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WAZIRISTAN

By DR. A. D. ILIFF, O.B.E.

Lecture delivered to the Royal Central Asian Society on October 13, 1954, Admiral Sir Cecil Harcourt, G.B.E., K.C.B., in the chair.

The CHAIRMAN: Dr. Iliff, who has kindly come this afternoon to lecture to us, has spent twenty years in or near Waziristan as a medical missionary, and is now working in the Church Missionary Society's hospital at Bannu on the N.W. Frontier of Pakistan. It is a great pleasure to introduce to you and, at the same time, to welcome Dr. Iliff.

TO those of you who know, ~~about~~ Waziristan, I am hoping that this short talk and film will prove, if not instructive at least interesting. Those of you who are already acquainted with the N.W. Frontier will, I am sure, be glad to refresh your memories of a part of the world which has a strange fascination of its own. I have met but few officers who have not been sorry to leave it. Some still regard the rather tough years they spent on the Afghan border as amongst the best of their lives.

Waziristan is that barren, mountainous strip of so-called tribal area, roughly 5,000 square miles in area (say a third the size of Switzerland), sandwiched between the N.W.F. Province of Pakistan on the east and Afghanistan on the west. My introduction to it was a somewhat dramatic one, fitting in with the character of the country. At the time I was in charge of a mission hospital in the settled district of the Province. One very hot summer night I had gone to bed on the roof of my bungalow when, at about midnight, I was given an urgent message from the South Waziristan Scouts, part of the Frontier Corps who police the tribal areas of the Frontier. Two of their sepoy had been wounded that day in an engagement with hostile tribesmen. Their surgeon was away on leave and no other was available. Could I come and see what I could do for them?

With a car and driver borrowed from a friendly Deputy Commissioner, for my own car was not too reliable, I was soon on my way to Scouts' headquarters, 70 miles away up in the mountains. Not driving myself, I was able to relax and appreciate the beauty of the scene. In the bright moonlight which made headlights quite unnecessary, the occasional mud-walled villages we passed at intervals, drab enough in daylight, now looked mysterious and attractive. Every now and then we sped past great heaps of melons on both sides of the road, awaiting the lorries to transport them to the markets of India. Away over to the south I could just distinguish that massive range of mountains rising to over 11,000 feet and known as the Takht Suleiman, or Solomon's Throne.

After some 40 miles we found our way barred by the gates of a frontier town. The inhabitants had long since bedded down for the night—indeed, so sound asleep were they all that we could get no reply from the sentries. To lose no further time, therefore, we cut straight across country, following the line of the floodlit perimeter barbed wire, until we reached

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the road once more at the other side. A few minutes' further travelling and we picked up two armoured lorries, with their escort of Scouts, awaiting us by the road. We had now entered Waziristan, that strange tribal area where law, as it is known in the settled districts and elsewhere, is unknown, revenue and taxes are non-existent, there are no police as such, and only tribal law runs, a law which allows a man to commit murder in a blood feud, the only condition being that it must not take place on or near a Government road.

We were now nearing the end of our journey. For a few miles we travelled through the mountain pass, where the road climbs steeply up the side of a precipitous river bank, to drop almost as steeply down again the other side. And then suddenly we were entering the large headquarters fort. As we passed through the great armoured gates I could not help noticing the shadowy figures of quite a large number of armed sepoy covering our entry; a very necessary precaution. Not so many years ago some hostile tribesmen by a ruse persuaded a small frontier fort to open its gates after dark and then rushed in and stormed the place. These forts in Waziristan are manned by Pathan or Pushtu-speaking Government troops of the Frontier Corps, recruited from all over the N.W. Frontier, with a very fine tradition of their own. They exercise a loose sort of control over the local tribesmen, dealing as necessary with outlaws who have a nuisance value, and restraining the wilder Mahsud and Wazir tribesmen from troubling the villages of the adjacent settled districts. For raiding the rich, fertile villages of the Indus plains used to be quite a profitable business. Of necessity this leads to occasional action against them, and it was such an action which had provided me with my two Pathan soldier patients that night.

