

A.I.F. Rugby Team Visits Paris of the East

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Palestine.*

BEIRUT, April 29.—“Cheerio—it’s a long way to Tipperary,” said the dapper little French official at the customs house, which marked the boundary between Palestine and the Republic of Lebanon. It was all the English he knew. “Bonne chance, Australiens!”

“So long, old man. Vive la France; vive l’amour!” called the little party of Australians who crowded the big bus. They were on their way to Beirut to play the crack Rugby team of the French Army—the Marsouins—and in high spirits at the prospect of two days in the “Paris of the East.”

The road to Beirut winds along the coast. I have heard it called the finest coastal drive in the world, but at the risk of being called insular I should say without hesitation that the South Coast road in New South Wales and the Great Ocean Road in Victoria could give it ten lengths and a beating. Every few miles on the road we passed parties of young men and girls arm-in-arm with necks on their

and girls, arm-in-arm, with packs on their back, and wearing very abbreviated shorts and open-necked shirts. They are happy, healthy-looking youngsters—the lads well-built, and many of the girls strikingly attractive in the dark buxom Jewish style.

We all voted Haifa, with its wide streets and fine modern buildings, dominated by the pleasant slopes of Mt. Carmel, the most attractive town in Palestine. It is probably the busiest, too—a big port, the headquarters of the northern district, and an active commercial and manufacturing centre.

As a contrast came the ancient city of Acre, famous for its Crusader associations—it was the capital of the Latin Kingdom, and the last city held by the Crusaders in Palestine. Napoleon in 1799 laid siege to Acre, which was successfully defended with extraordinary gallantry by Sidney Smith. We passed Tel al-Fukhar, where Napoleon had his headquarters.

SOLDIERS EVERYWHERE

FURTHER on we pulled off the road to let a long convoy of French army waggons past. The waggons were camouflaged with grey and green blotches, and filled with grinning coal-black Senegalese soldiers. Everywhere there were soldiers and military camps and gun parks, convoys of army lorries, and marching troops, squadrons of picturesque native cavalry, and all the deadly traffic of war. Every second man we passed seemed to be in a uniform of some sort.

We drove into Beirut, capital of Lebanon, under the muzzles of powerful coastal batteries and groups of anti-aircraft guns. In each room of our hotel we found notices giving directions what to do in case of an air raid or a naval bombardment. Little signs in the streets indi-

bombardment. Little signs in the streets indicated the nearest air raid shelters, and every normally pleasant little park was pitted and scarred with trenches. At night the only lights in the streets were the dim blue air raid bulbs.

"By cripes," observed one Australian "then there really is a war on—somewhere."

After weeks in the backblocks of Palestine Beirut seemed to belong to another world—a pleasant civilised world with a keen appreciation of the good things of life. There was a general air of *jolie de vivre*, life, and movement, and chattering crowds, smartly dressed French women—the women of Beirut are said to be the loveliest in the Middle East—Arabs and Syrians in tarbooshes and long robes, immaculate French officers in sky-blue and scarlet kepis, and soldiers in their khaki uniforms. The flower of France's magnificent colonial army is massed in Syria under the veteran General Weygand.

AUSTRALIAN BAR

THERE were open-air cafes, with groups of French officers and civilians sipping their coffee on the pavement, gay cabarets on the seafront, well-appointed hotels and good shops.

A popular resort was the Australian Bar, presided over by a jovial grey-moustached old fellow, who is known to all Beirut as "Anzac Harry." His name is Platt Ruskin, and he was born in Poland. He lived all his life in Australia before the last war, and was a well-known member of Wirth's Circus 25 years ago. In 1916 he sailed with the A.I.F. as an artilleryman, and later went to the Middle East front as an interpreter. He has remained there since.

Altogether it was an excellent tour, with an eleven-five victory in the match to add to its savour. General Weygand said that he had been delighted to welcome Australians to Syria. He had, he said, a most lively recollection of their qualities in the last war. The senior British liaison officer sent a message to Brigadier Allen saying that he had been greatly impressed by the bearing and excellent behaviour of the men. They had created an excellent impres-

men. They had created an excellent impression in Beirut.