

INCOMPLETE VICTORY: GENERAL ALLENBY AND MISSION
COMMAND IN PALESTINE, 1917-1918

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

INCOMPLETE VICTORY: GENERAL ALLENBY AND MISSION COMMAND IN PALESTINE, 1917-1918, by LCDR Geronimo Nuño, 152 pages.

The Palestine Campaign of the First World War exhibited a fighting style that brought with it various challenges in mission command. While General Allenby, commanding the Allied Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF), gained several victories in the early stages of the campaign, he did not comprehensively defeat the Turkish forces in Palestine. He drove them away from their defensive line, but they escaped, avoided destruction, and retreated north to reestablish a defense and engage the EEF at later date. This thesis argues that General Allenby did not achieve the great successes at the battles of Beersheba, Gaza, Sheria, and the pursuit of Turkish forces that ended with Allenby's capture of Jerusalem. Instead, Allenby had to learn how to succeed in Palestine to finally destroy the armies of the Ottoman Empire in Palestine at the battle of Megiddo in September 1918. The research in this study highlights the mission command challenges in Allenby's early campaigns and how he learned to overcome them and adapt his tactics to achieve complete victory at the battle of Megiddo. This thesis will use the tenets of mission command, consisting preparation, combined arms, prioritization of resources, and communication, to examine General Allenby's Palestine campaign. Mission command, both a function of war and a philosophy of leadership comprises one of the key facets of military thought that leaders must consider in order to achieve complete victory.

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ACRONYMS

ANZAC	Australian and New Zealand Army Corps
DMC	Desert Mounted Corps
EEF	Egyptian Expeditionary Force
GHQ	General Headquarters
RFC	Royal Flying Corps

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The problems of mission command have plagued leaders in many wars throughout history. Mission command, the authority a commander holds over his subordinate forces to accomplish a mission, consists of four key areas: preparation, coordination of different units, prioritization of resources, and communication. Preparation includes the responsibility to generate plans, preparations, guidance, and objectives. The coordination of units, or combined arms tactics, includes the appropriate use of a force's different types of units in campaigns and operations. Furthermore, a commander must prioritize and distribute supplies and resources to the units in the command. Finally, communication includes the responsibility for passing timely information and orders to subordinate units and receiving updated battlefield information in a timely and accurate manner.

One learns lessons from every war, and leaders who understand the past are able to benefit from the successes and mistakes made by their predecessors in planning their own campaigns. Conversely, leaders who focus solely on previous wars often miss important lessons from their current conflicts. To adequately fight a war, leaders must understand both the lessons of previous wars and incorporate those lessons into their current conflict. The First World War saw drastic changes in military technology and tactics, as well as inexperienced leaders who had to fight a large scale war between massive armies. Many of the officers of the Great War had proved themselves as exceptional leaders, but their experiences in colonial campaigns and in studying wars of the past rarely prepared them for the conditions of the First World War.

British World War I leaders gained their education in military arts by studying strategy and tactics that generally came from Napoleon's campaigns. Their ideal view of war demanded a decisive attack on the enemy's strong point. Massed infantry advances supported by artillery would defeat the enemy, and cavalry would reconnoiter and eventually pursue and destroy a retreating enemy.¹ The British generals applied the lessons that they learned in their study of Napoleon's wars and the experiences they gained in Britain's colonial conflicts to the trenches of the Western Front. However, the face of war had changed significantly since Waterloo. Furthermore, British leaders in the Great War faced a massed enemy with similar tactics and equipment, rather than the types of enemy they had faced in colonial conflicts. This type of war created new challenges in mission command.

While the main effort of the First World War ground along at a slow, but bloody pace on the Western Front, the Allied army of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF) and Ottoman Turkish armies fought in Palestine. Britain's primary interest in the area was the protection of the Suez Canal, which kept the British connected to India, an important source of raw materials and men during the British Empire's history. India largely financed Britain's ability to remain an imperial power and to fight a large scale war. As the armies of the Allied and Central Powers dug trenches across the European continent, the Suez Canal kept the road to India open, a vital factor in Britain's wartime resources and manpower.

The EEF suffered from many mission command challenges in Egypt and Palestine, as did the armies that fought on the Western Front. Mission command in

¹Tim Travers, *The Killing Ground* (London, UK: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 86.

Palestine included the responsibility of the commander to prepare and organize his forces, the proper coordination of units, the prioritization of resources and supplies, and the communication of information. A vital component of mission command is not only the command of subordinate forces, but also the preparation and modification of plans, guidance, and the determination of objectives. This aspect of controlling a battle only remained effective until the battle had started, however, and that loss of control made up the primary difficulty for the EEF that transcended all areas of mission command.

The individual mission command challenges Allenby faced in Palestine created problems that any commander faced in the First World War. Allenby's eventual success over the Turkish forces in Palestine did not simply mean overcoming the individual challenges, but they were a matter of overcoming the problem of commanding an army in the desert as a whole. His success was not a change in how he dealt with the challenges by themselves, but a change in tactics and in how he fought. Over the course of the war in Palestine, Allenby evolved to overcome the mission command challenges between the third battle for Gaza and the subsequent advance through Palestine to the crucial battle of Megiddo.

In the beginning of the war, British strategy in Egypt focused on the defense of the Suez Canal. After an unsuccessful Turkish attack on the canal in February 1915, the British decided on an active defense approach to keep the Turks as far from the canal as possible.² From January 1916 until March 1917, the British army under General Sir Archibald Murray advanced slowly across the Sinai Peninsula and attempted to capture the Turkish town of Gaza in March and April of 1917. After Murray failed in two

²Anthony Bruce, *The Last Crusade* (London, UK: John Murray, 2002), 34.

attempts to take the town, the British War Office replaced Murray with General Sir Edmund Allenby. Before he took command in Palestine, Allenby commanded the British Third Army on the Western Front.³ Allenby succeeded where Murray failed, capturing Gaza in October 1917; he proceeded to capture Jerusalem by December of the same year.

By early 1918, with victories at Gaza and Jerusalem, the British strategy in the region continued to evolve. The question of strategy in other theaters divided the British War Office into two camps. On one side of the spectrum, British Prime Minister Lloyd George decided that success in other parts of the world, such as Palestine, would draw enemy forces away from the Western Front. More importantly, however, if the British could achieve victory in Palestine, it would knock Turkey out of the war.⁴ According to Lloyd George and his “Easterners,” Turkey’s withdrawal would lead another of Germany’s allies, Bulgaria, to seek peace. With Turkey and Bulgaria out of the war, the British would then have an avenue of approach to attack Germany and Austria from their poorly defended southern flank. The domino effect envisioned by Lloyd George and his colleagues in London would leave Germany without any allies and force an end to the war.⁵

At the other end of the Palestine debate were the “Westerners,” led in large part by General Sir William Robertson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS) and General Sir Douglas Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force

³H. S. Gullet, *The Australian Imperial Force in Sinai and Palestine, 1914-1918* (Sydney, Australia: Angus & Robertson, 1923), 356.

⁴Bruce, 88.

⁵General Sir Archibald Wavell, *Allenby, A Study in Greatness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), 240.

(BEF) in France. The Westerners believed that the war would be won or lost on the Western Front, and that “defeat in France meant inevitably the loss of the war.”⁶ To them, any attention the Allies paid to the Turkish forces in Palestine beyond maintaining the security of the Suez Canal was a wasted effort. Even if the EEF was able to advance as far as Damascus, victory against the Turks in Palestine would have little real influence on the outcome of the war. They believed that Turkey would withdraw from the war based on the fortunes of the Germans on the Western Front. According to the “Westerners,” all available reinforcements should join the war in France, and the remaining forces in the EEF should remain on the defensive.⁷

The Easterners eventually decided the outcome of the issue, and Lloyd George ordered Allenby to defeat the Turkish forces in Palestine in the interest of driving the Ottoman Empire out of the war. Allenby’s subsequent advance in Palestine with the intention of destroying the Turkish forces eventually succeeded. After the capture of Jerusalem and two raids across the River Jordan in early 1918, Allenby attempted a bold attack on the Turkish defenses at the Plain of Esdraelon, south of Megiddo. In the Megiddo campaign in September-October 1918, the EEF broke through the Turkish lines of defense and destroyed three enemy armies. The EEF advanced to Damascus and Aleppo, destroying any Turkish resistance in Palestine.⁸

⁶Ibid., 239.

⁷Bruce, 185.

⁸Cyril Falls, *Armageddon, 1918: The Final Palestinian Campaign of World War I* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 150.

The political aspects and goals make up an important part of any war, so one cannot completely ignore them. Regardless of the debate between Lloyd George and General Robertson, however, the military wing at the end of this political argument was the EEF under General Allenby. Whether the idea of knocking Turkey out of the war by advancing through Palestine was viable is a matter for a different study. The War Office assigned Allenby to take charge in Palestine in June 1917 with orders to defeat the Ottoman Empire in Palestine in order to knock Turkey out of the war. By the time he arrived to take command, the British had moved beyond the role of the defense of the Suez, and Allenby's mission was to destroy the Turkish armies. This study will largely ignore the strategic objectives that policy makers hoped to achieve and focus instead on the operational endstate that Allenby attempted to gain: the destruction of the Turkish military in Palestine.

A reader might easily compare Allenby's success to the stagnation of trench warfare that has come to characterize the war on the Western Front and hail his actions in Palestine as one of the few success stories of the war. However, Allenby did not achieve immediate success. His army met the Turkish forces across Palestine in many hard fought battles that did not bring comprehensive victory to the EEF until the battle of Megiddo. Rather than sweeping through the Turkish enemy without any difficulty, Allenby had to learn how to succeed. He took the lessons and experiences of the Western Front and combined it with the lessons of the early battles in Palestine to overwhelmingly defeat the Turkish armies at Megiddo. Allenby adapted his mission command and changed his battle tactics in order to achieve this comprehensive victory, overcoming the challenges

that had denied the EEF complete victory in the Gaza-Beersheba offensive and the pursuit of the Turkish forces to Jerusalem.

The first aspect of mission command that one must examine is the preparation that went into an offensive. Preparation included the plan of maneuver for a battle, the organization of subordinate forces, and creating the most favorable conditions for the battle, such as massing forces and deception. Generals could attempt to prepare for every contingency in a battle, but once the battle started, other mission command issues arose. In both France and Palestine, generals frequently lost communication with their units as well as the ability to control their soldiers once the attack advanced. Leaders at Headquarters as well as on the battlefield could not rely on their communications technologies, which often proved useless in conveying timely and accurate information to the advancing unit's command structure. Furthermore, the use of runners to deliver updated information caused delays and sometimes inaccurate updates.⁹ If the advancing troops did manage to break through the enemy defenses, they would likely have lost communication with their artillery support, and the enemy would be able to direct reinforcements to the threatened area for a counterattack. The force that had just taken an objective would now face a counterattack without communications with its leadership for further tasking or assistance. It would be without adequate artillery support to continue its advance or resist the oncoming counterattack. Additionally, an advancing unit would also be beyond its supply lines. Even if the advance proved successful and the enemy retreated, the attacking forces needed the correct combination of different types of units,

⁹Gary Sheffield and Dan Todman, eds., *Command and Control on The Western Front* (Kent, UK: Spellmount, 2004), 34.

including cavalry and artillery, to pursue a retreating force and guard against a counterattack. Finally, the distance from the advancing unit's supply lines would either require the advance to halt to await supplies and enable the enemy to establish a defense, or they would have to retreat in the face of an enemy attack.¹⁰

Combined arms tactics became a key factor in successful mission command throughout the entire First World War. The widespread use of cavalry in Palestine made it a war of mobility, exacerbating the difficulty of controlling an advance once it had started. In Palestine the cavalry had the luxury that armies on the Western Front lost. Mounted units in Palestine could maneuver through the countryside and around enemy defenses as long as they could handle the desert conditions and sparse water. The use of trenches determined the type of war that armies fought on the Western Front, eliminating the benefits or usefulness of cavalry in many instances. In Palestine, on the other hand, cavalry played a much more important role than on the Western Front. In France, generals often ignored cavalry, used them as infantry, or kept them waiting for a breakthrough that never happened.¹¹ A war of mobility characterized the Palestine front, where cavalry would sweep across vast expanses of land to attack a Turkish town or fortification in an encircling action or an attempt to secure water sources around the objective.¹² Several major actions in Palestine saw massed cavalry charges against entrenched Turkish defenders. Generals on the Western Front largely considered the idea

¹⁰Sheffield and Todman, 35.

¹¹Paddy Griffith, ed., *British Fighting Methods in the Great War* (London, UK: Frank Cass, 1996), 150.

¹²Bruce, 155.

of a mounted cavalry charge not only impractical but dangerous and ineffective.¹³ It should be noted that for the purposes of this paper, the term “cavalry” includes conventional cavalry, mounted riflemen, and lancers.

With the cavalry’s mobility in Palestine came the problem of supply lines being able to keep up with their rapid advance. Moreover, the need to supply men and horses with water exacerbated the problems of resource management, especially in a desert war. Management of resources—especially water—presented a challenge throughout the whole Palestine campaign. While vast lines of trenches crossing massive territories characterized the Western Front, strategically important strongholds that controlled precious water supplies characterized the campaign in Palestine. The importance of the strongholds in Palestine was their access to water, a constant necessity of war in the desert. The logistical problems of the Western Front notwithstanding, the issue of supplying an army with water in the desert was so important that it determined the purpose and tempo of nearly every British action in Palestine. Breaking through an enemy’s defenses, securing a fortified town, and advancing deep into their territory may have the appearance of a victory, but in Palestine, the availability of water after the breakthrough became just as important as the advance.

The communications aspect of mission command created problems in every campaign during the war. A commander’s need to communicate with his subordinates and to maintain accurate information is a vital component of mission command. The communications technology of the First World War evolved slowly in a war that saw drastic advances in military technology. Wireless radios were in their infancy, and

¹³Griffith, 151.

soldiers in the trenches had difficulty using visual methods of communication such as the semaphore. The newly adopted telephone was effective as long as the lines remained intact and an advancing unit brought enough wire with them to reach back to their leaders. Communication was a key issue once an advance had started, but it often broke down quickly. Beyond the front line troops had little or no communication with their leaders. Runners were one of the more effective means of updating orders or information, but they were also often unreliable and time consuming in the best of conditions.¹⁴

In examining the success or failure of Allenby's adaptation to his mission command challenges, the question arises as to whether he did actually overcome them. If one measures success by the territorial gains in the Palestine campaign, then Allenby won many victories in this theater, including Beersheba and Jerusalem. If one views these battles as victories, historians and critics who hail them as successes are correct. However, Allenby's triumph in Palestine, whether in political or military terms, cannot be measured by territory alone. A victory without any consequences on the enemy gains little more than a casualty list. In order to achieve true victory, Allenby had to achieve not only his territorial objectives, but he also had to prevent the Turkish army from successfully retreating. Although his early victories at Gaza and Beersheba gained his campaign the fame and praise that it largely holds today, these victories were incomplete. He had captured his objectives, but the Turkish armies withdrew to continue fighting in fortifications further north. They again withdrew from Jerusalem, again escaping destruction, after Allenby's army pursued them north from the Gaza-Beersheba line. Allenby may have driven his enemy back, but he did not destroy or defeat them as an

¹⁴Sheffield and Todman, 7.

effective fighting force in Palestine until the battle of Megiddo in 1918. Although Allenby's dramatic victory at Beersheba and his capture of the Holy City of Jerusalem appeared complete successes, Allenby had to fight the enemy again in order to comprehensively defeat them in Palestine. As such, Allenby had to learn how to succeed in his own part of the First World War.

In spite of his success at driving the Turkish forces across Palestine, Allenby could not accomplish his task soon enough to be effective. By the time he destroyed three Turkish armies in the Megiddo campaign and the advance to Aleppo, the war changed on the Western Front, and the Ottoman Empire's withdrawal from the war had little to do with Allenby's victory in Palestine.¹⁵

One must place aside the timeline of the rest of the war and outside political influences and examine Allenby's campaign by itself in order to gauge his success at overcoming his mission command challenges. Allenby learned from the difficulties in his earlier battles and observed the issues of the war in Palestine, and he changed his methods of dealing with these difficulties. Allenby's changes in tactics to adapt to the mission command realities that his army faced in Palestine throughout the course of his advance enabled the British army to exploit the initial breakthrough of the Turkish defenses and to eventually drive them out of Palestine. He won many campaign victories, and he did eventually attain his complete victory. However, he did not truly overcome the mission command challenges until the Megiddo campaign, having learned from the third battle of Gaza, the advance on Jerusalem, and the Transjordan raids.

¹⁵Matthew Hughes, *Allenby and British Strategy in the Middle East, 1917-1919* (London, UK: Frank Cass Publishers, 1999), 110.

There is a limited amount of literature critically analyzing the Palestine campaign. Much of the analysis concerning mission command in the First World War focuses on the Western Front. Several detailed histories of the Palestine campaign exist, although few are overly critical of Allenby, putting much of the blame for the British army's early difficulties on Allenby's predecessor, General Archibald Murray. These histories include Anthony Bruce's *The Last Crusade* and Grainger's *The Battle for Palestine, 1917*, as well as the more contemporary histories, including Archibald Wavell's *The Palestine Campaigns* and H.S. Gullet's *The Australian Imperial Force in Sinai and Palestine, 1914-1918*. These volumes give detailed accounts of the war in Palestine and the victories that the EEF achieved in various battles. These sources hail the entire advance as a success, including Allenby's incomplete victories at Gaza and Beersheba. The opinion of Allenby and the campaign is generally positive in both primary and secondary sources. Historians have somewhat neglected the campaign, with the consequence of allowing historians to "perpetuate mythology," a mythology that hails the EEF's campaign as one of the overwhelming success stories of an otherwise unpleasant war.¹⁶ Given this neglect, one must consider the battle for Palestine in a new light, ignoring the romanticism that has made it so popular in the past. Historian Matthew Hughes, in his book *Allenby and British Strategy in the Middle East*, is one of the few to question the success of the campaign. Hughes' work mostly concerns the political maneuvering in the Middle East after the war, stating that the overriding motivation for British actions in Palestine was to advance their influence in the region after the war.

¹⁶Jean Bou, "The Palestine Campaign 1916-1918: Causes and Consequences of a Continuing Historical Neglect," *Journal of the Australian War Memorial* (2007): 6.

The primary sources include several memoirs of soldiers involved in the campaign, such as Antony Bluett's *A Gunner's Crusade*, Major H.O. Lock's *With the British Army in the Holy Land*, and Captain O. Teichman's *The Diary of a Yeomanry M.O.* These sources and many of the other soldiers' accounts exhibit the difficulties of fighting in the desert and the misery and exhaustion that they experienced. They also hail Allenby as a popular leader and credit the Turkish soldiers with being effective and tough adversaries.

Several biographies of Allenby exist, namely Wavell's *Allenby, A Study in Greatness*. Wavell worked on Allenby's staff during the advance, so he may show some bias in his account. Historian Cyril Falls' two volumes on military operations in Palestine in his *History of the Great War* discuss the Palestine campaign in depth. Falls is another author who holds Allenby in extremely high regard. Falls furthermore seems to be rather taken with the panache of the campaign, sweeping himself along in the glamor of a cavalry charge when compared to the dogged trench warfare of the Western Front. Another primary source of interest is T. E. Lawrence's *Revolt in the Desert*, in which Lawrence discusses Allenby's campaigns from the standpoint of their connection to Feisal's Arab Revolt. Lawrence's account, as well as Cyril Falls' later book on the Megiddo campaign, *Armageddon, 1918*, bears some of the responsibility for the prevalent impression of the romanticism of the campaign. Rather than the painful descriptions of trenches and high casualties, the Palestine campaign recounts exciting cavalry charges and exotic stories of the Holy Land.

It is also of note that in an era where every surviving general of the war seems to have written his memoirs, Allenby published nothing official on the subject other than the

document, *A Brief Record of the Advance of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, July 1917 to October 1918*, a collection of his dispatches to the War Office. Allenby communicated often with contemporary authors writing histories of the campaign, but the fact that he wrote nothing himself is in itself significant. He may have felt that he did not need to justify his actions in a campaign that many accepted at the time to be an overwhelming success.

Each of the following chapters will frame the mission command problem around a chronological event, such as a battle or campaign, and examine how the four areas of mission command affected the campaign in question. The first chapter will focus on the EEF's efforts in Palestine in the early days of the war, including the defense of the Suez Canal and the advance across the Sinai Peninsula under General Murray. The second chapter will discuss Allenby's arrival, and the Gaza-Beersheba offensive. This chapter will cite specific problems that General Allenby faced and his method of overcoming them in these famous but incomplete victories. It will also discuss Allenby's inability to pursue and defeat the retreating Turkish army, and why this inability was crucial to Allenby's future changes in mission command. The third chapter recounts the mission command difficulties at the battle of Sheria and the EEF's pursuit of the retreating Turkish forces up to the capture of Jerusalem. The fourth chapter will consider the battle of Megiddo, where Allenby put his changes in doctrine and tactics into action, comprehensively destroying the Turkish forces in Palestine and preventing its retreat, demonstrating Allenby's learning from previous battles. The final chapter will conclude the critique of the EEF's challenges by exploring the outcomes of Allenby's methods in the grand scheme of the war itself. It will seek to apply the results of the British war in

Palestine to today's conflicts and discuss the importance of learning and adjusting to challenges in future wars.

CHAPTER 2

GENERAL MURRAY SETS THE STAGE

British Strategy and the Defense of the Suez Canal

The initial phase of the First World War in Palestine consisted of the actions of the EEF under General Archibald Murray from January 1916 until his relief in June 1917. When England and Russia declared war on the Ottoman Empire in November 1914, the Ottomans declared a *jihad* against these infidels.¹⁷ By the time General Allenby arrived in Egypt in 1917, the EEF had already successfully defended the Suez Canal against a Turkish attack and fought the Turkish army across the Sinai Peninsula and into Palestine. The challenges that Murray's EEF faced during this phase of the Palestine campaign would last throughout the war. Before General Allenby arrived, Murray advanced across the Sinai Peninsula, but he lost two key battles at Gaza, causing the British War Office to replace him with Allenby. The following chapter will discuss the first stage of the Palestine campaign and the difficulties the EEF under Murray encountered.

The mission command challenges that the EEF faced in Palestine included the problem of preparation for operations, the need to supply water to the forward troops in the desert of Palestine, the combination of different types of fighting arms, and the difficulty in updating and communicating information. In the initial phase of the war, under Murray's leadership, the EEF could not overcome these challenges, resulting in failure in two attempts to capture the Turkish stronghold at Gaza. General Murray set the stage for Allenby's later success, but he never overcame the mission command

¹⁷David R. Woodward, *Hell in the Holy Land, World War I in the Middle East* (Lexington, KY: The University of Kentucky Press, 2006), 2.

challenges. Allenby would adapt where Murray had failed and learn from Murray's failures in order to achieve comprehensive success in Palestine. The challenges in the advance across Sinai until Murray's attacks on Gaza set the stage for the situation that Allenby encountered when he arrived in Palestine.

In popular thought, the First World War is generally a story of the Western Front. Although the War Office might have seen the EEF's operations in Palestine against the Ottoman Empire as a sideshow, it still played a vital role in the in the early stages of the war. The Suez Canal connected the British Empire with India and the east. The canal was a conduit for supplying the British army with manpower and raw materials and war-fighting resources.¹⁸ If the British lost control of the canal, it could spell disaster for the Allies on the Western Front.

Even so, the Western Front was the priority in Britain's strategy. According to the War Office, the Allies would win the war in France against the German army, and not in the desert against the Turks.¹⁹ By 1915 the war on the Western Front had degenerated into a stalemate, a series of back and forth conflicts across the trenches, causing massive casualties and limited territorial gains over the course of fighting since 1914. In the middle of 1916 the German attack at Verdun proved costly for both sides. The offensive at the Somme had not yet turned against the Allies, and the British War Office saw no reason to advance in Palestine. As long as Egypt and the Suez remained secure from a

¹⁸Bruce, 3.

¹⁹Colonel A. P. Wavell, *The Palestine Campaigns*, 2d ed. (London, UK: Constable and Co., 1929), 57-58.

Turkish attack, the British leaders saw fit to remain on the defensive in Egypt.²⁰

Additionally, the Gallipoli campaign had failed by the beginning of 1916, and the Allies had lost any chance of opening the Dardanelles to connect the Allies with Russia or to attack Constantinople.²¹

By the end of 1916, however, the Somme offensive had proved indecisive and costly, and David Lloyd George had become Prime Minister of England. Lloyd George would become the key advocate for an offensive in Palestine to knock Turkey out of the war and draw German resources away from the Western Front. Giving rise to the “Easterners” movement, he informed General Murray, the Commander-in-Chief of the EEF, to open another front in the Middle East. General Murray would have to defend Egypt by being as aggressive as possible without further reinforcements.²² Thus far, Egypt had been a base in which to rest and recuperate Gallipoli veterans and retrain soldiers for the Western Front. Any soldiers stationed in Egypt were destined to support the strategy of Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS), General Sir William Robertson, who saw victory on the Western Front as the Allies’ priority.²³ Robertson had been against any operation in Gallipoli and Mesopotamia. He saw anything that took troops away from the Western Front as a waste of resources. He decried any “more d—n

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Falls, 165.

²²Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 59.