I found them in the small, well-equipped hospital within the fort. Both had bullet wounds in the abdomen, but whereas one consented to immediate operation, his only hope of survival, the other refused. "If it was his fate or Kismet to die," he said, "then no operation could alter it. If it was his Kismet to live, then no operation was necessary!" And no persuasion by me or by his friend could change his mind. He died, but his companion, by a miracle, lived. It was a difficult task, for I was a very inexperienced surgeon, not long out from home. I claim no credit for his recovery, for by all the canons of surgery he should have died. Yet over and over again I have been amazed at the extraordinary way these Pathan people of the frontier can survive injuries which would soon be fatal to you and to me. He had a will to live and did so, with a perseverance and cheerfulness that were good to see.

I have found these same qualities amongst the Mahsud inhabitants of Waziristan, who hold the greater part of the southern *bloc* of mountains in this tribal area, the rest being occupied by the Wazirs. These two originated from the same stock and are really closely related, though the Mahsud does not like to remember this fact. I do not blame him, for he is in my opinion definitely the better man of the two, the Wazir being particularly treacherous and untrustworthy.

Maybe I am biased when I say this, for, after this introduction of mine to Waziristan I soon got to know the Mahsuds well. During the war I

served in the I.M.S. as Agency Surgeon for this southern half of Waziristan and was responsible not only for the medical and surgical care of the three or four thousand men of the Scouts, but also for that of the civil population. This double job led to some queer situations at times. Our civil hospitals in Waziristan, in contrast to those in the Scout posts, were not too good. With the consent of the O.C. Scouts (freely given, provided my patient was not an active hostile, capable of treachery) I used to admit urgent cases amongst the Mahsud tribesmen into the Scouts' hospitals within the forts. One day an inspecting General came round unexpectedly and made a round of the headquarters hospital. All went well until he came to a surgical ward full of patients, each of whom had his bedsheet pulled up to his eyes. To find a surgical ward so full of patients, without a previous battle to account for it, was most unusual, and it was not long before the General had pulled back one of the sheets, thereby revealing not the clean-shaven face of a Scout sepoy he was expecting but the luxuriant black beard of a Mahsud tribesman. I had put all my overflow cataract patients from the civil hospital outside the fort into the better equipped Scout hospital within. However, the General took it well and decided to turn a blind eye to it. The only objection came from the Afridi subedar-major of the corps, who hated all Mahsuds and considered that the only good Mahsud was a dead one.

Then again, one day I happened to be out on patrol with a mounted party of Scouts when they were ambushed by a large force of hostile Mahsuds. It was a good opportunity to see these famed Frontier troops in action and they acquitted themselves well, under the leadership of a Pathan officer who has since risen to an important political post in his own State of Pakistan. Afterwards, as I was tending the wounded of both sides, both Scouts and Mahsud tribesmen, an English officer arrived on the scene and suddenly remarked: "You know, Doc, I often wonder whose side you are really on!" The answer was, of course, neither . . . or both!

But it was not so much in our hospitals that I really got to know the tribesmen, but out in their homes amongst these mountains of Waziristan. Seeing that country from the few, winding, at times precipitous roads which traverse it, there appears to be little life within it. Yet tucked away amongst those barren hills are pleasant fertile valleys watered by mountain streams. The tribes make the most of any land available. Wherever water is to be found, every inch of suitable ground is cultivated. Yet they have to contend not only with drought, intense cold and heavy hailstorms, but also with spates when, after a storm over the mountains, a great wall of water comes roaring down a hitherto dry river bed, sweeping away in a few moments the work of many months. Irrigation, too, is difficult in that shaly soil. Apart from agriculture, their livelihood comes from their flocks and herds, and their trade in timber, fuel, skins and clarified butter. Indeed, their trade in timber has had to be restricted to what they can bring down to the bazaars of the plains on camels. No timber is allowed to be transported in lorries, for indiscriminate felling of trees has led to deforestation on an immense scale, with subsequent erosion of the soil and diminution of rainfall.

