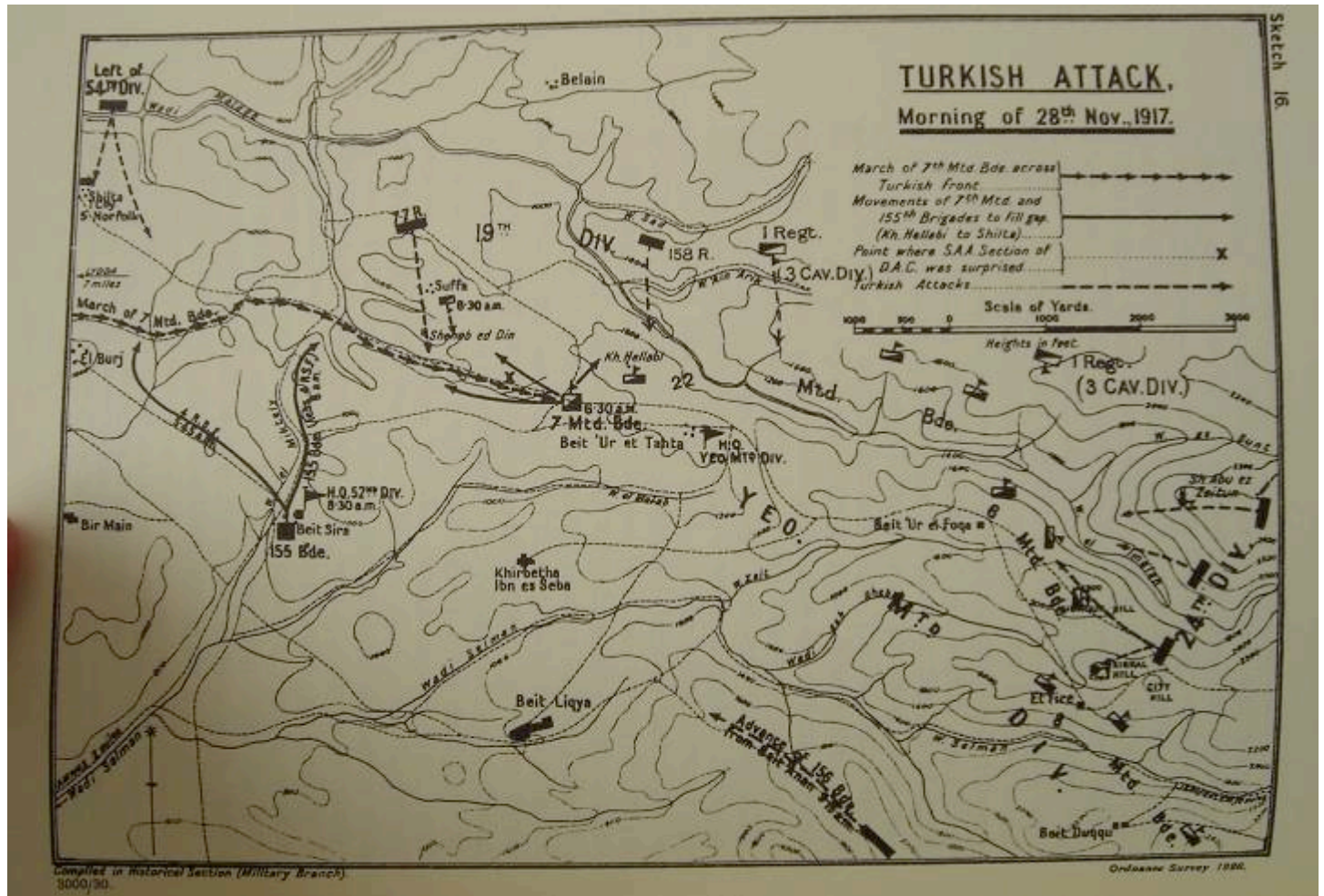


Extracts from Official History describing action of 28th November 1917
ITLSU Judean Gap Scenario



THE ATTACKS OF THE 28TH NOVEMBER.

