

**50 Years On, Copy Of An Original Handwritten Memoir By A Yeoman From
Child Okeford**

50 years have passed by since I rode out of Wadi Maktie with my comrades of the Dorset Yeomanry in the early hours of the 26th Feb '16 for the scene of the cavalry charge that routed the Senussie and led to the capture of Gaafar Pasha one of their Turkish leaders. An experience that half a century has failed to dim the memories of the scene of the charge known as Agagia. I was always mystified as to who named this arid, no-man's land of desert Agagia and why. It lay about 15 miles due south inland from Wadi Maktie on the coast at which afoot we had arrived the afternoon previous to the charge. At 5.30pm that evening we were feeding the horses when shells began to explode around the bivouack. We had with us a battery of the Notts R H A who soon ranged and silenced the Turkish gunners.

We "stood to" for the night, I well remember Col Suter stalking around and saying "we'll give them ginger for jam tomorrow boys".

(Many Yeomen who were listening to him saying those words during the evening of the 25th were at the same time the following evening lying dead at the scene of the charge.)

We moved out of Wadi Maktie the next morning between 9 & 10am and later in the morning were occupying a position roughly 2 ½ miles from the evening's position at Agagia. Jockeying for position went on until about 1 pm when Col Suter received a message from GOC warning him to be ready for cavalry action.

The enemy were preparing for retreat at 2pm the whole retreating force was extended for about a mile with a depth of anything up to ¼ mile. We were now closing on them but it was not until 4pm by which time the enemy had retreated some miles that we attacked in two lines galloping steadily. Col Suter gave the order to charge there was one yell and it was now every man for himself. The Senussie were terrified by the galloping horses and swords and were yelling, throwing away their weapons and dispersing in all directions. Some stood their ground and by dodging and shooting at close range accounted for most of our casualties. Darkness was closing in fast and the Senussie were disappearing into it. Gaafar Pasha was in our hands having been captured by Col Suter and with him our remnants retired a couple of miles from the scene to lick our wounds and assess our losses. At daylight the following morning we revisited the scene of the charge to discover the Senussie had been back in the night and stripped the dead of their clothing and belongings. Men and horses were lying dead over a large area. We collected them all and buried them in a communal grave after identification. The Burial Service was conducted by a Padre of the "Springboks" the South African & Rhodesians what fine fellows they were. They were following us the day before but being Infantry could not make our pace. They saw the charge from the distance and were wild with excitement. They arrived foot sore and most were carrying their boots tied with the laces slung over their shoulders.

A "Roll Call" now showed that we had 5 officers' 27 men and 85 horses killed in the charge. Our total was 180 when we galloped into somewhat over 4000 of armed Senussie & Turks, and when we reviewed our casualty list and think of Col Suter's words the evening before the charge i.e. "we'll give ginger for jam tomorrow" we must admit that the Senussie dealt out a little "ginger" to us.

Of the Charge Gaafar Pasha said: C'est magnifique, mais cen'est pas selon les regles" and added "No-one but British Cavalry would have done it!" Long since has the ashes of our comrades been absorbed into sands of the desert and time. Feb 26th is one day of the year that should be remembered by Dorset. They were youthful Yeomen of the County of Dorset full of Patriotism or they would not have volunteered (yes volunteered) to go overseas and be paid as Troopers of the princely sum of one shilling and twopence per day and a good chance of loosing their lives in the bargain. It surely must have been worthwhile when one compares that price with farms that change hands in our country today at £100,000. Also one who was at Agagia cannot but remember the splendid, patriotic Rhodesian Infantry who came to our aid on the 26th Feb 1916.

Today we are drawing their lifeblood by the pressure of sanctions on their economy. There stands a war memorial in a pretty setting by the main roadside at Iwerne Minster on which there is an inscription:- "Is it nothing to you all ye who pass by". 50 years have performed some nasty twists to the meaning of words. Patriotism where is your sting?