These Mahsuds of Waziristan, famed, as a British Brigadier put it, as

"potentially the finest fighting men in Asia, with unsurpassed powers of endurance," are of excellent physique. Intelligent and cheerful, they possess a sense of humour much like ours. A tribal patient in our mission hospital, recovering from wounds received in a blood feud, called the doctor over to him one day and asked him for some cartridges. He said that when he left hospital he wanted to have his revenge on his cousin who had done him these injuries, but had no ammunition left. The doctor said he could not help him in this matter and added: "Think of the time and trouble we have spent on getting you well these many weeks, and now I suppose we shall soon be seeing your cousin in here and have to spend all that time and trouble on him, too." "There's no fear of that, sahib," replied the young man. "I am a far better shot than he is."

As a doctor I fortunately have an entry to their homes and villages denied to others. At intervals, epidemics of disease break out, which give me my opportunities to go right into the heart of their country. A young Mahsud, enlisted in the army and stationed in the Punjab, hundreds of miles away, died of cholera. According to their custom, his relatives demanded his body for burial. This was therefore packed in ice and sent all the way to Waziristan on a lorry. All might have gone well had not his mother insisted on kissing the corpse of her son. An epidemic of cholera soon broke out and the Mahsuds, who are now sufficiently enlightened to appreciate prophylactic medicine, begged me to visit their villages to give cholera inoculations to all and sundry. This, and spasmodic outbreaks of smallpox, gave me many opportunities of visiting their homes and, in particular, their capital. Built on the side of a hill, it is a strange town of some 5,000 inhabitants. The main street through the middle frequently tunnels under the floors of the houses above, and in the bazaar can be seen the shops of those who make daggers and rifles, the latter being exact copies of British service rifles, though liable to burst after a few rounds. Incidentally, a British rifle now fetches Rs.1,000 (approximately £100) . . . the price of a good wife!

Wherever I go in Waziristan I am always impressed by the loyalty and kindness of the tribesmen themselves. Their hospitality is proverbial and sometimes embarrassing in its generosity. Even when I spent a night in a cave amongst the people of one of the poorest and most primitive of their tribes, during a vaccination "sortie," they looked after me excellently. They gave me of their best for a meal and provided me with a comfortable bed and clean bedding, quite free from the creatures one is led to expect on such occasions.

During the seven years following the Partition of India and creation of the State of Pakistan, Waziristan has changed a good deal. To begin with there was a good deal of propaganda amongst the tribes for a separate State of Pukhtunistan, or a "land of Pathans." But in Waziristan, at any rate, this propaganda had little effect. A few tribal leaders, it is true, seeing a chance of getting rich without much trouble, put up strange flags over their tribal towers. But the movement soon petered out and gained but few adherents among the Mahsuds. The Faqir of Ipi, the chief protagonist of this movement, is now a sick, ailing old man, a sufferer from chronic asthma, and has lost whatever influence he once possessed.

The tribesmen are content to stay under the flag of Pakistan, the largest Islamic State in the world. Qaid-e-Azam Mohd. Jinnah, the founder of this State, was wise enough to promise them that their allowances, given for the maintenance of peace and friendly relationships with Government, would remain unchanged. These allowances are not bribes. They are distributed among the leading men of the tribes in return for their co-operation and confer a certain status upon the recipients. Meanwhile many new schools for boys have been opened to meet the constant demand of the tribes for education, and this year the first girls' school has been opened in the Mahsud capital. This is a great advance, for girls are not much thought of in Waziristan and are regarded as existing simply to serve the needs of the men. When my first child was born, many of my Mahsud friends expressed their condolences with me that it was a girl; on the birth of my second, a boy, they not only called to congratulate me, but also demanded much entertainment at my expense! The very names these tribesfolk give to their children often express their longing for a boy rather than for a girl, for the girl's name "Bas bibi," meaning in short "No more girls, please," is a common enough one in their country.

