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What's in a name? Identifying military engagements in Egypt and the Levant, 1915-1918

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the official names listed in the 'Egypt and Palestine' section of the 1922 report by the British Army's Battles Nomenclature Committee and compares them with descriptions of military engagements in the Official History to establish if they clearly identify the events. The Committee's application of their own definitions and guidelines during the process of naming these conflicts is evaluated together with examples of more recent usages in selected secondary sources. The article concludes that the Committee's failure to accurately identify the events of this campaign have had a negative impact on subsequent historiography.

Introduction

While the perennial rose would still smell the same if called a lily, any discussion of military engagements relies on accurate and generally agreed on enduring names, so historians, veterans, and the wider community, can talk with some degree of confidence about particular events, and they can be meaningfully written into history. The Battles Nomenclature Committee identified World War I conflicts engaged in by British Empire forces, and codified them in their report, which was approved by the Army Council, presented to the British Parliament and published in 1922.¹

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¹Battles Nomenclature Committee (Great Britain) and John Headlam, *The Official Names of the Battles and other Engagements fought by the Military Forces of the British Empire during the Great War, 1914–19, and the Third Afghan War, 1919: Report of the Battles Nomenclature Committee as approved by the Army Council. Presented to Parliament by Command of His Majesty* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office (HMSO), 1922), (hereafter cited in text as BNC Report).

This article examines the official names given to military engagements in the 'Egypt and Palestine' section of the report, the Committee's application of their definitions and guidelines during that process, and considers their efficacy when compared with descriptions of these events provided in the Official History of the region.² This publication is particularly apposite as it raises questions and discusses technical issues about the names listed in the report, and is based on information contained in official documents including 'the war diaries of every staff and unit engaged, special reports of actions, messages received and sent, both those passing between the War Office and the command in Egypt and those between commanders and their troops', and enemy documents, and provides three maps included below. Prior to publication it was 'read by a number of commanders, staff officers and regimental officers who took part in the events described', and '[c]hapters in draft have been circulated to over five hundred officers who took part in the campaign'.³ Among them would have been Brigadier General A. P. Wavell, who acknowledged in his campaign history, checking 'all facts, and especially the figures of strengths, casualties, etc., with the Official History', which he considered to be, 'by far the most complete and authoritative work'.⁴

Selected secondary sources indicate how the events named in this section of the report have been identified more recently, although in most cases they are treated as rubrics, often without discussing their technical qualities.⁵ Also included are four maps which reflect views of the campaigns found in many publications.

²George MacMunn and Cyril Falls, *History of the Great War based on Official Documents by Direction of the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence, Military Operations Egypt & Palestine: Volume 1 From the outbreak of war with Germany to June 1917*, (London: HMSO, 1928); Cyril Falls and A. F. Becke, *History of the Great War based on Official Documents by Direction of the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence, Military Operations Egypt & Palestine: Volume 2 From June 1917 to the end of the War*, (London: HMSO, 1930).

³MacMunn and Falls, *Official History Vol. 1*, p. vi; Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, p. viii.

⁴A. P. Wavell, *The Palestine campaigns* (London: Constable & Co., 1928) (Google books, cited in 'original pages' format not the Contents' pagination), pp. 4, 302.

⁵The literature is dominated by Wavell's popular, wry, and extremely influential *The Palestine Campaigns*. Key works include Edward J. Erickson, *Ordered to Die: A History of the Ottoman Army in the First World War* (Westport Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001), and *Ottoman Army Effectiveness in World War I: A Comparative Study* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), with Matthew Hughes, *Allenby and British Strategy in the Middle East 1917–1919* (London: Frank Cass, 1999) and (ed) *Allenby in Palestine: The Middle East Correspondence of Field Marshal Viscount Allenby June 1917–October 1919* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing Ltd, 2004). Recent histories include Jean Bou, *Light Horse: A History*

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Service on the Committee

The Battles Nomenclature Committee was appointed in August 1919 by the Army Council and began naming operations fought during the Great War 1914–1919 and the Third Afghan War of 1919 on 18 August 1919. Their report was signed on 9 July 1920 by the Committee President Major General Sir John Headlam, the Secretary Captain H. Fitz M. Stacke, and eight of the longest serving Permanent Members. They were a Lieutenant Colonel from the General Staff and another from Canada who both served for 11 months, a Captain from New Zealand served for 10 months, a Lieutenant Colonel from South Africa and a Major from Canada both served for 8 months, two Lieutenant Colonels from Australia served for 5 months and for two stints of one and a half months respectively, and the eighth signatory a Colonel also from Australia served for 3 months. The remaining eight permanent members served only briefly – six for less than a week. Among them, an Australian, a Canadian and a New Zealander served for three days, another Australian for five days, and another New Zealander for just one day. The seventh non-signatory permanent member, a General Staff representative served for nine days, and the eighth a South African served for two months.⁶

Two Temporary Members were ‘specially selected for their local knowledge’ of each of seven theatres of the war and appointed by the General Staff to assist permanent members for unknown periods. Representing ‘Egypt and Palestine’ were ‘Lieut.-Colonel A. E. M. Sinclair Thompson, DSO, Essex Regiment’, and ‘Major J. A. H. Gammell, DSO, MC, Royal Artillery’.⁷ Sinclair Thompson probably served in one of the Essex Regiments in the 54th Division’s 161st Infantry Brigade, and Gammell appears to have served on the General Staff in Egypt from December 1915 until mid-1918, and from October at the War Office.⁸

The Committee claimed in their preamble, to ‘have carefully examined all the Despatches and Reports, ... received valuable assistance from the Headquarters of the

of Australia’s Mounted Arm (Port Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Anthony Bruce, *The Last Crusade: The Palestine Campaign in the First World War* (London: John Murray, 2002); John D. Grainger, *The Battle for Palestine 1917* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006); Terry Kinloch, *Devils on Horses in the words of the Anzacs in the Middle East 1916–19* (Auckland: Exisle Publishing, 2007); David R. Woodward, *Hell in the Holy Land: World War I in the Middle East* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2006).

⁶BNC Report, pp. 3, 4, 9.

⁷BNC Report, p. 4.

⁸MacMunn and Falls, *Official History Vol. 1*, Appendix 2 Order of Battle p. 383;

Lieutenant General Sir James Andrew Harcourt Gammell 1892–1975,

<https://www.gammell.net/james-a-h-gammell-1892-1975.html>. Accessed 18 May 2020.

different Dominion Forces ... and many accounts published unofficially ... In all matters of doubt the War Diaries have been freely consulted'. They were assisted by officers of the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence 'who acted as their secretaries', and by 'a large number of officers specially qualified to speak on the subject'. Given the enormous scope of their task, the extremely short terms served by many, and their claim to 'have carefully considered each case in all its aspects and they believe that their recommendations do substantial justice', it is difficult to see how they could have completed their work in just 11 months without a very great deal of help.⁹

They also claimed in the preamble that members 'have themselves had very varied experiences during the war', but no one from India appears to have served on the Committee despite its forces' substantial involvement in the war. The report records permanent members serving in the Grenadier Guards, the Devonshire, the Auckland, and the Otago Regiments, in the Australian Imperial Force, and the Canadian, New Zealand, and South African Military Forces.¹⁰ Although the Official History notes Devonshire, Auckland, and Otago battalions and a South African unit served in the region under consideration at one time, permanent records are not available to support or deny the contention that all the permanent members may have served on the western front, except that all five Australians certainly did.¹¹ If preliminary conclusions regarding war service prove correct, that most fought in the largely static, relatively compact, and mechanised war in Europe, they may have had difficulty grasping the mobile and dynamic Egypt and Levant campaigns which relied on camel- and horse-power, and where infantry moved on foot at about 3 miles an hour, not in lorries.

Terms of Reference, Definitions, and Layout

The Committee's Terms of Reference were:

- a) To tabulate the actions fought in this war.
- b) To classify these actions with a definite system of nomenclature which will denote their relative importance ...
- c) To define the geographical and chronological limits of each action.¹²

⁹BNC Report, pp. 4, 5, 9.

¹⁰BNC Report, pp. 3, 9.

¹¹MacMunn and Falls, *Official History Vol. 1*, pp. 441–5; Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, pp. 737–48; Charles Bean, *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918: Volume V The Australian Imperial Force in France during the Main German Offensive, 1918* (1941) Dowse p. 787, Jess p. 799, Plant p. 810, Somerville p. 815, and Whitham p. 824, <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1416531>. Accessed 20 April 2019.

¹²BNC Report, p. 3.