²³Bruce, 34.

silly eccentric Dardanelles fiascos.”²⁴ Robertson’s policy in Egypt sought to keep it secure and send all available manpower to France.²⁵

Lloyd George, on the other hand, decided that successes in other theaters would undermine the enemy in Europe.²⁶ In his view, if the Germans had to support their allies elsewhere, they would have to withdraw troops from the trenches and send them to other theaters. Under Lloyd George’s prodding, the War Office instructed General Murray to be ready to advance against the Turkish forces, but that they would not send any reinforcements until the autumn of 1917 due to a planned offensive in France.²⁷ In response to the War Office’s orders the EEF prepared for an advance across the Sinai in 1916.

Sinai Advance

The British understood the benefit of turning the defense of the canal into an offensive operation after the Turkish forces proved they could cross the Sinai desert in 1915. Although the EEF defeated the attack on the banks of the canal, the Ottoman forces had proved not only that they could cross the desert, but they also demonstrated the canal’s vulnerability. The British exposed one of their key problems in the defense of the canal. They had positioned no mobile forces on the eastern bank, using the canal itself as

²⁴Woodward, 19.

²⁵Bruce, 38.

²⁶Ibid., 88.

²⁷Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 67.

a defensive obstacle.²⁸ As a result, when the Turks retreated back into the desert, the British could not pursue them, and the Turkish force reestablished a defense on the eastern side of the Sinai.²⁹

The Sinai Peninsula forms a natural barrier between Egypt and Palestine. Any attack by the Turkish forces against Egypt or by the EEF against Palestine must cross this rugged wasteland of soft sand and sparse water.³⁰ After a Turkish attack on the canal in February of 1915, General Murray saw that the best way to defend the canal was to keep the enemy as far away as possible. That strategy meant that the British must defend the canal from the Turkish side of the Sinai.³¹ Murray saw that a scheme of protecting the Suez along its whole length (approximately 100 miles) wasted troops that the Allies needed elsewhere. He proposed moving across the Sinai to establish a defensive position at El Arish and El Kossaima. Murray would establish a mobile defense force at El Arish to disrupt any Turkish attack on the canal.³²

In January 1916, the War Office approved Murray's advance across the Sinai to Qatiya, an oasis twenty-five miles east of the canal that the Turks had used to stage their canal offensive. The EEF advance began with the construction of a railway across the desert to support their logistical needs.³³ The trek across the Sinai introduced the British

²⁸Bryan Perret, *Megiddo 1918* (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 1999), 7.

²⁹Bruce, 25.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 4.

³¹Falls, 48.

³²Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 41-42.

³³*Ibid.*, 42.

to one of the mission command difficulties that would follow the EEF throughout the Palestine campaign. The resource problem balanced the need to supply the advancing troops with supplies while not preventing that forward force from keeping up with the retreating enemy. Murray based his objectives in this phase of the Palestine campaign on water, not future advances or a final objective. Murray required his objectives to hold enough water and key terrain to defend against Turkish counterattacks until the railway and water pipeline could catch up to the forward troops. This tactic demanded slow movement as the British troops could not rapidly advance beyond their railroad. It took the EEF from January until December 1916 to cross the Sinai into Palestine, slowly laying tracks along the way.³⁴

Soft sand makes up the desert of Sinai, making it difficult to move artillery or any sort of motorized transport. During the slow advance under hot, dry conditions, camels became the most useful form of moving water and other supplies until the British had built their railway.³⁵ With camels, however, came the requirement for more water and food as well as camel drivers.³⁶ Murray saw the slow construction of the railway as the most effective means of crossing the desert. The advance continued painfully slowly, but the EEF could travel little faster than the railway if they hoped to keep their troops adequately supplied. In proceeding so slowly, however, Murray sacrificed the ability to engage the Turkish forces before they could establish a defense.

³⁴Perrett, 90.

³⁵Ibid., 62.

³⁶Woodward, 35.

In October 1916, Murray moved his HQ back to Cairo to deal with the developing Senussi uprising and the Arab revolt. The Ottoman-backed Senussi tribe threatened Cairo from the west, demanding Murray's attention.³⁷ Meanwhile, Sharif Hussein's Arab Revolt in the Hejaz region to the south had gained some success against the Ottoman Empire, but without additional weapons and supplies from the British, it would fail.³⁸ A Turkish attack planned against Arab forces south of Medina also endangered the revolt's progress.³⁹

To counter his absence with the forces crossing the Sinai, Murray created the Eastern Force and the Desert Column. Major General Sir Charles Dobell commanded the Eastern Force as the main advance, and Major General Sir Philip Chetwode led the Desert Column.⁴⁰ This delegation left Murray out of touch with his key subordinates. Moreover, he did not give either general control over the other. Dobell was nominally the main effort of the advance, controlling the majority of the infantry. Chetwode, controlling most of the EEF's cavalry and one infantry division, served as the advance guard of the Eastern Force.⁴¹ Dobell and Chetwode operated as two mutually supporting forces, but neither directly controlled the advance; both generals answered to Murray. Murray, however, was too far from the front to have any direct influence on the fighting. The two

³⁷T. E. Lawrence, *Revolt in the Desert* (Hertfordshire, UK: Wordsworth Editions, 1997), 81.

³⁸Gullet, 204.

³⁹David Murphy, *The Arab Revolt, 1916-1918* (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2008), 36.

⁴⁰Bruce, 79-80.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 82.

commanders could not coordinate their operations effectively without consulting Murray as to their objectives and preparations for future advances. Any situation that demanded Murray's attention involved communication from the middle of the Sinai all the way to Cairo, and by the time Murray could respond, the situation could very well have changed. This early example of the difficulty in combined arms and communication exhibits one of the key problems that the EEF would encounter during the Palestine campaign.

The British moved on from Qatiya to El Arish in December 1916, while the Turks retreated to Rafa and Magdhaba.⁴² At El Arish the EEF had accomplished its mission of establishing a forward defense of the canal, but the Turkish forces at Rafa threatened their security. The EEF had determined to defend the approach to Sinai—and therefore the canal—from El Arish; therefore, they first needed to secure Rafa and then defend El Arish. However, beyond Rafa was the Turkish stronghold at Gaza, the entrance to Palestine.⁴³

Chetwode's Desert Column went into action without Dobell's force at Magdhaba in December 1916, and Rafa in January 1917. In both engagements he defeated the Turkish defenders.⁴⁴ Chetwode commanded all of the forces involved in these actions, and he exercised direct control over the battles. At both Magdhaba and Rafa, after encircling the objective with cavalry, General Chetwode ordered his forces to withdraw due to approaching Turkish reinforcements, the lateness of the day, and the lack of water to support his troops. The railway and pipeline had not advanced far enough to support a

⁴²Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 64.

⁴³John D. Grainger, *The Battle for Palestine, 1917* (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2006), 11.

⁴⁴Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 64-65.

sustained operation beyond the reach of the British supply lines. In both cases the cavalry did not receive the order to withdraw, and they attacked, charging over open ground against Turkish defenses. The fact that the operations proved successful does not eliminate that they succeeded despite a miscommunication. After these British victories, the Turks abandoned their defensive positions at Khan Yunis, Auja, and El Kossaima to a defensive line running from Gaza to Beersheba in southern Palestine.⁴⁵

These engagements may have been battlefield victories, but they demonstrated the EEF's communication difficulties and the early lessons they began to learn in terms of combined arms. They relied on their cavalry when the infantry could not overcome the enemy defenses at both Magdhaba and Rafa, and they found that the lack of water in the desert dictated their tactics. Without adequate water, the cavalry could only stay out in the desert for a limited period of time; if the EEF hoped to succeed, they would need rapid victories.

The battles of Magdhaba and Rafa also stand as examples of incomplete victories. After the cavalry charged over the enemy trenches and captured the fortifications, the EEF subsequently withdrew in the face of Turkish reinforcements.⁴⁶ The British victories during the advance did little to defeat the Turkish forces. Magdhaba and Rafa had little strategic value to either the Ottomans or the British.⁴⁷ The EEF attacked the enemy only to secure their ability to build their railway and pipeline. After Magdhaba, the British withdrew to El Arish after their victory because the supply lines had still not moved far

⁴⁵Grainger, 19.

⁴⁶Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 65.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 67.

enough to support the army once it occupied the town. They could not leave the Turks in a fortified location as that would threaten the continued British advance. The EEF's progress still focused on the railway and pipeline, however, and this focus made for very slow progress through the grueling Sinai desert. The mission command difficulties that the EEF encountered on their advance across the Sinai continued during the next phase of the campaign as they fought their way to the Turkish stronghold of Gaza. The EEF had fought a slow moving fight through the desert against small enemy fortifications, and the British soldiers generally succeeded in capturing these fortifications. As they approached the defenses at Gaza, they encountered the same mission command difficulties, but they could not overcome them.

First Battle of Gaza

Gaza and Beersheba stand at the entryway to Palestine from the south. Gaza commanded the coastal road, and Beersheba held the last sources of water before the mountains to the east and south.⁴⁸ On the one hand, the EEF had captured a large amount of territory, and they could safely assume that they had ensured the safety of the canal by crossing the Sinai.⁴⁹ On the other hand, however, as the EEF emerged from the Sinai, the guidance from the War Office changed. With Lloyd George's belief that action in Palestine would draw German resources away from the Western Front came a new purpose for the EEF. The War Office ordered Murray to plan an offensive for the autumn of 1917 and to advance into Palestine as "the gaining of a military success in this theatre

⁴⁸Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 67.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 57.

was very desirable.”⁵⁰ Murray did not need to destroy the Turkish army or force them out of the war; he only needed to attack them in Palestine to draw the enemy’s focus away from France. Meanwhile, the War Office ordered Murray to send reinforcements to France to participate in an Allied offensive in the spring of 1917.⁵¹

At the suggestion of their German adviser, Colonel Kress von Kressenstein, the Turkish defenders established small garrisons at Gaza and Beersheba in anticipation of a British attack. Kress held the bulk of the Turkish forces at Tel esh Sheria as a mobile force to reinforce either Gaza or Beersheba, whichever the British chose to attack.⁵² The Gaza garrison had to hold the town long enough for reinforcements to arrive and drive off the attackers.

In the British assault on Gaza, Dobell’s infantry force attacked from the south while Chetwode’s cavalry circled to the north.⁵³ Both Dobell and Chetwode shared the same headquarters, but they still independently commanded their own forces. Neither general held authority over the other. Instead, both answered to General Murray, who had stationed his HQ at El Arish, approximately fifty miles away.⁵⁴ Murray’s location precluded him from influencing or determining the outcome of the fight, and as a result, Dobell and Chetwode experienced difficulties in coordinating their efforts. One might

⁵⁰Sir Archibald Murray, *Sir Archibald Murray’s Despatches* (London, UK: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1920), 130.

⁵¹Bruce, 88.

⁵²Grainger, 19.

⁵³Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 71.

⁵⁴Gullet, 293.

even compare Murray's distance from the fight to the "chateau generalship" that characterized a great portion of the fighting on the Western Front. Furthermore, Murray could have alleviated much of the confusion at Dobell and Chetwode's HQ in the planning stage of the battle, demonstrating an example of the EEF's difficulty in the mission command aspect of preparation.

The attack on Gaza proceeded slowly on 26 March 1917. The first chance the British had to reconnoiter the terrain was the morning of the attack, which caused some delays.⁵⁵ Fog held off the attack throughout the morning of the battle, most significantly to the infantry under General Chetwode's Desert Column. Major General A.G. Dallas, commanding Chetwode's 53rd Infantry Division's assault to the south of Gaza, delayed his advance on the Turkish positions because he did not want to advance without artillery support. He could not use the artillery to support an advance because the gunners could not see due to the fog, and he feared that the artillery fire would land on his own men. Even when the fog did lift and Dallas could attack with artillery support, he delayed a further five hours despite General Chetwode's increasingly frustrated orders to attack with all speed.⁵⁶ The difficulty in communication during the opening stages of the first battle of Gaza further illustrates the mission command challenge of conducting a large scale operation with ineffective communications. Chetwode ordered Dallas to proceed with his attack several times throughout the morning, but as Dallas delayed, Chetwode did not know what caused the delay, nor could he get in direct communication with Dallas to find out any more information.

⁵⁵Gullet, 265.

⁵⁶Ibid., 275.

As the attack stalled, Chetwode ordered the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) mounted division under General Harry Chauvel to attack from the north. The cavalry had circled around the town to guard against enemy reinforcements and cut off the Gaza garrison's retreat, and "If necessary to co-operate with the Infantry by attacking GAZA from the North."⁵⁷ The open desert suited the cavalry's role as a mobile infantry force that could attack from the far side of a town as well as cut off or pursue a retreating enemy. Unlike the Western Front trenches, the cavalry could maneuver in Palestine and attack the enemy fortification's weaker point. When the infantry assault on Gaza faltered, Chetwode ordered the cavalry to assault the town through cactus hedges to the north of the town.⁵⁸ Chetwode, a cavalryman by training, had seen the effect of cavalry on Turkish defenses, and he ordered an assault that he had observed to be effective at Magdhaba and Rafa. However, the problem at Gaza came in the difficult terrain. The EEF had successfully used the cavalry in mounted charges at Magdhaba and Rafa, but it had worked then because it was a rapid mounted charge over open ground.

The 22nd Mounted Brigade, the New Zealand Mounted Rifles, and the 2nd Australian Light Horse Brigade advanced sometimes mounted and sometimes dismounted, often in single file, with rifle, revolver, and bayonet.⁵⁹ This slow advance

⁵⁷Headquarters New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade, "Australian Imperial Force Unit War Diaries: New Zealand Units," Australian War Memorial Collection, Item Number AWM 35/1/23, March 1917, <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/records/awm4/35/1/awm4-35-1-23.pdf> (accessed 15 April 2012).

⁵⁸Grainger, 30.

⁵⁹Gullet, 279-280.

eventually succeeded, but it denied the British the advantage of their cavalry's speed and mobility. At Gaza the cavalry could not use their speed to the greatest benefit due to the cactus hedges. In this case the British took advantage of the mounted troops' mobility in enveloping the city, but once they advanced, they lost the benefits of speed and mobility that had succeeded at Magdhaba and Rafa.

Chauvel's cavalry reached the outskirts of the town despite their slow advance through the cactus hedges. The infantry, in a direct assault against Turkish positions, eventually took the heights of Ali Muntar, the key to the assault.⁶⁰ Dallas' 53rd infantry and the ANZAC cavalry met late in the day on the outskirts of the city, the 53rd having secured Ali Muntar as darkness approached.⁶¹ By the time the EEF troops entered the town, an accomplishment unknown at British HQ, Dobell and Chetwode agreed that they must order a withdrawal due to a report of Turkish reinforcements approaching from Tel esh Sheria and Beersheba. With the onset of night, the horses in the Desert Column had been without water for nearly two days.⁶² Neither general had the key information that both infantry and cavalry had entered the outskirts of the town and attained the objective of Ali Muntar, and the British forces withdrew.⁶³ The poor communication of the information that the British had taken the town overarched the cavalry's feat of fighting through the cactus hedges and the infantry's eventual entry into the town.

⁶⁰Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 73.

⁶¹Gullet, 282.

⁶²Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 77-78.

⁶³Gullet, 277-280.

The order to withdraw reached the Desert Column's shocked brigade commanders just as they secured Ali Muntar, and they did not understand the reason for the order. Major General Grenville Rylie, of the 2nd Australian Light Horse called the withdrawal order a blunder. "When we got the order to pull out, the town was undoubtedly ours . . . and my men were actually in Gaza."⁶⁴ Major General Edward Chaytor, commanding the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade went so far as to request the order in writing.⁶⁵ Because Dobell and Chetwode did not have the information that their forces had taken Ali Muntar, what could have been a great success in the campaign resulted in a demoralizing defeat due to the lack of effective communication. The EEF would have to learn to coordinate their different types of units as well as learn to trust to the initiative of their commanders at the front.

Murray made another crucial error in the report he sent back to the War Office. Murray, who had remained in El Arish and out of touch with his generals during the battle, reported that the attack had nearly been a success. "It was a most successful operation, the fog and waterless nature of the country just saving the enemy from disaster. . . . It has proved conclusively that the enemy has no chance against our troops in the open."⁶⁶ Although the EEF had not captured Gaza, they had advanced up to the Wadi Ghazze and inflicted severe Turkish casualties.⁶⁷ Thinking that victory in Palestine was a foregone conclusion, the War Office instructed Murray to renew his attack and

⁶⁴Ibid., 287.

⁶⁵Ibid., 284-286.

⁶⁶Ibid., 296.

⁶⁷Murray, 132.

continue his advance. They instructed him to take Gaza and Jerusalem, and extend the railway to Jaffa.⁶⁸ Murray again asked for reinforcements, but the War Office retorted that speed was more important. As the British thought they had numerical superiority over the Turks, who were still reeling from their recent “disaster” at the first battle of Gaza, Murray must attack with his current force with all haste.⁶⁹ Murray did not have an understanding of the true situation at Gaza. He could not communicate an accurate picture to the War Office, and this error resulted in the War Office’s false confidence in the EEF’s ability to easily take the town in their second attempt.

The first defeat at Gaza resulted from problems in preparation, communication, and the misuse of cavalry. The EEF still focused on objectives that the British could defend long enough to bring up their railway and pipeline. When Dobell and Chetwode found their troops without water on the far side of Gaza with night approaching, they immediately withdrew. They did not know that their forces had taken Ali Muntar, and they should have considered that such a withdrawal would take considerable time. The idea of pressing their attack to capture Gaza to capture its wells and to use Gaza’s defenses against the approaching Turkish reinforcements may have occurred to them, but the poor communications and the lack of accurate information drove their decision. Both the lack of supplies and poor communication overshadowed the entry into the town despite the ill prepared attack and ineffective combination of different types of units. Regardless of the knowledge that their forces had captured Ali Muntar, however Murray

⁶⁸Ibid., 133.

⁶⁹Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 83.

at the time had the mindset that they could only support their efforts with their railway. As they continued to build the railway, the EEF prepared for another attack on Gaza.

Second Battle of Gaza

Murray's misleading report on the results of the first attack on Gaza led the War Office to demand a further advance in Palestine. The EEF did not want to seize the town for defensive purposes, but to use it as a base for an advance into Palestine and the capture of Jerusalem.⁷⁰

The second battle of Gaza gained even less success than the first. While the EEF reconstituted its force and prepared for another attack, the Turkish forces prepared their defenses. They had seen that the British force would attack at Gaza, so they strengthened the garrison. The Turks established a line of defensive redoubts along the line from Gaza to Beersheba to prevent the cavalry from encircling the town as it had in the first attempt at Gaza. Dobell would have to make a direct frontal assault on the town's entrenched defenses, and the town's defenders knew exactly where the British would attack.⁷¹ The British planned to send three infantry divisions against three objectives along the town's trenches with Chetwode's Desert Column screening along the infantry's flank to prevent any reinforcements coming from the redoubts along the Gaza-Beersheba line.⁷² Although the EEF cavalry had demonstrated its bold, capable effectiveness during several engagements in the campaign so far, the British nevertheless reduced them to guard the

⁷⁰Grainger, 38.

⁷¹Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 84.

⁷²Grainger, 42.

EEF flank against Turkish reinforcements during the second battle of Gaza. If the British had used their cavalry poorly at the first battle of Gaza, they rendered their mounted arm almost useless at the second battle. Murray demonstrated that he had not adapted to the mission command difficulties in Palestine

The EEF suffered an unqualified defeat at the second battle of Gaza. The British took small amounts of territory, but the Ottoman forces quickly won these gains back with a series of counterattacks. The direct assault by infantry was ineffective, and the British did not have the capability to support the attack from the far side of the town with cavalry. The British took little time to prepare for the battle due to the need to rapidly attack the town before the Turkish forces could adequately set up a defense.⁷³ The lack of preparation and the lack of open area for cavalry to maneuver made the British defeat at the second battle of Gaza a foregone conclusion. The attack ended in another withdrawal, and the EEF began digging in around to oppose the Turkish trenches, much like the situation on the Western Front.⁷⁴ A stalemate ensued along the Gaza-Beersheba defenses with trenches supported by redoubts preventing movement beyond the enemy's lines.⁷⁵

Conclusion: Murray's Lessons

The War Office removed General Murray from command, citing his lack of judgment of the positions at the front. In his place they appointed General Allenby as

⁷³Grainger, 42.

⁷⁴Bruce, 102.

⁷⁵Ibid., 106.

commander-in-chief of the EEF.⁷⁶ Since taking command of the EEF in 1916, Murray had defended the Suez Canal, advanced across the Sinai desert, and crossed into Palestine, but he had failed to take Gaza in two attempts. The troops and generals under his command achieved some minor victories, not due to Murray's skill or leadership. On the occasions that he succeeded, he did so more out of luck and the abilities of his subordinates to adapt than his skill in mission command. In the cases of the tactics that worked, the British seldom exploited their advantages.

To say that the EEF under Murray failed at every turn is misleading, however. Murray defended the Suez Canal and laid the railroad across Sinai to support an advance into Palestine, both key factors in Allenby's later success. In some cases he succeeded by accident and luck and in some cases he failed due to his inability to overcome the mission command challenges of the war in Palestine. If he wanted to defend the canal, Murray achieved his objective. By crossing the Sinai and constructing the railway almost up to Gaza to support his forward troops, Murray ensured that the Turks would not be able to attack the canal. However, when the War Office changed his mission, he could not press his success further.

Murray's subordinate generals deserved some credit for their leader's successes as well as failures. While Murray remained at his HQ in Cairo or behind the lines with the railway effort, generals such as Dobell, Chetwode, and Chauvel fought the Turks from their HQ at the front. Chetwode experienced the most success in rapid attacks, profiting from his cavalry's impulsive charges at Magdhaba and Rafa. More importantly, however, he learned from his experience in the Sinai, and attempted to repeat his success at the first

⁷⁶Grainger, 82.

battle of Gaza with a cavalry advance from the far side of the enemy's defenses.

Although the cavalry succeeded at the first battle of Gaza, the attack failed due to the faulty organization of the EEF and poor communication among the generals at the front.

The failure to adapt to the changing situation or to learn from previous experiences did little to help the British at the second attempt on Gaza. The attitude of trying new tactics, taking advantage of what had worked, and discarding those that had failed was an important component of mission command. Murray did not learn from previous situations or adapt to their environment, resulting in his failure at the second battle of Gaza. The Turks had strengthened their defenses, and the British ignored their own strengths by engaging in a frontal assault using only infantry and ignoring the effectiveness of their cavalry. Having seen what had worked in the Sinai and what nearly worked at the first battle of Gaza, Murray's second attack on Gaza failed even before it began.

The initial stage of the Palestine campaign saw generals trying to fight a Western Front style of war in a land that differed significantly from the Western Front. The generals in Palestine had more room to maneuver their cavalry, but in these early days of the war, they had not learned how to combine the speed and shock of their mounted infantry with their regular infantry. Furthermore, the British generals would need to learn from their experiences and adapt to their mission command difficulties if they wanted to win in Palestine.

Allenby inherited a situation in Palestine that was different from Murray's. The construction of the railway across the desert up to Gaza enabled Allenby's later success over the Ottomans. The challenge of communicating and supplying water to the troops

would never go away in Palestine. However, like the preparation and combined arms aspects of mission command, Allenby would meet these challenges differently than Murray. As Murray had advanced across the desert, building the railway and pipeline at a slow methodical pace, Allenby changed his focus away from bringing the railway and water to his troops. Murray's organization of the EEF into two separate but equal fighting forces while he remained behind the front contributed to the difficulty of communication, and Allenby would adapt to that challenge as well. Finally, Allenby had the experience of generals who had been fighting in the Middle East for over a year to assist his adjustment to the challenges of warfare in the desert.

CHAPTER 3

THE BULL CHARGES INTO THE HOLY LAND

General Allenby arrived in Palestine in June 1917 and achieved early success at Gaza and Beersheba. Although he won these early victories against the Turks in stark contrast from Murray's recent humiliations, the capture of Beersheba and the third battle of Gaza only made up shaping operations in the offensive that intended to destroy the Turkish army at Sheria. In his first experience with war against the Ottoman Empire, Allenby would take some of his predecessor's experiences and begin to adapt to the mission command challenges of war in Palestine. Although Allenby defeated the Turks at Gaza and Beersheba, he did not achieve his mission, which was to destroy the main Turkish army and knock the Ottoman Empire out of the war. This chapter will describe Allenby's initial experience with the challenges of mission command in the Gaza-Beersheba offensive of October and November 1917. It will discuss how well Allenby dealt with these challenges in his first fight against the Turks as well as suggest that Allenby's incomplete victories, while generally hailed as sweeping victories, did not accomplish Allenby's objectives or achieve the great success that historians claim that they did. The EEF drove the enemy farther north in Palestine, but the Turkish forces escaped destruction and survived to fight Allenby again. Allenby failed to destroy any large portion of the enemy army or to remove the enemy from the war as a fighting force. As a result, he would need to adapt to his mission command challenges in his early incomplete victories.

Allenby faced the same mission command challenges as Murray throughout the initial stage of his advance. Although Allenby gained initial success, he did not

completely overcome his challenges in this initial stage of his command. When Allenby arrived in Cairo, the Turks still opposed the EEF in strongly fortified and entrenched positions along the Gaza-Beersheba line. His objectives included breaking through the Turkish lines and destroying their forces in Palestine. Allenby's mission command challenges included the preparation and planning of operations, the ability to prioritize resources-especially water-the proper coordination and use of cavalry, artillery, and infantry, and the need to communicate and update information across the battlefield.