Some of the old Scout forts have been evacuated by the Frontier Corps and are now loosely held by tribal levies. It is sad to see the gradual dissolution of those lovely gardens and orchards, for which these posts were famous, but it is inevitable, for with the garrisons went the pumps which supplied them with water. All regular troops have long since been withdrawn. Razmak, a big military garrison in North Waziristan, once dubbed as the largest monastery in the world, owing to the absolute bar to the entry of women into tribal territory, is now empty but for local Wazir levies, known as khassadars, who act as caretakers. Wana, too, is empty of regular troops, but this fortified camp near the Afghan border has been taken over by the Scouts as their summer headquarters. The officers' mess is as attractive and hospitable as it ever used to be, and the Pakistani officers of the Corps are maintaining those fine traditions for which the Scouts are well known. I have many friends amongst them and find they are ever ready to give me a helping hand when I need it.

In Wana both men and officers are now allowed to have their families with them. Here, too, we run a mission hospital for a few weeks every summer. I am now the only Englishman left in Waziristan, yet I find myself able to move about more freely than I did in the old days. The country is quieter and incidents are few, although armoured lorries are still used and escorts are provided for the stranger.

I have said little about the economic development of Waziristan, the great irrigation project the Pakistan Government is now carrying through, and the mineral resources of this area which are shortly to be surveyed. There is coal there, for instance. One political officer I knew used to use it for domestic purposes, and though it seemed a bit smoky to me, yet it may well prove worth while to mine it on a big scale. There is also iron and other materials which, if found workable, may well change the whole character of Waziristan in but a few years.

But I have approached my subject from the more personal point of view of a doctor who has had the privilege of working amongst these

attractive people for so many years. As such I cannot leave out any mention of the blood feud, for although it is slowly decreasing in incidence as the tribespeople become educated and see the futility of it all, is it nevertheless still there. Many of these feuds, arising perhaps out of a dispute over land or even from an insult, have now been going on for so long that their original cause is forgotten. It is because of the blood feud that homes are fortresses in Waziristan, every man and boy over 12 goes about armed with rifle and dagger, and many of the Mahsud boys attending our mission school have lost their fathers. It was a feud, too, which lay behind the strange request of a boy of 15 or so, who one day asked me for some chloroform. When I asked him why he wanted it, he replied that he had an enemy he wanted to get rid of, had heard that chloroform kills quickly, silently, and leaves no traces, and thought it was just the stuff he needed! Nowadays the tribesmen are using more modern weapons in their feuds—grenades, Sten guns, and on one occasion recently, vouched for by two of our schoolboys, even a bazooka!

The blood feud is still the curse of Waziristan and affects the lives of all its inhabitants. In their hills they live under its shadow at all times; almost every family is affected. Yet in hospital and school that shadow is lifted for a time. There seems to be a mutual truce in those two places, so far unbroken.

Two tribal patients were admitted to our Bannu mission hospital on the Waziristan border, each wounded in the same feud, yet from opposing sides. One had a dangerous head wound; the other a simple graze. It was not long before the latter was holding the head of his former enemy for the daily dressing to be done, and it was remarkable to see the gentleness with which he did it.

In our mission school nearby is a hostel for Mahsud youngsters from Waziristan. In my spare time from hospital I act as their Warden. I have often noticed that boys who are at deadly enmity with each other up in Waziristan soon become the greatest of friends at school. Up there, family honour demands that one should do his best to kill the other. Down at school they are learning a better way of life, in which "to love one's enemy" takes on a new meaning.

It's because the blood feud plays such a large part in the lives of these simple, primitive people of Waziristan that it has been taken as the background of this film I am now going to show you. It took three months to make and a good deal of it is filmed in rather inaccessible parts of Waziristan. Without the unstinted help of my Mahsud friends it could never have been completed. The two professionals who filmed it did a good job and the film had the unusual honour of being shown at the Edinburgh Festival.

Those taking part are just ordinary people with no experience of acting for films, but I think you will agree with me that the Mahsud youngster who plays the chief part gives a remarkable performance. His success has not spoilt him in any way. He is to be my senior prefect next term and the other day wrote me a typical schoolboy letter, in which he asked me to bring out a Parker pen for him when I return next month. Like any extravagant Pathan, he reckons little of the cost!