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The system of nomenclature used to maintain consistency in naming and classifying engagements is set out in the preamble. Concerning the scale of events, the Committee decided:

The only names in the military terminology which convey any real indication of proportion are “battle,” “action,” and “affair,” ... the rank of “battle” has been confined as a general rule to engagements of primary importance fought out between forces not smaller than the corps. The title “action” has been employed for the next class, the limit in this case being taken as the division; lesser engagements have been styled “affairs.”¹³

And they agreed to employ,

... *descriptive* terms, such as “capture,” “occupation,” “attack,” “defence,” &c., ... “Capture” has been reserved for operations where the primary object was the capture of a definite locality, and where this was only accomplished by actual fighting of some importance; where this latter condition was absent “occupation” has been used, and the same distinction has been drawn between “passage” and “crossing.” Again the term “attack” has been confined to unsuccessful offensive operations, and “defence” to successful defences of definite localities.¹⁴

The Committee presented their report as a table on landscape orientated pages. ‘By an arrangement in several columns, by the use of different terms and of varieties of type, the Committee have endeavoured to indicate the relative importance of events’. Columns are headed on verso pages: ‘Operations’; ‘Battles’ with sub-columns ‘Name’ and ‘Tactical Incidents Included’; ‘Actions, &c.’; ‘Miscellaneous Incidents’; and ‘Limits’ with sub-columns ‘Chronological’ and ‘Geographical’ (see Figure 2).¹⁵

However, the first two pages of the ‘Egypt and Palestine’ section of the report do not indicate ‘the relative importance of events’. This section starts with minor fighting in the ‘Sudan’ from 1 March to 31 December 1916, described in the Official History as involving three battalions of Sudanese and Arab infantry, followed by fighting on the ‘Western Frontier’ against the Senussi from 23 November 1915 to 8 February 1917, which the Official History documents being fought by two and a half brigades, three regiments and four units, a camel corps, and light armoured and light cars. Not until the following page does the report finally name the relatively much more important and arguably strategically vital, ‘Eastern Frontier and Palestine. I.—The Defence of

¹³BNC Report, p. 7.

¹⁴BNC Report, p. 7.

¹⁵BNC Report, pp. 8, 30, 32.

Egypt' and fighting for the Suez Canal from 3 February 1915.¹⁶ The Official History's versions of the report replicated this organisation, while Wavell rearranged his version to show relative importance and chronological order. He began with the 'Eastern Frontier and Palestine', 'I The Defence of Egypt', 'Defence of the Suez Canal', and 'Operations in the Sinai Peninsula', followed by 'II Western Frontier' with 'Operations against the Senussi', and finally 'Sudan' and 'Operations against the Sultan of Darfur'.¹⁷

Analysis of the 'Egypt and Palestine' section of the report

Operations in the region began with the Ottoman advance across the Egyptian Sinai to attack the Suez Canal in early 1915, followed by the Senussi insurgency in the Western Desert from late 1915 to 1917, and fighting in the Sudan in 1916. Northern Sinai became contested ground from April 1916, the second Ottoman advance across the desert was stopped at Romani in August, and the Sinai cleared by Christmas. Invasion of Ottoman territory began with the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF) victory at Rafah in January 1917 but two defeats at Gaza in March and April were followed by stalemate. This lasted until the October to December offensive pushed the Gaza to Beersheba line north to Jaffa and Jerusalem, when the Judean Hills became contested ground. The EEF won Jericho and occupied part of the Jordan Valley in February 1918, before attacks were launched against Es Salt and Amman in March and April and in the Judean Hills, and September brought the spectacular offensive which culminated in the captures of Amman, Damascus, and Aleppo, and Armistice on 31 October.

Fighting for the Suez Canal and Sinai

The report identified the 'Defence of the Suez Canal (26th January 1915–12th August 1916)' in the 'Operations' column, 'Actions on the Suez Canal' in the 'Actions, &c.' column, and '3rd–4th February 1915' in the 'Chronological' column.¹⁸ According to the Official History this was not an 'action' fought by a division. Instead it describes a 'battle' fought by corps-sized forces after the Ottoman VIII Corps advanced across the Sinai desert to launch a series of major attacks against the Suez Canal, successfully defended by the 10th India Division, parts of the 11th India Division and the New Zealand Infantry Brigade, with the Imperial Service Cavalry Brigade, the Bikanir Camel

¹⁶BNC Report, pp. 30–1; MacMunn and Falls, *Official History Vol. 1*, p. 375.

¹⁷MacMunn and Falls, *Official History Vol. 1*, pp. 374–9; Wavell, *Palestine campaigns*, pp. 297–8. Annotated and edited versions of the Report appear in the Official History as Appendix I in both volumes with added 'Forces engaged' columns: MacMunn and Falls, *Official History Vol. 1*, pp. 374–9; Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, pp. 650–59, and Wavell includes his edited version as Appendix I: Wavell, *Palestine campaigns*, pp. 296–300.

¹⁸BNC Report, p. 31. The chronological limits are combined with the names, below.

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Corps and a squadron and two regiments of Yeomanry.¹⁹ Lieutenant General Sir J. Maxwell, Commander-in-Chief of the Force in Egypt recalled a minor event, 'no great effort [was required] on our part to throw those who reached the Canal back in confusion', reflecting the downgrading of the event in the report. More recently, Edward Erickson also diminished the fighting when he described the attackers as 'almost completely untrained in water crossing operations', and as virtually ineffective; '[t]he carefully prepared attack plan disintegrated'.²⁰ However, as described in the Official History, this fighting between corps-sized forces fully conforms to the Committee's definition of 'battle', being 'of primary importance [and] fought out between forces not smaller than the corps'. David Woodward confirmed the primary importance of the Suez Canal, when he recognised it as 'the Empire's lifeline', and crucial to the Allies ability to conduct the war, yet this important and pivotal battle continues to be diminished in the secondary sources.²¹

While troops continued to hold Canal defences the Committee extended the chronological limits of the 'Defence of the Suez Canal' to 12 August 1916, but according to the Official History, from late February the strategic focus had shifted to 'The Advance into Sinai'. Raids conducted into the Peninsula including to Jifjafa in mid-April 1916, provoked enemy responses which the report recognised as the 'Affair of Qatia' and 'Battle of Romani', while fighting for Bir el Abd, Bir el Mazar, and the Maghara Hills during the advance of about 90 miles across northern Sinai, was overlooked. It was not until just before the EEF reoccupied 'El Arish only 27 miles from the frontier at Rafah', that the Committee finally named 'Operations in the Sinai Peninsula', and the 'Affair of Maghaba 23rd December 1916'. For the Official History this was no 'affair' but an 'action' by Major General Sir H. G. Chauvel's Anzac Mounted Division with the Camel Brigade, who fought and captured the Ottoman garrison. It fully accords with the Committee's own definition, that "'action" has been employed for the next class, the limit in this case being taken as the division'. This action resulted in the evacuation of Ottoman garrisons at Maghara Hills, Nekhl, and Bir el Hassana.²² The confusion over these events can be seen to this day with Figure 1, the United States Military Academy's map of the Egypt and Palestine campaign up to March 1917, showing Qatia, El Arish, and Bir el Hassana but overlooking all military operations across the Sinai. Uncertainty about this fighting will continue until there is a published

¹⁹MacMunn and Falls, *Official History Vol. 1*, pp. 37–52, 377.

²⁰General Maxwell quoted in C. Guy Powles and A. Wilkie, *The New Zealanders in Sinai and Palestine, Vol. III Official history of New Zealand's effort in the Great War* (Auckland: Whitcombe & Tombs Ltd, 1922) p. x; Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, p. 71.

²¹BNC Report, p. 7; Woodward, *Hell in the Holy Land*, p. 15.

