy Bee to assess the situation. I urged the servants to hurry; they struck the tents, loaded them on to a truck, and in a matter of minutes were away down the road to where the transport was assembling. Feeling highly efficient, I went over to the Busy Bee, in time to hear Wavell saying to Giffard: "Well, George, there doesn't seem

to be anything else for me to do ; I'll get back to bed."

I swallowed, and explained shyly that his bed and tent had been dismantled, and were now a mile away down the road. He said nothing, and I began to tiptoe away ; but he called out " Bernard ! " I sprang back again, and said " Sir ? "

There was a short pause while he went on looking at his map ; and then he said :—

" Another time, remember that I command this Division, and not you."

I don't blame him. My only feeling at the time was one of regret that the Staff Captain was so much senior to me.

Those were the manœuvres dubbed " The C.I.G.S. Stakes." Montgomery-Massingberd was about to retire. There were three possible candidates for the succession. Far and away the most inspiring was Wavell's personal hero, Sir John Burnett-Stuart, who was C.-in-C. Southern Command. He had the nimblest of brains, the quickest of wits and the warmest of hearts ; Wavell had twice been his chief Staff Officer, and between the two there was deep affection and complete understanding. But Burnett-Stuart had been too much of an original to find favour with the powers, and it was common knowledge that he was no longer a runner. It therefore lay between Gathorne-Hardy at Aldershot and Sir Cyril Deverell at Eastern Command ; and in these big manœuvres of 1936 they were pitted against each other. The 1st and 2nd Divisions under Gathorne-Hardy were facing west ; the 3rd and 4th under Deverell looked east ; and it was popularly and naïvely supposed

that whoever won would be C.I.G.S. Burnett-Stuart was Chief Umpire, and he must have discharged the job with skill, since the battle continued without loss of realism for the best part of a week. Eventually Deverell succeeded in selling Gathorne-Hardy an extremely dexterous dummy, and tied him into knots. While this process was going on, the irrepressible Burnett-Stuart walked into the Umpires' Report Centre and said to the officers present:—"My advice to you young fellows is to sell Gathorne-Hardys as fast as ever you can, and buy Deverells."

Meanwhile 2nd Division Headquarters were somewhere near Whitchurch, and Wavell received a frantic message from Corps to attack at once. It so happened that one of my brothers was in the Argylls, in Deverell's Corps. I had written to him before the manœuvres began, telling him that I had put a price of £1 on his head, and advertised it throughout the Division; he replied saying that he had not felt justified in offering more than half a crown for mine. At this point in the battle, Wavell summoned his brigade commanders and others to give out his orders. They sat around with their pencils poised, while Wavell cleared his throat. He began with the time-honoured opening paragraph of "Information About the Enemy," while they scribbled busily. He then continued in the conventional manner with his "Intention."

"My Intention," he said, and paused, while they hung on his words; "My Intention—is to advance and capture my A.D.C.'s brother."

The manœuvres of the following year, 1936, attracted a large number of spectators. One was Mr. Oswald Pirow, the South African Minister of Defence in General Hertzog's government; he was known to be strongly Nationalist, was reputed to be anti-British, and startled everybody by going straight from our manœuvres to be the guest of Hitler. Another was Brigadier Claude Auchinleck, on leave from India, who had become something of a national hero the previous winter in action against the Mohmands on the Nahakki Pass; he had turned a near disaster into a victory by a timely intervention, and reminded the British public that Kipling was not as *vieux jeu* as he was fashionably regarded. A third was the Russian military attaché, who stayed in our mess and made himself very much liked. Before the manœuvres ended, he received a telegram recalling him to Moscow, and we parted with mutual regret. A few days later we were shocked to read in the newspapers of a great purge in the Red Army, and among the names of the liquidated that of our late guest.

Almost at the same moment there arrived an invitation for a small British delegation to watch Russian manœuvres, and Wavell was chosen to go, along with Colonel Martel, the tank expert. I had already arranged to spend my leave sailing a Bristol Channel pilot cutter from Ipswich to Oban, and was greatly relieved—though I suppose I regret it now—when Wavell was told that he couldn't take an A.D.C. with him. The most startling innovation which he witnessed was the large-scale

dropping of parachutists, complete with military band, whose musicians picked themselves up off the ground as soon as they had landed, and began to play like men possessed. The use of parachutists made alarmist headlines all round the world; but Wavell took it fairly calmly. He reckoned that the threat of them would always be a bigger factor than their actual use, in that it would tie up quantities of troops in guarding rear areas. The most immediate result of his visit, so far as I was concerned, was that he returned with a barrel of caviare, which added pleasantly to my perquisites as an A.D.C.

Wavell used to pull my leg, especially in front of my friends, about the soft life which I was leading; and he taught me some verses, which as usual he had by heart; he said they were by Julian Grenfell. I have never seen them in writing, or met anybody else who knew them; and since they deserve better than oblivion, here they are:—

Prayer for Those on the Staff

Fighting in mud, we cry to Thee,
O Thou dread God of Battles, Lord,
To keep us safe, if so may be,
From fire and tempest, shot and sword.

But not on us, for we are men
Of lesser clay, who fight in clay,
But on the Staff, the Upper Ten,
Depends the issue of the day.

The Staff is fighting with its brains,
  While we are sitting in the trench ;
The Staff the Universe ordains,
  (Subject to Thee, and General French).

God help the Staff ! Especially
  The young ones, many of them sprung
From our high Aristocracy :
  Their task is hard, and they are young.

O God, who mad'st all things to be—
  And madest *some* things very good—
Please keep the Extra A.D.C.
  From horrid sights and scenes of blood ;

See that his eggs are newly laid,
  Not tinged, like some of ours, with green,
And let no impious draughts invade
  The windows of his limousine.

When he forgets to buy the bread,
  When there are no more minerals.
Preserve his sleek, well-oilèd head
  From wrath of caustic Generals.

O God, who mad'st all things to be
  And hatest *nothing* Thou hast made,
Please keep the Extra A.D.C.
  Out of the sun and in the shade.

Those were blissful years for me. There were no limits to the kindness of Wavell and his wife and family ; and

Wavell himself bestowed great pains on my private military education. He made me read military history, prescribing and often giving me the books, and cross-examining me not so much on their contents as on what lessons I had deduced from them. I still possess the notes which he had made for himself on Napoleon's campaign in Italy of 1794, about which there was no good book. He disapproved of all examinations and of all cramming; when asked if he had any views about the improvement of promotion examinations he said: "Yes: abolish them." He disapproved especially of cramming for the Staff College Examination, and of courses being run for officers who were preparing to sit for it; he insisted on my having my first try without any such aid, and was as pleased as I was when I qualified. He must be turning in his grave today, when officers are struck off duties to attend specially-run courses, and encouraged to follow correspondence courses before the exam.

He made special efforts to encourage officers who had failed to pass into the Staff College, and who were inclined to look on their careers as blasted in consequence. He ran an annual course for forty captains and majors of this category in the Division; and one year he took them on a three-day battlefield tour in France, to the Marne, the Aisne and Néry, with me as the courier and Thomas Cook's man.

Tongue-tied as he often was—he was in those days a poor public speaker, and knew it—he made soldiering exhilarating for every officer and man under his command. Every man-jack was far more aware of him and his influence than of many another more articulate

General. He contrived to make soldiering the fun that it ought to be. Indeed, to allow soldiering to be dull was to him a cardinal sin. He would inveigh against our system of training recruits. According to him, we enticed young men into the Army at their most malleable age, appealing to their spirit of adventure. We then put them on the depot square for the first six months of their service; deliberately drilled the heart out of them; turned them into automatons; told them several times a day that they weren't paid to think; and then complained of their want of initiative. What was more, as a matter of policy we diverted our most intelligent recruits into the so-called technical arms, where much of the work was done by rule of thumb.

He yielded to nobody in his admiration of smartness, but he deplored it as a substitute for tactical skills, as a certain quondam squadron leader in the Household Cavalry may remember. He himself was perhaps the worst-turned-out General in the Army; many a time I was fined a drink by some officers' mess or another for failing to spot some sartorial enormity which he had committed. He had a favourite pair of breeches which he used to wear entirely to annoy me. In the boot of his car he kept a hat-box with what he called his "better hat," which I used to whip on to him whenever I spotted General Gathorne-Hardy in the offing.

Orthodoxy for its own sake was anathema to him, partly because it led to rigidity and stifled new ideas, and partly because officers were often orthodox for bad reasons. Either they were too idle or too stupid to think for themselves, or they were anxious not to put a foot

wrong by differing from policies or tactical solutions which they deemed sanctified by official approval. Of supine idleness he was contemptuous; for zestful idleness—such as that of a young officer who thought more about his hunting than about his profession—he had a soft spot. He himself had never thought of taking the academic side of soldiering seriously until about his eighth year of service, when one of his closest friends in the Regiment in India refused to play polo one afternoon because he was going to work for the Staff College.