Allenby overcame the various challenges to a limited extent, but that did not guarantee the comprehensive victory he sought. He took the time he needed to train and prepare his force, organizing them for the offensive and deceiving the Turks as to the main attack. This preparation allowed him to take Beersheba and Gaza. However, these victories did not adequately prepare his force for the main effort, the follow-on attack on the Turkish forces at Sheria. Allenby's plan to take Beersheba relied on his cavalry's quick defeat of the Turkish defenses and seizing the town's wells. At Gaza the water pipeline ran nearly all the way to the British defenses, so water posed less of a challenge to the EEF in the third attempt to take the town. While Allenby succeeded in both battles, he did not fully overcome the challenge of water, he merely avoided it. His use of cavalry to encircle Beersheba used their speed and versatility, but his tactics, although effective in capturing a fortification, did not prove successful when he attempted to cut off the main Turkish force at Sheria. Finally, the EEF temporarily overcame the communication and control issue because Allenby relied on his subordinates to take charge of the engagements while reporting directly to him.

Allenby would use his experiences before the war and his experiences on the Western Front to adapt to the mission command challenges he faced in Palestine. He also brought a personality and style of leadership to Palestine that contrasted drastically with Murray's. This stage of the campaign was Allenby's first experience with the war in Palestine. He would have to adapt to the challenges he met upon his arrival, and after the battles that this chapter will describe, he would have to further learn and evolve in order to overcome the mission command challenges that the war in Palestine posed.

The latter half of 1917 severely taxed the Allied war effort. On the Western Front, the war dragged on with the failed Nivelle offensives at the Aisne and Arras in the spring and the third battle of Ypres later that year. These losses caused high casualties, drawing Allied men and resources deeper into the abyss of the war in Europe.⁷⁷ The revolutionary Russian government looked like it might withdraw from the war, promising to free up Turkish troops from the Eastern Front that could very well challenge the British army on the Western Front, Palestine, or Mesopotamia.⁷⁸ French forces wore thin, and they had an increasingly difficult time with maintaining their efforts against Germany. The United States entered the war in April 1917, but it would be some time before their troops would arrive in Europe.⁷⁹ The Allies could claim few decisive and clear victories. They had fought numerous large engagements in France, but those battles raged over the course of

⁷⁷Cyril Falls and A. F. Becke, *Military Operations in Egypt & Palestine from June 1917 to the End of the World War* (London, UK: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1930), 1:14.

⁷⁸Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 96.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*

several months, costing the Allies thousands of lives, but yielded little in the way of success. Stalemate seemed only to produce more stalemate.

Allied forces in Mesopotamia captured Baghdad from the Ottoman Empire in March, one of the rare clear victories to this point in the war.⁸⁰ The British War Office anticipated that Turkey would attempt to retake Baghdad or counterattack in Palestine. The loss of Baghdad to the British and Mecca to the Hejaz Revolt in July 1916 were hard losses for the Turks to accept, and the British suddenly saw some hope in their Ottoman enemies' vulnerability.⁸¹ However, the Ottomans were far from defeated. Lloyd George and his colleagues in the British War Office advised an attack in Palestine to draw Turkish attention away from Baghdad and German attention away from the Western Front, where the Easterners still believed that the trenches were impenetrable by either army.⁸²

The British War Office needed a victory somewhere to convince the British people that they could win the war and that they were not merely fighting a stalemate in France. More importantly, the British saw growing French interest in Palestine and the progress of the Arab revolt. The British and French according to the Sykes-Picot agreement planned to dismantle the Ottoman Empire—the “Sick Man of Europe”—and carve it up as they saw fit after the war.⁸³ An agreement was one thing, but victory in Palestine would bring with it a clear British hegemony in the area. If they wanted to have

⁸⁰Grainger, 65.

⁸¹Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 96.

⁸²Gullet, 366.

⁸³Grainger, 80.

their way in Palestine after the war, they saw the need to gather territory and momentum in the region. However, the British government began to see that Murray was not the man to achieve their victory. The War Office selected Allenby as Murray's replacement in May 1917.

Allenby: Cavalryman and Army Commander

When the war began, Allenby had become a veteran cavalry officer. He had commanded cavalry in British colonies in South Africa and Zululand, where he learned the administration and movement necessities of cavalry in the field.⁸⁴ The British cavalry experience in the Boer War of 1899-1902 involved mounted infantry armed with rifles, who fought mounted as well as dismounted actions.⁸⁵ Allenby saw most of his early combat action in the Second Boer War in the advance on Kimberly, and operations at the battles of Ladysmith and Bloemfontein.⁸⁶ The cavalry during the Boer war took part in countless small actions, patrols, and reconnaissance, and Allenby learned not only how to use cavalry in combat, but also valuable lessons in leadership and the details of administration and mission command, which would serve him later in his career.⁸⁷ After the Boer War Allenby served as Inspector General of Cavalry from 1910 until 1914,

⁸⁴Wavell, *Allenby, A Study in Greatness*, 57.

⁸⁵Griffith, 145.

⁸⁶Wavell, *Allenby, A Study in Greatness*, 82.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 92.

where he developed training systems based on the combination of shock and the use of dismounted firepower.⁸⁸

When the Great War broke out, Allenby went to France as part of the British Expeditionary Force's cavalry division. In the British army's retreat after the battle of Mons, Allenby's cavalry covered the main army's retreat, fighting small unit defensive actions against the advancing German army. The small unit actions proved vital in the retreat, as opposed to a large scale cavalry charge. The failure of a charge would have exposed the retreating army to destruction.⁸⁹ In October 1915 the British army gave Allenby command of Third Army, which he commanded at the battle of Arras in April 1917.⁹⁰ After initial success in breaking through the enemy lines, the battle turned into a deadlock. Commanders lost touch with their units, and later improvised attacks gained little.⁹¹ Allenby urged his divisional commanders to press their attacks to exploit their advantage, ordering a "relentless pursuit" of the enemy.⁹² His division commanders, seeing how poorly the battle progressed, issued written protests to Allenby's orders.⁹³

General Robertson, the CIGS, praised Allenby for his initial success at Arras, although others fixed the blame on him and suggested that it damaged his reputation because of the eventual failure of the battle. In fact, shortly before the battle, one of

⁸⁸Ibid., 117.

⁸⁹Griffith, 147.

⁹⁰Wavell, *Allenby, A Study in Greatness*, 144.

⁹¹Sheffield and Todman, 106.

⁹²Travers, 24.

⁹³Falls, *Armageddon, 1918*, 11.

Allenby's staff members informed him that due to General Haig's dislike of Allenby's plan for the battle, if the attack failed the blame would rest solely with Allenby.⁹⁴ Allenby and Haig had attended Staff College together, and they never quite got along.⁹⁵ After Arras, Allenby voiced his dislike of Haig's plans for future attacks.⁹⁶ This disagreement, in concert with Murray's failure to achieve victory in Gaza, provided Haig an opportunity to rid himself of his opponent and for Allenby to excel in Palestine.

Allenby brought a style of leadership to the EEF that drastically contrasted with Murray's. He was a large, physically imposing man, who always showed himself willing to share his troops' hardships.⁹⁷ Upon his arrival and assumption of command, Allenby moved his GHQ to Um el Kelab, an outpost near Rafa, during the worst heat of the summer in Palestine. This move had a strong effect on the EEF's spirits. Allenby showed his men that he was willing to share the difficult physical conditions of the desert in the interest of pressing the enemy, and it inspired his troops' faith in the renewed operations against Gaza and Beersheba.⁹⁸

Allenby's gruff style and close involvement with his troops demonstrated an early approach to overcoming the mission command challenge with which Murray had struggled. The troops of the EEF rarely saw their previous commander. With Allenby close at hand conducting surprise inspections and discussing the situation with leaders at

⁹⁴Wavell, *Allenby, A Study in Greatness*, 183.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 170.

⁹⁶Grainger, 82.

⁹⁷Wavell, *Allenby, A Study in Greatness*, 122.

⁹⁸Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 103.

the front, the EEF no longer had a hazy idea of a leader who spent much of his time far behind the lines. This forward presence not only renewed the EEF's fighting spirit, but it assisted Allenby in overcoming the mission command challenge of preparation and organization. Allenby saw the condition of his men, horses, supplies, and the desert in which they were fighting. With his previous experience of men and horses fighting in South Africa, Allenby could gauge his troops' condition and their ability to endure a long march through the desert and to extend their fight with limited water. This involvement and close communication with his men proved an important facet of Allenby adapting to the new environment in which he found himself. It helped him plan for the attack on Beersheba and the follow-on attack at Sheria.

Allenby's powerful physical presence as well as his outbursts of temper toward his subordinates earned him the nickname "The Bull."⁹⁹ This sobriquet preceded him when he visited the camps and front lines, causing units to send semaphore or radio messages, warning "Bull's loose!" or "BBA: Bloody Bull's about."¹⁰⁰ However, besides alerting his men to his high standard of effort and administrative detail, these visits showed that he was not a chateau general, content to run the war from Cairo. As an EEF artilleryman suggested:

Just to see your chief wandering about more or less informally, finding things out for himself, watching you - not on parade, but at your ordinary daily jobs; to know that he was not above getting out of his car to ask a question personally, or,

⁹⁹Grainger, 85.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 88.

during operations, to sit on a gun-limber digging his bully-beef out of a tin with a jack-knife, like any other man. These things went a mighty long way.¹⁰¹

Allenby made it clear from the beginning of his time in Palestine that he was there to command the fighting. His presence in the eyes of his troops and his aggressive style of leadership reinvigorated the EEF for the coming fight. Even before he began fighting the enemy in large engagements, Allenby established his mission command at the top of the EEF, and he demonstrated to his men that he would control the coming fight.

“The Bull’s” explosive temper and high standards of performance had an impact on his troops as well as his generals. Whatever the final effect on the outcome of an operation, the soldiers fought for their leader, knowing his demand for high performance and success, but also how high he valued their initiative to achieve success. Although his overbearing presence often intimidated his subordinates, they nevertheless admired him, as one subordinate noted, “At one time or another I served under most of the senior commanders in France during the War, but I never met one under whom I would serve so gladly again as under General Allenby.”¹⁰² Allenby had to rely on his subordinates for their initiative and to trust that they understood his orders, since he could not be everywhere on the battlefield.

Allenby’s experience as a cavalry commander prepared him for the versatile mobile warfare that he would face in Palestine. Rather than the static life of a Western Front commander, Allenby’s past as a cavalryman who learned to fight like a

¹⁰¹Antony Bluett, *A Gunner’s Crusade, The Campaign in the Desert, Palestine & Syria as Experienced by the Honourable Artillery Company During the Great War* (UK: Leonaure, 2007), 152-153.

¹⁰²Wavell, *Allenby, A Study in Greatness*, 179.

“bushranger” taught him how men and horses survived in the wilderness.¹⁰³ Separate from the challenges of water, communications, and combined use of forces, Allenby’s impact on the EEF aided him in the preparation for the coming offensives. After two disheartening defeats, one of which had come so near to victory, and the difficult life of trench warfare in the desert, Allenby’s soldiers needed confidence in their commander and in their own ability to fight the Turks. Having seen the way armies fought on the Western Front, Allenby could see that his biggest advantage in Palestine lay in the open terrain and mobility. This advantage, however, also included his biggest challenge, that of supplying his mobile forces in the desert.

Jerusalem by Christmas: Allenby’s Mission and Chetwode’s Assessment

Even before Allenby arrived in Egypt in June 1917, the War Office pressed the EEF for an attack—and a victory—in Palestine. Allenby’s orders told him to “strike at the Turks as hard as possible,” and “press them to the limit of their resources.”¹⁰⁴ Robertson informed Allenby that Lloyd George and his war cabinet wanted to eliminate Turkey from the war in one large scale operation, occupying the Jerusalem-Jaffa line. At this stage of the war, Lloyd George felt he needed a victory to sustain the endurance of the British people, and he requested Allenby capture “Jerusalem as a Christmas present for the British nation” that would “strengthen the staying power and morale of the country.”¹⁰⁵ This task meant that the EEF must first break the Turkish defenses along the

¹⁰³Ibid., 101.

¹⁰⁴Falls, *Military Operations*, 1:15.

¹⁰⁵Wavell, *Allenby, A Study in Greatness*, 186.

Gaza-Beersheba line, a task which had already proved difficult and costly in both resources and men.

The Palestine Front to which the War Office sent Allenby had begun to take shape much like the Western Front. The EEF opposed the Turkish forces along a series of trenches that stretched for the Turks from Gaza to Sheria with redoubts placed along the way to the defenses at Beersheba. For the EEF the trench line ran from Sheikh Abbas on the coast to Gamli. The opposing forces settled down to trench warfare like their colleagues in France.¹⁰⁶ The British railway and pipeline had advanced almost to the Wadi Ghazze, bringing a constant stream of supplies to the front lines.¹⁰⁷

After the second defeat at Gaza, General Chetwode had assumed command of the Eastern Force, which consisted of the troops entrenched along the EEF's furthest advance to the Wadi Ghazze.¹⁰⁸ He took action to secure against a major Turkish counterattack, shoring up the British defenses opposing the enemy's Gaza-Beersheba line. Although his primary concern was defense, Chetwode began to rebuild his command and to devise a plan of attack. The War Office "made it clear that it was whole-hearted in the prosecution of the invasion of Palestine."¹⁰⁹ Chetwode presented his "appreciation" of the situation

¹⁰⁶Major H. O. Lock, *With the British Army in the Holy Land* (London, UK: Robert Scott, 1919), 51.

¹⁰⁷Gullet, 354.

¹⁰⁸Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 100.

¹⁰⁹Gullet, 342.

and his plan for breaking the Turkish line to Allenby upon the new commander's arrival.¹¹⁰

Chetwode's plan called for the invasion of Palestine and the destruction of the Turkish forces with an assault on the right of the Turkish line at Beersheba. Beersheba was the weakest point of the Turkish line, since they had built up the defenses at Gaza to be too strong for another direct British assault. The assessment stated that an "attack on Gaza would be an attack on the enemy at his strongest point."¹¹¹ With Gaza heavily defended and the main Turkish force firmly entrenched around Sheria, Beersheba's flank was the enemy's only vulnerable point.¹¹² Once the EEF had taken Beersheba and its wells, they could use it as base for further attacks on the Turkish main force at Hareira and Sheria. Allenby would strike the "main blow against the left flank of the main Turkish position, Hareira and Sheria. The capture of Beersheba was a necessary preliminary to this operation, in order to secure the water supplies at this place."¹¹³ The objective in this case became the wells to overcome Allenby's water difficulty, instead of simply breaking through the enemy lines. This judgment of objectives was one of the primary challenges in mission command that Allenby faced.

Allenby endorsed Chetwode's plan, but he decided to delay the attack until October of 1917. Allenby wanted to attack as soon as possible, but he wanted to better

¹¹⁰Bruce, 114.

¹¹¹Falls, *Military Operations*, vol. 1, 9.

¹¹²Gullet, 348.

¹¹³H. Pirie-Gordon, Edmund Henry Hynman, and Viscount Allenby, *Brief Record of the Advance of the Egyptian Force: July 1917 to October 1918* (London, UK: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1919), 1.

prepare his force through training. Just as importantly, he did not want to advance into the desert away from his railway and pipeline during the hottest time of the year. If he delayed, however, he would risk advancing during the autumn rainy season, which would make the already difficult roads impassable to his artillery and mechanized units when he advanced on Jerusalem.¹¹⁴ In preparation for the Gaza-Beersheba offensive, Allenby used the summer months to train his troops for a mobile war and long marches with limited water.¹¹⁵ He balanced the risk of a properly trained force with the need to take their objectives before the rains began.

Allenby reorganized the EEF for the Gaza-Beersheba offensive. He eliminated the Eastern Force and divided the EEF into three Corps. Chetwode commanded XX Corps (10th, 53d, 60th, 74th divisions), General Sir Edward Bulfin, recently arrived from Mesopotamia, would command XXI Corps (52nd, 54th, 75th divisions), and Chauvel commanded all of the EEF's cavalry in the Desert Mounted Corps (DMC).¹¹⁶ The overall plan for the offensive called for the British to attack Beersheba with XX Corps and the DMC. While Chetwode's infantry attacked the outer defenses of Beersheba from the west, Chauvel's cavalry, the Australian mounted division, the ANZAC mounted division, and the Yeomanry mounted division, would encircle Beersheba and attack from the desert to the east of the town. Once the DMC had taken Beersheba, they could use it as a water source to support their decisive operation against the Turkish main army. XX Corps and the DMC would advance to the north and northwest to attack Sheria.

¹¹⁴Gullet, 362.

¹¹⁵Bruce, 121.

¹¹⁶Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 101.

Meanwhile, Bulfin would lead XXI Corps in an attack on Gaza from the west in cooperation with several days of preparatory artillery and naval gunfire.¹¹⁷

Allenby used the time before the Gaza-Beersheba offensive to gain an understanding of the situation and the war in the desert. He had spent the past few years fighting the Germans in France, facing the challenges of trench warfare and the inability to use his cavalry for mobility and pursuit. For the most part on the Western Front, supply was not the limiting factor that it was in Palestine. Railways and roads allowed the armies to conduct attacks anywhere along the trenches, provided they could move their men, ammunition, and supplies to that point.¹¹⁸ In Palestine, however, the EEF either had to capture a water supply from the enemy or retire. In the event that they did capture the water supply, they had to balance the need to pursue the retreating enemy with watering their horses.¹¹⁹

In Palestine Allenby quickly learned the importance of water for an advance, especially in a mobile war in the desert. He also gained first-hand knowledge of his troops and the terrain on which they fought. He went beyond the security of his front lines and inspected the terrain around Beersheba to confirm the validity of Chetwode's plan, gaining vital knowledge of the conditions around the objective.¹²⁰ One Australian Light Horse officer noted that he "could not count the times I have shaken hands with

¹¹⁷Falls, *Military Operations*, 1:16-17.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, 1:19.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*

¹²⁰Gullet, 357.

Allenby . . . between the Canal and Gaza I never set eyes on Murray.”¹²¹ He identified the need for water in the attack on Beersheba and the importance of preparation and training for the coming battles in the desert. His presence during the planning stages of the Gaza-Beersheba offensive and his direct control over his forces during the fighting demonstrated his early appreciation of the preparation and communication challenges of mission command.

Beersheba: The Charge of the Light Horse, 31 October 1917

After several months of preparations and planning, the EEF embarked on the Gaza-Beersheba offensive. On 23 October 1917 the DMC began their movement along the towns of Esani, Khalasa, and Asluj, setting up water supplies and taking what water they could find in the wells along the way.¹²² The DMC could not carry enough water with them for an attack beyond one day, nor could Allenby extend the water pipeline towards Beersheba, as it would risk alerting the defenders to the coming attack. The DMC had to rely on the wells in the desert to support their advance until they could take the wells at Beersheba.¹²³ They might be unable to sustain a prolonged attack even after they did capture the wells. Allenby and his staff understood that their plan depended on taking the wells, but they may not have grasped the risk that the distribution of water to the horses after the attack might pose.

¹²¹Ibid.

¹²²Pirie-Gordon et al., 2.

¹²³Gullet, 365.

Speed and deception formed the critical keys to success at Beersheba. The Turks could not know that the attack would come at their most weakly defended position, and Chauvel's cavalry must take the town in one day to gain control of the water supply.¹²⁴ Various means of deception aided the EEF in keeping the Turks from sending reinforcements to Beersheba, including the bombardment of Gaza beginning on 27 October, and limited movement by day to avoid Turkish aerial reconnaissance. As the EEF left its camps to begin the attack on Beersheba, they left their tents pitched and fires lighted at night.¹²⁵ The deception also purportedly included an episode in which a British officer's money, lunch, and false official documents discussing an attack on Gaza fell into Turkish hands.¹²⁶ Whether or not these ruses actually worked, all of these factors attempted to convince the enemy that the EEF would attack at Gaza and to leave a smaller force to defend Beersheba.¹²⁷ Where Murray had attacked the enemy's strong point on two different occasions, Allenby went to great pains to ensure that the attack on Beersheba met as little resistance as possible.

The need for water as well as to prepare for the follow-on operations at Sheria determined that the DMC must capture Beersheba quickly.¹²⁸ As soon as the DMC captured Beersheba, they must water their horses and embark on the next phase of the

¹²⁴Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 103.

¹²⁵Falls, *Military Operations*, 1:40.

¹²⁶Bruce, 118.

¹²⁷Lock, 53.

¹²⁸Falls, *Military Operations*, 1:30.

attack, supporting the flank of the XX Corps' attack on Sheria.¹²⁹ The success of Allenby's entire operation counted on the ability of Chauvel's cavalry to overcome the challenge of water in the desert. The EEF's extensive preparations leading up to the attack focused on the key balancing point of Beersheba. If the DMC failed at Beersheba, the entire operation would be at risk of failure.

The attack eventually succeeded, but Allenby's early appreciation of the situation did not extend beyond the first phase. He relied almost exclusively on success at Beersheba with enough resources from the wells there to support his main attack. When the attack did succeed, however, Chauvel did not find adequate water to support an immediate advance on Sheria, nor could Allenby expect the tired cavalry to venture out against another entrenched enemy so quickly after the difficult victory at Beersheba. Although the DMC captured Beersheba, success without the ability to quickly transition to attack the Turkish forces at Sheria limited Allenby's purported success. He had captured an important town, but that did not guarantee that he had defeated the enemy along their main defensive line.

The attack on Beersheba began on the morning of 31 October after the DMC marched between 25 and 35 miles from the areas surrounding Asluj with only what water the riders could carry.¹³⁰ At four in the morning Chetwode's XX Corps was in position to assault the Turkish defenses between the Khalasa road and Wadi es Saba.¹³¹ The 60th and 74th divisions attacked the defenses, carrying them early in the day while the 53rd

¹²⁹Pirie-Gordon et al., 4.

¹³⁰Lock, 54.

¹³¹Bruce, 128.

division attacked north of the wadi. The attacks drew Turkish troops to their defense and away from Chauvel's attacks in the north and east.¹³² The infantry succeeded, and the rest of the assault on Beersheba depended on Chauvel's cavalry. The infantry played a role in the attack on Beersheba, but Allenby had made their key task the assault on the Turkish forces at Sheria.¹³³ Allenby's reorganization of the EEF had, in this case, split the cooperation between the infantry and the cavalry. He used the cavalry to maneuver around Beersheba into the desert while the infantry waited to conduct the main attack on Sheria. He relied on the cavalry to proceed hastily beyond the capture of Beersheba to exploit the infantry's imminent success at Sheria. Allenby's separation of different types of units brought him success at Beersheba, but it caused him more difficulty at Sheria due to the problem of not finding enough water at Beersheba to support the cavalry.

General Chauvel established his HQ on a hill near Khashim Zanna where he had a clear view of the Turkish defenses, including Tel es Saba and the city itself. From his vantage point he could see the developing situation, and he did not need to rely on feedback from his divisional and brigade commanders.¹³⁴ He still had to communicate with Allenby at GHQ, but Chauvel's first-hand view of the battlefield eliminated any delay or misinterpretation by his subordinates. He could rapidly assess the situation, report to the commander-in-chief, and take action as he saw appropriate.

Tel es Saba presented the DMC with its first challenge. This fortification consisted of a tall, rocky mound that defended Beersheba from the east. Although it faced

¹³²Gullet, 384.

¹³³Ibid., 392.

¹³⁴Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 120.

an open plain that was ideal for a cavalry advance, the hill itself boasted steep, rocky slopes that horses could not climb. The Turks defended the hill with trenches and machine guns, precluding a dismounted advance.¹³⁵ General Chaytor, now commanding the ANZAC division, assaulted the position with the New Zealand Mounted Rifles brigade and the 3rd Australian Light Horse, who charged across the open plain, dismounted, and fought the Turkish defenders on foot.¹³⁶ Tel es Saba proved to be an especially difficult objective, given the harsh Turkish defenses and the limited artillery to cover the ANZAC division's attack.¹³⁷ The ANZACs captured the hill, but not until much later in the day than the EEF expected. The combined arms aspect of Allenby's mission command challenges proved to be the biggest difficulty at Tel es Saba, as Chauvel did not have any heavy artillery to support the ANZAC advance. Additionally, when cavalry dismounted to fight, they reduced their striking power, leaving every fourth man to hold his partners' horses. Despite the ANZAC Division's capture of the hill, the difficulties involved seriously delayed the assault on Beersheba.

The fight for Tel es Saba illustrated not only the importance of preparation for a battle in mission command, but the EEF's need for different types of supporting units in the war in Palestine. The plan for Beersheba relied on the cavalry's ability to maneuver around the Turkish defenses and capture the town. The plan largely ignored the need to take Tel es Saba early in the engagement, and it further ignored the hazards of taking this defensive structure with limited artillery support. Before the DMC even had a chance to

¹³⁵Gullet, 387.

¹³⁶Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 120-121.

¹³⁷Bruce, 131.

consider the advance on Beersheba itself, they nearly failed to take the key defensive objective, without which the attack on Beersheba would come under rifle and machine gun fire from Tel es Saba. The deliberate and methodical approach on Tel es Saba delayed the attack on Beersheba to the point where Chauvel had to order the assault on Beersheba almost out of desperation. The offensive focused on Beersheba and not the difficult objective of Tel es Saba. This focus, as well as the reliance on cavalry without heavy artillery, suggested the limit of the EEF's preparation for the attack, and exemplified Allenby's mission command challenges early in his campaign.