²²BNC Report, pp. 7, 31; MacMunn and Falls, *Official History Vol. 1*, pp. 159–204, 242–6, 251–8.

campaign history. Jeffrey Grey confirms: 'The campaign to clear Sinai in 1916 remains the "orphan" in the historical literature'.²³

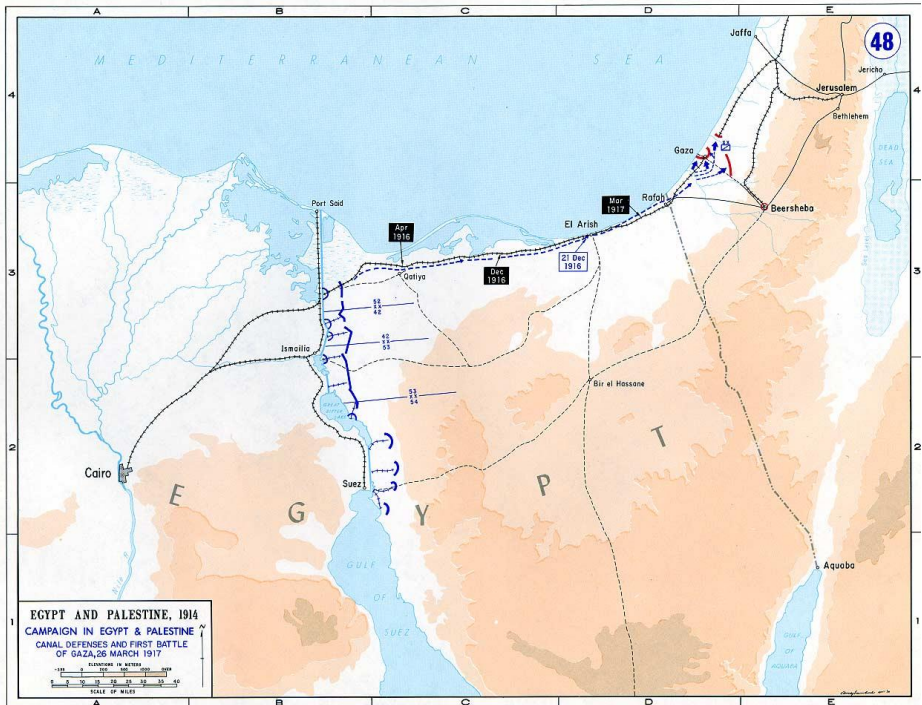


Figure 1: Egypt and Palestine, 1914; Canal Defences and First Battle of Gaza 26 March 1917 (Map courtesy of the United States Military Academy Department of History).

The Second Offensive

Following the 'Action of Rafah 9th January, 1917', the third page of this section of the report is headed 'II – The Invasion of Palestine', and lists in the 'Operations' column, 'The First Offensive (24th March–19th April)' against Gaza and 'The Second Offensive (27th October–16th November)' with the 'Third Battle of Gaza' in the 'Name' subcolumn of 'Battles', and the 'Capture of Beersheba', and the 'Capture of the Sheria Position' named in the 'Tactical Incidents Included' subcolumn of 'Battles', as if they were somehow part of, but lesser than the Gaza fighting. Next the 'Affair of Huj 8th November' and the 'Action of El Mughar 13th November' appear in the 'Actions, &c.'

²³Jeffrey Grey, *The Centenary History of Australia and the Great War Volume 2 The War with the Ottoman Empire* (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 191.

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column, and 'with subsequent Occupation of Junction Station 14th November' is in the 'Miscellaneous Incidents' column (see Figure 2).²⁴

EGYPT AND PALESTINE— <i>continued.</i>						
OPERATIONS	BATTLES		ACTIONS, &c.	MISCELLANEOUS INCIDENTS	LIMITS	
	NAME	TACTICAL INCIDENTS ENCLOSED			ORONOLOGICAL	GEOGRAPHICAL
II—The Invasion of Palestine.						
The First Offensive ... (14th March—10th April, 1917.)	FIRST BATTLE OF GAZA	20th—27th March	} North of the line Beersheba—Beit.
	SECOND BATTLE OF GAZA	...	...	...	17th—19th April
The Second Offensive ... (17th October—10th November, 1917.)	THIRD BATTLE OF GAZA	Capture of Beersheba Capture of the Sheria Position	27th October—7th November	} North of the Wadi Ghazza. } North of the line Beersheba—Gaza and west of the Beersheba—Jerusalem road.
			Affair of Haj	...	8th November	
			Action of El Mughar	...	13th November	
			—with subsequent Occupation of Junction Station	...	14th November	
Jerusalem Operations ... (17th November—30th December, 1917.)	BATTLE OF BEEHARBIL	17th—24th November	} North and east of the line Hebron—Junction Station.
	DEFENCE OF JERUSALEM	...	...	...	7th—9th December
	—with subsidiary BATTLE OF JAFFA	21st—22nd December		Between the Tel Keram—Junction Station—Jaffa railway and the sea.
Operations in and beyond the Jordan Valley. (19th February—4th May, 1918.)	Capture of Jericho	...	19th—21st February	} Between the Bethshem—Nabbus road and the Jordan, north of the line Jerusalem—Dead Sea. } East of the Jordan.
	...	...	Passage of the Jordan	...	21st—23rd March
	...	...	First Action of Es Salt	...	24th—25th March
	...	...	First Attack on Amman	...	27th—30th March
	...	...	Turkish Attack on the Jordan Bridgeheads	...	11th April
	...	...	Second Action of Es Salt	...	30th April—4th May
—with subsidiary Arab Operations in the Mountains of Moab. (March and April, 1918.)	March and April	
Local Operations, 1918	Actions of Tel Asur	...	8th—12th March	} West of the Jordan, and north of the line Jericho—Ram Allah—Jaffa.
	...	...	Affair of Abu Tulul	...	14th July
The Final Offensive... (18th September—31st October, 1918.)	THE BATTLES OF MEGIDDO	19th—25th September	} Between the Hejaz Railway and the sea, north of the line Dima Station—mouth of Jordan—Arwad.
	(I) BATTLE OF BEARUS	...	...	...	19th—25th September
	(II) BATTLE OF BEARUS	...	...	...	...
	...	...	Actions beyond Jordan	...	23rd—30th September
	...	...	Capture of Amman	...	22nd September
—including The Passage through Syria (20th September—21st October.)	Capture of Dara's	...	27th September	} North of the Haifa—Dara's railway.
	...	...	Capture of Damascus	...	1st October
	Affair of Hattin	...	26th October		—with subsequent Occupation of Aleppo

† Arab forces.

Figure 2: The layout of the Battles Nomenclature Committee's report at one opening, shows verso page 32 with column headings, and 'The First Offensive', 'The Second Offensive', and 'Jerusalem Operations', and recto page 33 'Operations in and beyond

²⁴BNC Report, p. 32.

the Jordan Valley’, ‘with subsidiary Arab Operations in the Mountains of Moab’, ‘Local Operations. 1918’, and ‘The Final Offensive’ ‘including The Pursuit through Syria’.

Numerous discrepancies between these names and the Official History’s descriptions of the events are examined below, which indicate major misunderstandings by the Committee of the scale of and distances between the sites of these conflicts, concluding with examples of the confusion which continues in the literature.

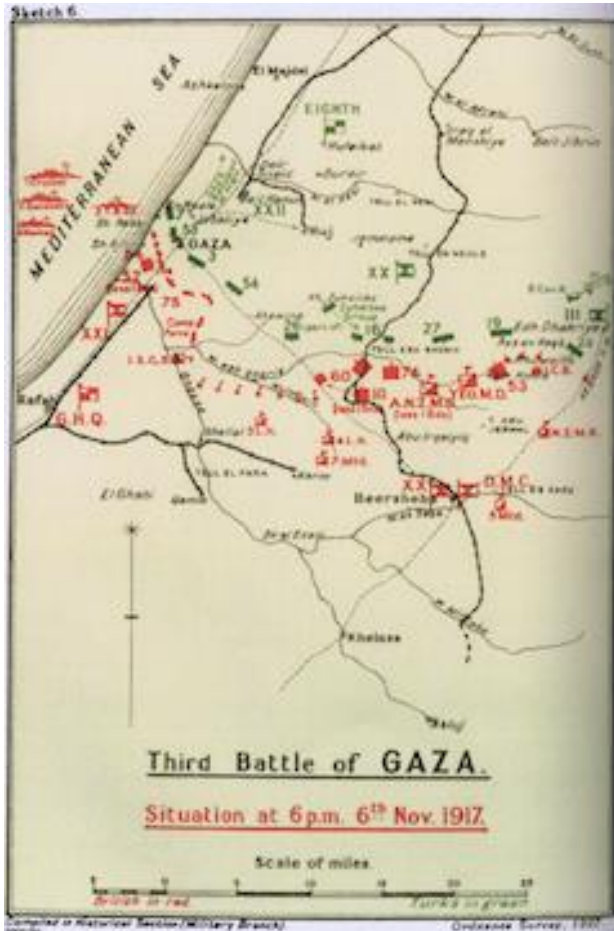


Figure 3: ‘Third Battle of Gaza. Situation at 6 pm 6th Nov. 1917’, shows Ottoman forces holding Gaza to Sheria, EEF flank deployments against Sheria, and fighting around Khuweilfe north of Beersheba (Falls and Becke, *Official History* Vol. 2, Sketch 6).

