

A.I.F. WOUNDED French Treatment Praised

OWN WAR CORRESPONDENT
WITH A.I.F.

BEIRUT, July 17.—The happiest people to hear of the arrival of the Australian troops in Beirut were a number of Australian wounded, who had been taken prisoner during the fighting around Merjityun, Jezzín, and in the coastal sector.

Visiting a big, modern hospital in one of the main streets, I was escorted to two large airy wards. In one there were several Australian and Yeomanry officers, and in the other about 50 Australian soldiers.

Every man with whom I spoke paid the highest tribute to the way in which the French had treated them.

They said they had got the same, if not better, attention and food as the French wounded, and had been shown the utmost kindness and consideration.

I lunched with wounded officers, some of whom had their arms in slings, bandaged chests, or hobbled in on crutches. The lunch consisted of soup, salad, meat, vegetables, brown bread and butter, and a plentiful supply of red wine. They said this was a fairly typical menu.

An officer of a Pioneer regiment, which distinguished itself in the attack against Merjityun, considers himself the luckiest man alive.

"I was leading my platoon to the attack," he said, "when we ran into some French tanks, which opened with everything they had. A bullet from a tank's heavy machine-gun creased me right across the back, just grazing my shoulder-blade. Another fraction of an inch to the right and it would have torn off my shoulder.

"The armistice is a wonderful relief. You can imagine how we felt when some of our boys came to visit us yesterday."

EPISODE AT JEZZIN

A gallant episode near Jezzín was recalled by the story of a Victorian private. He was one of a platoon sent out to capture an important hill. The French had been reinforced, and the Australians found themselves up against, not as they had thought two platoons, but a battalion of Senegalese.

Finally, there was no more ammunition left, and as soon as their fire ceased the Senegalese rushed at them. The nine gallant survivors fixed their bayonets and stood back to back.

How a New South Wales company captured five French guns during the brilliant flanking movement around Damour was told by a youngster, who was taken prisoner after being wounded by a shell splinter.

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"We were advancing through real mountain-goat country to cut the road north of Damour and surround French who were holding out in the banana groves, when our scouts spotted five French 75's under olive trees on a hilltop," he said.

"Without firing a shot we charged the French battery at the bayonet. It was a complete surprise, and before the startled gunners could do much about it we hustled them off the hill and took possession of their guns.

"We sent back a message and a section of our artillerymen came up the next morning. The French guns were fired then on their former owners.