His penetrating mind was quick to see what every individual officer had to contribute, even when it was an example of "his single talent well employed." There was a Captain in an English regiment of the line, with a D.S.O. and an M.C. from the first war and an admirable company commander, who was utterly unable to pass the promotion examination to major. His qualities were outstanding, but the rule had no loopholes; and he had reached the age limit for captains. Wavell got round it by getting him a brevet, and he rose to be a successful brigade commander in the desert.

Deverell had won "The Stakes" and the appointment of C.I.G.S.; and a thankless job it was in those days. He had no more success than Montgomery-Massingberd in fighting the Army's battles with the Government. Not even the events of the autumn of 1936, when the 2nd Division had to be stripped of much of its equipment to mobilise the 1st Division for emergency service in Pales-

tine, did much to loosen the purse-strings. Moreover, the Old Guard of very senior Generals did not enjoy the confidence of their juniors. The Army at the top was mentally as well as literally horse-drawn; the infantry, except for the D.L.I. and one or two units on Salisbury Plain, had no heavier weapons than machine-guns, and Wavell organised a mock court-martial of the infantry arm on the charge of "having no visible means of support." The prototype 3-inch mortar was demonstrated one morning on Chobham Ridges, before a large gathering of rank and fashion; the third round travelled only twenty yards, and a more distinguished set of rumps never stuck out of heather than at that moment.

Young as I was, it was obvious that Wavell's contemporaries were looking to him as something of a prophet. A stream of Major-Generals used to travel down to Aldershot to pour out their hearts to him. I would serve them with sherry, bang the door to pretend I had gone out of it, and settle down to eavesdrop.

The most frequent visitors were Dill, the Director of Military Operations, Gort from the Staff College, and Alan Brooke the Director of Military Training, who was especially vehement in his quick speech; others were Marshall-Cornwall, then on half-pay (but he came as Chief Umpire on the Golden Fleece exercise), and Freyberg, whose vehemence and rate of speech were the equal of Brooke's. Wavell listened and said "I see," rather than spoke much; but I realised that they, like I, felt him as a prop. Years later, Geordie Gordon-

Lennox, now a Major-General himself, stayed a week-end with me in the Rhineland after the war, when both of us were commanding battalions, to meet Wavell; and his comment was: "What a Rock!" A rock he always was; but he was more. He had the capacity to set himself thinking, with the same deliberation that another man might use to set himself to read or to write. The only other man I have ever known do this in the same fashion was his protégé: Wingate.

Wavell could think in the most unpropitious circumstances. While I was with him as A.D.C. he worked on three different pieces of writing. One was the new edition of Field Service Regulations, Volume III, the volume which concerned itself with strategy. When it left his hand, it was readable and stimulating, with apt analogies drawn from golf, horse-racing and other spheres. Even when the dead hand of the War Office had finished with it, it was streets ahead of its predecessor. (I once borrowed from Eric Linklater a book which Linklater had written for the War Office; against two paragraphs I found in the margin the legend pencilled in his own writing: "These paragraphs were added by another hand—*or foot.*") The second was a series of lectures for the Royal United Service Institution. The third was his first volume of *Allenby*. None of them was written in seclusion. They were all works which, one would have thought, called for complete isolation and a Trappist silence. They were in fact brought forth in a welter of daughters borrowing three-ha'penny stamps,

and puppies chewing at his boot-laces, and a series of bulletins about what was happening in the stables and who couldn't come to luncheon. He never smoked; and so far as I can recall, sherry and port was all he ever drank. I think he used to smoke in moderation long before. He had an occasional glass of beer.

There was a good deal of entertaining. Much of it was necessarily duty stuff and was heavy going; but the house was often full of débutante friends of the eldest daughter, or fellow cadets of Archie John's from Sandhurst, or gay young subalterns to help entertain the débutantes. On such occasions Wavell was a wonderful host; he always enjoyed the company of the young. He looked with favour on an outrageous game which I introduced, and which we used to play at my own home: a cross between Prisoners' Base and Hide and Seek, which involved plunging up or down the front and back stairs, and diving through the service hatch. Usually he umpired; sometimes he actually took part. Years later in India he used to play billiard fives, and a very rough game it could be.

I had been with him almost two years before I thought I should go back to my Regiment. The Battalion was due for Palestine in August 1937; and somewhere about January of that year I suggested that I should return to it. I had some hopes—frustrated in due course—that I might be the new Adjutant. He agreed, and in due course Michael Fox in the Coldstream was signed up. It pleased Wavell's fancy that Fox should relieve

me on precisely the second anniversary of Wavell taking over the 2nd Division, the 11th of March; and I still have in my scrapbook my receipt for One Major-General, complete with Division, signed for by Michael Fox on that date.

Before I left, I gave a farewell cocktail party in the Officers' Mess of the Royal Scots Fusiliers, who had taken me over from the Camerons a year before, along with the rest of the fixtures in Oudenarde Barracks. It was for males only, and most of the guests were young officers of my own sort of seniority in the Division. In the course of it my soldier servant, Peter Dorans, who came from my home and who was with me for fourteen years, hissed in my ear: "They've just opened the thirty-eighth bottle of sherry: will I let them cairry on?" Wavell had accepted my invitation to the party to begin with; then he ran out on me on the plea that he had to go up to London.

"But, Sir," I said, "if you aren't there, everybody will think you've sacked me, and that we've parted brass-rags."

"We can't have that," he said. "I'll come for the beginning, then."

He was as good as his word. He came for the first ten minutes; called for the attention of the first few people to have arrived; said: "I can't stay, but will you tell everybody else that I haven't sacked Bernard? Can I go now?" and went.

I cannot actually remember leaving Aldershot; but well do I remember our farewell talk. He said that he sympathised with my desire to go back to the Regiment

in order to serve abroad with it. "The Regiment is the foundation of everything." But don't be swallowed up by it, he said. Never let yourself be trammelled by the bonds of orthodoxy; always think for yourself; get as much experience outside the ordinary run as you possibly can; and remember that the herd is usually wrong.

II

. . . Who, if he rise to station of command,
Rises by open means ; and there will stand
On honourable terms, or else retire,
And in himself possess his own desire ;
Who comprehends his trust, and to the same
Keeps faithful with a singleness of aim ;
And therefore does not stoop, nor lie in wait
For wealth, or honours, or for worldly state . . .

BY THE TIME my Regiment got to Palestine, in September 1937, Wavell was already there as G.O.C.; he had beaten us to it by nearly a month. I found myself Brigade Intelligence Officer, which meant spending most of my time away from base. But one evening when I happened to be in Jerusalem, two of our Jocks, both from my old platoon, both from old regimental families, both unarmed, were shot in the back in the street, near the Birket es Sultan. It went to my heart to see them lying there in the gutter, with their white spats so smartly Blancoed but stained with blood. Palestine Police dogs had traced the killers to the village of Siloam, less than a mile away, just at dusk; and it was proposed to throw a cordon round the village that night and search it at dawn. I was sent off to tell Wavell what was planned.

He asked me what mood the Jocks were in, and I said they were furious. There was another battalion in Jerusalem, the North Staffords; and Wavell wondered whether it might not be wiser to let them cordon Siloam and search it, rather than the Regiment. The Regiment had only been in the country for three weeks, and in

Jerusalem for a matter of days; and these were our first casualties. I begged him to let us do the job, and he agreed, stipulating only that the Commanding Officer should impress on everybody that there must be no reprisals or roughness, and that this was the highest test of discipline that could be imposed on the Battalion. It all passed off quietly. A few shots were fired on us as we closed in, including several specifically at me—my first experience of being shot over; I remember one round being fired by us at a man who refused to halt when challenged. The Jocks were grim and angry, but their behaviour was impeccable. Nevertheless that evening in Jaffa there were tales of how in their brutality they had tossed babies from bayonet to bayonet—an extremely difficult thing to do, when you come to think of it.

After eight months in Palestine, Wavell returned to be C.-in-C. Southern Command at Salisbury: and in July 1939 he formed the new Middle East Command, with a staff of only half a dozen officers. One of them was John Benson in my Regiment, who had relieved me as Brigade Intelligence Officer in January 1938, when I went home to be an instructor at Sandhurst. He wrote to me for expert guidance on Wavell; years after the war was over he gave me the very letter I sent him in reply, dated 7th August, 1939. I see that, *inter alia*, I wrote:—

. . . If the balloon goes up, you will be on the ground

floor in the most interesting theatre of war of all—the one which was Allenby's in the last war, but which will develop far more quickly in the next.

You ask about Archie himself. Well, I think he's the greatest figure in the Army. I lived cheek by jowl with him for two years, and the more I saw of him, the greater man I thought him. I believe he is a potential Marlborough, and that if the chance ever comes his way he will be one of the great commanders of history. He is the only soldier I've ever met of whom I think that.

Here are a few points.

1. If he doesn't want to talk, don't make conversation. He usually doesn't. If he is in a talking mood, then play up to him. He appreciates a good story when in the mood as much as anyone.

