

Beyond the Western Front: Oxfordshire in the First World War

MESOPOTAMIA 1914-18

Researched by

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Preserving memories: The Mesopotamian Campaign

Scrapbooking is a means of preserving memories. Drawn from the Archives of the Soldiers of Oxfordshire Museum, three very different scrapbooks offer insight into the Mesopotamian Campaign.

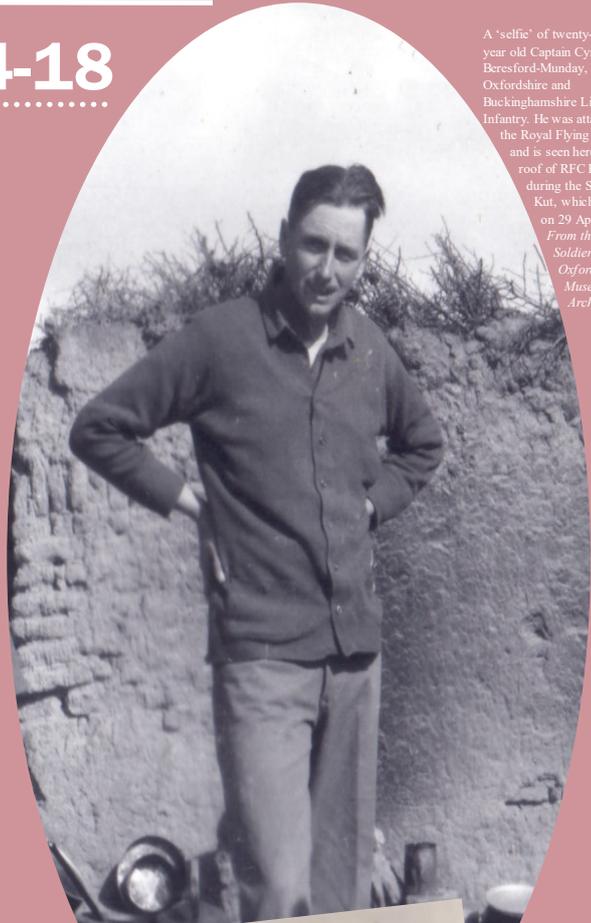
Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Reynardson's scrapbooks include his wartime diaries and photographs and provide an authentic snapshot of his service. Far from the scene of battle, the sister of Lieutenant Charles Widcombe of 1st Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, compiled an album including photographs and contemporary newspaper accounts. Much later in 1961, Captain Stanley Beresford-Munday created a scrapbook of his photographs with later recollections of the campaign.

'Too awful for words' is how Reynardson described war time conditions. Poor diet and lack of clean water helped the spread of diseases such as dysentery. Infections and wartime injuries were exacerbated by lack of medical provisions. Extreme temperatures, sandstorms and floods added to the misery of constant sniping. Away from the frontline boredom was alleviated by hunting, fishing and rounders.

Sadie Widcombe's scrapbook is a eulogy for her brother and includes photographs of his earlier life and officer training. Newspaper clippings illustrate the campaign and some of the issues raised at home about strategy and lack of support. The only time we hear Charles Widcombe's voice is in a poem he wrote satirising Rudyard Kipling's poem *If*.

Beresford-Munday's scrapbook is dedicated to the officers of the 1st Battalion Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry. He uses his own photographs, adding the captions from memory much later. This scrapbook strongly defends Major General Townshend the maligned leader of the campaign to take Baghdad.

A 'selfie' of twenty-eight year old Captain Cyril Beresford-Munday, of 1st Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry. He was attached to the Royal Flying Corps and is seen here on the roof of RFC HQ during the Siege of Kut, which ended on 29 April 1916. From the Soldiers of Oxfordshire Museum Archive



A game of rounders under way in Mesopotamia. A blurred image from Reynardson's album. From the Soldiers of Oxfordshire Museum Archive



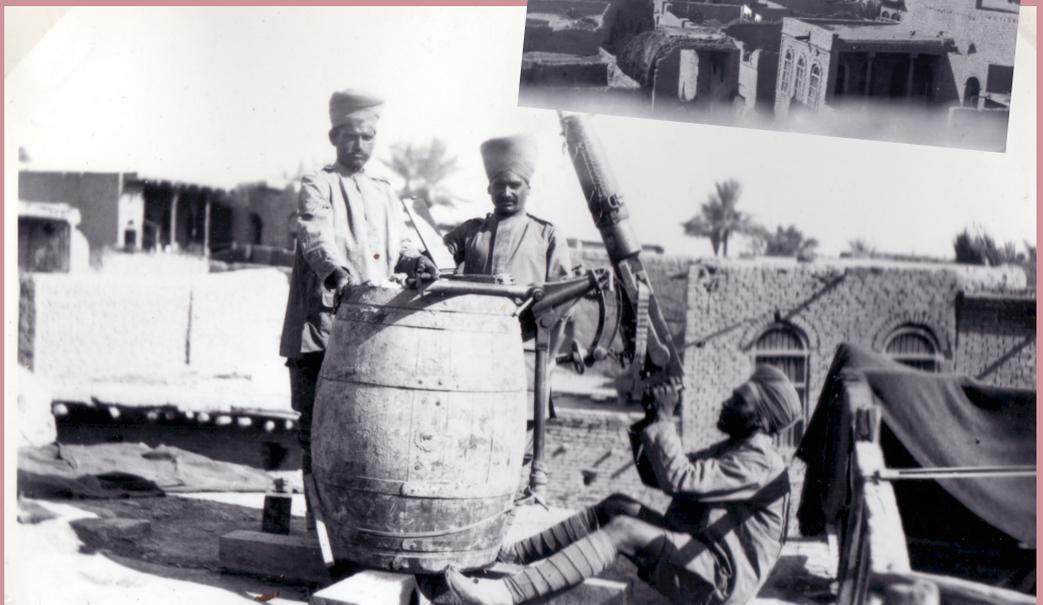
A view over Kut during the Siege in 1916, from Reynardson's album. From the Soldiers of Oxfordshire Museum Archive



Photographs of Lieutenant Widcombe in an album compiled by his sister Sadie, after his death in Mesopotamia on 6 April 1916. From the Soldiers of Oxfordshire Museum Archive



Photograph of Lieutenant-Colonel Reynardson, (third from the left). From the Soldiers of Oxfordshire Museum Archive



Indian anti-aircraft gunners of the Royal Flying Corps pose to be photographed by Beresford-Munday during the Siege of Kut in 1916. From the Soldiers of Oxfordshire Museum Archive