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For the Official History, the Second Offensive began on 31 October with a day-long pitched battle for Beersheba, by the EEF's XX Corps and Desert Mounted Corps against the Ottoman III Corps defending the town, which was won at dusk by reserve units.²⁵ This victory as described in the Official History was no mere 'capture' with 'actual fighting of some importance'. It fully conforms to the Committee's two criteria for 'battle'; being fought by corps-sized forces and of 'primary importance', as it opened the road via Hebron to Jerusalem to assault and captured the eastern end of the Gaza–Beersheba line shown on Figure 3. The Committee diminished this conflict by placing it in the 'Tactical Incident Included' subcolumn of 'Battles' indicating that it was somehow part of the fighting at Gaza and substantially misunderstood the battle was fought at least 25 miles away; about six hours for infantry on foot and three hours for trotting horses. This led to their contravention of their 'general principle' of including 'in a battle area only what might fairly be regarded as the actual 'battlefield'.²⁶ The event continues to be diminished in the secondary sources. For Erickson, 'Beersheba was a battle lost from the onset ... an almost unavoidable defeat', and Matthew Hughes thought it unnecessary: 'Counterfactual history suggests that an attack at Gaza would have routed the Turks and secured all of Palestine', and that General Sir E. H. H. 'Allenby [Commander-in-Chief of the EEF] overestimated the Turkish defences ... [He] and the War Cabinet misread Turkish capabilities and intentions ... [and] adopted an unsuitable plan for battle that involved attacking Beersheba'.²⁷

Conversely, the fighting at Gaza was inflated by the Committee when they named the 'Third Battle of Gaza 27th October–7th November', recognised in the Official History as subsidiary; '[t]he date of the assault on the Gaza defences was not fixed until the results of the fighting at Beersheba were known'.²⁸ The Official History named the '[Attack on Gaza Defences] 1st–3rd Nov.', and described assaults on 1 November by the 3rd Gurkhas (233rd Brigade, 75th Division), 7th Scottish Rifles, a company of the 8th Scottish Rifles with two tanks, on 2 November by the Royal Scots (156th Brigade, 52nd Division) with the 161st, 162nd, and 163rd Brigades (54th Division) and four tanks, and on 3 November by the 4th Essex (161st Brigade), which 'had not reached all its objectives'.²⁹ Woodward acknowledged: 'To reduce casualties in a frontal assault against fortress Gaza, the high command planned a night attack on a narrow front'.

²⁵Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, pp. 48–51, 55–60, 651.

²⁶BNC Report, pp. 5, 7, 32. For times see *Mounted Service Manual for Mounted Troops of the Australian Commonwealth: Mounted Service Manual for Australian Light Horse and Mounted Infantry*, & c. (Sydney: F. Cunninghame & Co., 1902) p. 272.

²⁷Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness*, p. 121; Hughes, *Allenby and British Strategy*, pp. 46, 56.

²⁸BNC, Report, p. 32; Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, p. 63.

²⁹Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, pp. 66–74, 651, 664–5.

Erickson confirmed fighting was launched against ‘the first line of Turkish trenches’, and that, ‘[t]he Turkish official history noted that Gaza never fell to a direct assault but was deliberately evacuated’ (see Figures 3 and 5).³⁰ Despite these clear acknowledgements of the scale of fighting, this so-called ‘battle’ continues to warp understanding of the overall offensive (see below). In addition, the chronological limits assigned to this event by the Committee include four days of bombardment in contravention of their own decision that, ‘the length of the preparatory action ... should not be included’, and four days of consolidation which were to be included, but according to the Official History was accomplished during pauses in fighting. Further, the geographic limits of ‘North of the Wadi Ghuzze’ take in the whole of the Levant but fail to identify ‘the actual “battlefield”’ as required by the guidelines. As described by the Official History, Woodward, and Erickson, this fighting between 1 and 3 November was quite separate from fighting for Beersheba, and fully conforms to the Committee’s descriptive term of ‘attack’ used to identify ‘unsuccessful offensive operations’.³¹ Yet it is the name in the report that continues to echo through the historiography.

Fighting for Khuweilfe which began on 1 November was completely overlooked in the report. The Official History described the major conflict for the strategically important ‘only metalled road running northwards ... from Beersheba to Jerusalem through Hebron up the spine of the Judaeian Hills’ (Figure 5). The EEF’s 53rd Division with the Imperial Camel Brigade attached, units of the Anzac Mounted Division, the 1st Light Car Patrol, and the 11th Light Armoured Motor Battery, attacked the Ottoman 12th Depot Regiment, the 3rd Cavalry Division, and from 2 November the 24th Division and the Beersheba Group’s 27th Division, reinforced by the 19th Division on 3 November.³² For A. J. Hill, ‘an unexpected battle was developing around Khuweilfe’, while Woodward assessed, ‘[t]he fighting around Khuweilfe ... was an important sideshow to the collapse of the entire Turkish front from Gaza to Beersheba’.³³ For the Official History: ‘[t]he fighting in the hills from the 1st to the 5th November had resulted tactically in a drawn battle’, but, ‘strategically the British ... had established themselves in a position of vantage from which to roll up the enemy’s flank’, pulled in their reserves, and stopped them ‘withdrawing a man or a gun from the hills to support the cracking front at Tell esh Sheria’.³⁴ By overlooking this strategically important

³⁰Woodward, *Hell in the Holy Land*, p. 111; Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness*, pp. 123–4.

³¹BNC, *Report*, pp. 5, 7; Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, pp. 70, 71, 73.

³²Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, pp. 19, 78–92.

³³A. J. Hill, *Chauvel of the Light Horse: A Biography of General Sir Harry Chauvel, GCMG, KCB* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1978), p. 129; Woodward, *Hell in the Holy Land*, p. 120.

³⁴Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, pp. 91–2, 101–6.

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conflict, the Committee obscured the shape of the offensive, the strength of the enemy's defences, and the fierceness of the continuing fighting in the region.

The Committee named the 'Capture of the Sheria Position' in the 'Tactical Incidents Included' subcolumn of 'Battles', as if it was part of fighting at Gaza. The Official History described a pitched battle beginning on 6 November, when the EEF's XX Corps launched flank assaults (made possible by the fighting for Khuweilfe pushing the enemy north towards Hebron) against the Ottoman XX Corps defending the eastern end of trenches impregnable from the south, guarding the Wadi and the Tell esh Sheria and Hureira (see Figure 3). Next day the 60th Division with units of Desert Mounted Corps fought for the Wadi esh Sheria, held by the Zuheilika Group and part of the 16th Division.³⁵ This conflict finally ruptured the old Gaza to Beersheba defensive line and compelled the Gaza garrison to retreat overnight 6/7 November. As described by the Official History it was no mere 'capture' but fully conforms to the Committee's criteria for battle; being fought by corps-sized forces and of primary importance.³⁶ When the Committee named this quite separate battle for Sheria, they disguised and diminished the scale and location of fighting, while bolstering Gaza as the main conflict. Erickson noted: 'on November 6 Allenby shifted his forces and attacked in the centre' and that, 'Falkenhayn ordered the Eighth and the Seventh Armies to conduct a fighting withdrawal to a new defensive line about ten kilometres to their rear'. The resulting fighting for the Wadi el Hesi during 7 and 8 November, described in the Official History, was also overlooked in the report.³⁷

Following the EEF's capture of the Gaza to Beersheba line, Allenby was beginning to move north when he wrote on 8 November, '[t]he battle is in full swing. ... My army is all over the place, now; on a front of 35 miles'.³⁸ During the next days he reorganised his forces and prepared to launch a pitched battle on the maritime plain against Junction Station. The Official History described the first day's combat which was completely overlooked in the report:

On the 12th November, a minor but still important operation ... [was launched] by the 52nd Division in preparation for the general advance upon Junction Station. It was to drive the enemy from his position north of the Nahr Suqreir between the villages of Burqa and Yazur ... the Yeomanry Mounted Division ... cover[ing] the infantry's left flank ... [t]he Australian Mounted Division ... on the right.³⁹

³⁵BNC, *Report*, p. 32; Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, pp. 93–101, 106–16, 651.

³⁶BNC, *Report*, p. 7; Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, p. 75.

³⁷Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, p. 173; Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, pp. 129–41.

³⁸Allenby quoted in Hughes (ed), *Allenby Middle East Correspondence*, p. 80.

³⁹Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, pp. 148–9.