2. Don't ever say you are hard-worked. He believes that people who say that never are. I think he's right, usually!

3. Don't count on leave. He is always good for a day's leave for any good reason; a duck-shoot or a game of polo takes precedence over anything where possible, but leave home is very hard to come by. You had better recognise that at the first! He's a worker himself, and his staff has to be.

4. He can bite, and sometimes bites just on account of liver. But it is all over at once.

5. He is a most loyal and affectionate person to work for, and will back you up through thick and thin. He is very accessible.

6. He will tire you out long before he tires himself. He can make do with three hours sleep a night for a week.

7. He has the most concentrated mind in the world. He can write a memorandum or discuss something no matter what hullabaloo is going on all round him. Wake him up at three in the morning, and he *is* awake, and a bloody sight more on the spot than you are . . .

I repeat that you're a lucky fellow, and I do congratulate you. I learnt more in two years with Archie than ever before or since, *and* he was the first fellow to give me a real enthusiasm for soldiering. I bracket Hammie[1] with him! With Hammie for a tutor in the Regiment and Archie for a tutor on the wider aspects, there would be something wrong if one didn't get bitten with the Army.

A month or two after the war broke out, I heard that Wavell was in London, and rushed up to beg him to take me back with him to the Middle East in any capacity; but he refused. I was determined to get to that theatre eventually, since my own Battalion was there; but it took me more than a year to contrive it. It was Wavell's old friend Marshall-Cornwall who fixed it in the end. He was going out to act as Liaison Officer between Wavell and the Turks, and to carry out reconnaissances in Turkey with their approval, in case the Germans invaded them; and he took me with him as his G.S.O.

[1] Colonel A. K. Hamilton, D.S.O., M.C., The Black Watch. Died April 1960

Wavell

On Exercise "Golden Fleece", 1936. *Left to right*: Fergusson as ADC; Eastwood, GSO 1; Wavell; Grant-Taylor, Royal Scots Fusiliers

Visiting Germany as Colonel of The Black Watch, 1948. *Left to right*: Major Robinson, RTR; Fergusson, commanding 1st Black Watch; Wavell

II. He went out ahead by air; I followed by sea, an exciting journey in which everything went wrong. My original ship was first attacked by a pocket battle-ship, and then ran aground on the Rock of Gibraltar, no less; I went on to Malta in a flying-boat, arriving in the middle of an air-raid, and was stuck there for a week; I then transferred to a tanker, which was bombed by enemy aircraft throughout two consecutive days but was never hit. When I at last reached Cairo and reported, I found that Marshall-Cornwall was already in Turkey, but that I was to dine with the Wavells that night. A happy reunion it was. The whole family was there except Archie John, now an officer with five years' service in the Regiment; he had been wounded in Palestine in 1938, and was serving in our war-time 10th Battalion in Scotland.

As Marshall-Cornwall didn't immediately want me, Wavell attached me to his own staff, and I found myself flying down to Khartoum with him to see Platt, and on to Nairobi to see Cunningham. This was January 1941, in the middle of Wavell's epic run of success against Graziani and the Italians. He seemed quite unmoved by it; he was in every respect just the same as ever; and we dropped back into our old relationship as though I had never left him. At Khartoum he discussed with Platt the operations which resulted in the victory at Keren; at Nairobi he discussed with Cunningham the forcing of the Juba River.

All his life, Wavell was a complete Jonah in the air. Forced landings, crash landings, just plain bad landings pursued him as relentlessly as though some malicious

fairy had been omitted from the invitation list at his christening. We were scheduled to take off from Nairobi at six o'clock in the morning, to fly up to Wajir, near the Abyssinian border. At first the aircraft was unserviceable, so we all sat down to breakfast at the airport. As the sun rose, it became obvious that all the rank and fashion which had come to see us off had counted on the darkness to conceal the fact that they had postponed shaving until after we had gone. When at last we got into the aircraft, we taxied down to the end of the runway, turned, and started; and then, as we gained speed, one of the engines burst into flames. We all scrambled out. The fire was extinguished, while Wavell surveyed it grimly, and our luggage recovered. The only alternative aircraft available was too small to carry me and Wavell's other staff officer; so we had a splendid four days' holiday in Nairobi. The other chap was far more earnest than I was, and seemed convinced that the war would be lost through being deprived of his personal supervision; but I enjoyed myself thoroughly in the Game Reserve.

I hope that Wavell's eventual biographer will produce an exhaustive count of his flying mishaps. Some of them had a marked effect on events. During the disastrous set-backs at the end of March and the beginning of April of 1941—two or three months after the incident at Nairobi—Brigadier John Harding, as he was then, was sitting at a track-crossing somewhere in the Western Desert, sorting out the stragglers as they came back, in his capacity as B.G.S. of the Corps. He was in a chair behind a table in the open air; he knew

little of the situation beyond the fact that there had been a catastrophe; he was doing his successful best to re-group units and formations, by indicating where they should go. (My father had done exactly the same thing as a Divisional Commander on the retreat from Mons, twenty-seven years earlier.)

Harding felt a hand come gently down on his shoulder from behind; and looking round saw that it was none other than Wavell. He tried to get up, but Wavell pressed him back into his chair, telling him just to carry on. For an hour he felt Wavell's hand on his shoulder. Wavell said nothing, and did nothing. He was merely there. And the reason why he was there was the usual one: his aircraft had made a forced landing about a mile away, and he was awaiting the arrival of another. I heard this story not at first hand, but at second; but it smacks of truth.

There was at least one occasion when the hoodoo or jinx on Wavell's flying extended, or was projected, to his visitors. He has recorded in his own despatches how he had to postpone a visit to the Western Desert at a crucial moment because he was expecting the arrival of Dill and Eden in March of that fateful year of 1941. They were delayed for a couple of days because of engine trouble; and if only this could have been foreseen, Wavell could have flown up to the front, made his assessment and decisions and been back again, in ample time to receive them. When at last they arrived, I went with Wavell to the airport. Sir Miles Lampson, the

British Ambassador (now Lord Killearn), went in another car.

Dill came back with Wavell, Eden came back with Lampson. Dill and Wavell discussed in the car Wavell's relations with Churchill; and Dill said: "I don't think he will ever forgive you for that last sentence in your signal about Somaliland."

In August 1940, Wavell had been summoned home for consultations. The Italians were advancing in Somaliland. Originally the French and ourselves had made joint plans for its defence. When France defected and the Vichy Government took over, the local French commander, Legentilhomme, tried to rally the French sector of the country to de Gaulle; but he failed to carry it, and was obliged to flee. It was obvious that the country would be difficult to hold, if the Italians moved against it from French Somaliland as well as from Italian, which is exactly what they did. When Wavell went home, he gave Maitland Wilson (who was answering for him in his absence) a free hand to decide whether or not to evacuate it.

The Prime Minister tried to persuade Wavell, in London, that Somaliland must on all accounts be retained. Wavell pointed out that with his present shortage of troops its garrison was of far more value to the Middle East than the place itself; that he had given Maitland Wilson a free hand, and was not going to indulge in back-seat driving from London. All he would agree to, in response to the Prime Minister's urgings, was that it would not be abandoned without a fight.

By the time he got back to Cairo the place had been

evacuated, The Black Watch having provided the rear-guard and being the last to re-embark from Berbera. The defensive operations had been carried out by a mixture of Punjabis, King's African Rifles, Northern Rhodesians, Somaliland Scouts and Camel Corps, and the Regiment; and casualties had been light. They were so light, indeed, that the Prime Minister sent an angry signal to Wavell accusing him of not having fulfilled his undertaking that the place would be fought for. At that moment, the extent of the Italian casualties became known: attacking with a preponderance of five to one, they had lost 1,800 men. In replying to the Prime Minister's signal, Wavell pointed this out; and added the unfortunate sentence: "Heavy butcher's bill not necessarily indication of good tactics." It was this unlucky phrase which had annoyed the Prime Minister, and started the rot in his relations with Wavell.

Marshall-Cornwall's Turkish assignment was completed by the beginning of April. By that time the whole world seemed to be collapsing about us: Greece and the Western Desert alike were crumbling. Marshall-Cornwall and I were on our way back through Ankara when we heard the news. I remember sitting in the sun with him at Adana waiting for the aircraft that was to take us back to Cairo, appalled at the latest reports, but putting a brave face on it in front of our Turkish host. He was the local divisional commander, by name Fakhri Belen; and as we sipped our coffee he recited to us a long Persian poem about the beauties of the

spring—not very relevant to the tragedy being enacted.