As the afternoon wore on, Allenby pressed Chauvel for results, ordering him to "Capture Beersheba to-day, in order to secure water and take prisoners."¹³⁸ Most of the DMC's horses had been without water for 24 to 48 hours, having left their starting positions late in the day on 30 October.¹³⁹ At this point in the attack, the EEF came very close to a disastrous defeat. After the methodical and cautious advance on Tel es Saba, Chauvel and his divisional commanders saw that they must abandon caution and accept some risk in an all-out assault on the Turkish trenches around the town.¹⁴⁰ After an anxious conference at Chauvel's command post overlooking the town, Chauvel ordered a mounted charge by the 4th Australian Light Horse brigade straight at the enemy defenses.¹⁴¹ The 4th Light Horse charged across four miles of open terrain against Turkish artillery, machine guns, and two lines of trenches to enter the town and capture

¹³⁸Gullet, 394.

¹³⁹Ibid., 400.

¹⁴⁰Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 122.

¹⁴¹Gullet, 393.

the vital wells before the Turkish forces could destroy them or retreat in an orderly fashion. As the mounted riflemen charged, “the enemy opened up a very heavy fire but the charge was so vigourous and skilled that the enemy was over run and his fire silenced in a few minutes, thus enabling the Regiment to carry on the assault and complete the capture of Beersheba.”¹⁴²

The mounted assault on Beersheba was the Australian Light Horse’s finest hour, and it was a grand success story in an otherwise gloomy and brutal war. However, it is important to note that Beersheba was only a phase to set up the main objective of defeating the Turkish main army at Sheria. The entire assault on the Gaza-Beersheba line rested on Chauvel’s success at Beersheba, and it almost met with failure. The war’s historians praised the valiant charge and victory over the Turks, calling into the hearts of those who read about it a glamorous style of fighting that the Western Front’s misery overshadowed. In a sense the accolades that Allenby won at the charge had more to do with the excitement of capturing the town rather than the completeness of the victory. Without the charge’s success, however, Allenby’s expedition could have ended in disaster. Even after the months of preparation, deception, and training, the attack came dangerously close to failure and military disaster.

The EEF’s use of cavalry brought success in the battle of Beersheba. Rather than using the cavalry as a reconnaissance or covering force, or holding them for pursuit, Allenby and Chauvel used them in an all-out assault on the town. Chauvel’s decision to use the Light Horse for the final charge also suggested the need to adapt to the challenges

¹⁴²“Distinguished Service Order,” Australian War Memorial Collection, 6 November 1917, <http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/records/awm28/2/awm28-2-410-0013.pdf> (accessed 25 June 2012).

of combined arms in the desert. Most cavalry leaders thought along the lines of the Western Front, stating that trench warfare and machine guns negated the effectiveness of the cavalry's shock power. Furthermore, the Light Horse consisted of mounted infantrymen, designed to move rapidly to a fight, dismount—leaving their horses with their colleagues and reducing their numbers—and fighting as infantry. Chauvel used the Light Horse as cavalry at Beersheba due to their proximity to the fight while the Yeomanry division of regular cavalry had dispersed to avoid air attacks.¹⁴³ The charge illustrates the EEF's ability to adapt to the situation at hand in the field of combined arms. A dismounted attack without heavy artillery would surely have met with disaster, so Chauvel used the mounted infantry he had available. Allenby's reliance on his subordinates and their initiative proved a key factor in the capture of Beersheba. Allenby pushed Chauvel for results, and rather than risk another withdrawal similar to the first battle of Gaza, Chauvel adapted to the challenge at hand by using the speed and shock of his mounted units. The use of Light Horse as cavalry was a valuable lesson for the EEF throughout the rest of the campaign.

The challenge of water in the war in Palestine played as big a part in the assault on Beersheba as in any major operation in the theater. Despite all the laborious construction of the railway and pipeline, the EEF's advance hinged on the cavalry's journey into the desert the night before the attack and their rapid and successful seizure of Beersheba's wells. Moreover, even after the EEF's lengthy preparations and reconnaissance, when the DMC entered Beersheba, they found that the wells were not adequate to support their force. Beersheba had multiple wells, but as artilleryman Antony

¹⁴³Gullet, 393.

Bluett complained, “you could not get at the water!”¹⁴⁴ The Turks had placed explosives in the wells, but they had not had time to destroy them, and the British had to spend the next day removing the explosives.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, the British engineers had to develop a pumping system to get the water out of the deep wells to distribute it effectively. Many of the horses, “who had drunk nothing since the previous day, had to remain thirsty.”¹⁴⁶

The DMC intended to get into Beersheba, water their horses, and move on to support XX Corps’ attack on Sheria, bringing enough water from Beersheba for the attack. Due to the inadequacy of Beersheba’s wells, the DMC had to go looking for more water, and Allenby had to delay the main attack.¹⁴⁷ They succeeded in their intermediate objective, but the cavalry without adequate water promised to be ineffective in the coming attack on Sheria. Even though he had captured the town of Beersheba, Allenby nearly made the same mistake that had cost Murray at the first battle of Gaza. Unlike Gaza, however, where Chetwode and Dobell had agreed to call off the attack without the knowledge that the EEF had entered the town, Allenby relied on Chauvel to conduct the attack. Chauvel had the most up to date information regarding the attack, and it remained his responsibility to decide whether to proceed with the attack or to withdraw. This trust in his divisional commanders demonstrated Allenby’s early grasp of the appropriate organization of the EEF’s mission command structure.

¹⁴⁴Bluett, 162.

¹⁴⁵Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 127.

¹⁴⁶Bluett, 162.

¹⁴⁷Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 127.

Despite the conundrum of mounted infantry at the time, the Light Horse won the day. At the same time, however, the DMC's involvement in the attack on Beersheba negated their ability to take part in the follow-on attack at Sheria. The EEF counted on the cavalry to rapidly prepare for the next phase of the assault, but the limited water at Beersheba and the need to defend Beersheba took away the cavalry's use at Sheria or their ability to pursue any retreating Turkish forces. If the cavalry's mission after Beersheba tasked them to pursue or to cut off the enemy retreat, they had wasted their mobility and speed by seizing Beersheba first. The plan to destroy the Turkish armies relied on the cavalry, but as the fighting at Tel es Saba and Beersheba exhausted the men and horses so much, they proved ineffective in cutting off the enemy army.

Finally, the EEF's communications and ability to update information in the Gaza-Beersheba offensive warrants some discussion. If nothing else, it far outperformed the disastrous network of communications at the first battle of Gaza, when the commanders of the attack did not know that their forces had captured the town. Chauvel's position overlooking Beersheba from Khashim Zanna made him aware of the progress of the battle. He spoke with Allenby via telephone throughout the day, but he made his own decisions regarding his objective. Because he could see events as they developed in front of him, Chauvel could accurately report the progress of the attack to Allenby. During the battle Allenby remained with Chetwode's force on the west side of the town, ready to give the order to assault Gaza and begin operations to attack Sheria.

Despite the challenges that the assault on Tel es Saba presented, as well as the almost desperate last-minute charge of the Light Horse and the discovery of the wells' inadequacy at Beersheba, the DMC gained the first victory in Allenby's campaign in

Palestine. Aside from being a boost to the EEF's morale, however, Beersheba was an incomplete victory. The town held the Turkish weak point, and victory there provided a means to an end, specifically the destruction of the Turkish army at Sheria. Without the water to support follow-on operations, however, the success at Beersheba did little to accomplish Allenby's overall mission.

Allenby had taken steps to overcome some of the difficulties that mission command presented, but he did not overcome them comprehensively. First, he had not overcome the difficulty of water. Allenby only avoided it with a bold and fortuitous charge that may well have ended in disaster. Furthermore, the mission command challenge of resources and supply would rapidly return after the victory; the DMC did not find enough water in Beersheba, and Allenby had to balance the need to supply his cavalry with the need to support his attack on Sheria. Second, he had used the cavalry for their mobility and speed in moving through the desert, but he essentially overused this ability, precluding their use in the follow-on operations, especially without enough water from Beersheba.

Allenby's force overcame one of the facets of the challenge of mission command, that of communication and updating information. Chauvel's conduct of the battle and his position overlooking the field gave him the ability to update Allenby as events unfolded. Allenby did not have to rely on piecemeal and uncertain reports filtering in from his subordinates; he could rely on Chauvel's view of the battlefield for an accurate assessment of the progress of the battle. However, the limited conquest of the other aspects of mission command caused the incomplete victory of Beersheba. Of course, the assault was a shaping operation for the main attack on Sheria, but the troubles the EEF

experienced in this first step of their offensive shaped their later inability to destroy the Turkish army.

Finally, Allenby had limited success in facing the mission command challenge of preparation and organization with his series of deceptions, reorganization, and training for the offensive. The meticulous preparation for the attack ended in capturing the town, but Allenby had focused so much of his efforts on Beersheba that the drive to seize the wells resulted in impeding his chance to defeat the Turks at Sheria. Although it ended in success, the attack on Beersheba achieved limited success along the road to Allenby's overall mission of defeating the Turkish army.

Third Battle of Gaza

At the other end of the Turkish lines was the EEF's old nemesis, the fortified town of Gaza. General Edward Bulfin's XXI Corps bombarded Gaza as part of the deception in the attack on Beersheba in order to lead the Turks into believing that the main attack would come at Gaza. The British did not need to take Gaza, only convince the Turks to reinforce their garrison there and not send any reinforcements to Beersheba. The EEF captured Gaza on their third attempt, causing a major break in the Turkish line. However, the Turkish army retreated along the coast to the north, and the British lost their chance to prevent the enemy's escape. Like Beersheba, despite the capture of Gaza, the victory was a limited success, as the Turkish forces retreated and escaped destruction. Also similar to Beersheba, Allenby overcame various mission command challenges, but as the Turkish army moved north, leaving determined rearguards to protect their movement, Allenby and the EEF would face them again.

The victory at Beersheba was the first shaping operation toward the main effort of destroying the Turkish army at Sheria. Victory at Gaza, the second shaping operation, would allow the EEF the freedom to approach Sheria from east and west and to cut off the Turkish army's retreat from their strong point.¹⁴⁸ While Chetwode's XXI Corps and Chauvel's DMC attacked Beersheba with the intention of quickly advancing on Sheria, Bulfin's XXI Corps attacked Gaza.¹⁴⁹ As part of the ruse to convince the Turkish defenders that the EEF aimed their main attack at Gaza, Bulfin began an artillery bombardment against Gaza on 27 October. He continued the bombardment along with several Royal Navy ships as the attack on Beersheba approached.¹⁵⁰ The bombardment and deception would draw reinforcements away from the main force at Sheria, preventing them from relieving the Turkish forces at Beersheba.¹⁵¹

The preparation involved in this two-pronged attack created another challenge for Allenby and his generals. Once the right wing of the attack succeeded at Beersheba, XXI Corps would begin their assault on Gaza. The need to take Beersheba's wells quickly meant that almost all of the EEF's cavalry had to join the DMC attack from the desert east of the town, leaving very little cavalry to cover the flank or to assist in the attack on Gaza. Furthermore, Allenby could not allow Bulfin's force to attack until he ascertained that Beersheba's wells were adequate for Chetwode and Chauvel to advance on Sheria. After he received mistaken initial reports that the wells were suitable for his follow-on

¹⁴⁸Falls, *Military Operations*, 1:17-18.

¹⁴⁹Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 102.

¹⁵⁰Falls, *Military Operations*, 1:28.

¹⁵¹Lock, 55.

attack, Allenby ordered the attack on the Turkish left for 3 November, which meant that Bulfin must attack Gaza on 2 November.¹⁵² Allenby relied on Bulfin to coordinate the attack, remaining with Chetwode's force for the main effort.

Allenby's mission command challenges included the need to prioritize resources and supplies, and that challenge exemplified itself in the water difficulty. However, water and resources posed less of a problem at Gaza than it did in the previous attacks. The railway and pipeline had advanced far enough to support the British trenches that ran from the coast to Gamli.¹⁵³ Bulfin had more ammunition for his artillery due to the railway. Furthermore, the artillery barrage, increasing in strength since 27 October, had reduced the defenses at Gaza.¹⁵⁴ This abundance of resources contributed to the EEF capturing Gaza in their third attempt.

The plan for the attack struck a different tone than Murray's two attempts. While Murray had focused on the strong point at Ali Muntar and the "Labyrinth" on the eastern approaches to the town, Bulfin's attack would focus on Umbrella Hill and Sheik Hasan to the west, near the coast. The soft sand dunes on the west promised very difficult movement, so the troops advanced during the night to cover their movement from the Turkish gunners defending these positions.¹⁵⁵ Due to the strong defenses, but also due in large part to the availability of resources, Bulfin did not attempt to take the town in one day. Instead, he advanced on his objectives in stages. The objectives consisted of the

¹⁵²Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 127.

¹⁵³Lock, 51.

¹⁵⁴Falls, *Military Operations*, 1:10.

¹⁵⁵Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 128.

Turkish defensive positions at Umbrella Hill and Sheikh Hasan rather than the town itself.¹⁵⁶ Once the initial advance had taken Umbrella Hill, XXI paused for four hours to secure their gains, after which they attacked Sheikh Hasan.¹⁵⁷

When the EEF under Murray had fought at Gaza, they captured several of the defenders' defensive positions, but they could not hold onto them due to Turkish counterattacks or the need to get water to their troops and horses. With the railway and pipeline supporting the advance, timing no longer constrained the EEF, and they could concentrate on holding their gains. Murray's painstaking and laborious construction of the railway and pipeline had laid the logistical foundations for Allenby's success at the third battle of Gaza.¹⁵⁸ Without the assurance of supplies and water, the attack might well have failed a third time.

Once XXI Corps had secured their positions on Umbrella Hill and Sheikh Hasan, they continued their bombardment on the town itself. Having advanced beyond several outposts and defeating several Turkish counterattacks between 2 November and 6 November, the EEF planned a large scale attack on the town, but as they approached the town on the night of the 7th, according to Allenby's account of the EEF advance, "the enemy was found to be gone," having "retired during the night."¹⁵⁹ Gaza's defenders pulled out of the town to the north and east, leaving a rearguard at Beit Hanun and

¹⁵⁶Pirie-Gordon et al., 3-4.

¹⁵⁷Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 129.

¹⁵⁸Bruce, 265.

¹⁵⁹Pirie-Gordon et al., 5.

Atawine.¹⁶⁰ XXI Corps advanced through the town, engaging the Turks defending Ali Muntar, but the rearguard and the lack of sufficient cavalry prevented any pursuit of the retreating forces.¹⁶¹

The third attack on Gaza achieved its objectives of fixing the garrison from reinforcing Turkish positions at Sheria or Beersheba, and the town fell, opening up the road to the north and east. The attack exhibited a Western Front style of fighting, consisting of an infantry advance preceded and supported by an artillery barrage. It proved successful in no small part due to the availability of water and ammunition from the railway and pipeline built up to the Wadi Ghazze, and, as a matter of morale, the EEF finally captured the town after three attempts over nine months that cost them thousands of lives. Allenby's force altered the plan in favor of attacking Beersheba, learning from the first two attempts under Murray's command. They did not overextend themselves at Gaza, taking objectives in stages and following up with artillery support for infantry attacks.

Like Beersheba, however, the third battle of Gaza was an incomplete victory for the EEF. The large Turkish force withdrew from the town, and the British could not pursue or destroy a large portion of the enemy as they had intended. While the search for water occupied the DMC in the east, XXI corps could not effectively pursue their retreating enemy along the coastal plain. The EEF took Gaza with adequate preparation and planning, the pipeline provided enough water for the attack, artillery combined with infantry prevented the Turks from defeating the attack, and communication within XXI

¹⁶⁰Lock, 58.

¹⁶¹Bluett, 167.

corps as well as with GHQ proved effective. Besides the victory to British morale, however, the victory at Gaza had not accomplished Allenby's mission. Allenby had overcome many of the mission command challenges, but overcoming the challenges in another shaping operation did not ensure a complete success.

Despite the success of the attack, however, Allenby's mission command challenges still remained. The nearby pipeline enabled the victory, but it would not support a pursuit. The railway and pipeline took a long time to build, and once the EEF advanced beyond Gaza, the difficulty of supplying an advancing army would return. Additionally, the lack of available cavalry prevented an exploitation of the victory. The EEF had gained the key town standing in the way of their advance further into Palestine, but the Turkish army was still in fighting form.

Conclusion: False Success

Allenby's arrival in the Middle East had a dramatic effect on the men and the fighting in the Palestine campaign. He regained the offensive initiative against the Turks and drove them out of their seemingly impenetrable stronghold at Gaza and broken open their defenses along the Gaza-Beersheba line. He challenged the desert and deceived the enemy with remarkable feats of maneuver combined with a dashing cavalry charge. Under his command the EEF reminded the British people and government that they could defeat the enemy. However, he did not achieve a complete success, since the enemy escaped to pose a threat to Allenby's further advance into Jerusalem. His mission was to attack the Turkish army and capture Jerusalem. More than that, the War Office wanted him to force Turkey out of the war, and his means of doing that required that he destroy their army in Palestine. The Gaza-Beersheba offensive made up the initial step in this

mission, but with the escape of the Turkish army to continue their defense of Palestine, Allenby had to prepare to fight them again.

The victory at Beersheba often gains high praise and has made its way into the rare success stories of the war. This success sometimes overshadows the underlying fact that it was a small step in a larger operation, and it nearly failed. The Australian Light Horse charge at the end of the day may have reminded soldiers and scholars of the excitement and dash of rushing cavalry charges, but the charge was a desperate attempt to avoid the disaster that might have ensued because of the lack of water. The attack nearly failed, and without the success of the charge, the entire operation would have failed. Furthermore, Beersheba was a means to an end. Allenby struck at the Turkish weak point in an effort to gain a foothold from which to attack the main enemy force. The DMC captured most of the Turkish garrison at Beersheba, but it was a small garrison; most of the enemy was either at Gaza or Sheria.

At the third battle of Gaza, the EEF under Allenby finally gained the town after the EEF had expended so many men and resources. Like Beersheba, Gaza was another shaping operation for the main attack at Sheria. Unlike Beersheba, however, XXI Corps did not capture the Turkish garrison; they withdrew during the night, leaving the town in the hands of the British but surviving to fight later in the campaign. As the Turkish defenders retreated, Bulfin did not have sufficient cavalry for pursuit, as they searched for water in the aftermath of the Beersheba operation. Both battles drove the enemy off his lines of defense and gained the British people confidence in the war. But mission command difficulties experienced in both battles kept the EEF from achieving their follow-on objective of cutting the Turkish army off at Sheria. Both Beersheba and Gaza

taken alone were victories, but successes at Gaza and Beersheba were not enough.

Allenby needed to leverage their victories to cut off the enemy retreat. As such, they were minor victories in the campaign, although they are generally hailed as great sweeping defeats of the Turks.

These minor victories should not suggest that Allenby did not partially overcome the challenges of the Palestine Front. Allenby's EEF displayed many measures of overcoming the mission command challenges in their victories at Gaza and Beersheba. Their preparation and coordination of the attacks captured two vital objectives in the Turkish defenses. The cavalry at Beersheba won the day, and they had temporarily overcome the obstacle of water. The positioning of key leaders at the right place at the right time had overcome the difficulty of communication.

More important than the challenges they had overcome are the lessons that the EEF observed as a result of the Gaza and Beersheba offensive. The lengthy preparations leading up to the attack paid off, and the organization of the three Corps under Allenby's control limited the mission command problems that Chetwode and Dobell had faced at the first battle of Gaza. In the factor of combined arms, Allenby learned that while cavalry was an effective and mobile force, mounted troops still had their limitations. Using the cavalry as the main striking force at Beersheba may have achieved victory, but the horses still depended on water, and they could only travel so far and so fast without it. Even though the British had captured Beersheba and its wells, they had not overcome the water problem. Chauvel's cavalry could not move out of Beersheba to engage the main Ottoman army at Sheria as they did not find enough water to sustain an immediate attack

One must also note that Allenby did not achieve the victories at Beersheba and Gaza by himself. In addition to his British, Indian, Australian, and New Zealand soldiers, Allenby had the support of capable and effective leaders who had been fighting the war in Palestine. Not only did they know the terrain and the enemy, but they showed themselves worthy of Allenby's confidence. Allenby supported Chetwode's plan upon his arrival, agreeing to shift the focus away from the enemy's strong point. He trusted Chauvel's initiative in sending him through the desert to attack Beersheba, knowing that Chauvel would be a long distance away and carrying out the key step to the offensive without Allenby's supervision.

At the end of the battles for Beersheba and Gaza, the EEF prepared to destroy the main Turkish force at Sheria or cut off their retreat to the north. Allenby and his force had achieved initial minor victories and temporarily overcome some of the mission command challenges of the war in Palestine. However, these challenges, like the Turkish army, were still a viable obstacle to Allenby's success.

CHAPTER 4

BREAKTHROUGH AND PURSUIT: THE TURKISH ARMY ESCAPES AGAIN

In the weeks following the EEF's victory at Beersheba, General Allenby drove the Turks out of their last defense along the Gaza-Beersheba line at Sheria and pursued them north through Palestine. He would eventually split the Turkish Seventh and Eighth armies. He captured Jerusalem in December, giving Lloyd George his Christmas present. In spite of his best efforts to intercept the retreating army, however, Allenby would miss several opportunities to defeat the enemy by destroying the Turkish armies before they reestablished a coherent defense. Instead, he would chase them to the north, engaging their rearguards as the main army retreated. The challenges that had caused problems in the initial phase of the Palestine campaign, such as the preparation, combined arms, and water, returned at the battle of Sheria, the pursuit north, and the capture of Jerusalem. Allenby learned lessons and adapted to the challenges of the campaign, but he nevertheless fell short of destroying the Turkish army, even though he drove them off their strong defensive line and captured the holy city. More importantly, he did not change his fighting style or tactics in an attempt to crush the enemy armies.

The characteristics of mission command in Allenby's Palestine campaign include the preparation and organization of forces, combined arms tactics against the enemy, the prioritization and distribution of resources, and the communication and updating of information. This chapter will apply these aspects of mission command to the battle at Sheria and the Turkish counterattack at Khuweilfeh, the pursuit of the Turkish army, and the capture of Junction Station and Jerusalem.

Several factors delayed the envelopment of the Turkish army and prevented Allenby from destroying them. First, the inadequate water at Beersheba caused a delay in attacking Sheria since the EEF had to develop the city's wells and search for other sources. The mission command aspect of the prioritization of resources never affected the EEF's advance so much as during the assault on Sheria and the pursuit north. Second, the Turkish rearguards throughout the area, especially their countermove in the Judean hills at Tel el Khuweilfeh, prevented the DMC from moving freely around the Turkish flank to envelop their main army and prevent its escape. These Turkish movements caused delays and dispersal of Allenby's troops so the British forces could not ensnare their prey in a grand pincer movement. The difficulty in transporting water and ammunition to the EEF troops in pursuit of the retreating Turks aggravated the delays. Since the pursuing British forces advanced faster than the supply trains could keep up, the pursuit seldom had enough ammunition or water to successfully destroy the retreating forces.

Third, after the battle of Sheria, Allenby's campaign became a war of mobility rather than a static fight against an entrenched enemy fortification. Even though he learned to fight as a cavalry officer, Allenby found that the war of mobility and pursuit a different entity than he might have anticipated. The static nature of the war up to this point generally brought with it the luxury of ignoring passing supplies far ahead to advancing columns of troops, risking overextension.

While Western Front battles and the early stage of the Palestine campaign exhibited a fight in a predetermined location that a general's staff could prepare for, the pursuit posed different problems. At Gaza, Beersheba, and Sheria, Allenby knew the location of the enemy and could plan for the attack, including the use of cavalry and the

arrangement of supplies and water for his troops. As the Turks retreated, however, the war of mobility altered Allenby's challenges. He now had to pursue the Turks across highly difficult terrain. The pursuit strained his slow moving artillery, supply lines, and railroad. During the pursuit, Allenby had to plan as the enemy retreated, adapting to the mission command challenge of preparation as events unfolded, as well as the resource demands that the Turkish retreat placed on his supply lines. He would also face the difficulty of incorporating the capabilities his exhausted and resource-hungry cavalry with the slow moving infantry and artillery. Cavalry alone might catch the enemy, but they required infantry and artillery support to successfully engage the stubborn and effective Turkish rearguards. He would add to these challenges the issue of communication and control in a dispersed army attempting to exploit their advantage over a retreating but fierce enemy force.

This chapter will discuss the phase of the campaign that includes the battle at Sheria, the pursuit of the Turkish army, and the capture of Jerusalem. It will argue that Allenby already began learning and adapting to the mission command challenges of the war in Palestine. However, despite driving the Turks from their defensive line, he once again did not comprehensively defeat them as he had planned.

Beyond Beersheba: Sheria and Khuweilfeh

The DMC captured Beersheba and began their preparations to support General Chetwode's XX Corps as it attacked the Turkish main force at Sheria. The preparations included the establishment of pumping and distribution systems for the water supply at Beersheba. When they found the water supply inadequate and difficult to distribute, the DMC found they had to go into the hills surrounding Beersheba in search of water.

Meanwhile, XX corps prepared to attack Sheria. Chronologically, the Sheria and Khuweilfeh actions took place during the bombardment and initial assault on Gaza. Generals Allenby and Chetwode had anticipated that they must not begin the assault on Gaza or Sheria until they had taken the time to assess the water situation in Beersheba, but the delay proved longer and more costly than Allenby's plan had dictated. Allenby targeted Tel esh Sheria, the major Turkish administrative and logistic center for the Gaza-Beersheba defensive line. A formidable system of trenches and barbed wire defended by machine guns and artillery ran for four miles along Kauwukah, in front of the Sheria position.¹⁶² XX Corps planned for the 74th, 60th, and 53rd Divisions to defeat the Turks at these positions while the DMC rushed past the Turkish strongpoints to secure the water sources at Huj and Jemmameh.¹⁶³ Allenby planned not only to secure the water and seize Sheria, Huj, and Jemmameh, but he also intended to deny the Turkish ability to withdraw by cutting off their retreat with his cavalry. The DMC would strike north to seize the water supplies, but their larger purpose was to cut off the enemy retreat and hold the enemy until the infantry could push far enough north to destroy the Turkish army.¹⁶⁴

Allenby realized "the water and transport difficulties were found to be greater than anticipated," and he sent General Chauvel's ANZAC Division north along the road towards Hebron to search.¹⁶⁵ The EEF began to realize the severity of the water situation as the British engineers struggled to establish an efficient system for the water at

¹⁶²Grainger, 134.