On the right, the Australian Mounted Division fought about 5,000 Ottoman soldiers from the 26th, 53rd, and 54th Divisions for Summeil, while the 52nd Division successfully assaulted the Ottoman 7th Division at Burqa and Brown Hill (see Figure 4 insert).⁴⁰ Field Marshall Lord Carver noted the '52nd Division had a successful but costly clash ... which opened the way for a direct advance towards Junction Station'. Wavell confirmed: 'The Australian Mounted Division ... were heavily counter-attacked by four divisions and driven back a little distance'.⁴¹ As the Official History recognised, 'Sir Edmund Allenby had now effected his concentration in the plain. He was prepared to launch on the morrow the general attack which resulted in the capture of Junction Station'.⁴²

For the Official History, 'The main attack of the 13th November was to be carried out by the XXI Corps, the right flank ... protected by the Australian Mounted Division, while the remainder of the Desert Mounted Corps [including the Anzac Mounted Division] operated on the left' of the infantry. The 52nd Division fought for Maghar, Qatra, Beshshit, Mansura and the railway and the 75th Division advanced up the Gaza to Junction Station road, both divisions opposed by the Ottoman XXII Corps' 3rd, and 7th Divisions and part of the Ottoman XX Corps' 26th, 53rd, and 54th Divisions.⁴³ E. G. Keogh and Joan Graham recognised the battle: 'The outstanding feature of the battle for Junction Station, is of course, the magnificent charge of the Yeomanry at El Mughar'.⁴⁴ They celebrated the Committee's official name; the 'Action of El Mughar 13th November with subsequent Occupation of Junction Station', as if fought by a division, and as if Junction Station was occupied without 'actual fighting of some importance', to obscure the battle. As described by the Official History, this was no 'action', nor passive 'occupation', but a 'capture' resulting from a fierce two-day pitched battle for the maritime plain which won the enemy's strategically important junction on the Jaffa to Jerusalem railway and extensive enemy territory on the plain (see Figures 3 and 4), and fully conformed to both of the Committee's criteria for battle; being between corps-sized forces and of primary importance.⁴⁵ Gaza was now miles in the rear, but because the report failed to recognise and name fighting between corps-sized forces, the historiography has misunderstood this battle, treating it as just

⁴⁰Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, pp. 149–154, Map 9 Insert.

⁴¹Field Marshall Lord Carver, *The National Army Museum Book of The Turkish Front 1914–1918: The Campaigns at Gallipoli, in Mesopotamia and in Palestine*, (London: Pan Macmillan, 2003), p. 219; Wavell, *Palestine campaigns*, p. 185.

⁴²Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, p. 154.

⁴³Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, pp. 158–74, 653.

⁴⁴E. G. Keogh and Joan Graham, *Suez to Aleppo*, (Melbourne: Wilkie & Co., 1955), p. 188.

⁴⁵BNC, *Report*, pp. 7, 32.

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an 'action' by a division at El Mughar. The shape and scale of this major offensive, and the strength and determination of enemy fighting to stop the onslaught, have been written out by the Committee's failure to accurately identify and name these events.

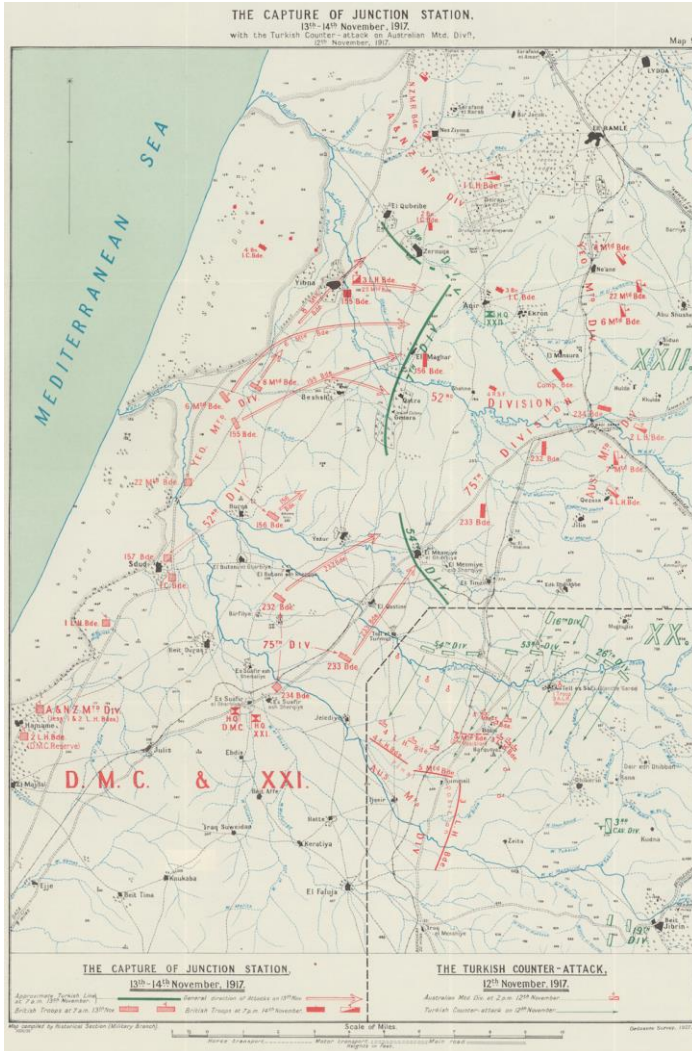


Figure 4: 'Capture of Junction Station, 13th–14th November 1917' with insert 'The Turkish Counter-attack 12th November 1917', shows the two day battle on the maritime plain for Junction Station (Falls and Becke, *Official History*, Vol. 2, Map 9).

The Official History's descriptions of the Second Offensive conclude with fierce fighting on 14 November by the Auckland and Wellington Mounted Rifles Regiments of the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade (Anzac Mounted Division) against 'the bulk of the much-depleted 3rd Division' for Ayun Kara (shown as Rishon le Ziyon on Figure 4), which was completely overlooked by the Committee.⁴⁶ John Grainger noted, 'In the north the New Zealand Brigade ... met a determined resistance from the Turkish 3rd Division, by now no more than 1,500 strong. They fought the New Zealanders for most of the day'.⁴⁷ This victory by New Zealanders led to them to occupy Jaffa unopposed on 16 November while the Ottoman Eighth Army withdrew up the coast and the Seventh Army withdrew back in the Judean Hills towards Jerusalem. The Eighth Army was pursued by the 1st Light Horse Brigade which 'entered Ramle ... caught up a retreating Turkish column ... and captured nearly three hundred prisoners ... [and] Lydda'.⁴⁸ The failure to identify this 'affair', further distorted the shape of the EEF's offensive, and understanding of the scale of fighting.

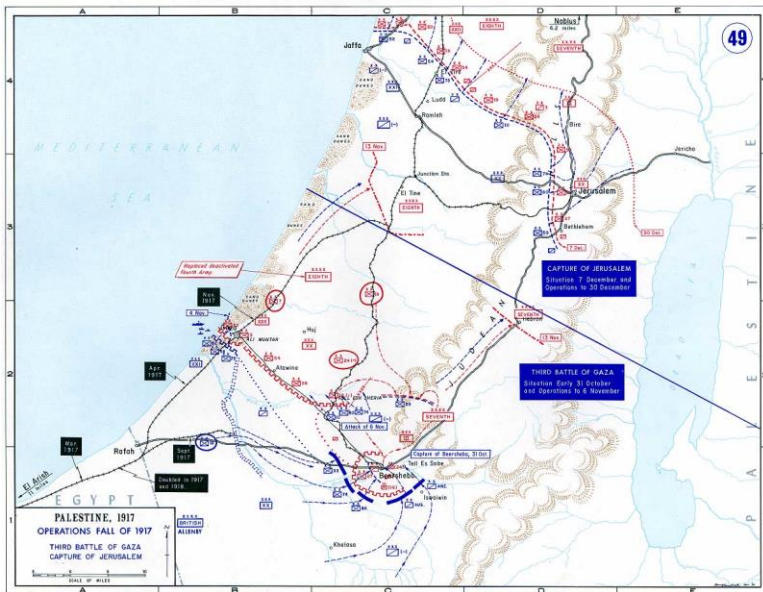


Figure 5: 'Palestine 1917, the Battle of Gaza and the Capture of Jerusalem' shows the EEF's front line during the stalemate, two Gaza forces moving up the coast, but overlooks fighting for Junction Station and the maritime plain (Map courtesy of the United States Military Academy Department of History).

⁴⁶Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, pp. 177–8.

⁴⁷Grainger, *Battle for Palestine*, pp. 172–3.

⁴⁸Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, pp. 181–2, 184.

