

**ON TWO FRONTS, BEING
THE ADVENTURES OF AN
INDIAN MULE CORPS IN
FRANCE AND GALLIPOLI**

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On two fronts, being the adventures of an Indian mule corps in France and Gallipoli by H. M. Alexander

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H. M. ALEXANDER

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THE ADVENTURES OF AN
INDIAN MULE CORPS IN
FRANCE AND GALLIPOLI**



CLERK MANGAT RAI IN HIS DUG-OUT AT ANZAC.

77640
A55

Dedication

TO

D. M. R.

IN GRATEFUL RECOGNITION OF

INVALUABLE HELP

IN THE PRODUCTION OF THIS BOOK

TO MISS
AUSTIN LIAO

FOREWORD

THIS book has been written during a long period of enforced idleness. It makes no claim either to literary or historical merit, but is a plain tale of personal experiences in the War. Having been written almost entirely from memory, assisted only by the briefest of diaries, I fear that it must inevitably contain some inaccuracies for which I ask indulgence.

To those officers and men whose names appear, I apologise for the liberty I have taken, and sincerely trust that I have said nothing that may cause annoyance.

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UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

ON TWO FRONTS

CHAPTER I

OFF TO THE WAR

AMBALLA in July is very hot and very dull. Any event however trifling which serves to break the monotony is therefore welcome to the weary, sleepy little coterie which gathers nightly at the Sirhind Club. July 1914 was no exception to the rule, so that, when the thunder-cloud of European war burst upon us, every one woke with a start and began to sit up and take notice.

On August 5 came a Reuter's telegram announcing that England had declared war on Germany. Bridge and billiards were superseded by discussions, first as to how long the war would last, and secondly how it would affect us in India. The general opinion was that three months would see it finished, and that the Indian Army, mobilised, would sit tight in India, ready to cope with any disturbances there. Very few even imagined

that Indian troops would be sent to serve in Europe.

But soon we heard that the Lahore and Meerut Divisions were to be mobilised for service abroad. Excitement grew. Officers began to overhaul their kits, and, figuratively speaking, to sharpen their swords. Fresh rumours cropped up every day. The 8th Hussars were under orders to leave at once for France. The origin of this turned out to be that the provident 8th had sent their mess silver to the bank! There had been no orders at all, but they wished to be ready. Then we heard that all officers and men throughout India had been recalled from leave, and that officers in England had been ordered to return. This proved correct. One of the most sleepy and fed-up of our little circle had sailed for home only a week or two earlier. He had gone to get married, and one pictured him arriving at Southampton to be greeted with the news that he must return at once. Some of the gunners had just gone off on a shooting-trip in the hills, the preparations for which had formed one of the chief topics of conversation for the last month: they, too, had to come back immediately. But the feeling of each individual was that, so long as he got to France, nothing mattered. B Battery, R.H.A., belonged to the "Internal Defence Scheme", and I remember their Major, whose command of language was great and

whose medals were few, enlarging on his misfortune very forcibly; but he found his way to Cape Helles eventually and greatly distinguished himself there.

I commanded at that time the 9th Pack Mule Corps, which was employed in Amballa and in sending convoys to the various stations in the Simla Hills. For the benefit of the uninitiated, I will describe briefly the organisation and uses of a Mule Corps, a unit peculiar to the Indian Army.

The Corps, at service strength, consists of eight troops of 96 mules each, in charge of a *kot duffadar* or troop-sergeant-major, assisted by two *naicks* or corporals, and about fifty Indian drivers. The "superior establishment", as it is officially called, includes the Commandant (usually a Major or Captain), two British warrant-officers, each of whom commands a "sub-division" of four troops; two British staff-sergeants as Sergeant-Major and Quartermaster-Sergeant; two Indian officers as Adjutant and Veterinary Officer, and two Indian clerks. In peace-time the Corps has 200 small carts, and four of the troops are then used in draught. The total strength is 768 mules and, roughly, 500 men.

The mules are recruited from the Argentine, China and the Punjab. Some are bred in India at remount-depots from country-bred pony mares and imported English donkeys. The average