¹⁶³Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 135.

¹⁶⁴Bruce, 141.

¹⁶⁵Pirie-Gordon et al., 4.

Beersheba due to the congestion in the city. One soldier noted, “Seemingly every horse in the Desert Mounted Corps was at Beersheba for water. . . . The engineers, in an effort to cope with the rush, set a time limit for each unit. This being much too short . . . many animals got no water at all.”¹⁶⁶ Since Beersheba was in the middle of the desert and so far from the British railway and pipeline, the resources problem rapidly became critical as Allenby’s forces struggled to supply their troops adequately for the follow-on attack on Sheria in a timely fashion. Cavalry units could not operate out of Beersheba for longer than 24 hours without returning to the city to water their horses amidst the confusion of the conquered town.¹⁶⁷ Allenby had taken months to prepare for the Gaza-Beersheba offensive, but as conditions changed, he had to plan on the move in a short amount of time and develop a plan that his water and resource situation drove.

The water situation in Beersheba had two results. First, Chetwode and Chauvel realized they must delay their attack on Sheria. Chetwode sent a message to Allenby, stating “General Chauvel and myself, after closest consultation, have decided with great reluctance that, owing to water difficulties and thirst of men, postponement till 6th November is inevitable.”¹⁶⁸ Although Allenby hated to delay as it would allow the Turks a chance to reinforce their positions and improve their defenses, he consented to his subordinate commanders’ recommendations.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶Terry Kinloch, *Devils on Horses: In the Words of the ANZACs in the Middle East 1916-19* (Auckland, New Zealand: Exisle Publishing, 2007), 211.

¹⁶⁷Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 132.

¹⁶⁸Falls, *Military Operations*, 1:88.

¹⁶⁹Wavell, *Allenby, A Study in Greatness*, 216.

As the DMC moved more troops toward Hebron searching for water, the Turks responded by pulling three divisions out of the Sheria defenses and sending them to defend the Hebron road in order to prevent the EEF's movement towards Jerusalem.¹⁷⁰ Whether the Turks intended to defend Jerusalem or drive the EEF back to Beersheba, the fighting around Tel el Khuweilfeh proved a fierce contest. The delay of the Sheria attack and the Turkish counterstroke at Tel el Khuweilfeh aggravated all of Allenby's mission command challenges. The supposed Turkish counterattack towards Beersheba forced Allenby to reorganize his divisions and re-plan the attack on Sheria. The water situation and shortage of transport to advancing units proved to be a main challenge and forced Allenby to prioritize resources to his units. The resource situation further affected Allenby's ability to operate effectively in using the different types of units in his army. As stated in the War Diary of the Australian Mounted division on 3 November, "Water question has become exceedingly acute and men and horses are feeling the shortage."¹⁷¹ The cavalry could not operate effectively in mass due to the water problem, limiting their use as Allenby's exploitation force.

In response to the fighting on Tel el Khuweilfeh, Allenby reorganized XX Corps and the DMC, sending the 53rd division to reinforce the cavalry along the Hebron road and pulling the 10th division out of reserve to fight at Sheria.¹⁷² The main effort remained

¹⁷⁰Gullet, 413.

¹⁷¹General Staff, Headquarters, Australian Mounted Division, "Australian Imperial Force Unit War Diaries: Formation Headquarters," Australian War Memorial Collection, Item Number AWM4 1/58/5, November 1917, <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/records/awm4/1/58/awm4-1-58-5.pdf> (accessed 7 July 2012), 6.

¹⁷²Kinloch, 210.

the attack on Sheria, but the Turkish army had already reorganized their forces to defend against what they believed to be the British main attack up the Hebron road.¹⁷³ Three Ottoman divisions fought the EEF at Khuweilfeh, and Turkish leaders sent reinforcements to Gaza in response to Bulfin's XXI Corps attack. This Turkish dispersal left Sheria weaker than Allenby had anticipated and contributed to the British victory there.¹⁷⁴ However, like the Turks, the EEF had also redistributed its forces and spread the cavalry across the region between Sheria and the Judean Hills. When Chetwode eventually captured Sheria, the cavalry could not exploit the victory in large enough numbers to effectively cut off or defeat the retreating Turkish army.

While Chetwode's force stood ready for the attack on 6 November, Allenby planned for the 53rd to cover the attack from the Northeast, leaving the DMC to defend against the Turks at Khuweilfeh.¹⁷⁵ Given the exhaustion of the cavalry, however, and their inability to stay in the fight for more than 24 hours without water, General S. F. Mott of the 53rd division recommended that his infantry attack in the hills instead of just the cavalry.¹⁷⁶ Allenby and Chauvel met with Mott at his HQ north of Beersheba and agreed to his recommendation.

One must note with interest that in an era of warfare where communication by telephone and telegraph came into being, Allenby made a point of often visiting his corps and divisional commanders in their HQ rather than rely on technology. The general

¹⁷³Grainger, 139.

¹⁷⁴Kinloch, 212.

¹⁷⁵Grainger, 134.

¹⁷⁶Falls, *Military Operations*, 1:94.

failure of communication in a breakthrough on a Western Front battlefield, not to mention the disaster at the first battle of Gaza, may have influenced Allenby's need to speak to his commanders in person. Even with telegraph wires strung and telephones operating out of his GHQ, Allenby still traveled in his armored car to discuss the coming battles with Chetwode, Chauvel, and Mott. As battles such as the assault on Beersheba progressed, Allenby allowed his subordinates to conduct the fighting, relying on telephones to update the situation at GHQ. In preparations for coming battles, however, Allenby made a point of visiting his generals and viewing the ground over which his men would fight. This control aspect of mission command involves not only the communication of information, but the ability to accurately update the commander on the situation. Allenby took the time to discuss the situation with his subordinates during the key moments of the operations.

The plan for the Sheria operation involved more complicated maneuvers even than the Beersheba attack. Allenby and his generals took several months to plan for the attack on Beersheba, and while the Sheria attack had started as a part of the Gaza-Beersheba offensive, it developed out of the changing situation once the fighting started. Although he had just won what the British saw as a major victory, the crucial fight had yet to occur. The status of the EEF's resources included the water situation as well as the difficult transport situation, which affected Allenby's ability to combine his different types of units. Water shortages limited the effectiveness of the cavalry, and transport difficulties in the rugged terrain prohibited the widespread use of artillery to support the EEF's fighting due to the difficulty in moving guns up to cover a cavalry attack.

The attack on Sheria included four main parts. The 53rd division would attack Khuweilfeh as a diversion as well as to guard the flank of XX corps' attack.¹⁷⁷ The 60th and 10th divisions would attack the Kauwukah defenses around Sheria, and the 74th division would stand by to advance on Sheria itself.¹⁷⁸ Meanwhile, Bulfin's XXI Corps had continued to attack Gaza, bombing the city from the recently seized positions of Umbrella Hill and Sheikh Hasan. Bulfin would attack Gaza on the night of 6 November to drive the Turks out of their defenses as the cavalry broke through the Sheria position.¹⁷⁹ Once Chetwode's infantry had broken through the Kauwukah and Sheria defenses, Chauvel's cavalry would advance quickly past Sheria to seize the water sources at Huj and Jemmameh to the northwest. The DMC would push on from there and defeat the Turks as they retreated from Gaza.¹⁸⁰

The assault on the Kauwukah trenches began on the morning of 6 November with an artillery barrage followed by an infantry advance that drove the Turks out of their trenches with bayonets.¹⁸¹ Operations in the Judean hills had drawn a large number of troops away from the defenses at Sheria. It may have been the case, as Major H.O. Lock of the Dorsetshire Regiment suggested: "It was this exhausting of the Turkish reserves, so early in the operations . . . that paved the way for the success of our attack on Sheria."¹⁸²

¹⁷⁷Grainger, 145.

¹⁷⁸Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 136.

¹⁷⁹Pirie-Gordon et. al., 5.

¹⁸⁰Falls, *Military Operations*, 1:107.

¹⁸¹Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 136.

¹⁸²Lock, 57.

Allenby unknowingly attacked the Turks' weak point, carrying the Kauwukah trenches by the night of 6 November.¹⁸³ The attack on Sheria became an example of an accidental victory, but Allenby could not exploit it due to his cavalry's dispersal and exhaustion. Without the Turkish reinforcements sent to Gaza and the Hebron road, the fight for Sheria would have been a much more difficult for the EEF. Like many of Allenby's victories, however, it resides in history as a victory despite his inability to comprehensively defeat the Turkish army in follow-on operations.

The 53rd division, meanwhile, along with elements of Chauvel's DMC fought a hard battle over Tel el Khuweilfeh against the Turkish 19th division, one of the enemy's finest units. Late in the afternoon of 6 November, the 53rd division and the Imperial Camel Corps gained a footing on the hills and the Turks could not drive them off with several counterattacks.¹⁸⁴ At Gaza, Bulfin prepared his corps for the assault on the town in the early morning of the 7th.

On 7 November the EEF finalized the plans for the offensive to break the Gaza-Beersheba line and began their pursuit of the Turkish Seventh and Eighth armies. As Bulfin's XXI corps entered Gaza, they found that the enemy had withdrawn in the night, leaving a stiff rearguard to the north of the city.¹⁸⁵ The inability to observe the retreat of an entire enemy army demonstrated the EEF's difficulties in communication and updating information accurately as well as the Turks' uncanny ability to establish a strategic withdrawal. Allenby's force did not have any presence behind the enemy's lines

¹⁸³Falls, *Military Operations*, 1:95.

¹⁸⁴Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 136.

¹⁸⁵Pirie-Gordon et al., 5.

when the enemy retreated from Sheria; he could not use his exhausted cavalry for reconnaissance, and he did not have adequate air power to observe the enemy's movements. The lack of situational awareness of the enemy's movements in fight at Sheria serves as another example of Allenby's difficulty in effectively combining his different types of units as well as maintaining accurate information.

Chetwode's XX Corps took Tel esh Sheria and the Hareira redoubts, forcing the general withdrawal of the Turkish defenders.¹⁸⁶ While the 53rd division had not captured Tel el Khuweilfeh, they had succeeded in preventing the Turkish reserves from reinforcing Sheria or outflanking the British attack.¹⁸⁷ The success of the battles at Beersheba, Gaza, and Sheria relied on the DMC's ability to push past the Turkish lines and cut off any retreating army. Now that the enemy was in full retreat, Allenby's cavalry had to carry out its mission, the drive through the gap in the Turkish defenses to cut off the enemy retreat.

Allenby and his staff had made thorough and bold plans for the Sheria attack, but they had to change the plan as the Ottoman forces counterattacked in the hills to the north of Beersheba. The inadequate water at Beersheba limited the range and effectiveness of the DMC. The Turkish counteractions and the water situation forced Allenby to alter the preparation and organization aspect of mission command, reacting to events as they unfolded, no matter how well he and his staff had planned the offensive. Furthermore, events after Beersheba scattered British cavalry throughout the area, dealing with the bitter fighting in the hills around Khuweilfeh, guarding the attack on Sheria, and

¹⁸⁶Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 137.

¹⁸⁷Grainger, 144.

preparing for the advance north to cut off the Turkish retreat. All the while cavalry units found that they had to search desperately for water every day. The only reliable water source remained Beersheba, and even then, the distribution process continued to limit the cavalry's ability to quickly water their horses. On one occasion, Chauvel even sent an entire brigade back to Karm, far to the south of the fighting, for water when they could have benefitted the EEF on the front lines.¹⁸⁸

The delays that Allenby faced during his offensive combined the various challenges of mission command in the Palestine campaign. As events unfolded, Allenby and his subordinates reacted to the situation, as any army must do. At the same time, however, he still had not changed his method of fighting or adapted to the challenges. He continued to advance in hopes of destroying the enemy army, but he did not have adequate water to support his cavalry, by far his most versatile unit in a mobile war. Allenby may have learned that the cavalry could land a fatal blow on the enemy, but as yet he had not granted the DMC the opportunity to deliver it.

Pursuit to Jerusalem

On 7 November the British cavalry prepared to exploit the breach in the Turkish line once defenses at Sheria and Hareira fell. The breakthrough from Sheria meant that the DMC could rush through the gap and cut off the Turkish retreat from Gaza that Bulfin's corps would force on the morning of the 7th. Chauvel prepared to rush his cavalry north to secure the water sources at Jemmameh and Huj before proceeding on to cut off the retreat. The Turks retreated from Gaza, however, on night of 6 to 7 November,

¹⁸⁸Falls, *Military Operations*, 1:10.

leaving the DMC with the task of pursuing a retreating army rather than cut it off.¹⁸⁹ The ideal result would have the DMC fighting the Turks from the North while the infantry pushed them from the South. However, the difficulty in pursuit came from the DMC's inability to drive past the enemy defenses in mass, leaving the entire EEF driving north in the face of stiff Turkish rearguards.

Allenby's staff officer and biographer, Sir Archibald Wavell, who would gain fame in the Second World War, pointed out the critical difference between the ideal exploitation of retreating enemy by cavalry and pursuit. The best method of destroying an a retreating enemy was to cut off their retreat before they could escape. In such a scenario, the cavalry should strike at the head of the army to cut off their line of retreat at the best time and place in order to hold the enemy in place until the infantry arrived to finish the job.¹⁹⁰ In a pursuit, on the other hand, the retreating force falls back on its defenses and supply lines, growing stronger every step that the pursuit force does not overtake them.¹⁹¹ Furthermore, as Chetwode had warned in his plan for the Gaza-Beersheba offensive, "every mile he [the enemy] goes back, helps his supply and decreases his water difficulties."¹⁹² Chetwode cautioned that the EEF would outrun its resources until they could break themselves of their reliance on the railway, stating that "We shall constantly be obliged to come to a full stop, giving him time to reorganize."¹⁹³

¹⁸⁹Falls, *Military Operations*, 1:107.

¹⁹⁰Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 142.

¹⁹¹Pirie-Gordon et al., 217.

¹⁹²Gullet, 346.

¹⁹³*Ibid.*, 347.

Chetwode's original appreciation highlighted the risk of allowing the Turks to escape the pincer movement, and this risk evolved into the very problem that the EEF encountered. The Turkish army withdrew from Sheria and Gaza before the DMC had the ability to cut them off. This failure to intercept the Turkish retreat further typified Allenby's incomplete victories. The enemy may have retreated from their strong defensive line, but they would withdraw to fight the EEF again.

The EEF's pursuit of the Turkish Seventh and Eighth armies north into Palestine made up the next stage of the campaign. In theory, with the Gaza-Beersheba line broken, the EEF might easily destroy the enemy army as it retreated, eliminating any Turkish presence in Palestine and knocking the Ottoman Empire out of the war. However, due to the various delays and difficulties in the Gaza-Beersheba offensive, which included the engagements at Sheria and Khuweilfeh, the Turks would escape the British pincer movement and continue to fight. Allenby's challenges in the pursuit changed from static warfare to a fight of mobility, using cavalry and infantry maneuver across the countryside to fight the enemy. Whereas the battles at Gaza, Beersheba, and Sheria had been battles against a static and well established target, the engagements that the EEF fought against the Turkish forces in the pursuit phase of the campaign brought a different set of challenges. Allenby would most likely have anticipated the war of mobility in his planning, but his plan called for the interception of the retreating enemy, not pursuit. The key to victory required the combined arms of the infantry and the DMC's exploitation of the breakthrough. However, the DMC could not force their way through the small gap in the Turkish lines with enough mass or infantry support to prove effective in the pursuit.

Additionally, the resource and transportation issues would challenge Allenby's ability to use his cavalry effectively without outstretching his infantry, artillery, and supply lines.

The Turkish moves against the EEF had scattered the DMC all over the area in which the EEF operated. Chauvel had gone to Beersheba with nine cavalry brigades, but as they prepared to rush through the gap in the Turkish defenses, he could only send four brigades. The rest had responded to Turkish movements on Khuweilfeh or been assigned to support infantry units for the assault on Sheria.¹⁹⁴ Furthermore, the four brigades (two from the ANZAC division and two from the Australian division) had to cross at different parts of the battlefield. The four brigades rushing through the gap in the Turkish line might have created a massed effect and had a greater chance of exploitation.¹⁹⁵ The two ANZAC brigades successfully moved past Sheria and continued on to the pursuit, but the two Australian brigades met tough Turkish opposition, and they joined the 60th division in the fighting around Sheria.¹⁹⁶ Allenby's plan to cut off two retreating Turkish armies relied on only two brigades of less than one thousand men and horses, all of them tired and thirsty.¹⁹⁷ This incident exemplified Allenby's difficulty in combined arms. His cavalry had the mobility and speed, but they could not hope to successfully engage the enemy with so few numbers, nor could they hope to hold the enemy while their infantry followed them to apply the main blow.

¹⁹⁴Kinloch, 213.

¹⁹⁵Falls, *Military Operations*, 1:114-115.

¹⁹⁶Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 144.

¹⁹⁷Kinloch, 215.

As General Chaytor's ANZAC brigades drove past Sheria, Bulfin's XXI Corps entered Gaza. They found the city abandoned, and they pressed on against the Turkish rearguard. Between the cavalry advancing northeast from Sheria and Bulfin's infantry moving northwest through Gaza, the EEF formed a large pincer to trap the retreating Turkish army.¹⁹⁸ As scattered and reduced in numbers as Allenby's cavalry was, this encirclement still went according to Allenby's original plan to defeat the Ottoman army. Yet the Turks' secret withdrawal from Gaza took away Allenby's chances of destroying the enemy army as he had intended. Khuweilfeh had disrupted the main British advance, and inadequate water had delayed it, but the Turkish retreat from Gaza precluded the British cutting them off before they could retreat. Even as the British chased the enemy out of Gaza, they met fierce Turkish rearguards. Bulfin's troops captured considerable prisoners and artillery pieces, but "no large formed body of the enemy was cut off. The Turkish rearguards fought stubbornly and offered considerable opposition."¹⁹⁹ The Turks had escaped the EEF's pincer movement. Allenby had to pursue the retreating army against stiff rearguards in an attempt to destroy as many of them as possible before they could establish an effective defense.

Although the victories gained praise and acclaim in London, Allenby faced a formidable army and the difficult situation of pursuing it deep into Palestine and far away from the British supply lines. One of the most critical aspects of Allenby's planning and preparation required the cavalry to cut off the Turkish retreat. Because of the factors that delayed him after the capture of Beersheba, Allenby had to adjust his plan, but he did not

¹⁹⁸Grainger, 151.

¹⁹⁹Lock, 63.

change his tactics until the Megiddo offensive in 1918. He pursued the enemy by sending his cavalry forward into Ottoman held territory, following with the slow moving infantry and artillery, and desperately trying to transport resources to his troops. His communications and ability to update information proved difficult with the rapid movement of large units in a constantly changing environment. Finally, the resources and supply part of mission command developed into one of Allenby's larger problems during the pursuit.

The pursuit phase of the campaign covers the breakthrough at Sheria and Gaza on 7 November until the capture on Junction Station on 16 November. In this phase the EEF advanced from the Gaza-Beersheba line as far north as Ramleh and Jaffa, and they stood ready to advance on Jerusalem.²⁰⁰ Rather than discuss in detail the numerous individual engagements during the pursuit, this paper will examine the overall pursuit and the difficulties that Allenby faced, highlighting battles as appropriate. Allenby's troops fought the Turks at Huj, Jemmameh, Jebaliye, El Kustineh, Qatra, El Maghar, Mesmiyeh, and Junction Station, and captured Ramleh, Ludd, and Jaffa with little opposition.²⁰¹ If one views the measure of Allenby's success as territory gained and enemy driven out of their defenses, the advance was an unqualified success. However, as Allenby wanted to destroy the enemy armies and knock the Ottoman Empire out of the war, his territorial gains and battlefield successes did not amount to an overall victory.

During the pursuit, as in every other operation, the supply and transportation piece of mission command would play a key role in the Turkish army's escape. Defeating the

²⁰⁰Bruce, 152.

²⁰¹Lock, 68-69.

enemy at Gaza and Sheria did not suffice. The EEF had to advance far beyond where their supply lines and railways could reach, and that meant using horses, camels, and trucks for transport. Due to the rocky and impassable roads, the majority of transport relied on horses and camels supplied and managed by Egyptian laborers (who also had to be fed and watered during the advance). Major Lock described camel columns miles long and thousands of Egyptian Labour Corps workers working on improving the roads.²⁰² Artilleryman Bluett discussed the difficulty of transport with camels, but noted that since many troops were in such difficult locations, camels could only reach them “over every imaginable kind of road but a good one.”²⁰³ Neither Lock nor Bluett seems to have any love for their camel transport, as when Lock notes that they were “inconsiderate” and decided to die in the most inconvenient places.²⁰⁴ Or when Bluett described their stubbornness: “Flogging has little effect on him [the camel] and profanity none whatever; violence is necessary.”²⁰⁵ Although camels exhibited such tendencies, they provided most of the supplies for the troops at the front. Camels could carry more than horses and they needed less water than horses, so the transport animals actually helped alleviate some of Allenby’s mission command challenge of supplying his troops.

Allenby had to balance what the troops at the front needed with how to get it to them. All armies face a similar logistics issue. In Allenby’s case, the difficulty grew because of the distance from the main supply lines to the front as well as the rugged

²⁰²Lock, 104-105.

²⁰³Bluett, 178-179.

²⁰⁴Lock, 104.

²⁰⁵Bluett, 179.

terrain that the supply trains crossed to get to the front. He could not hope to succeed without adequate resources or the appropriate determination of which fighting units needed the resources most. If he held any of his troops back in favor of supplying a specific unit or units, he limited his fighting strength at the front. Allenby had reassigned most Bulfin's transport resources to Chetwode for the Beersheba and Sheria operations, and this reorganization affected Bulfin's ability to pursue the Turks directly out of Gaza. On 8 November elements of XX and XXI Corps met near Atawine, and Chetwode delivered most of his transport back to Bulfin's corps.²⁰⁶ The priority of resources went to Bulfin's corps, for Allenby believed it was the best choice to defeat the retreating 8th Army out of Gaza. The allocation of transport to the advance along the plain, however, immobilized Chetwode's corps.²⁰⁷ For most of the pursuit, only the two infantry divisions of Bulfin's XXI Corps could advance. Although Allenby had seven divisions of infantry, he could only supply a limited number of men at the front. Allenby intended the transport organization to benefit the units doing the fighting, but it limited the number of men that could engage the enemy. The resource aspect of mission command determined the manpower and conduct of the pursuit, as even Allenby noted that "the problem, in fact, became one of supply rather than manoeuvre."²⁰⁸

Despite the measures the EEF took to supply their troops, the logistics situation worsened. Captain O. Teichman, a Yeomanry medical officer, noted on 9 November that the "horses, which had had no water since the evening of November 7th at Sheria, now

²⁰⁶Falls, *Military Operations*, 1:111.

²⁰⁷Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 150.

²⁰⁸Pirie-Gordon et al., 6.

had to go 10 miles to reach a suitable watering place,” which incidentally turned out to be occupied by the Australian Mounted Division.²⁰⁹ The infantry suffered as well, in some cases “starting with empty water-bottles, marched thirty miles across country, with a bayonet-charge thrown in, and found perhaps a pint of water per man at the end of the day.”²¹⁰ The commander of the ANZAC Mounted Division, General Edward Chaytor, who had often demonstrated his aggressiveness, reported to Chauvel that the ANZAC Division must halt until they could water all of their horses, as they had almost reached a state of collapse.²¹¹ In consideration of the mission command variable of communication, one might ask why Allenby was unaware of the severity of the water situation. His relentless drive to defeat the enemy may have allowed him to ignore the austere conditions the horses experienced. At the same time, the situation brought Allenby’s cavalry very close to destruction, not from the enemy, but from thirst. It may have taken Chaytor’s reluctance to advance under such conditions to make Allenby realize that his horses could not continue at such a pace.

The supply lines could simply not keep up with the pursuit if the EEF hoped to defeat the Ottoman forces. The engineers worked to improve roads and construct the railway, and the Royal Navy provided some assistance by landing stores on the beaches.²¹² However, Allenby met the mission command challenge of balancing

²⁰⁹Captain O. Teichman, *The Diary of a Yeomanry M.O.* (London, UK: T. Fisher Unwin, 1921), 186.

²¹⁰Bluett, 170.

²¹¹Kinloch, 215.

²¹²Bruce, 148.

priorities of supply or pursuit. He had sacrificed fighting strength for a chance to overrun the enemy, but his two infantry divisions could not keep up with the DMC, who became more and more exhausted. In *Revolt in the Desert*, T. E. Lawrence commented on Allenby's army, referring to the "cumbersome intricacy of his infantry and cavalry, which moved only with rheumatic slowness."²¹³ During the pursuit Allenby's war of mobility brought different challenges than the previous battles. When the enemy defended a specific town or series of fortification, such as Gaza or Sheria, the EEF could focus its troops and supply lines on that location and fight in one place. As they retreated, however, the EEF faced the added challenge of supplying their constantly advancing troops. The prioritization of resources established a mission command challenge that Allenby struggled with during the pursuit, and he would have to learn to adapt to this challenge in order to comprehensively defeat the enemy.