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The Committee's failure to accurately name all the military operations involved in this second offensive has impacted the ability of military historians to meaningfully write this fighting into history. Anthony Bruce claimed these 'defensive movements [of the Seventh and Eighth Armies] marked the end of the ten-day pursuit (7–16 November) following the third Battle of Gaza'.⁴⁹ Hughes also claimed: 'Allenby's preparations ... allowed the Turks during the third battle of Gaza to make an orderly retreat to new defensive positions just north of Jerusalem'.⁵⁰ These instances reflect the report; that the Gaza fighting denoted the whole of the Second Offensive. Further investigation, including into the 'Gaza School' of military historians who advocated against attacking Beersheba and for a strong third attack against Gaza discussed by Hughes and the Official History, may help explain why the report continues to dominate understanding of these operations more than 100 years later.⁵¹

Fighting for the Nahr el Auja

The report continued with the remaining conflicts of 1917; 'Jerusalem Operations (17th November–30th December)' in the 'Operations' column, the 'Battle of Nabi Samweil 17th–24th November', the 'Defence of Jerusalem 26th–30th December – *with subsidiary* Battle of Jaffa 21st–22nd December', in the 'Name' subcolumn of 'Battles', and the 'Capture of Jerusalem 7th–9th December' in the 'Actions, &c.' column (see Figure 2).⁵² According to the Official History the campaign in the Judean Hills began with fighting for Abu Shushe and Amwas by the EEF's XXI Corps (later relieved by the XX Corps) against the Ottoman Seventh Army which developed towards Bire north of Jerusalem on the road to Nablus. In addition, the Official History also identified the 'Turkish Counter-Attacks in Defence of Jerusalem' between 27 November and 3 December which were repulsed, and the occupations of Hebron on 1 December and Bethlehem on 9 December, all of which were overlooked in the report.⁵³

During this period, the Official History described an attempt to push the front line across the Nahr el Auja on the Mediterranean coast by the 161st Brigade (54th Division) and the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade (Anzac Mounted Division) on 24 November. They were forced to withdraw next day by parts of the Ottoman 3rd and 7th Divisions, leaving 45 prisoners from the '4/Essex'.⁵⁴ The Committee

⁴⁹Bruce, *The Last Crusade*, p. 152.

⁵⁰Hughes, *Allenby and British Strategy*, p. 46.

⁵¹Hughes, *Allenby and British Strategy*, p. 56; Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, pp. 32–3.

⁵²BNC, *Report*, p. 32.

⁵³Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, pp. 178–80, 184–212, 218n1, 218–36, 238–59, 652–3.

⁵⁴Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, pp. 213–17.

overlooked this fighting even though one of their temporary members had served in an Essex Regiment, and could have been involved or known about it.

Instead, the Committee chose to inflate the second crossing of the Nahr el Auja by naming it the 'subsidiary Battle of Jaffa 21st–22nd December', which comprehensively mistakes the location, the scale and the importance of the conflict, and overlooked the fact that Jaffa was occupied by New Zealanders on 16 November.⁵⁵ Further, this second crossing could not have been 'subsidiary' as it began five days before the 'Defence of Jerusalem', and occurred well outside the geographic limits at the other end of the front line, at least 10 hours and 30 miles away (see Figure 5 for distances), in contravention of the Committee's own decision, 'that any [subsidiary actions] which took place outside the geographical limits ... for the main battle, should be considered on their merits as separate engagements'.⁵⁶ The Official History described an 'action' by a division and noted: 'The Passage of the Nahr el Auja by the 52nd Division is the main incident of this battle and that title might well have been given to it'.⁵⁷

Wavell described the first passage 'to secure a bridgehead over the River Auja' and with Woodward talked about the second as the 'crossing of the River Auja', while Grainger made a strong case against 'battle' and primary importance: 'Yet there is something lacking in this "Battle of Jaffa", as it is rather pretentiously called. Highly competent though it was, the object was no more than minor and local, an adjustment of the line, not a serious attempt at conquest'.⁵⁸ As described in the Official History and by Grainger, this event does not conform with either of the Committee's two criteria for battle, but fully conforms with their definition of 'passage' which 'was only accomplished by actual fighting of some importance'.⁵⁹ Yet it is the so-called battle at Jaffa, which disguises and obscures the extent of the EEF's maritime plain offensive and fighting for Ayun Kara, that is focused on in the literature.

Jordan and Transjordan

The last page of the 'Egypt and Palestine' section of the report covering conflict in 1918 is dominated by a misleading list in the 'Actions, &c.' column. At first glance readers could have assumed not much happened during the year. The Committee named 'Operations in and beyond the Jordan Valley (19th February–4th May)', the 'Capture of Jericho 19th–21st February', the 'Passage of the Jordan 21st–23rd March', the 'First Action of Es Salt 24th–25th March', the 'First Attack on Amman 27th–30th

⁵⁵BNC Report, p. 32.

⁵⁶BNC Report, p. 6.

⁵⁷Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, pp. 265–75, 654–5n1.

⁵⁸Wavell, *Palestine campaigns*, pp. 197, 205–6, Woodward, *Hell in the Holy Land*, p. 156; Grainger, *Battle for Palestine*, pp. 220–21.

⁵⁹BNC, Report, p. 7.

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March', the 'Turkish Attack on the Jordan Bridgeheads 11th April', and the 'Second Action of Es Salt 30th April–4th May' all in the 'Actions, &c.' column (see Figure 2).⁶⁰ In most cases these names and the scales of combat they indicate are misleading, disguising and/or diminishing events as they were described in the Official History.

Instead of a 'capture' of Jericho, the Official History described a battle by the EEF's 60th Division and the Anzac Mounted Division against the Ottoman 53rd Division 'and other troops armed with a total of 3,000 rifles' between 19 and 21 February. While the infantry fought their way across the wilderness to the edge of the escarpment, the mounted troops forced their way down into the Jordan Valley to capture Jericho (see Figure 6).⁶¹ Hill noted 'the opening phase of the battle on 19 February' and Erickson stated 'Allenby attacked the town of Jericho. In a two-day battle, the British pushed the Seventh Army behind the Jordan River'.⁶² This victory, as described by the Official History, fully conforms with the Committee's criteria for 'battle' being fought by a corps-sized force and of primary importance. Wavell confirmed; it 'effectually removed any threat to Jerusalem from the east' and led to the occupation of the southwest portion of the Jordan Valley which became an important base for Transjordan operations. Had the Committee recognised a battle of the wilderness in the 'Name' subcolumn of 'Battles', they could have added the capture of Jericho in the 'Tactical Incidents Included' subcolumn, and clearly identify the full extent of fighting.⁶³

The next three seemingly separate minor events; the 'Passage of the Jordan 21st–23rd March', the 'First Action of Es Salt 24th–25th March', and the 'First Attack on Amman 27th–30th March' continued the report's list in the 'Actions, &c.' column.⁶⁴ Collectively these events are recognised in the Official History as the 'First Trans-Jordan Raid', by Major General J. S. M. Shea's Force consisting of the 60th Division, the Anzac Mounted Division and the Imperial Camel Brigade. They crossed the Jordan River on 22–23 March opposed by about 1,500 rifles between them and Amman. They then occupied Es Salt unopposed on 25 March while troops stretch from the Jordan Valley to defend their northern flank. The remainder of the Anzac Mounted Division with the Imperial Camel Brigade and reinforced by the 180th and 181st Brigades, continued on to launch three strong attacks against Amman (see Figure 6). By 27 March 'about 2,150 rifles, 70 machine guns, and 10 guns' protected the town, the Headquarters of the Ottoman Fourth Army arrived next day, and about 2,000 reinforcements before 30 March.⁶⁵ Allenby recorded: 'On the evening of the 30th, I ordered a withdrawal ... Prisoners,

⁶⁰BNC, *Report*, p. 33.

⁶¹Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, pp. 302–9, 655, Sketch 22.

⁶²Hill, *Chauvel of the Light Horse*, p. 142; Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness*, p. 130.

⁶³BNC, *Report*, p. 7; Wavell, *Palestine campaigns*, p. 215.

⁶⁴BNC *Report*, p. 33.