On the 3rd of April the disaster reached its crisis. The enemy made a great haul of our generals—O'Connor, Neame and Gambier-Parry—and several brigadiers. In the consequent re-shuffle, Marshall-Cornwall became Commander, British Troops in Egypt; in which capacity, incidentally, he did much unacknowledged work on the defences of the Alamein line. For a short time I tried on my own to keep the fire under the Turkish pot from going out; but the Turks were not to be impressed by a mere major, and I contrived to get my appointment wound up, hoping to get back to my Regiment, which was then in Crete. Instead, I hooked a real tartar of a temporary job: Wavell was ordered from London to hold an enquiry into the disaster of the 3rd of April, and I was put in charge of it. It was an awkward business, for I was much too junior, and some of the more senior officers who gave evidence were obviously of the same opinion.

This was the first of a series of odd jobs. Whoever normally took the minutes at the meetings of the three Commanders-in-Chief went sick; and I was answering for him during the evacuation of Crete, where my Regiment was fighting for its life. Wavell was grim but superb. He seemed quite unruffled, and no more shaken by these shocking adversities than he had been tempted to maffick during his victories a few weeks earlier. The first day of the evacuation was terribly costly in ships, and it seemed unlikely that the Navy would risk another go. The next day the meeting opened in the absence of Admiral Cunningham, who had gone back

to Alexandria (from which he always refused to shift his base) the night before. Wavell, Longmore, Arthur Smith and a few senior staff officers sat at the long green baize table and waited for Cunningham. With them was Peter Fraser, the Prime Minister of New Zealand. Nobody said very much. At last Cunningham arrived, sat down, and said: "We're going in again." It was a magnificent, an historic moment.

Two days later Wavell sent me down to Qassassin near the Canal to greet the Regiment on his behalf, and to say how sorry he was that he was too busy to come himself. I was to say that he "hoped they would understand." It still seems to me to be one of the most modest remarks of all time. The Regiment had had 200 men killed in the ships, six times as many as in the Island; but their tail was right up. Indeed, they were indignant at having been brought out: for at Heraklion, their end of the Island, they were getting the best of it. They still didn't realise how badly things had gone at the western end.

There were plenty of wiseacres afterwards to say that the intervention in Greece was madness; but in point of fact there was only one responsible staff officer at G.H.Q. who opposed it from the start and consistently, and who can legitimately say: "I told you so"; and that was Freddie de Guingand, then G.S.O. I in Joint Plans, and afterwards Chief of Staff to Lord Montgomery. Both Wavell and Wilson maintained afterwards, and in cold print, that in the light of their then knowledge they would do it again. Once again, an enquiry was ordered from home into the Crete débâcle, and I was

thing to do with it. I spent a pleasant and disillusioning few days roving about the Hauran and the fringes of the Jebel Druze in pursuit of relevant information, in the course of which I met various old friends such as Henry Browne (Rifle Brigade) in the Trans-Jordan Frontier Force, and Wilfred Thesiger in the Druze Levies; I also met that charming old rascal Hamza Darwish, a Druze leader who had cut the Free French lines of communication a fortnight before, and pinched six bottles of whisky which were on their way up to me: he gave me four of them back, and I gave one of them back to him, to show that there was no real ill-feeling. In the middle of all this, somebody brought me a three-day-old signal from General Arthur Smith in Cairo, which read: "Report here soonest."

In Arthur Smith's office I was made privy to a secret which he assured me was known to only two others in Cairo besides ourselves. "The Chief" was being superseded. Auchinleck was flying from New Delhi to take over, and Wavell was to replace him there. I was to go with him as Private Secretary.

I am ashamed to say that I burst out saying that I didn't want to go to India; here was my chance to get back to my own Regiment. General Arthur Smith, the most loyal and splendid of men, said solemnly:— "If you walk out on the Chief now, after all that you owe him, when he is down on his luck, you will be a bigger cad than I take you for, and you will never forgive yourself as long as you live." I felt a quarter of the size of Tom Thumb.

Some years later, after his death, I heard how the news

of his supersession reached him. A signal from the Prime Minister telling him that Auchinleck and he were to change places had arrived in the small hours of the morning, and been taken to General Arthur Smith, who had at once dressed and gone round to Wavell's house on Gezira. He found him shaving, with his face covered with lather and his razor poised. He read out the signal. Wavell showed no emotion. He merely said: "The Prime Minister's quite right. This job wants a new eye and a new hand"; and went on shaving.

Three or four days later we took off from Almaza airfield, early in the morning. Wavell's departure had been kept pretty secret, but there was a knot of devoted officers to see him off. Among them was a Free French officer, Major des Essarts, who had been Wavell's liaison officer from General Weygand in Syria before the fall of France. When that lamentable event happened, des Essarts had offered his sword to Britain, and Wavell had got him commissioned into The Black Watch. Ten days later, General de Gaulle's movement had got under way, and des Essarts had joined it. At the moment when Wavell left Cairo for India, Wavell and de Gaulle were "non-speaks"; and we heard afterwards that des Essarts was put under arrest for daring to come and make his farewells to Wavell. Years later, after the war, des Essarts and I—he as a Major-General—were to serve together again at S.H.A.P.E. During that time, his only son was killed in Indo-China. He still keeps, in his house in Brittany, his Red Hackle,

glengarry and *sgian dhu*, as souvenirs of his ten days as an officer of The Black Watch.

Lady Wavell and the family were to follow on later. The party in the aircraft, which was flown by an excellent character called Burberry who was to drop supplies on me in Burma a year later, consisted of Wavell, myself, and Sandy Reid-Scott of the 11th Hussars, who had been in my house at Eton some years after me, and had lost an eye in one of the desert battles. There was also a rather lugubrious Group-Captain from Air Headquarters, India. Egypt fell away from beneath us as we took off and flew westward, towards and across the Suez Canal. I watched Wavell from my seat on the starboard side, as he looked down at Sinai with his good left eye from a port-side window. It isn't for me to reconstruct what he was thinking about; but surely he must have remembered the great days of Allenby, (on whose staff he had been), the battles of Gaza and Beersheba, and his own brief taste of victory against odds which might have overwhelmed him.

We landed at Lydda to re-fuel; and here again was a little cluster of officers to say goodbye. Among them was the burly figure of Brigadier Joe Kingstone, formerly of The Queen's Bays, who, until he was very gently checked, made some insubordinate remarks about Wavell's supersession. We flew on, over the familiar cities of Jerusalem and Jericho and Amman, with Wavell still looking out of the window. He was showing no emotion, of any sort or kind, beyond a mild interest in the view.

When we got to the featureless country beyond

Amman, he screwed himself round and said, across the aisle of the aircraft: "Have you got anything for me to read?"

I was reading it myself, but I offered him Flecker's *Hassan*. He screwed up his eye as he looked at the title; and then, without opening the book, turned to me and quoted in full the following lines from it—Ishak's song:—

Thy dawn, O Master of the world, thy dawn;
The hour the lilies open on the lawn,
The hour the grey wings pass beyond the mountains,
The hour of silence when we hear the fountains,
The hour that dreams are brighter and winds colder,
The hour that young love wakes on a white shoulder,
O Master of the world, the Persian Dawn.

That hour, O Master, shall be bright for thee:
Thy merchants chase the morning down the sea,
The braves who fight thy war unsheathe the sabre,
The slaves who work thy mines are lashed to labour,
For thee the waggons of the world are drawn—
The ebony of night, the red of dawn!

He read it all the way to Habbaniyah; and I never got it back.

At Habbaniyah, Wavell at once suggested going up to Deir-ez-Zor, which was then being fought for; this would have been my first meeting with General Slim, an officer whom I was later to serve under and to get to know well. He suffered himself to be persuaded that he would be *de trop*, and filled in time instead by looking

over the scene of the recent fighting between Habbaniyah cantonment and Al Falluja. We spent a night in Baghdad where Wavell, Sandy Reid-Scott and I all went for a swim, a pastime which Wavell always loved; and another in Basra; and another in Sharja, where there was then no amenity except what was in the old Fort. Wavell was at last, for the first time for years, relieved of all pressing responsibility, and in no great hurry. If I had expected from him—but I knew him too well to be so stupid—any comment on his having been relieved of command, I would have been disappointed.

Burberry had a favourable meteorological forecast, and took off from Sharja expecting to make Karachi in a single hop. But Wavell's aerial Jonah was an invisible fellow-passenger with us, and the "met" was at fault. There came a moment when we turned back, and the lugubrious Group-Captain went forward to the cockpit to find out why. Unexpected head-winds had put us short of petrol, and we landed for the night at a ghastly place called Jiwani, on the Mekran coast of Baluchistan. It was designed only for re-fuelling, and not intended for a night-stop. Wavell was housed in a hut; the Group-Captain disappeared somewhere; Sandy and I bedded down on the uncongenial sand for a thoroughly uncomfortable night, with a hot wind driving scratchy particles of Mekran down our necks, and up our sleeves and trouser-legs. Characteristically, Wavell's first order to me after we reached Simla was to send a case of

champagne to the young B.O.A.C. agent stationed at Jiwani for just such an emergency as this. But when he told all and sundry in India just how comfortable we had all been at Jiwani when stranded there for a night, Sandy Reid-Scott and I made rueful faces at each other.

