

**Stage 5 History Elective
Year 9 Students**

Topic 2 Constructing History - History and the Media

Inquiry question: How does the study contribute to our understanding of the nature of history and the ways in which historical meanings can be constructed?

Outcome: E5.2 examines the ways in which historical meanings can be constructed through a range of media.

**Exercise 6: 'A Little-Known Campaign: British Army in
the Caucasus'**

***Sunday Times* (Perth, Western Australia)**

Sunday 27 April 1919, page 2

IN the last year of the war a small British army was despatched by the War Office to hold the Turks back from Persia and the Indian frontier. Little was ever heard of its doings, but, for, months it fought and suffered through the mountainous country of the Caucasus. Probably its wonderful deeds will never be fully recorded, but the service it rendered the Empire cannot be over estimated. In the narrative published by the Sydney 'Sunday Times', Captain J. M. Sorrell, M.M., a Sydney officer who has just returned home gives an outline of some of the achievements of the little force in fighting the Turks and Germans and relieving the terrible privations of the inhabitants of the country, who were dying in thousands from starvations and disease.

'When the Russian Army went to pieces after the revolution,' stated Captain Sorrell, 'the Caucasus was practically at the mercy of the Germans and Turks, who sought to exploit their opportunity by welding the Islamic races of that part of the world, into what, was called the Pan Turanian movement. The military objective was to move south through Persia to the Indian frontier and stir up disaffection with the tribes there.

To counter this movement, the War Office, early in 1919, organised small parties of officers and X.C.O.'s in France, Salonika, Palestine, Mesopotamia and India to proceed to the

Caucasus to get into touch with the Armenians, Georgians, Tartars, Assyrians and, other smaller races and organise and lead them against the Turks.

'The party from, the western front was composed of Canadians, New Zealanders, South Africans and Australians, with a few British officers with experience in Russia and various eastern Countries.

'Altogether, there were 22 Australian officers, and about the same number of sergeants. The whole force numbered about 206 officers and 300 or 400 N.C.O.s, and was under the command of Major-General Dunsterville, of the Indian Army, who, by tho way, was the original of Kipling's Stalky, and a specialist in out of the way jobs.

'When selected none of us knew where we were going or what we were going to do. We were told it was to be an irregular force with work altogether new to most of us, it was full of risk, we wouldn't know friend from foe, and would probably never return. The greatest secrecy was observed until the day

before we left London, when the whole scheme was expounded to us in a well-guarded room in the London Tower, by a War Office Official.

'We left London on January 29, 1918, and travelled overland through France and Italy, by boat from Taranto to Alexandria, by train to Suez, and then by boat direct to Basrah.

'Later we travelled again by boat up the Tigris to Baghdad. On the way we called at a number of places including Kut, where we saw many things of interest associated with General Townshend and his gallant defence during the great siege.'

'At Baghdad we stopped for some time making final preparations, learning to speak Russian and Persian, and taking special courses in Lewis' and Vickers' gun training, sword drill, the handling of camels, etc.

'By train we went 60 miles north of Baghdad, and from there commenced a 300 miles march across the mountains to Hamadan in Persia. Our baggage was carried on mules, but most of us had to walk the whole of the distance. The Journey occupied 24 days, and at times was anything but a Joy ride. The force did this part of the journey in four or five parties at different times as transport was very limited and difficult.

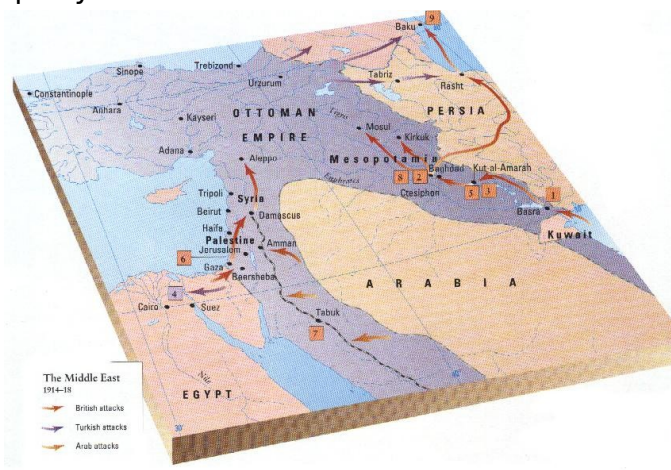
'At times there was a little trouble with the Kurds and continual guard had to be kept in order to ensure safety.

'From Hamadan, the line was pushed on to Resht, where there was considerable fighting with the Gelanis, a hostile native tribe led by Germans. These were ultimately crushed by aeroplane bombing and a battalion of Ghurkhas brought up from Mesopotamia.

'Then General Dunsterville reached Enzeil on the south-west coast of the Caspian Sea, but here he struck trouble in the form of the Russian Bolsheviks, who controlled the shipping on the Caspian and refused to allow our people to proceed to Baku. We now controlled the main road running south-west from the Caspian to Mesopotamia.

'The next move was to organise a line of posts north of this road, controlling the three main roads running south from the Caucasus. This was successfully done at Sennah, Bijar and Zinjan by small parties of officers and sergeants, who organised and trained numbers of Persian and Kurdish levies.