⁶⁵Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, pp. 328–49, 654, Sketch 24.

to the number of 986, were brought back ... I had intended this raid to be a preliminary step to an advance on the W. of Jordan to the line Nablus–Tulkaram’ (sites of the Seventh and Eighth Armies’ Headquarters in the Judean Hills).⁶⁶ The Committee’s recognition of three separate events contravened their own requirement, ‘that battles fought under a single plan on a continuous front should not be broken up.’ As described by the Official History and Allenby, this fighting fully conforms to both of the Committee’s criteria for battle; being by corps-sized forces and of primary importance to future operations in the Transjordan and the Judean Hills.⁶⁷

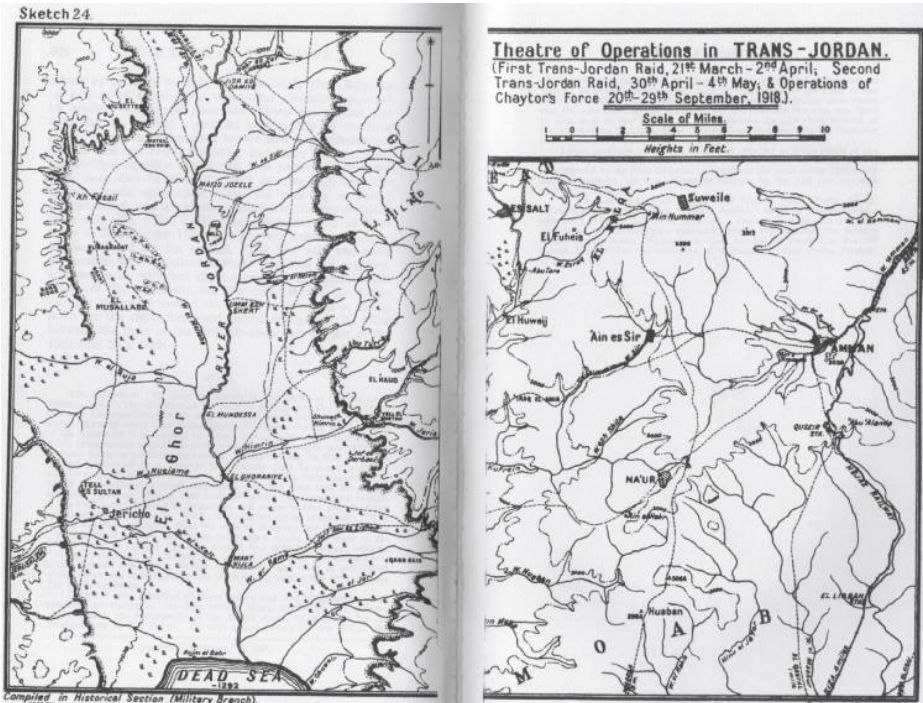


Figure 6: 'Theatre of Operations in Trans-Jordan', shows the valley of the Jordan River, Jericho, Shunnet Nimrin and Jisr ed Damieh, with Es Salt and Amman in the high country to the east, and the roads to Nablus and Jerusalem, (Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, Sketch 24 pp. 326–7).

Fighting against enemy defences on Shunet Nimrin on 18 April by the Anzac Mounted Division was described in the Official History but overlooked by the Committee.

⁶⁶Allenby's 5 May Report in Hughes, *Allenby Middle East Correspondence*, pp. 150–1.

⁶⁷BNC Report, p. 7.

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Instead they continued their dubious list in the 'Actions, &c.' column with the 'Second Action of Es Salt 30th April–4th May', recognised by the Official History as the 'Second Raid into Trans-Jordan', when the 60th Division, the Anzac Mounted Division and the Australian Mounted Division launched assaults on multiple fronts against the Ottoman Fourth Army. In the Jordan Valley the EEF attacked Shunet Nimrin again, and the Jisr ed Damieh, while in the hills they captured and defended Es Salt on three sides. The attackers were eventually compelled to withdraw to their Jordan bridgeheads by the Ottoman 3rd Cavalry Division, the Storm Battalion, and the 2nd, 32nd, 50th, and 58th Regiments.⁶⁸ As described by the Official History this fighting was no mere 'action' by a division, but fully conforms to the Committee's criteria for battle being by corps-sized forces and of primary importance to operations planned for September.⁶⁹ The report continued with '*with subsidiary Arab Operations in the Mountains of Moab (March and April, 1918)*' in the 'Operations' column, without identifying any conflicts. According to the Official History these were extremely minor; 'two large bodies of friendly Arabs' had some slight involvement to the north and south of Amman in March, while promised 'help of the Beni Sakr' during fighting for Es Salt in April did not materialise.⁷⁰

The Committee's identification of two major battles fought in the Transjordan as minor events in the 'Actions, &c.' column, obscured, disguised and diminished these operations while at the same time they promoted almost non-existent 'Arab Operations', to create a false understand of the operations and lasting confusion in the secondary sources. These fiercely fought and extremely difficult battles, by soldiers from Australia, New Zealand and India and British Yeomanry in a British Empire force, against equally diverse Ottoman Empire forces drawn from the regions, fought on Arabian and/or Bedouin lands deserve full recognition of the scale and location of the conflicts.

Instead of naming Judean Hills operations, the report identified 'Local Operations. 1918' in the 'Operations' column and 'Actions of Tel Asur 8th–12th March' in the misleading list of 'Actions, &c.'. The Official History described a battle fought by the EEF's XX and XXI Corps against the Seventh Army which captured a 'favourable' line in the Judean Hills including the Abu Tellul salient after pushing the enemy back five miles on a wide front which satisfies both of the Committee's criteria for 'battle'. Further fighting in the Judean Hills from 9 to 11 April was named and described by the Official History as the 'Action of Berukin' by the EEF's 54th and 75th Divisions against the Ottoman 16th and 46th Divisions, but completely overlooked by the Committee.⁷¹

⁶⁸BNC Report, p. 33; Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, pp. 361–2, 367–89, 392–3.

⁶⁹BNC Report, p. 7.

⁷⁰BNC Report, p. 33; Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, pp. 343, 364–5.

⁷¹BNC Report, p. 33; Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, pp. 310–326, 350–7, 656–7.

The list in the 'Actions, &c.' column continued with the 'Affair of Abu Telul 14th July', accurately reflecting the Official History's description of this successful defence by the 1st Light Horse Brigade (Anzac Mounted Division), but the Committee overlooked another Ottoman attack the same day against the El Hinu crossing of the Jordan, which was also repulsed (see Figure 6).⁷²

The Final Offensive (18th September–31st October, 1918)

The Committee identified 'The Battles of Megiddo 19th–25th September', '(i) Battle of Sharon' and '(ii) Battle of Nablus' all in the 'Name' subcolumn of 'Battles' with the same chronological limits (see Figure 2) making them the only conflicts not listed in the 'Actions, &c.' column on the page. The Official History described four divisions of the XXI Corps fighting the primary battle between 19 and 21 September and recorded, by 'the 21st September ... [t]he XXI Corps had thus completed one of the most overwhelmingly successful operations of the war ... The captures were about 12,000 prisoners, 149 guns'.⁷³ On their right, the Official History described the subsidiary battle by the XX Corps' two divisions, beginning 15 hours later. By 21 September they had occupied Balata and Nablus (Seventh Army Headquarters) and captured '6,851 prisoners, 140 guns'.⁷⁴ The Committee clearly identified this second battle by the name of the main place captured but failed to name the primary battle for its main objective, recognised by the Official History as Tul Karm and the Eighth Army Headquarters. Instead, they named it for the place of concentration on the Plain of Sharon, where one division of the XXI Corps strengthened by a creeping barrage broke the enemy's line. In doing so, they obscured and diminished the subsequent 'overwhelmingly successful' flank assaults by all four divisions of the XXI Corps into the Judean Hills, against Tul Karm, Tabsor, Et Tire, Jaljulye and Qalqilye, some of which could have been listed as 'Tactical Incidents Included'.⁷⁵

The misleading list in the 'Actions, &c.' column continued with 'Actions beyond Jordan 23rd–30th September' and the 'Capture of Amman 25th September', disguising another battle described in the Official History. Between 20 and 25 September, Major General E. W. C. Chaytor's Force consisting of the Anzac Mounted Division, the 20th India Brigade, two battalions of the British West Indies Regiment, and two battalions of Royal Fusiliers defeated remnants of the Ottoman Seventh Army at Jisr ed Damieh and captured 786 prisoners with 6 guns, advanced east against units of the Ottoman Fourth Army to capture Es Salt with about 669 prisoners and 3 guns, and launched a successful assault against Amman, capturing 2,563 prisoners with 10 guns. A further 4,602 Fourth Army prisoners were captured south of Amman at Ziza, and another

⁷²BNC Report, p. 33; Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, pp. 429–38.

⁷³BNC Report, p. 33; Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, pp. 470–88, 504–10.

⁷⁴Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, pp. 471, 490–94, 496–503.

⁷⁵Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, pp. 468, 470–88, 504–10.