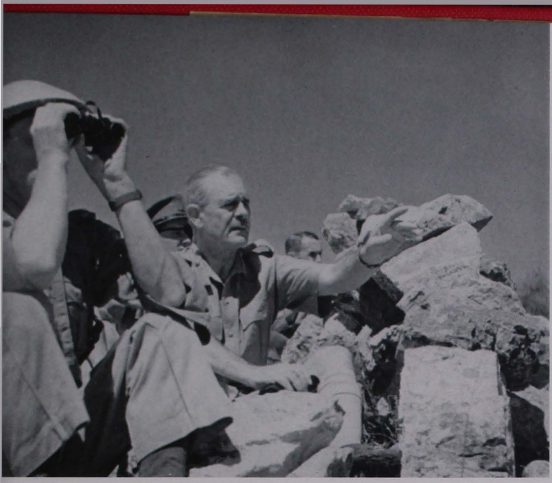
From Karachi, where Wavell was first greeted as the new C.-in-C., we flew to Ambala, at the foot of the Himalayas. We made one stop *en route*, at Jodhpur, where we found a squadron of Audax aircraft, such as Wavell and I used to fly about in from Farnborough. They were supposed to be what were then called " Army Co-operation Aircraft," used for reconnaissance, spotting for artillery and liaison purposes ; but no " Army " was visible at Jodhpur, other than a few guards on the airfield. We then made the discovery that they were masquerading as fighter aircraft, and that there were in fact no more modern aircraft in India to fulfil that role. Thus the first signal sent from India by the new C.-in-C., which he dictated to me, was addressed to Tedder, who had relieved Longmore as Air C.-in-C. Middle East a few weeks earlier. It read : " Have just seen India's most up-to-date fighter squadron armed with Audaxes. Does not this make your heart bleed ? "

At Ambala we changed to a train, and at Kalka to a narrow-gauge train, to take us up the hill to Simla. The Government of India was still following the peace-time practice of moving up from the plains for the hot weather, a process which, what with all the packing and unpacking, took about a week to achieve. Simla was—indeed, is—7,000 feet up and really chilly. At

Snowdon, the C.-in-C.'s house built by Kitchener, we actually found wood fires burning in the grates, a richly exotic sight for Middle Easterners. That evening after dinner, Wavell took my name for crass ignorance, because I failed to respond to a reference he made to Mrs. Hauksbee; I had never heard of the woman. He directed Francis Stuart, a charming A.D.C. left behind by Auchinleck to see us in, to provide me with a copy from Snowdon's bookshelves of *Under the Deodars*, for bedside reading, and warned me that I should have to pass an exam., to be set by him at breakfast the following morning, on the tale *The Phantom Rickshaw*. I did. And the following evening he made me accompany him on a climb up Jakko Hill, where the monkeys still swarmed as they did in his days as a subaltern.

An excellent bearer had been provided for him, by the fore-thought of somebody: he met us at the foot of the hill, and travelled up in the train. Wavell had at once addressed him in Urdu which was no doubt faulty—I am no judge—but was certainly fluent; and the nearest thing to a smirk that I ever saw come on to his face appeared when the bearer, obviously delighted, answered in a stream of words. It was thirty-one years since Wavell had last been in India.

Army Headquarters was depressing in all sorts of ways. The right to make even minor decisions was reserved to a very high level; the tempo was orientally slow in contrast with the two G.H.Q.s in which I had already served, Home Forces and the Middle East. One re-



Before Merdjayoun, during the Syrian campaign, June 1941
On the Burma Front, 1942

Wavell leaving the Tower of London on the last of all his journeys

membered how splendidly Delhi had responded to all demands made on it from Cairo; but on the spot one couldn't see how this could ever have been achieved by such a cumbrous organisation and the dog-tired men who staffed it.

I recall Wavell's first meeting with his Principal Staff Officers, as they were called in India—a small group corresponding in size and functions to the members of the Army Council at home, with two or three civilian officials added. They gathered in my office, from which Wavell's was reached by an inner door; and one of the civilians said to me rather truculently: "What's supposed to be so good about this man Wavell?"

I tried to give the Chief a build-up, but the man said: "If he's as good as you say, why did things go so wrong in the Middle East?" I tried to deal with that one too, and ended up by saying: "I'll bet that if I ask you in six months' time, you will be telling me that he's just about the biggest man you've ever met." But, to be honest, the man never retracted.

The soldiers were better mannered, though it seemed to me that they were considerably more in awe: one, at least, was an old friend of Wavell's from Aldershot days, and two belonged to the British service. They had all brought with them thick *aide-mémoires*, in anticipation of being catechised. In due course they went into the presence. Wavell was in one of his least communicative moods. He asked one or two questions of each; said "I see" to all the answers; and allowed long and painful pauses to ensue. At last he said: "Well, I think that's all for this morning. Perhaps the Master-

General of the Ordnance would be good enough to remain behind for a moment."

The others filed out, casting sympathetic looks at the M.G.O., who happened to be Wavell's old friend, though it didn't prevent him having a quick, last, furtive look at his *aide-mémoires*.

When I shut the door behind the others, Wavell greeted him and said that what he really wanted from the M.G.O. was a complete set of all Indian Army regimental badges "for a girl-friend of mine who collects them." The expression on the M.G.O.'s face was an amalgam, wonderful to see, of relief and astonishment. The fortunate collector was Minta MacMichael, daughter of the High Commissioner in Palestine and now the wife of Sir Toby Low; the MacMichael family were close friends of the Wavells and The Black Watch alike.

I remained in India only for about six weeks. Wavell knew that I was still striving to get back to the battalion, from which I had now been parted for nearly four years. He had finished the first draft of his final Middle East Despatch; and he really needed an Indian Army officer for his Private Secretary, who would be familiar with all the *nuances* of the job. Furthermore, the Turks had bobbed up again with a request for further liaison; and as Persia, which we had lately occupied, came under India, Wavell as well as Auchinleck was closely concerned. He decided to send his Director of Military Operations, Major-General Geoffrey Bruce, who had

been higher up Everest than any living man and was one of the last people to see Mallory and Irving alive, to join in the new Turkish talks, with me to accompany him. When these were over, I was to do some more research for him in the Cairo archives for his Despatch; and he gave me a letter to General Arthur Smith suggesting that as soon as that was done, I might at long last be allowed to revert to regimental duty. Meanwhile, I handed over my job as Private Secretary to Major Bill Birnie of the Guides Cavalry, another Everest man, who had been in the Military Secretary's office in Delhi, and also in the Middle East, and knew the Indian Army like the back of his hand. It was in fact another ten weeks before I finally got back to the Regiment, in the closing stages of the Tobruk siege.

III

. . . 'Tis, finally, the Man, who, lifted high,
Conspicuous object in a Nation's eye,
Or left unthought-of in obscurity,
Who, with a toward or untoward lot,
Prosperous or adverse, to his wish or not,
. . . Who, not content that former worth stand fast,
Looks forward, persevering to the last,
From well to better, daily self-surpast . . .

AT THE very moment that the clouds lifted over Tobruk, so they descended on South-East Asia. We heard appalled, huddling in our slit-trenches from the biting December wind, of Japan's entry into the war, the loss of the two battleships, the fall of Hong Kong, and Wavell's new and hopeless appointment as Supreme Commander in a disintegrating part of the world. After our siege was raised, we were sent to prepare defences in Syria against a German offensive through Turkey which was being prophesied by the pundits. Late one night we were all aroused, bustled down to the Hejaz station in Damascus, and sent hurtling south through Palestine to plug (as we thought) a gap in the Western Desert. We found ourselves instead on our way to Burma by sea; we were in fact decanted at Bombay; and a month later I found myself back on Wavell's staff, this time as a Joint Planner in New Delhi.

Out of twenty-eight years in the Army this was the only job in which I found myself continuously and thoroughly miserable. There were practically no resources to be spared for India; even the scrapings of

the barrel were meagre. Worse, it was obvious even to a junior officer like myself, who had seen the brilliant teams with which he had been furnished in Aldershot, Palestine and Cairo, that Wavell was now being served by a Second XI of staff and subordinates. One or two quite ordinary officers shone like jewels in comparison with those about them; though Wavell's own judgment was as bright as ever, and his imagination as penetrating.

There was one occasion especially, when a logistic study, of such importance that its eventual effect was to postpone the return offensive into Burma by a twelve-month, was never even shown to him. It had been prepared by the Commander of Eastern Army, as it was then called, whose headquarters were in Barrackpore; it pointed out that it would be impossible to complete the road system into Manipur and beyond in time for the invasion to be mounted before the onset of the 1943 monsoon. Copies of this paper had been circulating in G.H.Q. for several days; and my colleagues and I on the Joint Planning Staff, where I was G.S.O. I, had been unable to fault it. I got a message from along the corridor that Wavell intended to fly to Calcutta on the morrow to see the Commander, Eastern Army, and that I was to accompany him. We all assumed that he wished to discuss this paper; but as the talks opened round the table at Barrackpore, it suddenly became evident that Wavell had never seen it. This was one of the two occasions in my life when I saw him really angry, and no wonder. I have always been surprised that he did not dispense with the services of the very senior officer responsible for suppressing it. Was it

perhaps because he accepted almost too loyally the ruling that the India-Burma theatre, and the war against the Japanese, was to accept second place in relation to the war against Germany? And that he must continue to function with what he had at hand?