So now to the film. If it begins slowly, remember that this is but typical of life out there in Waziristan; it is only at times that the pace becomes hot and tragedy steps in. That seeming tragedy can be turned into something really worth while. The fact that these attractive people are no longer under a British administration surely absolves none of us from doing all we can to lead them into a fuller, happier and more satisfying way of life. The challenge of this film is just this: to what extent are we really co-operating to this end?

Then followed the Church Missionary Society's sound film, "Frontier Interlude," a tragic story of a blood feud on the N.W. Frontier which emphasized not only the futility of it all, but also the present vital impact of the mission hospital, school and church on the lives of these people and the hope for a new life in the future.

The CHAIRMAN: Although our time here is really up, I feel we should take a few more minutes, because Dr. Iliff has kindly said he will answer any questions.

Sir RUPERT HAY: Could Dr. Iliff say whether there is still anything in the nature of a pro-Afghan party amongst the Mahsuds and Wazirs? Also whether there is still any dispute between them over the boundary in the vicinity of Miram Shah?

Dr. ILIFF: There is still a pro-Afghan party, although it has lost most of its influence in Waziristan, especially as the Faqir of Ipi himself is now taking so little part in the affairs of the area. Hence the influence of the party is negligible. In reply to the second question, the Mahsuds have wrested a good deal of land from the Wazirs and still want to take more. Only a few months ago they sought to collect funds for that purpose. Razmak is next on the programme, but whether that programme will be kept to I cannot say.

Colonel DUNCAN: Have the Mahsuds any particular leader? How do they work?

Dr. ILIFF: Through the chiefs of the tribe; there is no particular leader, though one man is the hereditary chief of the tribe. Incidentally, his grandson has just come to the mission school, and I feel I am getting old when I see sons of my former Old Boys coming to the school. Most tribesmen in Waziristan are a law unto themselves. The chiefs in their *Jirga*, their own tribal council, arrange these matters and the ordinary man in the street says the money has gone into the chiefs' pockets. Where it has really gone nobody seems to know.

Colonel HAMILTON: (Referring to the film story.) Did not the law of the road itself protect the man who had been wounded and returned home from hospital and then was shot and killed on his way back?

Dr. ILIFF: On the road itself you are not supposed to murder your enemy—neither on the road nor 30 yards from it. Indeed, there was a subedar in the Frontier Corps who built a trench between his home and the main road so that when going on leave he could get to his house without being shot at; he crawled along the tunnel.

Colonel ORLEBAR : Is there any Communism among the tribes?

Dr. ILIFF : None at all. During the war, when there was a possibility of intervention by Russia against the British, I asked the Mahsuds which side they would be on in that event. They replied : " We will, of course, be on your side. You are the people of the Book " (they respect the Bible) " and we would never think of taking sides with a Godless country."

The CHAIRMAN : It now only remains for me, on your behalf, to thank Dr. Iliff for a most interesting talk and a most dramatic and extremely fascinating film. Both have given us a great deal of food for thought. We thank you very much indeed, Dr. Iliff. (*Applause.*)

NOTICE

SURVEY OF CURRENT RESEARCH ON THE MIDDLE EAST

THE Middle East Institute, a private organization in Washington, D.C., is preparing for publication an annual Survey of Current Research on the Middle East. The purpose of this Survey is to provide scholars and educational institutions with information on what research has recently been completed or is now being undertaken in the field.

Definition of research: (1) accumulation of original data; (2) classification of original data; (3) interpretation of data previously accumulated; (4) reinterpretation of data previously studied; (5) translation, bibliography, vocabulary, etc., with annotation.

Geographical limits: the Arab countries, Israel, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, North Africa, the Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Disciplinary limits: emphasis on the social sciences, but including all related aspects of the humanities and natural sciences.

Chronological limits: none (ancient, medieval and modern).

All those who are currently engaged in research on the Middle East, or have completed such research since October 1, 1954, are urged to submit the following information: name, address, topic of investigation, sponsoring organization (if any), date of completion or estimated date if still in progress, and pertinent comments on the nature of the research, sources being used and method of approach. Please address correspondence to:

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