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hundred with a gun to the north (see Figures 6 and 7).⁷⁶ The Committee's identification of this combat as two separate actions obscures a battle 'fought under a single plan on a continuous front' and assigned it the same general geographic limits as the two Meggido battles fought 15 to 40 miles away. In doing so, they again ignored their 'general principle' of including 'in a battle area only what might fairly be regarded as the actual 'battlefield' and added to the confusion in secondary sources.⁷⁷ This fighting as described in the Official History fulfils the two criteria for 'battle' being by a corps-sized force and of primary importance, as large areas of enemy territory and many prisoners were captured, and the right flank of the EEF in the Judean Hills and on the Esdraelon Plain was secured.

The Committee completely overlooked fighting for the Esdraelon Plain by Chauvel's Desert Mounted Corps' 4th and 5th Cavalry and the Australian Mounted Divisions to the north of the Judean Hills and west of the Jordan River between 20 to 25 September described in the Official History. After riding north along the Plain of Sharon and across the hills, they fought and captured enemy forces at the site of Armageddon/Megiddo, at Lejjun, at Nazareth (General Headquarters of Field Marshal Liman von Sanders), at Jenin with about 8,000 prisoners, at Haifa and Acre. They occupied Beisan, captured the Jordan crossings to complete the encirclement of what remained of two Ottoman armies in the Judean Hills, and on 25 September won Samakh and Tiberias to effectively end the battles of Megiddo.⁷⁸ This fighting as described in the Official History fully conforms with the Committee's two criteria for battle; being fought by corps-sized forces and of primary importance, as they stopped enemy escaping north or east from the Judean Hills, captured a wide region of Ottoman territory including a supply base and lines of communication and many prisoners, and opened the way for the pursuit to Damascus and advance to Aleppo.

Finally, the Committee conflated two simultaneous fighting pursuits with an advance, when they named '*including The Pursuit through Syria (26th September–31st October)*' in the 'Operations' column, with the 'Capture of Dera'a 27th September' by 'Arab forces', the 'Capture of Damascus 1st October' and the 'Affair of Haritan 26th October', '*with subsequent Occupation of Aleppo 26th October*' as a 'Miscellaneous Incident', to finally end the misleading list in the 'Actions, &c.' column and the page.⁷⁹ The Official History described two simultaneous Desert Mounted Corps pursuits to Damascus between 27 and 30 September; to the west of the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan, and to the east of the Jordan and west of the railway with Sherifial units; and the quite separate 190 mile advance from Damascus to Aleppo, conducted three

⁷⁶BNC Report, p. 33; Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, pp. 547–59, 673.

⁷⁷BNC Report, pp. 5, 7.

⁷⁸Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, pp. 513–46.

⁷⁹BNC Report, p. 33.

weeks later. Then ‘the strongest column of light armoured motor batteries and light car patrols yet employed in the theatre’ with the Jodhpore and Mysore Lancers of the 15th (Imperial Service) Cavalry Brigade and 1,500 Sherifial Army troops captured Aleppo and conducted the Affair of Haritan. The Australian Mounted Division rode out of Damascus on 27 October to reinforce Aleppo but were stopped south of Homs after the Ottoman Empire agreed an Armistice on 31 October.⁸⁰

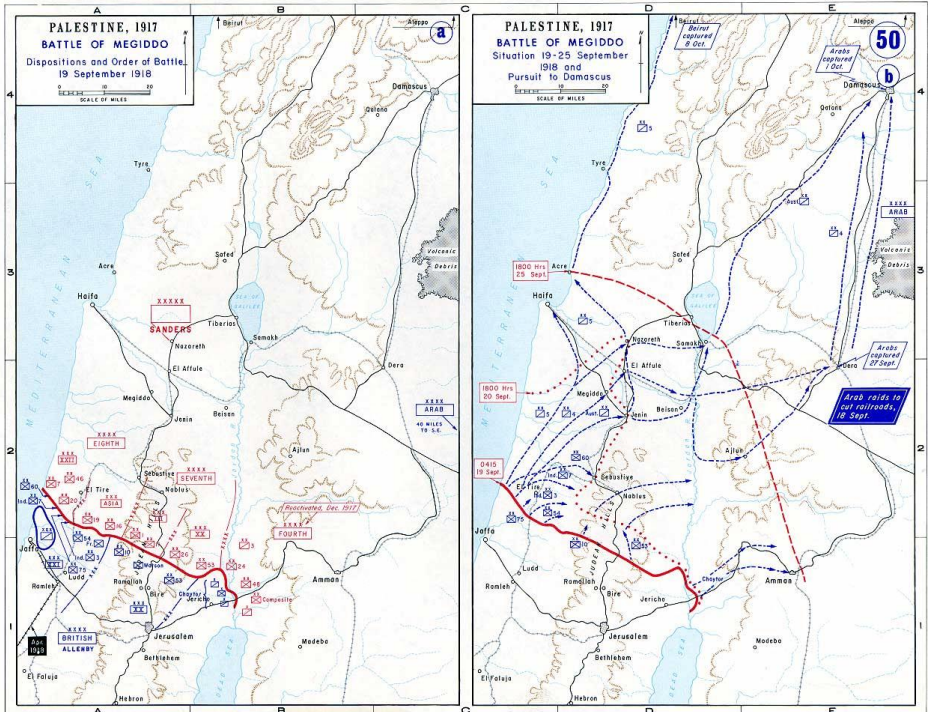


Figure 7: ‘Palestine 1917, Battle of Megiddo, Disposition and Order of Battle 19 September and Situation 19 - 25 September 1918 with Pursuit to Damascus’, shows Nablus but not Tul Karm, and overlooks the advance to Aleppo (Maps courtesy of the United States Military Academy Department of History).

Conclusion

What's in a name? It would seem, in many of the preceding instances, not that much. In their ‘Egypt and Palestine’ section the Committee failed to follow their own definitions and guidelines to clearly name conflicts based on scale, location, and chronology when they reduced a battle for the Suez Canal to actions, a battle for the

⁸⁰Falls and Becke, *Official History Vol. 2*, pp. 567–90, 610–21, Sketches 35, 38, and 41.

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wilderness to a capture, a battle for the maritime plain to an action, and an action at Magdhaba to an affair, inflated an attack at Gaza and a passage across the el Auja river to battles, failed to identify fighting for Gaza and Nablus as subsidiary, disguised battles for the maritime plain and the Judean Hills behind the obscure names of El Mughar and Nabi Samweil. They also created a misleading list of seemingly minor events in the 'Actions, &c.' column and completely overlooked numerous large and small conflicts described in the Official History. The shape of offensives has been obscured and disguised by the names and geographic limits assigned by the Committee and major operations have been overlooked entirely while the scale of others has been diminished. Despite these failings the report continues to reverberate in the literature. Only the 'Affair of Qatia', 'Battle of Romani', 'Action of Rafah', 'First Battle of Gaza', 'Second Battle of Gaza', 'Affair of Huj', 'Defence of Jerusalem', 'Turkish Attack on the Jordan Bridgeheads', and the 'Affair of Haritan', reflect the Committee's definitions and guidelines.⁸¹

Further research is needed to prove or disprove systematic obfuscation and to establish if this section of the report is or is not indicative of other sections. If this section proves to be exceptional, then it may be useful to investigate the selection of the Committee membership by the Army's High Command, the extremely short terms of many of the 'permanent' members, and the lack of representatives from India or the cavalry. Study of the 'many accounts published unofficially' which the Committee claimed to have consulted may also be informative along with consideration of any influence of wartime propaganda on the many questionable applications of the Committee's definitions and guidelines. The reasons for the apparent concealment or diminution of successful operations, as described in the Official History, are not clear but are themselves of great interest. Finally, it may be pertinent to establish if Basil Liddell Hart's tart phrase the official histories may be 'official but not history', played a part in discrediting these campaigns.⁸²

In any case, an unfortunate consequence of the Committee's work has been to obscure many of the achievements of those involved in the Sinai and the Levant during the First World War. Grey described the historiography, as 'partial and uneven in both quality and quantity, not least because it is rarely conceived of in holistic terms'.⁸³ To clarify the naming and relative scale of all the events of the fighting in Egypt and the

⁸¹BNC Report, pp. 31–33.

⁸²Quoted in Rodney Lowe, *"Official history" Making History: The changing face of the profession in Britain* (University of London: The Institute of Historical Research, School of Advanced Study, 2008)

https://archives.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/official_history.html.

Accessed 16 November 2019.

⁸³Grey, *War with the Ottoman Empire*, p. 191.

Levant during the First World War would be a major step toward providing the holistic treatment and substantial justice these campaigns deserve.