



Machine-gun in Piquer.



The Enemy.



Prisoners.



More Mountain Batteries.





Section of Mountain Battery
in action

February 24th, 1940. Posted from Mirali, Waziristan.

. . . We are now at a place called Islam Choki, all except one Company that has been left in Mirali for duties. All Islam Choki consists of is a landing ground, and what was once an aeroplane hangar- before the locals made a bonfire of it. However there is a small patch of ground enclosed by an almost bullet-proof mud-and-pebble wall in which we are camped. The ground is very flat and stony, as the Tocky and Kurram rivers meet hereabouts, but about five miles away great rocky ridges rise sheer from the valley. We are in British India, but the hills are in tribal territory, and it is there that the gangs of raiders live,- or used to live until a couple of days ago. For two days ago the "big offensive" opened.

The area concerned had been warned, but instead of clearing out, all the gangs in the frontier had concentrated on the nearest ridge. We could see their standards on the top, and the smoke rising from the mouths of their caves. The offensive opened with a magnificent bombardment. Six inch Howitzers firing from Bannu itself, with 4.5 field guns, and mountain batteries from points up to a mile from the ridge. We had to leave one coy. to guard the aerodrome, and the other coys. my own included, pushed forward to the end of the ridge at dawn to try and catch any gangs making a getaway to the west.

We had a grand view, and by 3 o'clock that afternoon we saw through our binoculars Ghurkas capture the topmost standard, although the Baluchis had done all the hard work and the Ghurkas had just been kept for the final assault. It looked a tremendous battle, and yet the casualties on our side could be counted on both hands. The artillery and supporting machine guns had done deadly work before the infantry got in. But it was not really the success that it might have been, since 99% of the hostiles managed to get away somehow as they always do when they see that we mean business. All the officers' wives and families were able to watch the fun through telescopes from the veranda of the Bannu club between rounds of bridge and cooling drinks!

Since then the Brigade has been pushing on into the area supported by two other brigades on either side. But we have to stay here, and just go out every day to try and catch those who have had enough, sneaking away.

The area is quite the rockiest and most difficult country in the whole of the frontier, and only one party of Englishmen has ever been into it,- and come out again - since about 1880, at a period when things were comparatively peaceful up here.

To-day it is my coy's turn to stay in camp and try to look after things and that is how I am managing to write this letter, although I don't know when or how I am going to post it.

M's of Feb 3rd has just this moment arrived; very welcome, but somewhat pathetic. What rotten weather you're having! It has suddenly got very hot and dry up here, and as there is not an inch of shade up on the hills where we spend most of the day, and "safas" and not "topees" are the order. I'm burned to a frazzle, and all my face and neck are coming off.

So sorry to hear about Fanny's fall. What bad luck! However the news of uncles S.S.G. and R.L. is grand, and ...Good old Thomas!

(continued on February 28th)

Back in Mirali. My coy. was sent back here two days ago for road opening duty.