At this time there were very few British troops in Persia except the Dunsterforce, as our party was called.



Communication with Mesopotamia was maintained by wireless, a single Persian telegraph line, and motor lorries, principally light cars, which in spite of mountains, found their way through the long line to the Caspian.

'At the beginning of August, in response to an urgent invitation from the various peoples in the Caucasus, an attempt was made to force a landing at Baku. By now we had gained control of one, or two gunboats on the Caspian and naval personnel were rushed through from India to man these vessels. In addition to the members of our party, a number of Locker Lamson's armoured cars from Russia, which had come out from England with us, and a part of a brigade of the 13th British Division from Mesopotamia, with a couple of guns, also took part in this bid.

'The landing was effected and heavy fighting followed. A body of Russian Cossacks ably assisted the British, but a large force of Russian Armenians, upon whom the British relied, a good deal, failed to come up to expectations.

The British, casualties were very heavy, and after six weeks it was obvious that the position was hopeless as the Turks had brought two divisions into the Caucasus. Our small force was greatly outnumbered and far from any support. Then it was decided that the only course left was to withdraw Persia. This was done with considerable difficulty but without great loss.

'About the same time as the Baku landing another force of 20 officers and 50 sergeants was dispatched northward to Lake Urmia to get into touch with the Assyrians and Jelus, and the Armenians south of the Black Sea. An advance party was sent from a post at Bijar and, the main body from Hamadan. At this time the Turks were harassing the Assyrians and Jelus near the lake. In one or two encounters the Assyrians were successful but their ammunition was running short, and just when an advance party was pushing through, panic took hold of the inhabitants of the country and away they came from the south, 100,000 of them fleeing before the Turks, who were beaten off by the small British party.

'For a month these refugees were on the road, over mountains and valleys, before any attempt could be made to organise and properly feed them. All available flour was despatched from our line of communications and every effort made to feed the worst cases and supply doctors and what medicines we could get for the sick.

'It was almost a hopeless task as the road for a hundred mile was thick with refugees. The suffering was very great, and in spite of all that our people could do thousands succumbed to starvation, disease and exhaustion. It was a ghastly business, and the trail was well marked with bodies of human beings and all kinds of animals.

'At Hamadan the situation was taken in hand and later some 50,000 of the Armenians and Assyrians were sent to Bakuba, just north of Baghdad, where they were at the beginning of the year awaiting repatriation.

'The men of fighting capacity were organised into four groups: Turkish Armenians, Persian Armenians and Jelus. After some training under the British officers and N.C.O.'s in Northwestern Persia they were sent to help hold the line against the advancing Turks, where they remained till the Armistice.

'Nearly all the time the Dunsterforce was in Persia we lived on the country, and a precarious existence it was at times. Food was very scarce and prices at

famine rates. When our people first arrived, they found the country in a state of starvation. Early in the war the Turks overran North-Western Persia and took all the foodstuffs and other material they wanted.

The Russians drove them out and took nearly all of what was left. Then a drought came and the desolation was complete. In one town alone the population was dying at the rate of a thousand a week from starvation. Gen. Dunsterville immediately set to work to organise and collect all available food, open depots and soup kitchens and start relief work. In this way 25,000 persons received assistance and thousands of lives were saved.

'We were called on to do all kinds of work. In addition to the fighting, organising and training of troops and relief works, the party supplied road engineers, men for supply and transport work, escorts, military police, surveyors, military governors and administrators, etc.

'Nearly all the party left Persia about the time of the armistice with Turkey, or a little later. Quite a number never returned. Some were killed in action or died of wounds and many died of disease. Fever, flu and cholera were our greatest enemies and collected a large toll.

The mission had many difficulties to contend with, and we were not sorry when we set our faces for Mesopotamia on the return journey; but the Turks and Germans didn't get to India.'

General Dunsterville, in bidding farewell to his command, said: 'I am prouder of my command of the gallant officers and the N.C.O.s than of any other command I have ever held, or am likely to hold.'

Activities

1. Use Captain Sorrell's story, the Genocide Education and the Australian War Memorial websites, as well as other sources to **produce a digital presentation** on the Dunsterforce.

Take this 1919 newspaper report on the story of Captain Sorrell and the Dunsterforce bring it into the 21st century.

2. Explain why the Assyrians and Armenians of south-eastern Anatolia (modern Turkey) and north-western Persia (modern Iran) became refugees.
3. Using Captain Sorrell's story and other sources, complete the 'assess' scaffold on the ANZAC Legend.

Assess the role of the media in the creation of the ANZAC Legend.

'assess' means to make a judgement based on the advantages and disadvantages

Advantages/Positives	Disadvantages/Negatives
Arguments that the Australian media has had a role in the creation of the ANZAC Legend.	Arguments that the Australian media has not had a role in the creation of the ANZAC Legend.

Television broadcasts from ANZAC Cove	The actions of Australian servicemen created the ANZAC Legend.

4. **Class Debate:** That the media has too narrowly focussed the ANZAC Legend on ANZAC Cove.
 - a. Divide yourselves into two teams.
 - b. Each team member is to present ONE argument for the Affirmative side and One argument for the Negative side.
 - c. As a group, organise your points into a team argument.
 - d. Then hold a whole class debate.