When a neighbouring Maharaja gave him a baby rhinoceros as a present, he said to a group of his personal staff: "What on earth am I going to do with this?" One of them made the constructive suggestion that he should let it loose in G.H.Q., where it would certainly do more good than harm.

He himself was as good company as ever. Not a day passed but he managed to fit in some exercise: a ride on the plains of Delhi in the cool of the morning, perhaps a swim in the evening. (The business of a hot-weather evacuation to Simla had been stopped.) He kept himself splendidly fit, though he had broken some ribs in Singapore in an accident in the black-out, and continued his career as a Jonah in the air. Flying down to Arakan with him once, during the 1942 monsoon, we landed in a squall of rain on the brick air strip at Fenny; the aircraft skidded off the runway and stood on its nose. It was a load-carrying Dakota without proper seats, and consequently without lap-straps. Wavell was sitting at the forward end of the main cabin, on the port side as usual, so that his good eye could see out of the window. As the aircraft's tail went up in the air, the rest of us hurtled forward in a heap, at the bottom of which was our revered com-

mander; I think there were five of us, plus oddments of luggage. As we sought to clamber back to the door up an incline of 45°, he naturally got rather trodden on. All he said, in a resigned voice rather than a cross one, was: "When you've all *quite* finished walking all over your Commander-in-Chief . . ."

Although I was sharing a house in Tughlak Road with two other officers, the Wavells' hospitality was undiminished, and they were extraordinarily kind to me. For years he and I had made up verses together, especially *ballades*: we would select the subject and the rhymes, produce possible related quatrains, choose the best, and weld them into a whole. When the Indian Parachute Brigade was raised, it included one composite British battalion; thirty Jocks from the Regiment, bored with internal security duties, joined it; and Wavell suggested for the last line of each verse of a *ballade*:—

Never go parachuting in the kilt.

One quatrain which he devised ran as follows:—

'Twould give the Indian ladies such a shock
To see how stoutly Scottish lads are built;
So here's a word of warning to you, Jock:
Never go parachuting in the kilt.

It was in April 1942 that I joined his Planning Staff, during the later stages of the evacuation of Burma. One evening, Peter Fleming (of whom, and of whose wits, Wavell had conceived a high opinion in the Middle East) and I were summoned to dinner, and afterwards

to his study. He ran over once again the story of Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen dropping a haversack full of bogus information near Beersheba on the 10th October, 1917, which played a major part in deluding the Turks about Allenby's intentions. He wanted to play a similar trick on the Japanese, to mislead them about Alexander's withdrawal route; and we sat up until 1 a.m. discussing it. The deed was duly carried out by Peter Fleming and Sandy Reid-Scott; and there are grounds, though not conclusive grounds, for believing that it had some effect.

In May there walked into my office Ivan Lyon, an officer of the Gordon Highlanders with whom I had done some sailing before the war. During the two years that his Regiment had been in Singapore, he had become an accomplished seaman, having sailed both to Indo-China and to Australia. When Singapore fell, he had managed to reach Sumatra; and from there had brought some forty officers and men in safety to Ceylon under sail in a Sumatran *prahu*. He was quite convinced that it would be practicable to raid Singapore from Australia in a Malayan sailing vessel, to destroy shipping, and to get away with it. The plan found no favour with my immediate superiors, but I abused my position and took him to Wavell by the back door, more or less as I had done with Fox-Davies seven years before. He supported Lyon in full, and sent him to General MacArthur with a letter of introduction. The final story is not nearly as well known as it should be. Lyon's first expedition was highly successful; he managed to sink or damage eight ships in Singapore Roads in a single night, and to return to Australia. On his second venture he was killed; and

such of his party as were not killed with him were executed by the Japanese as prisoners, shortly before the recapture of Singapore.

It was from Wavell alone that I got encouragement to join Wingate, when Wingate offered me the command of one of his columns. Everybody else tried to persuade me not to touch it; and I had nobody's blessing but Wavell's when I left New Delhi for Wingate's training area near Saugor, in the Central Provinces. Four months later he came to see us off from Imphal; and I showed him my column with enormous pride. My soldier servant Peter Dorans had been with me, except for two short breaks, ever since 1931, and including Aldershot and Cairo. When Wavell saw him standing in the ranks, he said:—

"Hullo, Dorans, what are you doing here?"

And Peter answered in a melancholy voice: "Just the same as usual, sir: followin' the Major."

It was not until we had returned from that first Expedition, when I was four months older and four stone lighter, that I became aware of two great kindnesses that Wavell had done me in my absence. The whole affair had been launched with immense secrecy: and I had no means, even if I had been allowed, of telling my parents what I was engaged in, or why they were not hearing from me: although all next of kin of those taking part received a printed Airgraph explaining that for the next few months they would hear nothing from their husbands or sons, though they themselves should

continue to write letters. But Wavell had found the time to write to my father, whom he had met only once in Aldershot days, for the information of him and my mother alone, giving them some inkling of what was afoot. That was the first kindness.

The second affected others besides myself. One of the first officers to get back to India reported with a wealth of confirmatory detail that I had been killed. When this reached Wavell, he put a temporary ban on all such information about members of the Expedition being passed back in the normal way to the United Kingdom, to give a chance for more of us to get out before accepting casualty reports as authentic. I myself reached the British outposts with the rump of my party a fortnight later on the 25th of April, and Wingate on the 29th; others were still arriving at the end of June. Wavell told me afterwards that in his experience expeditions such as ours always produced a handsome crop of faulty casualty reports from the first people home. His wisdom saved my parents from unnecessary grief, and many other parents and wives as well.

By the time I reached New Delhi, he had flown to London, whence he went on to the Quebec Conference. He was eventually to return no longer as C.-in-C. but as Viceroy. In his absence I was staying with his family, when I collapsed with malaria and dysentery. Lady Wavell could not have looked after me with more kindness if I had been her favourite nephew. When Wavell came back, I had fully recovered and was commanding a brigade in training for the second Expedition; but from time to time I had to go to Delhi, where I always

stayed with him. On one of these visits he was talking about the last hours of Singapore. There was a moment, he said, just before he left the stricken island for the last time, when he was genuinely tempted to stay behind for the capitulation. He would certainly be in for a bad time if he did so; but all the world would say: "Good old Archie Wavell! He stuck with his troops to the end." The alternative was to return to India and face the music, which would certainly mean criticism, and which might entail total loss of confidence and even disgrace. "I wasn't really in any doubt as to what my duty was," he said, "but just for the moment the other idea had its attractions—such as they were."

For some time he had been working on *Other Men's Flowers*. In August and September, down in the jungles of Mysore, I had run two courses of a fortnight each for officers of the 70th British Division on the art of living and fighting in forest. This was the old Middle East division which had held Tobruk and many of whose units had been in Palestine before the war; it was now being handed over to Wingate to augment his Chindit force. Among the students was Archie John, with other officers of the Regiment; and he had brought with him a list of the poems which his father was proposing to include in his anthology: I was delighted to see Ishak's song among them. Archie John and I had long discussions over his father's selection. One oddity which still perplexes me was the choice of the lesser-known version of Burns's *Banks o' Doon*, written—to

use the language of the Scottish Psalter—in Common Metre instead of in Long. I begged Archie John to dissuade his father from the proposed title, a quotation from Montaigne; I now freely admit that in so doing I was talking through my bush-hat.

There is at least one singularly beautiful poem preserved in *Other Men's Flowers* which would have perished but for Wavell's superlative memory: T. P. Cameron Wilson's *Magpies in Picardy*. Cameron Wilson was killed on the Somme in March 1918. He was a young and unknown schoolmaster, whose verses had appeared only in periodicals until the customary "slim volume" was published a year after his death, when it attracted little attention. The version of *Magpies in Picardy* which then appeared omitted the two superb last verses, the climax of the poem. Wavell had memorised them with his usual ease when they first appeared in the *Westminster Gazette*, during the poet's lifetime, and always included them when quoting the poem. (I notice that in the copy of the "slim volume" which Wavell gave me twenty-three years ago I have written them in, presumably at his dictation.) If it had not been for him, these verses certainly, and in all likelihood the poem and the author, would have been forgotten.

In fifteen years of effort I failed to induce Wavell to see any merit in Wordsworth's *The Happy Warrior*, or in Tennyson's *Ulysses*. As he said himself in his Foreword to *Other Men's Flowers*:

> Wordsworth's and Tennyson's verses have never registered an impression on my memory: they seem

to me to belong to a limbo which is earthy without being quite human, and star-gazing without being inspired.

