

SYRIA WELCOMES US BUT VICHY OBSTRUCTS.  
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Title: If I Were King.  
Track: Disputed Passage.

Lines: Stagg.  
Voice: Do.

It was at St. George's Bay, Beirut,, that the St. George of the legend slew the dragon. In this fine seaport of a hundred-thousand people the modern St. George of British arms was victorious over the forces of Vichy. General Maitland Wilson, accompanied by General Catroux of the Free French, came to the Palace to receive Syrian dignitaries, who welcomed our triumph.

General Catroux now High Commissioner in Syria, shared with the British Commander the thanks of Syrians for delivering them from the threat of domination by Germany - a threat averted by prompt British action.

Bren-carriers headed the British triumphal entry. We came to Beirut bringing freedom to people who had been too long baulked of their independence and whose delight now was not restrained.

Australians bore a big part in defeating the Vichy forces and thoroughly earned their prominent place in the procession. The brief campaign was fought against odds, in men and material and will rank as one of the most brilliant in British military history. It was not our fault that we had to fight against our former Allies.

All through the campaign General Maitland Wilson was greatly helped by the forces of the Free French. They included regiments from the French African colonies which declared for De Gaulle over a year ago. Over material surrendered by General Dentz under the armistice terms French troops mounted guard.

While the main British advance was from the south another force from Irak swooped towards Aleppo and barred any hope of retreat into Turkey that Dentz may have entertained. This force advanced to the border and compared notes with the Turkish frontier guards. The friendly greeting between Turk and 'Tommy' typified the relationship between the two peoples. Our men took a soldierly interest in the Turks' equipment, and they in turn displayed curiosity over the vehicles that made possible the dramatic dash to Aleppo.

Detraining from a French prison camp near the Turkish border came British and Empire troops who had been captured in the campaign. They had not been in custody more than six weeks and had been well treated. By violating the armistice terms General Dentz had a number of Allied officers sent into Axis occupied territory. We retaliated by putting Dentz under arrest. For the ex-prisoners all's well that ends well. They are back in the fighting ranks. Beirut and Syria are in British and Free French occupation and in the Middle East Germany will have to think again.

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