The combined arms and communication parts of mission command prevented the EEF from destroying the retreating Turkish forces. The cavalry often outreached the infantry and artillery due to the difficult terrain and the speed of the cavalry. The cavalry intended to catch and hold the retreating enemy, but in many cases the enemy fought determined and effective rearguard actions.²¹⁴ Instead of cutting down an enemy running chaotically away, the cavalry often found themselves fighting numerically superior Turkish units that had dug in and defended themselves with artillery and machine guns. Without infantry and artillery support, the cavalry might engage the enemy but could not

²¹³Lawrence, 208.

²¹⁴Grainger, 150.

always defeat them. In some cases, such as at Huj, the cavalry rushed into action against the enemy, seizing victory, but such actions did not always produce the best results.

The cavalry charge at Huj offers another example of Allenby's army gaining a questionable victory, and it also serves as an example of the difficulty of the mission command challenge in the effective combination of different types of units. After the breakthrough at Sheria, Allenby attached General Stuart Shea's 60th infantry division to Chauvel's DMC to support the cavalry's advance.²¹⁵ As the 60th approached Huj, they saw a large body of Turks withdrawing to the north of the city. As General Shea ordered his infantry to engage them, the Turkish rearguard of infantry, artillery, and machine guns fought back.²¹⁶ Shea pressed a nearby cavalry unit, the 5th Mounted Yeomanry brigade, to attack around the Turkish flank, insisting that they attack immediately to prevent the escape of the large body of Turks retreating beyond Huj.

The Warwick and Worcestershire Yeomanry, approximately 120 conventional cavalry, armed with sabers, conducted a mounted charge against approximately 500 Turkish soldiers, supported by artillery and machine guns.²¹⁷ The cavalry went into action covered by only two machine guns and no artillery. In the process, the Yeomanry lost 26 men and 100 horses. Although the Yeomanry's charge defeated the rearguard with a famed display of shock and speed, the large Turkish force still escaped. The 60th could not press the advance as night fell and they did not have the mobility of the cavalry. Even

²¹⁵Bryan Perret, "Mounted Action, The Charges at Beersheba and Huj, Palestine, 1917," in *Impossible Victories, Ten Unlikely Battlefield Successes* (London, UK: Arms and Armour Press, 1996), 157.

²¹⁶Gullet, 442.

²¹⁷Kinloch, 215.

more significant was the toll it took on the cavalry brigade. Captain Teichman, who participated in the charge, noted that “Our little force after the charge was now scattered and very weak, on account of the heavy losses it had sustained.”²¹⁸ Despite its lasting fame, the charge did not achieve much. The EEF did not capture or destroy any significant amounts of Turkish soldiers.

The charge at Huj illustrates the effective combination of different types of units for support. Shea may have decided on the urgency of the attack given the large number of retreating Turks, but the high casualties in the Yeomanry squadrons and their inability to pursue the Turks beyond Huj limited the efficiency of the victory. The cavalry had the advantage of speed and mobility, but their high casualties due to the lack of support precluded their ability to press their advantage. It is worth noting that the DMC did not conduct any more unsupported cavalry charges against enemy defenses. Despite the laurels that the Yeomanry’s charge gained, Allenby learned that dashing cavalry charges against machine guns and infantry posed a hazard to his men if he did not support the charge with artillery and infantry.

One combined arms tool that Allenby found he could use to his advantage during the pursuit was the Royal Flying Corps (RFC). The British had finally begun to gain air superiority in Palestine due to the arrival of several Bristol fighter planes. During Beersheba, the Turks used German aircraft to bomb and strafe DMC units, but the EEF suddenly had the advantage in the air during the pursuit.²¹⁹ The RFC reported the status and position of the retreating Turks, passing direct information on enemy movement to

²¹⁸Teichman, 185.

²¹⁹Grainger, 154.

Chetwode's and Bulfin's HQs. The accurate updating of enemy information assisted the EEF in their pursuit, relying on much more effective and efficient aerial scouting than on patrols reporting their best guess as to the enemy's position.

Despite the usefulness of the RFC for reconnaissance, the EEF did not employ their aircraft for attack in conjunction with ground forces. At the time the British army used aircraft for reconnaissance and to report enemy troop positions and movements. Cavalry scouting and reconnaissance had become especially impractical on the Western Front and had largely led to an increased use of aircraft for observation.²²⁰ On some occasions, the fighters would harass and machine gun retreating troops, but for the most part, the aircraft gathered information and passed it to their HQ.²²¹ Later in the campaign, the British would learn to use aircraft to attack the enemy, but in their first experience with air superiority in Palestine, they served as reconnaissance elements.

Junction Station: 13-16 November 1917

As the DMC and Bulfin's two divisions continued their pursuit north, enemy resistance began to stiffen on 10 November north of Nahr Sukhereir as though the enemy planned to stop the retreat.²²² The EEF began to realize that they no longer faced Turkish rearguards trying to delay the pursuers, but an organized defense to prevent the British from capturing Junction Station.²²³ Junction Station served as the main Turkish supply

²²⁰Sheffield and Todman, 18.

²²¹Grainger, 154.

²²²Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 151.

²²³Lock, 66-67.

line from the north. If the EEF could capture this stronghold, they could isolate the Turkish forces in the Judean hills and Jerusalem from their supplies to the north.²²⁴ Furthermore, it would cut the two enemy armies in two; Allenby could fight the Eighth army on the coastal plain while the Seventh army waited in Jerusalem.²²⁵ Finally, Junction Station held a large railway depot that could assist the EEF's further advance north. As it was, the advancing forces operated 35 miles from the closest railhead to the south, and as discussed previously, transport had become one of Allenby's biggest difficulties.²²⁶

In an effort to plan for the attack on Junction, Allenby met with Bulfin and Chauvel to decide where to strike and where the enemy had concentrated their forces. The EEF's main challenge to capturing Junction Station lay in the towns along the approach to the station as well as the twenty miles of Turkish defenses along Wadi Surar.²²⁷ Allenby approached from multiple sides on a wide front, splitting Bulfin's corps for the attack. The 75th would advance along the right, and the 52nd along the left towards Beshshit, Qatra, and Maghar.²²⁸ Allenby recorded the strong position the Turks held along the Qatra-El Maghar line, stating that

It was here that the enemy made his most determined resistance against the turning movement directed against his right flank. The capture of this position by the 52nd Division, assisted by a most dashing charge of mounted troops, who

²²⁴Kinloch, 215.

²²⁵Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 139.

²²⁶Pirie-Gordon et al., 6.

²²⁷Bruce, 151.

²²⁸Falls, *Military Operations*, 1:164.

galloped across the plain under heavy fire and turned the enemy's position from the north, was a fine feat of arms.²²⁹

This example of the approach to Junction Station typifies the combined arms engagements that Allenby had learned to fight throughout the pursuit. No longer did cavalry attack a well-defended enemy position without artillery and infantry support. The EEF now used cavalry charges as maneuvers to outflank enemy positions. Most of the enemy defenses consisted of Turkish infantry and machine guns in small villages around Junction Station. After actions at Qatra, El Maghar, and El Meshiyeh, "enemy resistance weakened, and by the evening his forces were in retreat. Early the next morning [14 November] we occupied Junction Station."²³⁰

Again, as at Gaza and Sheria, the Turkish army escaped destruction in an overnight withdrawal and retreat. The Turkish XXII corps escaped, leaving effective rearguards to delay the British pursuit.²³¹ The DMC continued to advance, taking Ramleh and Ludd on 15 November, and Jaffa on 16 November.²³² As Allenby intended, the capture of Junction Station and its surrounding areas cut the enemy forces in two; the Seventh Army still defended Jerusalem and the Judean hills, with the Eighth along the coast north of the Auja River.²³³ This split not only divided the Turkish armies, but it left Jerusalem vulnerable. The garrison at Jerusalem now had to get their supplies by road

²²⁹Pirie-Gordon et al., 7.

²³⁰Lock, 68.

²³¹Falls, *Military Operations*, 1:171.

²³²Pirie-Gordon et al., 7.

²³³Wavell, *Allenby, A Study in Greatness*, 222.

from Nablus, 40 miles to the north, or from Amman via the Hejaz railway, which was under constant attack by Feisal's Northern Arab Army.²³⁴ Jerusalem still remained a key goal, if only for morale reasons rather than military necessity.

The EEF gained some respite from the supply and water situation upon entering Junction Station, capturing the plentiful wells and steam pumping plant used to distribute the water.²³⁵ Additionally, they found several railroad cars that they could use on the smaller gauge railway while they constructed their own railway from the south. For the first time since before Beersheba, Allenby's horses could drink sufficient water.

Allenby's determination to overrun the retreating Turks had proved strong enough to push the EEF to Junction Station to ease their supply and transport difficulties. On the other hand, he had pressed his troops, especially his cavalry, to the point of exhaustion. Like Beersheba, the victory seems to have justified his drive. He had ordered a relentless pursuit as he had done at Arras, urging his commanders not to rest when they reached their objectives, but to press on after the enemy. Wavell noted that Allenby always took good care of his men's well-being in camp, but on the march or in a battle, he "spent their endurance ruthlessly if it seemed possible to gain an advantage over the enemy."²³⁶ Because he drove the enemy before him and captured the key supply and transportation hub at Junction Station, neither his subordinates nor history saw fit to question his orders, even though they came dangerously close to disaster. At this point in his advance, he

²³⁴Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 181.

²³⁵Bruce, 151.

²³⁶Wavell, *Allenby, A Study in Greatness*, 226.

could not pause to rest, reorganize, and resupply his men as the enemy continued to retreat.

The combination of infantry and artillery support for cavalry flanking maneuvers and charges demonstrates Allenby's adapting his tactics to the lessons he had learned early in the pursuit. Allenby's mission command changes had not defeated the enemy army, but he began to learn to use different tactics. Although the Turks began a more static defense around Junction Station, the conditions of war in Palestine exhibited features of a war of mobility that did not exist on the Western Front. Lawrence observed that Allenby had come from France, with new Western Front ideas of war. However, noted Lawrence, "as a cavalryman, [he] was already half persuaded to throw up the new school, in this different world of Asia, and accompany . . . Chetwode along the worn road of manoeuvre and movement."²³⁷

Jerusalem: 17 November–11 December 1917

By 16 November the pursuit ended as the EEF focused its attention on Jerusalem. Allenby had divided the Turkish armies into two separate areas of Palestine, and his forces had traveled over 60 miles. Allenby may have wanted to pause to rest and resupply his force, but he knew that such a pause allowed the Turks to dig in and improve their defenses.²³⁸ The 52nd and 75th divisions of Bulfin's XXI Corps continued the fighting, as Chetwode's corps remained immobile without transport or the resources to support an advance. The pursuit stretched supply and communication lines very thin, and the

²³⁷Lawrence, 168.

²³⁸Bruce, 154.

soldiers grew more and more tired. Allenby saw Jerusalem and a Turkish army over the horizon, so he chose to press the attack, hoping to gain the holy city and destroy the enemy army that held it.²³⁹

Besides the problem of a tired and overextended army, the ground leading up to Jerusalem posed a challenge to the advance. The road from Junction Station supported the advance, but the plan of attack called for movement north of the town into the hills around the Nablus road as far north as Bireh.²⁴⁰ Horses could not maneuver in the rocky terrain, and difficulties in bringing up artillery further complicated the situation. The engineers continued to build the railway, but horses, camels, and trucks still had to bring most of the army's supplies forward.²⁴¹ For lack of roads, artilleryman Bluett noted, the "exasperating fact was, that all roads did not lead to Jerusalem; most of them led nowhere except over a precipice; and they were but glorified goat-tracks at best."²⁴² Allenby wrote about the ground over which his men had fought in a letter to his wife: "The rocky and mountainous country they fought over is indescribable. Guns could give little support; and the Turks were driven out by rifle and machine-gun fire, followed by the bayonet."²⁴³ In preparing for the battle the EEF leadership saw that they would have difficulty in using their mobile arm that had been so successful, and that transporting artillery for what they knew would be a difficult fight would also challenge them.

²³⁹Wavell, *Allenby, A Study in Greatness*, 222.

²⁴⁰Lock, 81.

²⁴¹Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 165.

²⁴²Bluett, 173.

²⁴³Wavell, *Allenby, A Study in Greatness*, 231.

An added concern during the approach to Jerusalem came when the winter rains began. While the rains filled pools in which riders could water their horses, the terrain quickly turned into a bog, making it even harder to cross, especially with cars and trucks.²⁴⁴ Camels suffered particularly in the cold and rain, to which they were unaccustomed, and transporters began to rely on mules and donkeys for transport.²⁴⁵ Despite knowing that he could not use the cavalry as effectively as they had earlier in the campaign, and despite the transport difficulties he anticipated, Allenby pressed the EEF forward. He did not want to allow the Turks to shore up their Jerusalem defenses when he had come so close to his prize.

Bulfin's 75th and 52nd divisions advanced toward Jerusalem between 17 and 21 November to secure the Nablus road. They captured the large rock formation of Nebi Samwil, overlooking the approach to Jerusalem. Bluett called it "the highest point in Palestine," and that due to its rockiness, "infantry in some places had to sling their rifles and pull themselves up by their hands," all the while under enemy fire.²⁴⁶ The British planned to secure El Jib, but the Turkish garrison at Jerusalem counterattacked at Nebi Samwil, and the hard pressed EEF divisions could not proceed further.²⁴⁷

The Turks defended themselves with artillery and machine guns, but the British could not support their attacks with artillery due to the difficult roads and rainy conditions. In attacking the surrounding areas of Jerusalem, Allenby had fallen back into

²⁴⁴Falls, *Military Operations*, 1:158-159.

²⁴⁵Kinloch, 237.

²⁴⁶Bluett, 176.

²⁴⁷Wavell, *Allenby, A Study in Greatness*, 226.

the rush of the earlier days of pursuit, and his infantry could not proceed without artillery fire. Also, the Yeomanry division had gone north of Jerusalem to Bireh in order to cut the enemy off from a retreat along the Nablus road. They found themselves approaching Bireh on goat tracks and encountered Turkish defenders with artillery support, who drove the Yeomanry back from their objective.²⁴⁸

Allenby noted that “it was evident that a period of preparation and organization would be necessary before an attack could be delivered in sufficient strength to drive the enemy from his positions west of the road.”²⁴⁹ Although he had urged a relentless pursuit and constantly pressed his generals for results, he recognized the importance of appropriate planning for the attack. He realized that he must bring artillery forward despite the poor tracks if he hoped to capture Jerusalem.

On 24 November Allenby discontinued further attacks in favor of reorganizing and consolidating the front lines. He might have attempted to send the beleaguered 75th and 52nd divisions back into the attack after re-planning the operation, but they had fought constantly for three weeks, and the majority of Chetwode’s corps had seen little action since Sheria.²⁵⁰ While his engineers built roads to support the transport of supplies and artillery, Allenby swapped out his infantry divisions on the front lines. The 60th and 10th divisions took over for Bulfin’s troops while the 74th division relieved the

²⁴⁸Wavell, *Allenby, A Study in Greatness*, 226.

²⁴⁹Pirie-Gordon et al., 8.

²⁵⁰Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 161.

Yeomanry division to the north, and the 53rd division approached from the south from Hebron.²⁵¹

The replacement of the two corps occurred during fierce Turkish counterattacks. However, the EEF not only held their gains, but also successfully exacted a relief in place of its troops at the front line for the coming fighting. The large scale movement of so many troops while building up the railways and roads during the rainy season may be one of Allenby's more successful feats in mission command during the campaign. In addition to the difficulty of switching out two corps of infantry and move his artillery to the front, Allenby still had to supply his troops and prepare for another attack. During this time Allenby also had to deal with the poor communications and difficulty of receiving accurate information. With the rainy season came the inability for the RFC to scout regularly, and Allenby had to rely on his front line troops in contact with the enemy for information on enemy dispositions.

Chetwode approached Jerusalem with three divisions, the 53rd, 60th, and 74th in early December. He and Allenby changed the plan of attack in order to use the only reliable road (from Junction Station) to bring up his artillery. He would send the 74th and 60th divisions to attack from the west while the 53rd attacked from the south.²⁵² While Bulfin's attack had gone to the north to cut off the Turkish retreat, the poor roads and lack of artillery during that attack had defeated the British. For the second attempt, Chetwode would use the roads that the EEF knew could support their artillery. This approach left the Turks an escape route open to the north, however. It may have been the

²⁵¹Ibid., 162-163.

²⁵²Wavell, *Allenby, A Study in Greatness*, 229.

only avenue to capture Jerusalem, but it left Allenby's army open to the same problem of the unimpeded Turkish retreat that had plagued previous advances.

The second attack on Jerusalem took place through mist and rain on 8 December. The 53rd division could not advance along the Hebron road and did not take part in the attack. The 74th and 60th divisions approached slowly, working their way through rifle and artillery fire as well as the rain.²⁵³ In the afternoon the British called off the attack since, as Major Lock reported, "Artillery support from our own guns soon became difficult, owing to the length of the advance and the difficulty of moving guns forward."²⁵⁴ The whole purpose of the attack hinged on the successful transport of the artillery up to the city over the past two weeks. Chetwode found, however, that once the fight had started, he could not move his guns forward to support the infantry's advance. Rather than pressing the attack, perhaps even calling forward some cavalry to conduct a charge, the EEF halted for the night. The plan could not rely on cavalry for this operation, but Allenby and Chetwode also understood that the infantry could not take the city alone.

On the morning of 9 December the operational pause to advance the artillery proved useless, as the EEF found that once again, "the Turks had withdrawn during the night."²⁵⁵ Allenby entered the town on foot on 11 December while the infantry formed a defensive ring around the town and fought off Turkish rearguards.²⁵⁶ After crossing nearly 80 miles and fighting numerous engagements with a determined enemy, the EEF

²⁵³Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 166.

²⁵⁴Lock, 83.

²⁵⁵Pirie-Gordon et al., 10.

²⁵⁶Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 167.

finally had their Christmas present for England. Since Beersheba the British had lost almost 19,000 casualties compared to Turkish casualties of over 28,000 as well as 12,000 prisoners.²⁵⁷ The EEF prepared to halt their advance for the winter, shore up their defenses along the Jaffa-Jerusalem line, and improve their supply and communication lines.

Conclusion: Drive or Defeat?

Sir Archibald Wavell, writing his narratives on Allenby and the war in Palestine, called the campaign “brilliant.” He stated that the threat to Baghdad was over, Turkish forces went to Palestine rather than the Western Front or Mesopotamia, and the EEF had captured Jerusalem. The Arab Revolt now had a fresh “impetus,” which also contributed to the drain on the Ottoman Empire’s resources.²⁵⁸ One must remember, however, that Wavell served on Allenby’s staff for a large part of the Palestine campaign when one considers his labeling of the campaign as “brilliant.” One must further consider the success of the campaign when weighed against Allenby’s goals and his stubborn determination to achieve them.

While the capture of Jerusalem became famous all over the world, it served as a moral victory rather than a strategic or military gain.²⁵⁹ The people of France and England saw that victory on the battlefield could actually happen, especially when compared to the trench warfare in France and Belgium. As Allenby drove the Turks

²⁵⁷Bruce, 165. Not every casualty list agrees upon the numbers. The numbers reported here are Allenby’s claim.

²⁵⁸Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 167.

²⁵⁹Falls, *Military Operations*, 1:157.

across 40 miles of desert and captured a city of religious significance, General Haig had fought the third battle of Ypres, resulting in the capture of the generally unknown city of Passchendaele.²⁶⁰ Even though the victory gained public acclaim in newspapers and in the War Office, Allenby had still not accomplished his mission. He had driven the enemy out of his defenses and captured his objective of Jerusalem, but he had not defeated the enemy army. He had pursued them beyond their defenses, but they remained a viable fighting force. A retreating army and gains in territory did not equal the victory that Allenby sought. As a result, the Ottoman Empire remained in the war. Allenby had not defeated the Turkish army; he had driven it further north to fight again.

Allenby's mission command challenges remained largely the same as those he had experienced in the attack on Beersheba and the third battle of Gaza. Preparation and organization of forces remained a critical piece of mission command, and when a plan did not take place as intended, Allenby and his generals found that they must re-plan, but they were still learning how to adapt their tactics to defeat the enemy. Water and distribution of resources proved one of the largest mission command difficulties in the battle of Sheria, the pursuit, and the capture of Jerusalem. Despite this challenge, Allenby had pushed his men forward, often endangering his chances of victory by keeping his men and horses so hungry and thirsty.

Allenby began to learn the importance of combined arms, with cavalry charges that worked best when supported by infantry and artillery, and in the use of the RFC. However, these lessons did not help him until later in the campaign, as Wavell pointed

²⁶⁰Hughes, 30.

out that “He had to wait till the following year to show how mobility could be used to its right true end, the complete destruction of the enemy armies.”²⁶¹

In addition to the lessons of combined arms, Allenby was learning how communication and updating information affected his campaign. On several occasions the Turkish armies escaped destruction in secret withdrawals during the night that the EEF could neither detect nor prevent. The withdrawal from Gaza had disrupted the plans to cut off the retreating army, and the withdrawals from Junction Station and Jerusalem had prevented his ability to fix and completely destroy the enemy. Allenby would learn to adjust his fighting style in the following year’s campaigns to apply these lessons.

²⁶¹Wavell, *Allenby, A Study in Greatness*, 219.

CHAPTER 5

COMPLETE VICTORY AT MEGIDDO

In the final phase of the Palestine campaign, Allenby gained a decisive victory over the Ottoman armies in Palestine, drawing together the experiences that the EEF had gathered by fighting the Turkish forces since 1915. At the battle of Megiddo in September 1918, Allenby adapted to the challenges of warfare in Palestine and decisively defeated and destroyed the Turkish Fourth, Seventh, and Eighth Armies, driving the Ottoman Empire out of Palestine. The fast-paced battle allowed the EEF to drive all the way to Damascus and Aleppo, leaving the Turkish fighting presence in Palestine effectively nonexistent. Allenby demonstrated his changing tactics and ability to adapt to the mission command challenges that he had faced earlier in the war. The following chapter will examine Allenby's final victory at Megiddo under the mission command aspects of preparation, combined arms, resources, and communications.

Allenby had attempted to destroy the enemy armies in the Gaza-Beersheba offensive and the pursuit north to the Jaffa-Jerusalem line, but he had thus far been unable to accomplish this task. While the British War Office praised Allenby's earlier battlefield successes in Palestine as great victories, the Megiddo campaign became the final overwhelming success that destroyed the Turkish armies in Palestine. The mission command aspects of preparation, combined arms, resources, and communication that hampered the EEF's fight with the Turkish forces in Sinai and Palestine continued through the battle of Megiddo and the EEF's final drive north to Aleppo.²⁶² Whereas

²⁶²Geographical note: the ancient ruins of Tel Megiddo (the mound of Megiddo) or in Hebrew, Har Megiddo (Armageddon) stood overlooking the village of El Lajjun.

Allenby had achieved battlefield victories over the Turks and drove them back from their defenses in the earlier phases of the campaign, he had still not gained a comprehensive victory by destroying the Turkish armies in Palestine.

At Megiddo, however, Allenby's ability to overcome the mission command challenges gained him comprehensive success. First, The extensive and meticulous preparation for the battle brought unquestionable success to the EEF. Included in the preparation aspect of mission command were the deception and force organization as well as developing a plan for the battle. All of these facets of preparation showed Allenby's ability to adapt to the lessons he had observed in previous battles with the Turks. It also demonstrated his determination not to allow the enemy's repeated withdrawal and reconstitution that they had repeatedly achieved in the final months of 1917. Second, the combined arms aspect of mission command proved a key factor in the outcome of the battle. Allenby took advantage of the strengths of his units in what one might call a precursor to German blitzkrieg tactics.²⁶³ He joined the speed and mobility of the cavalry, numerical superiority in artillery, strength of infantry, and air power for both reconnaissance and air attack. The third aspect of mission command that Allenby had to overcome was the difficulty of prioritizing and transporting resources to his troops, which proved a great difficulty in the earlier phases of the campaign. Although water did not pose as much of a challenge to the success of the Megiddo offensive as at the Gaza-

The mound sits at the southern end of the Valley of Megiddo, also known as the Plain of Esdraelon. Michael P. Germano, "Megiddo," BibArch, <http://www.bibarch.com/archaeologicalsites/megiddo.htm> (accessed 15 September 2012).

²⁶³Gregory A. Daddis, *The Wright Flyer Papers No. 20, Armageddon's Lost Lessons: Combined Arms Operations in Allenby's Palestine Campaign* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 2005), vii.

Beersheba offensive or the pursuit, Allenby still faced the risk of his fast moving cavalry advancing too far beyond their supply lines to support their efforts. Finally, Allenby's Megiddo offensive faced the ever present difficulty of communicating events as they occurred on the battlefield. In contrast to previous battles, Allenby's subordinates in the Megiddo offensive overcame the difficulties of communicating events once the battle had begun. Throughout the build-up to the battle itself, Allenby and his generals demonstrated that they had adapted to their previous challenges and learned enough to change their fighting style to destroy the enemy army.