I never developed an appetite for either poet which was not quickly satisfied; but I found inspiration from *Ulysses* in at least one bad moment, and I have always revelled in *The Happy Warrior* and thought how every line is appropriate to Wavell himself: which is why I have no qualms about quoting from it in this book. In one of his notes to *Other Men's Flowers* he has compared Tennyson's conception of Ulysses with Flecker's in the scales: and Flecker's scale goes down with such a thump as to toss Tennyson in the air like a Westminster pancake.

At the end of 1944 I left India without saying goodbye to him, being snatched away from a jungle camp at the foot of the Himalayas below Darjeeling to Whitehall at the shortest of notice. I spent the next two years in London, where I acted as an occasional agent for him, in such matters as interviewing potential A.D.C.s or looking up literary or military references.

I wish I had kept more of his letters of this period and later: the few I have are a delight of humour and understanding. Some display a kind of bewilderment at how much the Old Country had changed during the ten kaleidoscopic years that he had been serving it abroad. He had spent only a year in England (in 1938-9) between leaving it for Palestine in 1937, and laying

down the office of Viceroy in March 1947. I select two passages from a letter of January of that year.

Commenting on a book I had written called *The Wild Green Earth* (a title, incidentally, which I had taken from one of the two retrieved verses of Cameron Wilson's almost forgotten poem) he wrote:

> I remembered while reading it some of the arguments we used to have about unorthodox soldiering when you first came to me at Aldershot. I think that you at that time, certainly at first, regarded my ideas with some scepticism and were a little scandalised by them; but perhaps they took root.
>
> I liked your entitlement of a certain type of office-bound staff officer as "pit ponies." I have often thought of them myself in the same way, without finding such a *mot juste*. I am glad that you find mules such attractive animals: I have always been attracted by them. I once had several hundred of them in my charge for about three weeks, marching up to Chitral and back . . .
>
> I seem to detect in your last chapter the same uneasiness that I have at present about the spirit of the Nation; what is causing me concern is the lowering of the standard of honesty, which I found in unexpected quarters when I was last home, and which rather shocked me. Friends of mine spoke openly of the evasion of the law and of government regulations, and of dealings in the black market, as if they were a normal part of modern life and quite justifiable. Unless we can get back to something like our old standards

of honesty, family morality, hard work, and pride in craftsmanship, I do not feel that we shall maintain our position or regain our former prosperity, which was founded on the above qualities more than on other things: more, for instance, than on the fortuitous location of coal and iron-ore in the British Isles.

By this time I was serving with the Palestine Police, and I still possess a letter from New Delhi to Jerusalem written five weeks after the one I have just quoted. After talking of family and regimental matters, he wrote:—

As you will have seen, I am leaving here next month. I am very sorry not so see the thing through, and just a little sore at the abrupt manner of my replacement; but I have no complaints. It is the Government's final responsibility, and if they think a younger and fresher mind can do it better, I have certainly nothing to say except to wish him all success. And I expect I was getting rather too comfortable and pampered here; modern England, from all I hear, will be quite a good antidote. I shall miss most, I think, the horses and the morning ride.

In March 1947 I returned to the United Kingdom for a fortnight, to carry out some commissions for the Police, and managed to snatch four days at home in Scotland. While I was up north, Wavell returned from India to London, where he had been lent a flat somewhere in Mayfair; and he rang me up in Scotland, suggesting that I should go there for "bath and breakfast" when I came off the night train. I rang the bell, and he him-

self answered the door. When I emerged from the bath-room, shaven and clean, he called: "You'll find me along here." He proved to be frying our breakfast eggs and making the coffee and toast in the kitchen; "I don't seem to have lost the art," he said. Less than a week before, he had been Viceroy of India with more than a thousand servants.

A few months later I was in serious trouble in Palestine. I had a clear conscience, but nobody to confide in; the first was of some comfort, the latter a considerable lack. A major scandal was brewing up, which in due course boiled over and then subsided, as these things often do. The brewing-up period was the worst, and in the course of it I revealed the barest outlines to my father, then aged 82, and to Wavell, in letters posted for obvious reasons by safe hand from outside Palestine. Part of Wavell's staunch reply was as follows:—

> When I read about (it) in the papers, I guessed that you might be mixed up in the matter, and it looked to me like an unorthodox ploy gone wrong. I should like to hear the whole story some day. I hope it will turn out all right for you . . . As you know, I have always been for unorthodoxy and for taking risks, and I am glad that you had the initiative to take them, and sorry that it has turned out wrong . . . I sent you a telegram, as I hoped it might cheer you up at a difficult time.

It "turned out all right" in the end, though my organ-

isation, which had had some success until this set-back, was broken up, and I myself was required to resign from the Palestine Police; but as consolation prize I got the appointment which is or ought to be the goal of every infantry soldier's ambition: command of my Regiment. It was stationed at Duisburg in Germany, on the Rhine fifteen miles north of Düsseldorf. Since March 1946, Wavell had been Colonel of the Regiment in which his father had served before him, and his son was serving still (though at that moment seconded; he had lost a hand in Burma, and was now somewhere on the staff).

Each of the first two years that I was in command, Wavell came over from England, and spent a week with us; and he seemed to enjoy it as much as we did. He came not as a Field-Marshal, but as Colonel, wearing kilt and Red Hackle, crown and two "pips"; he watched every aspect of training, and we used to make the Regimental Games coincide with his visit. In 1948, the first year, he expressed a wish to see where the 1st, 5th and 7th Battalions had crossed the Rhine. We made up a party of officers and other ranks from each, all of whom were now serving in the 1st Battalion, and took a picnic out to Goch, Rees and Appeldorn. As we ate our luncheon sitting on the river bank, my adjutant's dog suddenly began to growl and make faces at another dog approaching along the bund.

"It must be very exciting, being a dog," said Wavell dreamily, through a mouthful of sandwich; "you never know whether to prepare for love or war."

On his next visit, in 1949, the Russians were blockading Berlin. The Air Lift was in full swing, and Wavell

wanted to see it. We flew up to Berlin together and back again, spending a night there; it was fortunate that, on this last occasion that I ever flew with him, his Jonah was dormant. The General in Berlin was the one-armed Geoffrey Bourne. I had met him first amphibiously at Camberley in 1936, when Wavell, he and I were gambolling in the same swimming pool. But that was not entirely a happy visit, for it included a parade where the 1st and 2nd Battalions were merged into one after 145 years. Wavell, his father and his son, were all 2nd Battalion men; and Wavell had fought a fierce but unsuccessful rearguard action to keep the 2nd Battalion alive, on the grounds that, almost alone in the Infantry of the line, we had enough Regular volunteers to man two battalions and more. Indeed, throughout the last two years of Wavell's life he was engaged in a continuous fight against certain interests in the War Office—rats would hardly be too strong a term—who were nibbling away at the infantry regimental tradition.

It was a sad occasion. Among those attending was Eric Linklater, who had served three years in the ranks of the Regiment in the First World War, calling himself eighteen when in fact he was fifteen. He has recorded in *A Year of Space* some recollections of this temporary recall to the Colours, including the making of yet another joint *ballade* at breakfast. Wavell had come straight out from Aberdeen, where he was Chancellor of the University, and where he had inadvertently left his shaving-brush. Here are the immortal lines in full :—

A Ballade of Bereavement

Time was when I was happy and serene
  And mocked at all who thought themselves ill-starred :
Now poltergeists and gremlins intervene
  To haunt and hoist me with my own petard.
  My visit to the Regiment is marred
By a disaster not to be foreseen :
  Timor mortis conturbat, sang the bard—
I left my shaving-brush at Aberdeen.

My morning lather is a might-have-been,
  My shaving soap is like a lump of lard,
My razor is a mockery (though keen)—
  I might as well have used a Pictish shard.
  The harmony of life is sadly marred,
My face has lost its usual ruddy sheen,
  My stubbled cheeks are cicatriced and scarred—
I left my shaving-brush at Aberdeen.

My chin, once glossy as a nectarine,
  Now looks like holly on a Christmas card,
Or straggly hawthorns in a woodland scene
  Such as is deftly drawn by Fragonard ;
  No R.S.M. would pass me for a Guard
However much I titivate and preen.
  My luck would daunt a Roland or Bayard :
I left my shaving-brush at Aberdeen.

Pity me, Prince : the water here is hard,
  Hourly my tongue inclines to the obscene :
Full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard,
  I left my shaving-brush at Aberdeen.

"Laughter on the face of greatness," wrote Linklater, "has a moving beauty. Wavell wiped a tear of laughter from his wounded eye, and across the breakfast table he seemed to recede and grow in magnitude in the perspective of history. In the distance were Delhi and the black-bearded troopers of the Viceroy's Bodyguard; Ethiopia lay beneath his arm; swift and secret in the darkness the Army of the Nile moved out against the vast imposing structure of the Italian Empire, and O'Connor, for our first taste of victory, rode his armoured columns westward through Cyrenaica . . ."