So far the Turkish attacks had met with small success. The enemy's main effort had been reserved for the morrow, but by that time the British had a better chance of parrying it. The 155th Brigade had, as stated, been ordered to send up a battalion to the left of the Yeomanry, and the 4/R. Scots Fusiliers moved off from Beit Sira before 6 a.m. towards El Burj, 2 miles to the north-west. The 7th Mounted Brigade had been marching through the night to Tahta, and at 8.30 the Desert Mounted Corps ordered the 4th L.H. Brigade of the Australian Mounted Division to move to Berfilya, 2 miles west of El Burj. The division, less the 5th Mounted Brigade, had been resting at Majdal until the 27th. On that

the open at an average range of 3,700 yards. The other batteries of the 272nd Brigade R.F.A. were also in action, but at long range. Owing to the length of the front held by the brigade and the flatness of the ground behind Wilhelma, the bulk of the artillery had to be stationed at such distance from the line that it could be moved in case of need. Once action was joined these batteries were prevented from advancing by the Turkish fire.

¹ This Turkish attack was carried out by troops of the newly-arrived 20th Division, which had just marched down from Tul Karm. (See Note at end of Chapter.)

day the 4th L.H. Brigade marched to Deiran, and was followed at night by the divisional troops and 3rd L.H. Brigade, which reached Deiran at 7 a.m. on the 28th.¹ The 4th L.H. Brigade set out at once for Berfilya, but while on the march received orders to move straight on to Beit 'Ur et Tahta.

The march of the 7th Mounted Brigade is an extraordinary example of what may occur in war when lack of imagination causes each side to disregard the possible moves of the other. The brigade turned off the Lydda-Jerusalem road west of El Burj on to the track leading to Tahta. Thence for over four miles it moved across the gap in the British front and, though neither side was aware of the other's presence, across the rifle muzzles of the 19th Division, which was prepared to attack at dawn. The cavalry squadron of that division must have been in Suffa, 3 furlongs north of the track, before the long British column had passed it. By 4.45 a.m. the head of the brigade was halted in the valley three-quarters of a mile west of Tahta. The regiments began to off-saddle after their march and set about preparing a breakfast not destined to be eaten.

The situation of the 22nd Mounted Brigade was at this moment as follows:—the East Riding and Stafford Yeomanry, under the command of Lieut.-Colonel the Hon. Guy Wilson of the East Riding, were holding the high ground N.N.W. of Foqa to cover the left of the 6th Mounted Brigade and had come under the orders of Br.-General Godwin. The Lincoln Yeomanry was at Kh. Hellabi, north-west of Tahta; so that, in addition to the great five-mile gap on the left of the brigade, there was one of a mile and a half between its two right-hand regiments and that on its left.

Br.-General Wigan rode on to see Major-General Barrow at Tahta, who instructed him to reinforce the 22nd Mounted Brigade. He returned just as day was breaking and was in the act of preparing his orders when there came a sudden burst of fire from the hill above and a line of Turkish infantry was seen advancing. A squadron of the Sherwood Rangers

¹ The move of the 4th L.H. Brigade was unconnected with the Turkish attacks and simply preparatory to the relief of the Yeomanry Mounted Division by the Australian. The night march of the rest of the division, on the other hand, was ordered by General Chauvel when he heard how hard pressed the Yeomanry Division had been that morning.

was at once sent up to the left of the Lincoln Yeomanry at Kh. Hellabi and brought this advance to a halt. Br.-General Wigan next sent two squadrons of the Notts Hussars to hold the western end of the Hellabi spur. Soon afterwards Turkish patrols were seen moving down from the high ground just east of Shehab ed Din, a hill crowned by a sheikh's tomb a mile and a quarter west of Kh. Hellabi. A few of the enemy were actually crossing the valley in rear of the brigade and beginning to ascend the heights on the south side. The remaining two squadrons of the Sherwoods with two machine guns were sent to occupy the high ground on the north side and cover that end of the valley. Immediately afterwards the enemy attacked the Lincoln Yeomanry in great strength and momentarily forced it back, but was then checked by the enfilade fire of the Sherwood squadron. The South Notts Hussars carried out a counter-attack, the Lincoln Yeomanry gallantly rallied, and after bitter hand-to-hand fighting the Turks were driven back. For a few minutes they had been firing point-blank down into the valley and had wounded a number of horses.