Strategic and Political Situation

In the aftermath of the EEF's capture of Jerusalem in December 1917, the British War Office directed General Allenby to exploit his victories in Palestine with a further advance north towards Aleppo in order to finally knock Turkey out of the war.²⁶⁴ However, Allenby's situation in Palestine did not allow him to continue his advance. In addition to seizing Jerusalem for Lloyd George, Allenby had driven the Turkish Seventh and Eighth Armies away from their defenses, but he had still not destroyed the enemy. Allenby may have intended to advance beyond the Jerusalem-Jaffa line that he had established in December, but the preceding months' campaign had overextended his railroad and supply lines.²⁶⁵ Before he could continue the advance, Allenby needed to secure his front and right flank from Turkish counterattack as well as consolidate his

²⁶⁴Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 173.

²⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 168.

forces, establish supply and ammunition dumps, and build up his railway.²⁶⁶ He had extended his force so far from their supply depot at Deir Sineid that he had a hard time getting grain forward to his recuperating cavalry, especially as the rains began to clog the roadways.

As the First World War continued into 1918, the Allies revisited the Easterner vs Westerner strategy debate. Lloyd George still wanted to defeat Germany's weaker allies, or, as he stated, "knocking out the props" in order to defeat Germany without breaking the seemingly unbreakable stalemate on the Western Front.²⁶⁷ The newly formed Bolshevik government in Russia had entered into armistice negotiations with Germany. Additionally, CIGS William Robertson and General Douglas Haig argued that the Western Front needed the Allies' attention more than ever. As German soldiers now free from the Russian front would surely embark on a large scale offensive in the coming spring in France.²⁶⁸ Easterners believed they would never defeat Germany on the Western Front, but that they could continue to defend there. Lloyd George stated that the EEF could not lose its initiative in Palestine and go on the defensive. He argued that this course of action would cause despair in England, especially in the wake of the bloody Third Battle of Ypres in France.²⁶⁹ The British government believed Allenby could force Turkey to surrender by driving through Palestine to Aleppo and by cutting the communications between Turkey and Mesopotamia. That victory, in turn, would cause

²⁶⁶Ibid.

²⁶⁷Falls, *Military Operations*, 1:294.

²⁶⁸Grainger, 225.

²⁶⁹Falls, *Military Operations*, 1:294.

Bulgaria, another German ally, to withdraw from the war, opening the Allies' pathway to Austria and Germany from the east.²⁷⁰

The Allied Supreme War Council in Versailles made the final decision, stating that a final or far-reaching decision against the enemy in France was unlikely in 1918.²⁷¹ The military representatives to the Supreme War Council recommended that the Allies would defend in France, Italy, and the Balkans and that they would "undertake a decisive offensive against Turkey with a view to the annihilation of the Turkish armies and the collapse of Turkish resistance."²⁷² To accomplish this goal, the War Office agreed to send Allenby two Indian infantry divisions from Mesopotamia, and they authorized a slow advance north with the steady progress of the railway for support.²⁷³ Allenby planned to secure his right flank in the rainy season, and in the dry season he would advance north through the coastal plain to the Tiberias-Haifa line, building the railway as fast as he could. Allenby's original plan for the slow, methodical advance bore a remarkable similarity to General Murray's advance across the Sinai.

The situation changed, however, when Germany launched the Ludendorff Offensives on 22 March 1918.²⁷⁴ Germany attempted what would become their last great

²⁷⁰Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 176.

²⁷¹Allied Supreme War Council, "Joint Note to the Supreme War Council by its Military Representatives Regarding the Conduct of the War in 1918," National Archives, 21 January 1918, http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/firstworldwar/first_world_war/p_allied.htm (accessed 15 August 2012).

²⁷²Falls, *Military Operations*, 1:297.

²⁷³Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 177.

²⁷⁴O'Brien Browne, "The Kaiser's Last Battle," *MHQ, The Quarterly Journal of Military History* 13, no. 3 (2001): 91.

effort towards victory on the Western Front, hoping to defeat the Allies before the arrival of the American army.²⁷⁵ The Allies found that the “gloomy” situation in France required them to draw troops from other theaters to ensure that Germany did not win the war on the Western Front. The War Office told Allenby that given the current situation, “The only possible means at our disposal is to call on you for battalions.”²⁷⁶ Allenby’s theater served as a reserve in the crisis on the Western Front, and he had to go on the defensive for the time being as some of his best battalions left for the trenches in France.²⁷⁷ In April the 52nd and 74th divisions, as well as ten battalions from the other divisions, went to France, followed later in the spring by fourteen more battalions. Allenby saw these transfers replaced by the 7th and 3rd Indian Divisions from the Mesopotamia Theater and the remaining battalions replaced by fresh troops from India who had seen no combat the entire war.²⁷⁸ Rather than send them immediately into an advance, Allenby would have to train and acclimatize his fresh troops in order to prepare them for war in Palestine.

As he received the new formations and continued to prepare for his final offensive, Allenby launched two raids across the Jordan River against the Turkish Fourth Army. The Transjordan raids had several purposes. First, Allenby had to secure his eastern flank against the Turkish Fourth Army in the Jordan valley before he could successfully drive north.²⁷⁹ Second, Allenby wanted to convince the Ottoman armies that

²⁷⁵Hughes, 75.

²⁷⁶Gullet, 600.

²⁷⁷Hughes, 75.

²⁷⁸Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 183.

²⁷⁹Pirie-Gordon et al., 14.

his offensive would drive east across the Jordan towards Deraa and Damascus. A British expedition into the Jordan valley would deceive the enemy into keeping their troops spread throughout the valley, instead of concentrating their strength along the coast, where Allenby planned his main attack.²⁸⁰ Finally, the raids would aid the Arab Revolt in the Hejaz region. The Arab Army under the Emir Feisal, with the advice and support of such British officers as T. E. Lawrence, had fought the Turkish army in the Hejaz region since 1916, raiding towns and attacking sections of the Hejaz railway. They even went so far as to capture the coastal stronghold of Aqaba in July 1917.²⁸¹ Allenby counted on the added benefit of Feisal's Arabs to tie Turkish troops down in the Hejaz as he fought his way north.²⁸²

The first raid, conducted in March 1918, sought to capture Es Salt and send a mounted column to Amman in order to destroy the Hejaz railway.²⁸³ This raid failed due largely to the spring rains and the Turkish army's ability to transport reinforcements to Amman as the British attacked. As the swollen river caused delays in the British crossing, the Turks brought reinforcements to the area to defend the Jordan valley, and the British could not accomplish their objectives. Furthermore, the rains turned the valley into a muddy mess, preventing the EEF from transporting heavy artillery to Amman.²⁸⁴

²⁸⁰Pirie-Gordon et al., 15.

²⁸¹Murphy, 10.

²⁸²Kinloch, 255.

²⁸³Ibid., 257.

²⁸⁴Falls, *Military Operations*, 1:347.

The second raid, in late April, also ended in failure. The EEF attempted to secure the bridge crossings to prevent the arrival of Turkish reinforcements while an infantry division and a mounted column captured Es Salt and Shunet Nimrin.²⁸⁵ The British could not secure the bridge crossings, and Turkish reinforcements nearly turned the raid into a disaster, forcing the British to retreat back across the Jordan once again.²⁸⁶

Both raids ended with the British expeditions retreating across the Jordan River in scenes that sound remarkably similar to descriptions of the Turkish armies' withdrawal from the Gaza-Beersheba line.²⁸⁷ However, although they did not accomplish all of their objectives, the raids succeeded in drawing Turkish attention away from the coastal plain. Moreover, Allenby observed several valuable lessons from these attacks that he would apply in the Megiddo offensive. First the British needed to attack with overwhelming mass to ensure victory. The forces that undertook the Transjordan raids found themselves often outnumbered against a well prepared foe with increasing reinforcements. As a matter of creating this overmatch, Allenby learned the value of deception in preparing for battle. He had made no attempt to deceive the enemy as to the attack, which, coupled with delays in the river crossing, allowed the Turks to send reinforcements to the region.²⁸⁸ Second, in the combined arm facet of mission command, Allenby observed that he could not hope to succeed against an entrenched and fortified enemy without artillery. His cavalry proceeded to Amman without their artillery because the muddy terrain made

²⁸⁵Gullet, 601.

²⁸⁶Lawrence, 318.

²⁸⁷Falls, *Military Operations*, 1:377.

²⁸⁸Hughes, 78.

it difficult to transport, and they could not capture the town. Finally, the terrain and distance from the supply depots made transporting food and ammunition to the EEF forces difficult and occasionally impossible. Allenby would take these lessons into account in the Megiddo offensive.

As the Ludendorff Offensives failed and the War Office planned for the war to last into 1919, Allenby prepared to launch his offensive in September of 1918. He sought a decisive victory that would bring the EEF's lines north to stretch between El Afule and Beisan.²⁸⁹ He had to consider the trade-off between the preparation of his army and seasonal factors. The rain and mud had hampered the mobility and transport of the EEF during the Transjordan raids, so Allenby knew he could not attack any later than the middle of September, when the rains would return. Allenby and the EEF would combine all of the mission command lessons and experiences in preparation, combined arms, resources, and communications from their previous battles with the Turkish forces to achieve their final overwhelming victory over the Ottoman Empire in Palestine.

Armageddon: The Megiddo Offensive, 19-22 September 1918

Allenby faced many of the same Turkish forces that he had fought the entire campaign. The Turkish Eighth Army defended from the Mediterranean Sea to Nablus, the Seventh from Nablus to the Jordan and the Fourth Army held the Transjordan and Hejaz regions.²⁹⁰ The Turkish morale had deteriorated steadily throughout the campaign, and it reached a new low as Allenby prepared for his offensive, especially since the Ottoman

²⁸⁹Cyril Falls, *Military Operations in Egypt & Palestine from June 1917 to the End of the War* (London, UK: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1930), 2:447.

²⁹⁰Pirie-Gordon et al., 25.

Empire began to focus its attention on the Caucasus rather than Palestine.²⁹¹ Allenby knew the general disposition of the enemy forces, but more importantly he knew that they did not have much in the way of reserves. The new commander of the Turkish army group, German General Liman von Sanders, saw the Turkish soldiers' strength in fighting from trenches, and he counted on them holding the line of defenses against any British attack.²⁹² Allenby saw that if he could get past the enemy defenses and into the good cavalry country in the Plain of Esdraelon, he could cut off Turkish communications as well as their inevitable retreat.²⁹³ Allenby had learned that a conventional infantry attack would not prevent the Turkish escape, so he used the infantry to their best ability and combined that with the cavalry's mobility. He demonstrated that he had overcome the idea of the main attack of a battle being an infantry assault with cavalry support. Instead, he changed his tactics to a large cavalry action supported by an initial infantry assault.

Allenby issued the plan for the battle of Megiddo in simple and direct terms. The overall object of the attack was "inflicting a decisive defeat on the enemy."²⁹⁴ It called for an infantry assault to set the stage for a cavalry rush that would cut off the Turkish retreat.²⁹⁵ Bulfin's XXI Corps would assault the Turkish trenches on the coast after an artillery barrage and swing the enemy left in order to break open a route through which

²⁹¹Kinloch, 303.

²⁹²Woodward, 195.

²⁹³Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 196-197.

²⁹⁴Cyril Falls, "Force Order No. 68," in *Military Operations in Egypt & Palestine from June 1917 to the End of the War* (London, UK: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1930), 2:713.

²⁹⁵Falls, *Armageddon, 1918*, 35.

three divisions of Chauvel's DMC would pass. The DMC would advance north, avoiding any fighting unless a serious enemy force blocked their advance, after which they would sweep into the Plain of Esdraelon and occupy Beisan, El Afule, and Nazareth, where the enemy's GHQ stood. Between Bulfin and the Jordan, General Chetwode's XX Corps would block the enemy retreat across the Jordan at Jisr Ed Damiye. Both infantry corps would drive the Turkish defenders north, where the waiting cavalry would destroy the retreating forces.²⁹⁶

Allenby had learned from the failures of the Transjordan raids and the success of the Gaza-Beersheba offensive that he needed overwhelming force to fight the Turks. Furthermore, during the pursuit he could not support more than two divisions at a time. He reorganized his infantry, giving Bulfin numerical superiority over the enemy with the 75th, 60th, and 54th Divisions as well as the 7th and 3rd Indian Divisions. Chetwode held his 45 miles of defenses with the 10th and 53rd Divisions. Behind Bulfin's infantry stood Chauvel's 4th, 5th, and the Australian Mounted divisions to exploit the gap.²⁹⁷ This force organization—a key preparation requirement of mission command—showed Allenby creating a numerical superiority over the enemy. He could not afford the Turkish defenders to stop or even delay the infantry's ability to open the gate for the cavalry, and he sought to limit this risk in his preparations for the battle. While the specific numbers of the force ratio for the final offensive differs throughout several sources, one sees that on the coast where Bulfin and Chauvel readied their troops for the fight, Allenby held a

²⁹⁶Falls, *Military Operations*, 2:198-199.

²⁹⁷Perret, *Megiddo*, 24-25.

crushing numerical advantage over the Turkish Eighth army, which spread itself out evenly along its defenses.²⁹⁸

In addition to the combination of infantry and cavalry, Allenby collected the biggest concentration of artillery in all of the Palestine campaign to initiate the assault in a combined arms attack.²⁹⁹ The 383 guns of Allenby's artillery would open a barrage to cover the infantry's advance, but per Allenby's Force Order, "there will be no preliminary bombardment."³⁰⁰ Allenby had learned the benefit of an artillery attack against enemy trenches, but he also knew that an artillery bombardment told the enemy where the attack would come, allowing them to move reinforcements to that area. Allenby had tried to limit opening artillery attacks as far back as the battle of Arras.

In another measure of taking advantage of combined arms tactics, Allenby also exploited the air superiority that the EEF had recently gained over the enemy in another combination of arms. The German air force in Palestine had lost the air superiority that they held up until the third battle of Gaza, but they had maintained parity with the British for most of the campaign. By the time Allenby launched the Megiddo offensive, however, the British had gained air supremacy in Palestine, both in the buildup to the battle as well as during the offensive itself.³⁰¹

While Allenby had used aircraft for reconnaissance during the pursuit, he would use it in the Megiddo offensive for long range bombardment. The RFC would attack the

²⁹⁸Pirie-Gordon et al., 26.

²⁹⁹Woodward, 193.

³⁰⁰Falls, *Military Operations*, 2:713.

³⁰¹Bruce, 218-219.

headquarters of the Seventh and Eighth armies to disrupt their phone lines and communication with their forward defenses.³⁰² Additionally, the RFC would establish air supremacy leading up to the battle to prevent enemy air cover from disrupting or discovering EEF movements and preparations. Allenby would use his aircraft not only for reconnaissance and keeping the enemy from conducting counter reconnaissance, but he would now use it to disrupt the enemy's reaction to the attacks. Artillery could not reach as far as the aircraft could to have any effect on Turkish communications. Instead of using aircraft for reconnaissance purposes alone, Allenby had learned to use them as a long range striking force.

As a part of the mission command aspect of preparation, Allenby had learned the value of deception in launching an attack. His elaborate deception in the Gaza-Beersheba offensive had resulted in battlefield success, while the lack of any serious deception combined with various delays had contributed to the Transjordan defeats by allowing the enemy to reinforce his defenses. The massing of his forces and the drastic overmatch against the Turkish defenders was a vital part of Allenby's plan. To that end, Allenby staged a masterful deception to concentrate his infantry and cavalry on the coast while keeping the enemy's focus on the Jordan Valley in anticipation of another British attack there. To keep the enemy's attention on the Jordan valley, Allenby established "Chaytor's Force" in the austere conditions around Jericho and the Jordan River to lead the enemy to believe that the main attack would come over the Jordan.³⁰³ For nearly a month leading up to the battle, Chaytor's ANZAC Mounted Division, the 20th Indian brigade, two

³⁰²Perrett, *Megiddo*, 32.

³⁰³Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 199.

battalions of infantry from the British West Indies, and two battalions of Royal Fusiliers (Jewish volunteers) built dummy camps and fifteen thousand fake horses out of wood and canvas, lit extra fires, and dragged sleds around to simulate the dust of large unit movement.³⁰⁴ When the battle began, Chaytor would guard the EEF's eastern flank. If the Turkish Fourth Army withdrew from Es Salt, Amman, and Maan to avoid being isolated by the British main effort, Chaytor would cross the Jordan, seize these objectives, and cut off as much of the retreating Fourth Army as possible.

Through the deception plan he not only focused the enemy's attention in the Jordan valley, but he also massed the EEF's forces on the coast. Allenby moved three cavalry divisions and one infantry division to the coast under cover of darkness, hiding them in orange groves during the day to protect them from enemy aerial reconnaissance.³⁰⁵ Finally, before the attack began, Feisal's Northern Arab Army would increase their efforts in the Hejaz, attacking and destroying the railway around Deraa.³⁰⁶

For all of these efforts, Allenby attained the overwhelming superiority of numbers on the coast. The enemy focused their defenses across the Jordan while Allenby staged nearly 35,000 men in a fifteen mile wide front to advance over the enemy.³⁰⁷ The overwhelming mass of men and guns did not account for the subsequent victory at Megiddo, however. The EEF achieved their victory by combining the mission command aspects of preparing for an operation and taking advantage of the strengths of his

³⁰⁴Kinloch, 305.

³⁰⁵Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 200.

³⁰⁶Lawrence, 326.

³⁰⁷Pirie-Gordon et al., 26.

different units. Without the artillery and infantry breakthrough, the cavalry would not have been able to encircle the Turkish armies, and without the cavalry cutting off the enemy retreat, the infantry would not have been able to keep up with the retreating armies to destroy them. Allenby's Chief of Staff, General William Bartholomew told T. E. Lawrence that "the Turks could save themselves and their army, and give us our concentration to do over again, by simply retiring their coast sector seven or eight miles."³⁰⁸ The last thing Allenby could afford was a repeat of the previous battles at Gaza, Beersheba, Sheria, and Jerusalem, in which the enemy armies escaped destruction and survived to fight the EEF in a different set of defenses.

The battle of Megiddo has established its place in military history as one of the most one-sided battles of the First World War. One need not argue about the completeness of the victory or whether the battle achieved Allenby's objective of destroying the enemy forces. While the EEF's previous battles gained fame as Allenby's early victories, they did not achieve the operational and battlefield successes that the EEF gained at Megiddo.

The story of the battle itself played out remarkably similar to Allenby's plan. Lawrence's Arabs attacked the Hejaz railway, adding to the enemy's confusion and anticipation of an attack in the Jordan valley toward Deraa.³⁰⁹ On 19 September fifteen minutes of artillery bombing combined with RFC attacks on Turkish headquarters preceded Bulfin's XXI Corps moving out of their trenches. The Turkish defenders offered little resistance, stunned by the suddenness of the barrage and infantry attack. By

³⁰⁸Lawrence, 324.

³⁰⁹Ibid., 326.

the middle of the day the Eighth Army fled in disorganization.³¹⁰ Chauvel's cavalry advanced along the coast, swept past the Turkish defenses that the infantry had opened for them and formed a net to the north of the retreating Turkish forces.³¹¹ The cavalry seized El Afule, Beisan, and Jenin, capturing hundreds of prisoners, which nearly included Liman von Sanders in Nazareth.³¹² The RFC had rendered Turkish wire communications inoperative, and the disoriented Turkish leadership could do little to react to the speed of the DMC's drive into their sparsely defended rear areas. General George Barrow's 4th Cavalry Division charged into the Plain of Esdraelon to the hill of Megiddo via the Musmus Pass, the last position where the Turkish defenders could hope to stop Chauvel's cavalry.³¹³ Within 36 hours of the artillery barrage, the cavalry had cut off the retreat of the Seventh and Eighth Armies other than the bridge at Damiye. The enemy retreated in confusion, streaming by the hundreds into the trap of the EEF's cavalry waiting in the north.³¹⁴ As Antony Bluett recorded, "panic reigned" as the retreating trucks, wagons, and soldiers clogged the roads.³¹⁵

With the success of XXI Corps opening a gap in the Turkish defenses, Allenby issued orders to secure Nablus and to cut off the Turkish retreat across the Jordan at Jisr

³¹⁰Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 206-207.

³¹¹Woodward, 196.

³¹²Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 206-209.

³¹³William Thomas Massey, *Allenby's Final Triumph* (London, UK: Constable and Company, 1920), 153.

³¹⁴Pirie-Gordon et al., 30.

³¹⁵Bluett, 205.

Ed Damiye.³¹⁶ At the same time, Chaytor's Force crossed the Jordan at Ghoraniyeh and drove north to seize the Damiye Bridge. XXI Corps met some of the fiercest resistance of the battle against the Seventh Army, and they could not cut off the Turkish retreat as they pulled out of Nablus. However, the RFC attacked the withdrawing Seventh Army in the Wadi Fara along the road to Damiye, machine gunning and bombing the transport vehicles in a narrow gorge that the British would call the "Valley of Death."³¹⁷ This attack left thousands of dead horses and destroyed vehicles, but more importantly, it blocked the final escape route for the Seventh Army to the Damiye crossing, which Chaytor seized on 22 September.³¹⁸ Not only had the RFC provided important information about enemy troop movement and kept the enemy aircraft on the ground, but they had become a valuable tool in preventing the escape of a large number of enemy troops. Allenby's forces accomplished their mission, and moreover, they displayed the combination of solutions to the mission command problems that had previously failed to cut off the enemy's escape.

After General Chaytor captured the Damiye river crossing, he sent his ANZACs rushing across the Jordan Valley as the Turkish Fourth Army began its retreat to Deraa. The commander of the Amman garrison had waited as long as he could for the Turkish II Corps to join him from Maan, and as Chaytor captured Es Salt and moved on to Amman, the Turkish Fourth Army began their laborious withdrawal north, harried by Feisal's

³¹⁶Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 211.

³¹⁷Massey, 184.

³¹⁸Pirie-Gordon et al., 30.

Arab irregulars along the way.³¹⁹ The ANZACs seized Amman several days before the Maan garrison surrendered to one of Chaytor's brigade commanders.³²⁰

Although the fighting would continue until the middle of October with the EEF's capture of Haifa, Damascus, and Aleppo, Allenby's offensive had crushed the fighting strength of the Ottoman Empire in Palestine. The Megiddo campaign moved the EEF's front lines 350 miles, captured 75,000 prisoners, and destroyed the Fourth, Seventh, and Eighth Armies.³²¹

Conclusion: Examining Lessons in Mission Command

The four categories of mission command were noticeably different in the planning and execution of the battle of Megiddo from the EEF's previous engagements with the Turkish armies. In regards to the mission command requirement of preparation, the plan for Megiddo displayed a similar approach to the Gaza-Beersheba offensive, but General Allenby had altered the main focus of the plan from breaking through the enemy lines to the cavalry's exploitation behind the Turkish defenses. The Beersheba plan had intended to send cavalry north once they had taken Beersheba, but their fatigue after marching through the desert to Beersheba, the lack of water at Beersheba, and the difficult fight at Sheria eliminated any ability to take advantage of the cavalry's speed and mobility. Chauvel's specific order not to engage the enemy until they had proceeded into the plain at Megiddo ensured that the DMC would be fresh to drive north and not delay their

³¹⁹Falls, *Armageddon*, 1918, 90.

³²⁰Guy Powles, *New Zealanders in Sinai and Palestine* (Auckland, New Zealand: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1922), 254.

³²¹Wavell, *Palestine Campaigns*, 233.

advance to assist the infantry in their portion of the fight.³²² In the fight for Sheria and the pursuit to Jerusalem, the EEF counted on their infantry as their main fighting force, but at Megiddo, the infantry only had responsibility for the opening moves. Every step of the planning for the battle emphasized the importance of the cavalry getting through the gap and into the enemy's rear areas.

The combined arms coordination between the infantry, artillery, and cavalry demonstrates the emphasis on the cavalry. In the days before the assault, Allenby met with Generals Chauvel and Bulfin to discuss the trigger that would launch the cavalry through XXI Corps' gap. A veteran of the Western Front battle of Cambrai, Bulfin did not want the cavalry to advance before the success of the infantry advance, as that risked a Turkish counterattack. If the cavalry proceeded before the infantry had cleared the enemy trenches, the cavalry would mask Bulfin's guns. The contrary argument saw the difficulty in moving the cavalry along the roads to get to their gap. At Cambrai, the cavalry lost their chance to exploit the infantry's breakthrough because the cavalry could not advance quickly enough past the traffic of the crowded roads.³²³ As a result of the coordination between Chauvel and Bulfin, the commanders of the 4th and 5th cavalry divisions would wait at the HQ of the infantry divisions to get the official word to launch their cavalry.³²⁴ This liaison between divisional commanders exemplifies the importance of the cavalry's mobility in the battle, but it also demonstrates the EEF's leaders learning from their experiences in the war. The cavalry had lost its ability to maneuver effectively

³²²Massey, 114.

³²³Falls, *Armageddon*, 1918, 42.

³²⁴Falls, *Military Operations*, 2:465.

in the aftermath of the fighting at Beersheba and Sheria, and Allenby determined that he would not lose their effectiveness at Megiddo.

The cavalry's starring role, as well as the massed artillery and air attack, show another aspect of Allenby's learning how to use mission command throughout the campaign. The Megiddo offensive looked to exploit every type of unit's strength to its best advantage. The cavalry during the Transjordan raids had to cross terrain "which would have given a mountain goat the horrors," and their advance proved slow and difficult.³²⁵ Moreover, when they got to the town of Amman, the wet terrain precluded their ability to ride their horses to charge into the town. The seasonal timing and the terrain chosen for the cavalry's maneuver in the Plain of Esdraelon sought to ensure the cavalry could use its speed and mobility to the EEF's best advantage. The Australian Lighthorse had even adopted the use of the cavalry saber in their training for the operation, knowing that the fight would require them to conduct innumerable mounted charges deep behind the enemy's trench lines.³²⁶ Additionally, the use of air power as an attacking force proved to be a remarkably effective asset in preventing the Turkish retreat, especially along the Wadi Fara. In the long days of the pursuit north from the Gaza-Beersheba line, the cavalry had not enough speed or strength to effectively pursue the retreating enemy's withdrawal. The retreat from Nablus might have caused the EEF some difficulty if the Seventh Army had escaped down the Wadi Fara and across the Damiye bridge, but the RFC's attack prevented this occurrence, turning the enemy's retreat into a rout.