Wavell was to have come again in the spring of 1950; but the visit was postponed because of an attack of jaundice. On the 11th April he wrote:—

> This jaundice does not seem to leave me. I am still bright orange, still confined to bed, and unable to sleep owing to the irritation of one's skin which is set up. I do hope it will wear itself out soon, as otherwise it looks like wearing *me* out. (On the 24th:) This dam jaundice hangs on to me and shows little sign of clearing up.

The last letter I ever had from him was dated the 1st May. It was chiefly concerned with the regimental history he had made me write, (in his own words, "with perhaps the unfair authority of the Colonel of the Regiment, and of a General towards his ex-A.D.C.") and with the further postponement of his visit; we had just moved into Berlin.

The doctors have now decided that this persistent jaundice of mine must be due to a gall stone, and I am going into a nursing home this afternoon with a view to its removal. It is very tiresome. I suppose it means I shall be in the nursing home for about three weeks and shall have to take things very easy for another two or three months.

In Berlin, we heard with a shock a few days later that he was on the danger list—he who was never ill, and whose spells in bed had always been the result of physical injury such as a fall from a horse. For three weeks he fought gamely on, and Archie John wired us daily bulletins. The last of these gave him still a fighting chance, and spoke of his courage. On the 24th of May I had just left the Orderly Room on my way to the mess for luncheon when the adjutant, Victor Fortune's son Bruce, who had also been his A.D.C., threw up his office window as I passed, and called to me. A telegram had just come. Wavell had died that morning.

I spent the afternoon by myself on the lawn between my house and the Havelsee, with much to remember.

IV

. . . This is the happy Warrior ; this is He
That every Man in arms should wish to be.

ON THE 7th of June 1950, a glorious summer's day, I stood on Westminster Bridge looking down the River. A little flotilla of three launches was coming upstream in perfect symmetry, with their wake fanning out white behind them. The flags flying from the buildings on either bank were at half-mast; so were those of *Discovery* and *President*. All river traffic was stopped, but I could see the crews "manning ship" —not in smart naval fashion, but in little spontaneous democratic huddles—and hauling their caps off as Lord Wavell came by.

This was the first State Funeral to come up the Thames since Lord Nelson's; the inspiration was Archie John's. For a fortnight the Field-Marshal had lain in the Norman Chapel of the Tower of London, of which he had been Constable, watched day and night by Yeomen of the Guard. For the last few days a detachment from the Battalion in Berlin had taken over this duty.

As the leading launch drew nearer, I could see the sun glinting on her metal-work, and on the halberds of

the two Yeomen in full dress, one at the bow and one at the stern. On either side of the coffin stood the bearer party from the Regiment, under a young officer and the R.S.M. The launch drew alongside Westminster Steps; the coffin was carried up the ramp past the statue of Boadicea; and the procession moved off to the Abbey. At its head was our own Pipe-Major, who had lost an eye in Tobruk, and our Pipes and Drums; then our regimental detachment and another from the Scots Guards, who had especially asked to be represented; and the procession ended with some Household Cavalry. Among others who walked in it were Alanbrooke, Montgomery, Auchinleck, Arthur Smith; Giffard, Platt, Wilson, O'Connor; Mountbatten; and the two brothers Cunningham.

Mr. Attlee was present. Mr. Churchill had sent a representative; some of us felt that he of all people might have come in person. When the Lesson was being read, and the reader came to the words: "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual wickedness in high places," I could not refrain from a glance at certain pews. Later on, Alan Don, the Dean, read in his beautiful voice a few sentences from *The Pilgrim's Progress*:—

> My Sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage, and my Courage and Skill to him that can get it. My Marks and Scars I carry with me, to be a witness that I have fought His battle, who will now be my rewarder.

I found a tide of memories rising, and among them the "mark and scar" of Wavell's missing eye.

After the benediction, the pipers played "Lochaber No More": and the Pipe-Major played "After The Battle". He began at the far end of the Bath Chapel, moved forward invisibly to behind the Altar, and went back again. The effect in the Abbey was infinitely solemn, as the sound swelled and then died away. Soon afterwards the cortège was on the road to Winchester.

We drove past Camberley, Basingstoke and Micheldever. The road for me was full of memories of old manœuvres and tactical exercises. It was the same road up which, a century and a half before, an express had galloped with the news of the death of Nelson. As we drove down it on this radiant afternoon, little knots of people were waiting by the roadside to take off their hats and pay their last respects. The burial in the Chantry Garth of his old school was attended by his family, sixty officers and men of his Regiment, and the current generation of Wykehamists, who watched him being carried past. The only others were the Duke of Wellington and Lord Portal, the war-time Chief of the Air Staff and a fellow Wykehamist.

After it was all over, six of us who had been his A.D.C.s, still in uniform, sprawled under a tree in the garden of a Winchester housemaster who had also served on his staff, and talked about him. We were bound together by a golden thread of recollections which would always be precious to us, but which we could never

hope to spin about those who had not had our privilege. Somebody mused about his odd trait of being so often tongue-tied; odd, because with us he had always been relaxed, and his talk as refreshing as a waterfall. We had all seen him breasting adversity, but none of us had seen him downcast, or heard him repine. He never kept up a front in our presence; what we saw of him was the full, the genuine, character; and the more we saw of it, the more aware we became of the flawlessness. His standards were high, and he did not shrink from rebuke; but his personal relations with us were indulgent and comradely, like those of an understanding and nearly contemporary uncle.

He was only sixty-seven when he died. By normal reckoning we should have enjoyed his company and his counsels for years to come. Several foolish things which have been done within the Army might have been averted if he had lived longer. His powers of thought were still as robust as the body which he had always kept in perfect trim. No blow, fair or foul, military or political, ever got past the shield of his integrity.

For all that he was a poor speaker, and lacked the breezy *bonhomie* which soldiers are supposed to enjoy, he was adored by the troops. Even in his setbacks they had full confidence in him; he was as much the soldiers' hero as Roberts half a century before. We may doubt whether any other general could have scratched his crop of victories from the barren soil of the Middle East with such scanty seed. Later it fell to others to reap where he had sown, with resources which he had never had, both there and in South-East Asia;

and he was always whole-hearted in his admiration of the reaping.

When he was a schoolboy at Winchester, his headmaster had written, not very tactfully, to his father, then a major-general and a former commanding officer of the Regiment: "There is no need for your son to go into the Army: he is really quite intelligent": an observation which he used to quote with relish. If at times he was irked by stupidity about or above him, he kept his counsel and his patience. Once when I myself in a mood of frustration was thinking of leaving the Army I sought his advice. He said that he wouldn't dissuade me. "But I will say this: I was once very tempted myself, with the offer of the Chichele Professorship of the History of War at Oxford: and now I'm glad I didn't fall for it."

When I first went to serve with him, I made some jejune remark about Henry Wilson having been "a political general"; he took me up on this cliché, and listened to my flounderings as he made me define exactly what I meant. I don't think he held much of a brief for Henry Wilson, but he did at least impress on me that it was part of a soldier's training to understand the ways of politics without becoming involved in them. He deplored the tendency of officers, today more in evidence than ever, to pursue their careers and their leisure in isolation from the main stream of national life. He felt that the rising stars of the Services, the Foreign Office, the Colonial Office, and of politics should know each other, and win a full understanding of each other's problems before they got set in their ways.

He regretted never having been a student at the Imperial Defence College, where these different streams are induced to flow together for the space of a year.

On the day of his funeral, one of the fifteen hundred Metropolitan Policemen on duty said over his shoulder to somebody of my acquaintance in the crowd: "They're making a hell of a fuss of him now he's dead. Why didn't they do it while he was alive?"

Time is usually a fair assessor, and will no doubt assign Wavell his proper place. But Time gives only a short rope to personal recollections; they are apt to be cut short with his scythe, which is my excuse for committing these to paper. A few weeks ago on television I was asked out of the blue which experience of my life so far I had found the most exhilarating; and I heard my voice answering with conviction: "Serving under Wavell." If I had had a week's warning, I could have given no other answer.

The Author

Bernard Fergusson was born in 1911 and was educated at Eton and Sandhurst. He joined the Black Watch in 1931, and during the war served in the Middle East, India and Burma.

His most famous exploits were on the Wingate expeditions in Burma. In the first he commanded a column and in the second, that in which Wingate met his death, he led the only brigade that went into Burma overland. He has recorded his experiences of these campaigns in *Beyond the Chindwin* and *The Wild Green Earth*. He became Director of Combined Operations (military) in 1945, and after the war was Assistant Inspector, General Palestine Police, commanded the 1st Battalion The Black Watch in Germany, and for two years was Intelligence adviser to S.H.A.P.E. He was at the Allied Force H.Q., Port Said Operations in 1956 and commanded the 29th Infantry Brigade 1957-8. He is now retired, is married and has one son.

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