Every man of the 7th Mounted Brigade, but for one horse-holder to every twelve horses, had by now been hurried into the line. Br.-General Wigan, while placing a machine gun in position on a knoll at the western end of the Hellabi spur, had been wounded by a bullet, and Lieut.-Colonel C. A. Calvert, South Notts Hussars, had taken over the command of the brigade. By 9 a.m. the enemy in front was being firmly held but was working round the brigade's flank west of Suffa and Shehab ed Din, where he was opposed only by a car of the 2nd Light Armoured Motor Battery, sent up by General Chauvel. A small party of the Sherwood Rangers under Lieutenant J. C. H. Harter captured the tomb of Shehab ed Din, but was soon afterwards driven out by overwhelming numbers after its gallant commander had been killed. However, the 4/R. Scots Fusiliers was now near El Burj, and further help was forthcoming. At 8 a.m. Br.-General Pollok-M'Call had been ordered to despatch another battalion of the 155th Brigade in the direction of Suffa, but on receiving news of the dangerous situation in that quarter he had set forth with all three battalions. At 9.30 he began an attack on Suffa from the south, with the 4/K.O.S.B., covered by the fire of ten machine guns, while companies of

the 5/Scots Fusiliers and 5/K.O.S.B. attempted to turn the Turkish position from the south-west. The attack failed, but by 11 a.m. the ridge on the south side of the valley was occupied, so that the enemy was prevented from advancing further and taking the 7th Mounted Brigade in rear. While this fighting was in progress Br.-General Pollok-M'Call received an urgent appeal from the Yeomanry Division, and at once despatched two companies of the 5/K.O.S.B., his last reserve, to Tahta. The leading company moved up to the Hellabi ridge to the assistance of the 22nd Brigade. Early in the afternoon the enemy got some mountain howitzers into action, and, owing to the scanty numbers of the horse-holders, the valley was soon filled with loose horses, many of them wounded, dashing madly about. The S.A.A. Section of the Yeomanry D.A.C. was caught by a burst of shell fire and had most of its horses killed.

From the east pressure on the 6th Brigade had continued all night. In the morning the garrison of the Zeitun post was shelled out of the tomb and suffered heavy loss. Br.-General Godwin decided to withdraw it to avoid its annihilation, and with great difficulty it crossed the valley. The remnants of the Berks and Bucks, now numbering 120 rifles, were disposed to cover Foqa, on which a strong attack was launched at 2 p.m. The detachment held out stubbornly, but two hours later the Dorsets holding "Jonquil Hill" to the south-east were driven back. About thirty men reached the right of the Berks and Bucks line south of Foqa; the remainder, hard-pressed by the enemy, fell back down the Wadi Zeit, when suddenly the way was barred to the pursuing Turks by the fire of Australian troops. It was the head of the 4th L.H. Brigade. Once again reinforcement had arrived at the most desperate moment.

The 4th L.H. Brigade had moved by the same route as the 7th Mounted Brigade till on reaching the neighbourhood of El Burj it had found the road blocked by fire. It then moved up south of El Burj, and Br.-General Grant reported at about 5 p.m. to Major-General Barrow, who placed the brigade south of Tahta in support to the 6th Brigade. The 11th A.L.H. was pushed forward with two machine guns to hold the Wadi Zeit, south-west of Foqa. All horses save a few officers' chargers and packs—180 in all—were sent back to the plains.