³²⁵Bluett, 193.

³²⁶Bruce, 205.

The mission command aspect of prioritization of resources and transport always gave the EEF problems, and it proved no different during the Megiddo campaign, especially as the EEF advanced on Damascus and Aleppo. On the first two days of the attack, the 4th Cavalry Division alone outdistanced their transportation by 50 miles, and their troops had to break into their emergency rations.³²⁷ Had it not been for the plentiful water and grazing for the DMC's horses, the advance could have run into trouble. Even finding water on the march did not ensure the success of the advance, however. As General Barrow's 4th Cavalry advanced, they heard that a sizable Turkish force prepared to occupy the Musmus Pass, the opening to the Plain of Esdraelon. Barrow ordered the 10th Cavalry Brigade to advance as soon as possible to seize the pass, but the commander of the 10th responded that he must water his horses and could not embark for another hour.³²⁸ The need to care for and water their horses often plagued the EEF, and in this case the difficulty did not wane even when they did have enough water. In the end, the horses and men of the DMC found that they had to live off the land. Allenby never truly solved his supply and transport problems other than by fighting in territory that he knew would suit his mounted troops with abundant water and forage.

Communications and accurate information plagued leaders throughout the entire war. The infancy of communication systems such as the radio and telephone combined with the effectiveness of long range weapons kept more and more generals far behind the front, resulting in long communication delays and inaccurate information. At Megiddo, however, the EEF's leaders conducted their communication along the lines of what one

³²⁷Falls, *Military Operations*, 2:521.

³²⁸Falls, *Armageddon, 1918*, 71.

might expect of a war one hundred years earlier. General Chauvel, commanding a full mounted corps, advanced with the DMC's reserve, the Australian Mounted Division. By the second day of the battle, Chauvel had moved his HQ all the way to Megiddo.³²⁹ He kept in touch with his divisions with aircraft, telephones, and dispatch riders, maintaining the most up to date information he could. He established a fighting HQ in the middle of the battle, which was rare for a corps commander, and would have been impossible on the Western Front. Chauvel's presence in the plain with his cavalry divisions proved a valuable asset in reacting quickly to the retreat of the Turkish forces. He could observe the flow of the battle from a closer perspective and direct his divisions to gain the best advantage over the retreating enemy. The RFC provided another effective means of accurate information, dropping messages to EEF leaders regarding enemy troop movements. In a mobile war, however, the forward presence of cavalry commanders made a significant difference in destroying the retreating Turkish forces.

The Megiddo offensive served as a culmination of all of Allenby's learning and adapting to the mission command difficulties that plagued the entire campaign. As far back as General Murray's failed attacks on Gaza, Allenby's EEF had adapted their fighting methods to overcome the challenges of fighting the Turkish forces in Sinai and Palestine. Allenby adapted his tactics in Palestine to ensure that the Turkish armies did not escape to reestablish a defense as they had done throughout the campaign since his victories at Gaza and Beersheba.

³²⁹Ibid., 82.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: LEARNING HOW TO WIN

By the end of October 1918, General Allenby had destroyed three Turkish armies and seized almost all of Palestine for the British. He had contributed some of his most experienced and capable battalions to the Western Front and fought the enemy forces in Palestine without placing a serious strain on Allied resources. He had taken a demoralized army over from General Murray and broke through the strong enemy defenses, driving them all the way back to Jerusalem, a town held by the Ottoman Empire for hundreds of years. The Allies signed an armistice with the Ottoman Empire on 30 October, but the Turkish defeat resulted more from other theaters than operations in Palestine.³³⁰ The defeat of Bulgaria, Austria-Hungary's weakening fight against the Italians, and the retreating German forces on the Western Front brought an end to the war for the Ottoman Empire more than Allenby's advance and expulsion of the Turkish presence in Palestine.³³¹

Throughout the Palestine campaign Allenby's EEF faced the mission command challenges of preparation, combined arms, resourcing a mobile war, and communication of accurate information. Allenby's key challenge was not the individual mission command difficulties, but overcoming them as a whole. In order to accomplish his mission, Allenby had to adapt to the challenges and learn how to win his fight. Like any commander, Allenby used his experiences and those of his subordinates and predecessors

³³⁰Falls, *Armageddon, 1918*, 151-152.

³³¹Lock, 144.

to adapt his fighting methods in order to finally defeat the Ottoman forces in Palestine. Allenby took General Murray's failures at the first two battles of Gaza, as well as Chetwode's experience of fighting in the Sinai to break through the enemy's defenses at Gaza and Beersheba. From his own failure to cut off the Turkish forces after they retreated from Gaza and Sheria, Allenby learned that he must keep his cavalry fresh and use their mobility to keep the enemy from escaping. Allenby also learned the value of deception in preparing for a campaign. After the success of the deception in the Gaza-Beersheba campaign, and the lack of any deception in the failed Transjordan raids, Allenby staged a massive deception campaign before the battle of Megiddo.

Commanders rarely expect to achieve victory without learning and adapting to the challenges they face. Failure to adapt or adjust one's tactics to exploit one's own strengths as well as the enemy's weaknesses risks failure in battle and the war he or she fights. Allenby's ability to adapt his limited victories in the early stages of the campaign allowed him to destroy the enemy at Megiddo. He overcame the combination of his mission command difficulties, but the key to his comprehensive victory at Megiddo was his adaptation of his solutions to the mission command difficulties and learning how to best use his assets to obtain victory. Learning how to succeed or adapting to one's challenges without any other characteristics, of course, does not guarantee comprehensive success. The key to such success is the appropriate exploitation of these lessons to their best advantage. Allenby adapted to his difficulties and changed his fighting style to defeat the enemy. In adapting and changing his tactics, he not only accomplished his overwhelming destruction of the enemy, but he also overcame the earlier questionable victories in the Palestine campaign. He changed the approach for the Gaza-Beersheba

offensive unlike General Murray, who had attacked Gaza twice in the same manner, losing on both occasions. Allenby later adapted his own tactics to not only defeat the enemy defenses, but he used the lessons he had learned to comprehensively destroy them and remove the enemy as a viable fighting force in Palestine.

Of course, Allenby did not achieve all of his victories on his own. His determined and talented subordinate commanders also adapted to the task at hand. When Allenby arrived in Palestine in the spring of 1917, his presence and bold style infected his soldiers with a reinvigorated fighting spirit that became crucial in renewing the attack on the Gaza-Beersheba line. In many ways the direct and often overwhelming attitude of Allenby's style of mission command also influenced his corps and divisional commanders. In a speech after the war, Allenby included trust of one's subordinates as an important aspect of leadership, warning not to "worry them by interference."³³² As Allenby could not be everywhere in a large-scale battle that would take place across Palestine, Allenby had to trust that they would carry out his plan, and the subordinates took on Allenby's forward-leaning style. During the battle of Megiddo, both Chetwode and Bulfin urged their divisional commanders to take risks, and to push on "regardless of fatigue of men and animals."³³³ Allenby drove his men and horses hard during a battle as far back as Arras. On the eve of the battle of Megiddo, however, his drive and determination for comprehensive victory had instilled itself in his generals, who had fought conservatively in previous battles, showing a marked concern for the well-being

³³²Brian Gardiner, *Allenby of Arabia, Lawrence's General* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1966), 195.

³³³Massey, 180.

of their men and horses. It is worthy of note that the very aspect of Allenby's personality that probably drove him from the Western Front gained him true victory in Palestine.

This intangible aspect of Allenby's mission command suggests that victory in Palestine could only come under Allenby's command. Perhaps a less bold general who had much less physical presence could not have succeeded in Allenby's place. Allenby's robust health in the harsh Palestine conditions allowed him to travel to the front, and to meet with Chauvel in his fighting headquarters on the third day of the Megiddo offensive. It allowed Allenby to push his men and generals from much closer to the front lines, gaining an up-to-date understanding of the situation and the conditions in which his men fought. Allenby could not have made such a physical presence on the Western Front due to the hazards of the front lines, causing one to consider whether Allenby could have been successful if he had stayed in France.

Certainly one must not compare Allenby's campaign in Palestine to the trench warfare of the Western Front. The situation of the war in Palestine brought different circumstances, including the ability to use the cavalry's speed and mobility as well as the complicated deceptions in preparing for offensives. Nor did the war in Palestine prove any easier to fight than the Western Front; the severe desert climate and terrain and the lack of water for a large portion of the campaign brought different resource challenges that the generals on the Western Front did not experience. Taken alone, Allenby's campaign in Palestine displays a general adapting to the specific mission command challenges of a specific theater.

Despite his final victory in the Megiddo offensive, Allenby's campaign in Palestine took its place in the history of the First World War as a sideshow that had no

effect on the outcome of the war. Germany and the Ottoman Empire did not dedicate a huge amount of resources to the theater, and the war ended due to events in other parts of the war. Nevertheless, those history books that do discuss the campaign generally hail the entire campaign as one of the few examples of clear and decisive victories in a war where generals often measured a battlefield success in matters of hundreds of yards. The capture of Gaza, Beersheba, and Jerusalem, as well as the fierce pursuit of the enemy army after the fighting at Tel el Khuweilfeh and Sheria took on the aspect of decisive victories over the Turkish armies. However, the real result was that the enemy forces merely withdrew north in order to face the EEF in similar defenses deeper in Palestine and farther beyond the EEF's supply lines. For all the effect they had on the outcome of the war, victories at Gaza, Beersheba, Sheria, and Jerusalem hint at a different kind of stalemate. The DMC charged over trenches and chased enemy army in a chaotic retreat, recalling the exciting spectacles of a type of warfare that largely disappeared during World War One. However, the gallant charges and enemy retreats only served to reset the army in a new set of defenses that the EEF would have to overcome again. Despite their successes, the battlefield victories did not achieve the decisive success that the battle of Megiddo did.

The various Turkish retreats and the EEF's tireless struggle through Palestine prevented them from knocking Turkey out of the war, delaying the decisive victory until it was almost inconsequential to the war overall. Despite its successes on the battlefield and its overwhelming victory at Megiddo, the EEF still did not knock Turkey out of the war. Other theaters proved to be the downfall of the Ottoman Empire. In that sense the war in Palestine proved little more than the same type of stalemate that occurred on the Western Front. Instead of fighting over the same trenches with little effect on the war in

France, however, the EEF fought the enemy over different ground with little effect on the outcome of the war.

One may find it difficult to criticize the EEF's victories over the Turkish armies in Palestine since their battlefield success had every appearance of a victory. The enemy lost more men and equipment than the EEF, and the enemy retreated in the face of the EEF's advance. The British soldiers took control of enemy defenses, towns, railroads, and more. For all appearances, the Ottoman Empire rapidly lost the war in Palestine as the unstoppable EEF continued its relentless advance. History does not call the EEF's battles in Palestine failures or defeats, even though they did not accomplish their main objectives of destroying the enemy armies in Palestine or knocking Turkey out of the war. In many cases the battlefield victories in Palestine, even if they did not have strategic consequences, served to instill in the Allies a sense that despite the carnage on the Western Front, there was still such a thing as victory in this war.

The capture of Jerusalem in particular strengthened the War Office's resolve, proving that British soldiers could defeat their enemies and hold the ground they had taken. Moreover, these battlefield successes came at a time when the public needed some sort of victory. In other words, the War Office could not afford to let the EEF fail. Allenby's victories must take on the appearance of victory that the war on the Western Front had not experienced. To that end, the false victories in the early stages of the Palestine campaign took on the accolades of success, even if they did not accomplish the War Office's objective of knocking the Ottoman Empire out of the war. Even the failed Transjordan raids resulted in a rationalization of success, with various official accounts discussing the EEF nearly accomplishing all of their objectives. Allenby's dispatches, as

well as war correspondent Massey's account and Cyril Falls' *Military Operations in Egypt and Palestine* all suggest that despite the EEF withdrawing back across the Jordan, the raids accomplished nearly all of their objectives. These accounts specifically highlight the success of the raids in keeping the Turkish focus on the Jordan valley rather than the coastal plain, where the main attack came. Despite these claims, however, the EEF's raids into the Jordan valley both failed, costing the EEF high casualties, and failing to accomplish their key operational goals of destroying the Hejaz railway.

Many histories that argue for the successes of Allenby's campaign ignore the idea that the EEF's role in Palestine eventually had no effect on the resolution of the war. If British operations in Palestine began as a sideshow to ensure the security of the Suez Canal, it also ended as a sideshow in the face of the Ludendorff Offensives and the Allied success in the Hundred Days offensive. The Palestine campaign probably never had a chance of knocking the Ottoman Empire out of the war, especially after the Gallipoli disaster. Nevertheless, Palestine provided the British War Office a place for maintaining Britain's public interest in the war, convincing them that the war did not consist of gruesome offensives that accomplished nothing in France and Belgium. The Easterners continued to present the plan to knock Turkey out of the war, although the War Office seldom gave Allenby any serious reinforcements for what they claimed to be their focus for 1918. Whether or not Lloyd George and the War Office truly believed that victory in Palestine would knock Turkey out of the war and spell eventual defeat for Germany, they did know that the British public needed an easily identifiable victory.

Despite the questionable nature of Allenby's incomplete victories early in the Palestine campaign, the mission command difficulties nevertheless existed, and Allenby

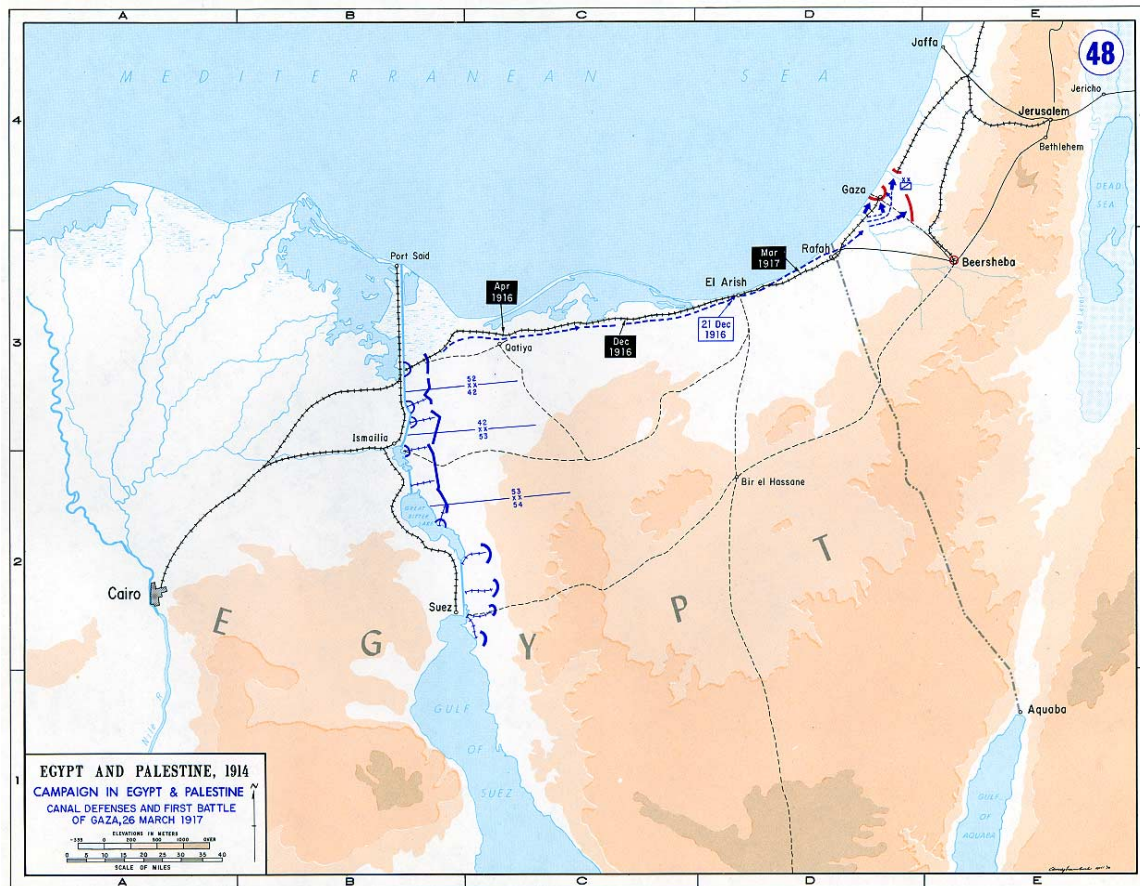
had to overcome them in his fight with the Turkish forces. The strategic implications and political aspirations of the war in Palestine aside, Allenby had an enemy that opposed his army and he went about engaging them in battle as he saw fit. He could not have achieved any of his victories without breaking the Gaza-Beersheba defenses, regardless of whether he was able to destroy the withdrawing enemy armies. Even if he did not succeed in destroying the enemy armies before they escaped to establish a new line of defense, Allenby succeeded in Palestine regardless of the outcome of the war.

The mission command challenges that Allenby faced in Palestine and his incomplete victories in the quest to destroy his enemy bear a lesson for commanders in any conflict. Allenby's early successes gained the aspect of clear victory in Britain. At the same time, Allenby realized that he would not accomplish true victory until he had destroyed the enemy forces in Palestine. Such victories drove the War Office to strive for further victories, both to tout their success in the war as well as to knock the Ottomans out of the war. Regardless of the nation's political aspirations, the commander nevertheless must seek to accomplish his or her mission. For Allenby, that mission proved to be the destruction of the enemy army, rather than the incomplete victories that drove them back from their defenses, only to fight the EEF again. A nation may need some indication of victory on some level, but commanders in a theater of war must see past the political or public need for tangible success in order to find true victory. Moreover, commanders like Allenby must be aware of false or incomplete victory without succumbing to the nation's need to rationalize a battle's outcome, whether it is a battlefield victory or a strategic defeat.

APPENDIX A

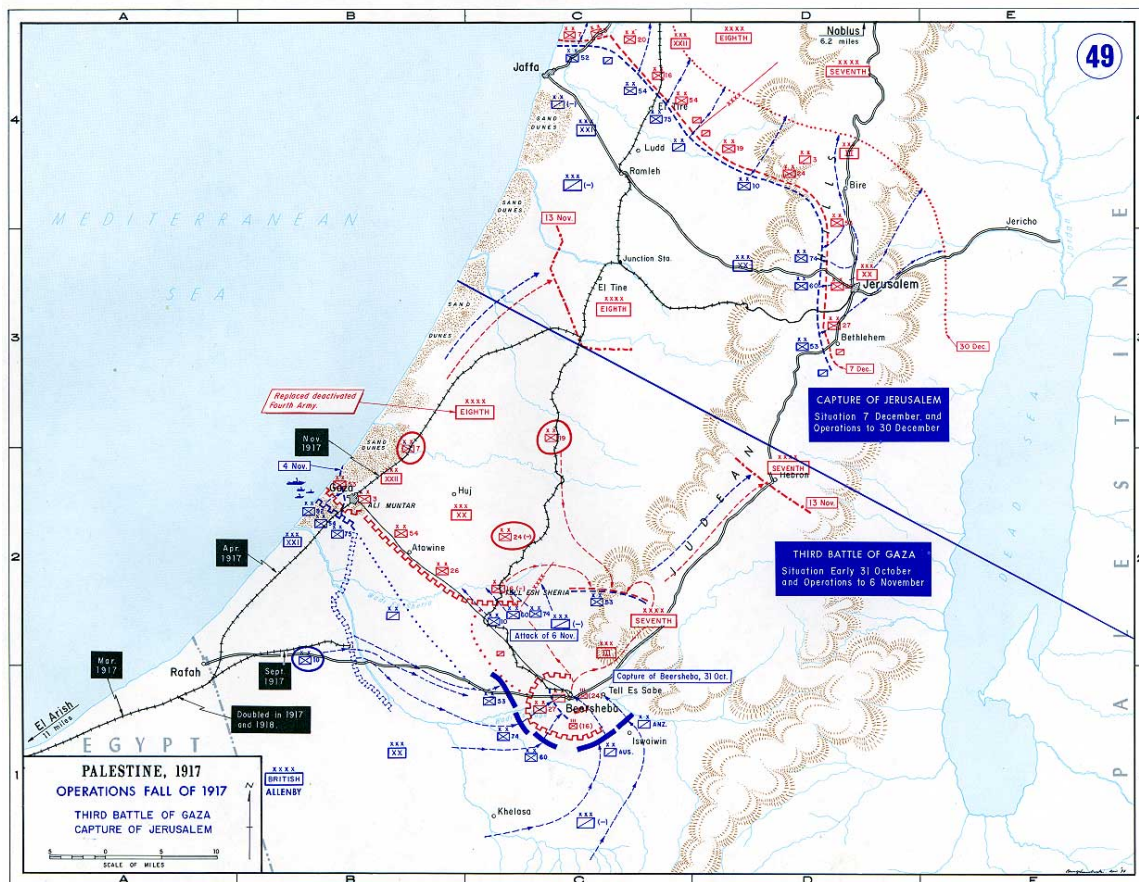
MAPS

Egypt and Palestine, 1914



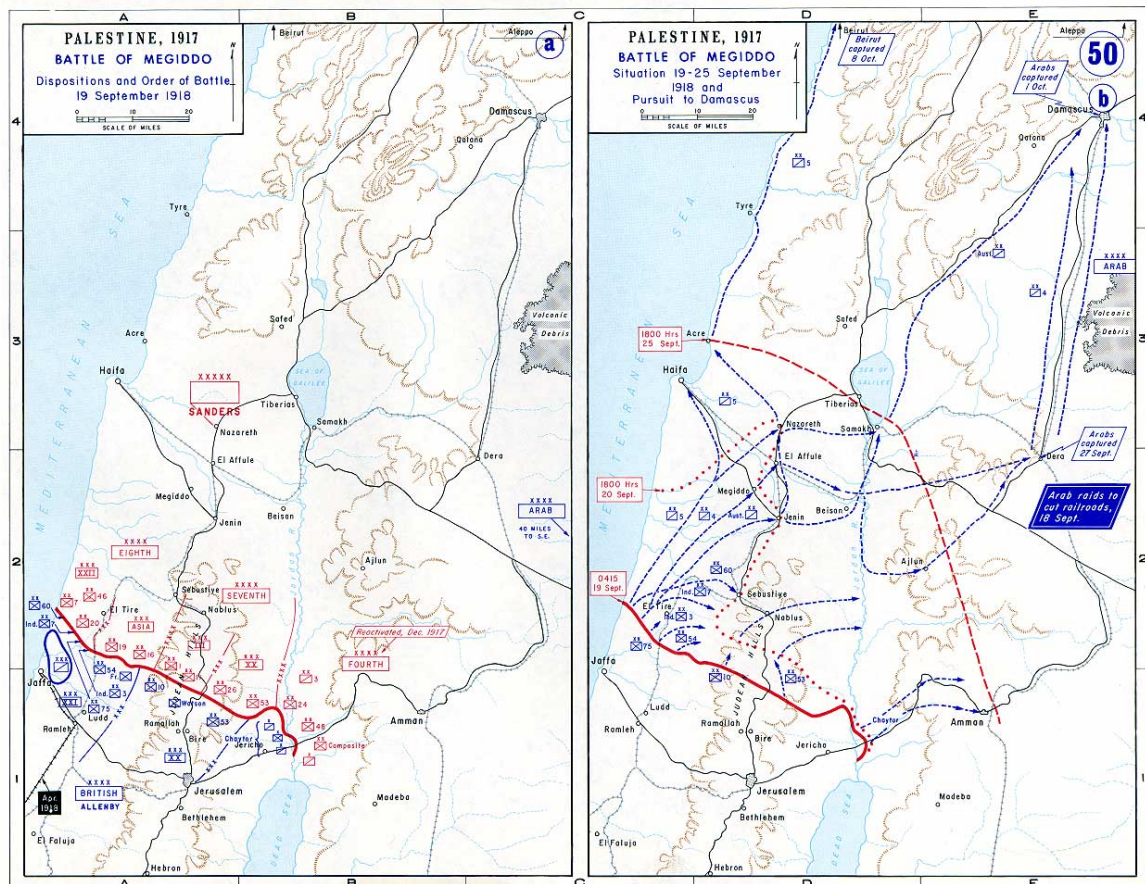
Source: United States Military Academy, "Egypt and Palestine, 1914," Department of History Campaign Atlas to the Great War, 2012, <http://www.westpoint.edu/history/SiteAssets/SitePages/world%20War%20I/wwOne48.jpg> (accessed 12 September 2012).

Palestine, 1917: Operations Fall of 1917



Source: United States Military Academy, "Palestine, 1917: Operations Fall of 1917," Department of History Campaign Atlas to the Great War, 2012, <http://www.westpoint.edu/history/SiteAssets/SitePages/world%20War%20I/wwOne49.jpg> (accessed 12 September 2012).

Palestine, 1917: Battle of Meggido



Source: United States Military Academy, "Palestine, 1917: Battle of Megiddo," Department of History Campaign Atlas to the Great War, 2012, <http://www.westpoint.edu/history/SiteAssets/SitePages/world%20War%20I/wwOne49.jpg> (accessed 12 September 2012).

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