

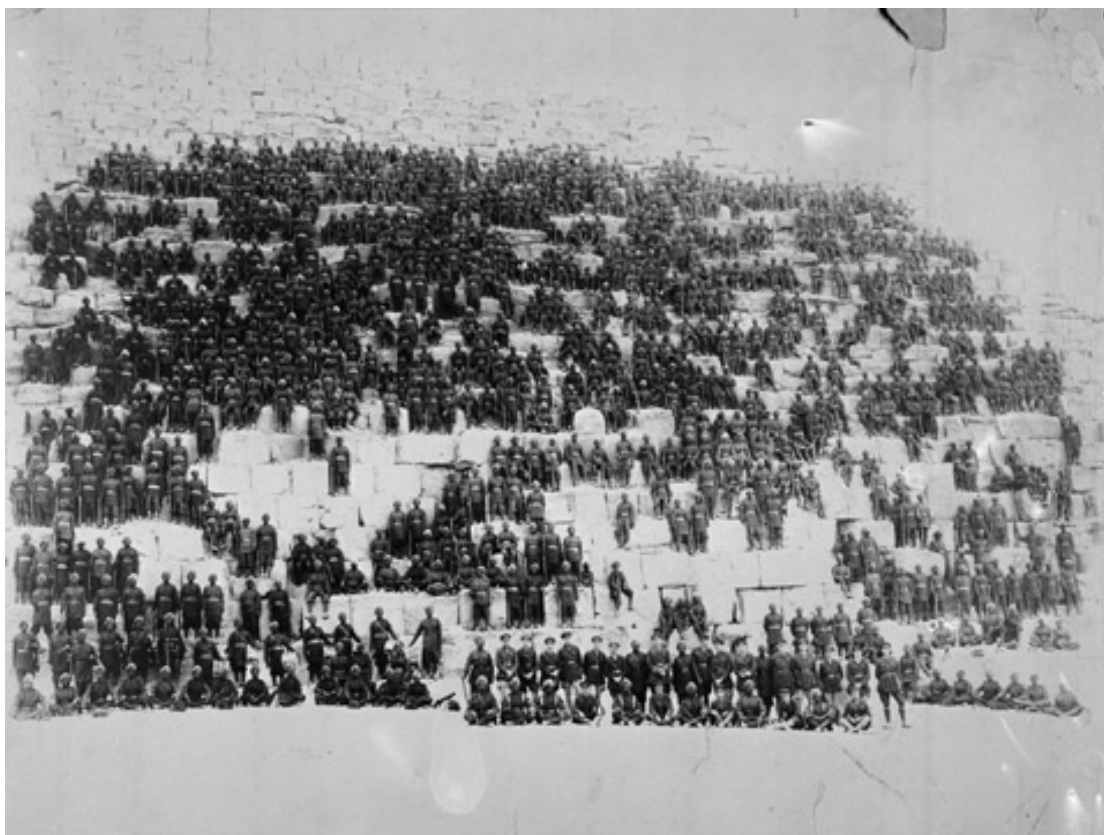
EMPIRE AND COMMONWEALTH: SINAI & PALESTINE CAMPAIGN, 1918 (THE BATTLE OF MEGIDDO)

28 January 1915 – 30 October 1918



Background

- Hopes of a quick victory over the Ottoman Empire had been dashed by the failure of the 1915 Gallipoli Campaign. Instead, a slow slog through the Middle East was required to subdue the Ottoman Empire and knock them out of the war.
- Following a successful defence of the Suez Canal in Egypt against an audacious Ottoman attack in 1915, the British Empire forces, consisting of British, Australian, New Zealand, Indian, West Indian and Palestinian Jewish troops, began a push into Ottoman Empire in 1916.
- A strong counter-attack by the Ottoman Army at Romani was repelled and despite the skilful leadership from German General Kress von Kressenstein, the Ottoman forces were forced to withdraw. They struggled to deal with the mobility and manoeuvrability of the Anzac Mounted Division, whose patrolling and screening prevented Ottoman units any freedom of movement.



NAM. 1959-11-355-1 38th Dogras on the Great Pyramid, Egypt, 1918

- The Ottoman garrisons at Maghaba and Rafa were dealt stinging blows in December 1916 and January 1917 by the Anzacs and the 52nd (Lowland) Division, forcing the Ottoman Army to withdraw from the Sinai.
- Buoyed by their success in the Sinai, the commander of the British Egyptian Expeditionary Force, General Sir Archibald Murray, decided to press the advantage by invading Ottoman Palestine. However, two British attacks on Ottoman-held Gaza in March and April 1917 both failed, and saw Murray replaced by General Edmund Allenby.
- Allenby's experiences commanding mounted units in the Boer War made him place his faith in mobile warfare, and rather than risk another failure at Gaza, he planned an extraordinary strategic manoeuvre to encircle Gaza by driving deep into the desert and taking Beersheba.



NAM. 2002-05-1-28 Indian transport crossing the desert in Palestine, 1917

- Despite the risks of a long desert ride whilst low on water and supplies, the attack broke the deadlock. With the support of British infantry and accurate artillery support, a daring cavalry charge by the Australian Light Horse at Beersheba had stunned the Ottoman defenders, resulting in the fall of Beersheba. It opened the road to Jerusalem, which fell in December 1917.
- Allenby famously dismounted, and entered the Holy City on foot, not wishing to be seen by the city's population as a conquering crusade
- The summer of 1918 saw the Ottoman Army on the defensive. Having been forced to retreat northwards through Palestine, they regrouped at Megiddo (The site of Biblical "Armageddon") planning how to launch a counter-attack. However they had fallen into Allenby's trap, and encamped in the exact position he had hoped for, as he planned their total destruction.



NAM. 1978-11-157-20-30 General Sir Edmund Allenby entering Jerusalem, 1917

Which British Empire & Allied Troops Were There?

Responsibility for the war against the Ottoman Empire fell to the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF), commanded by General Archibald Murray from January 1916 to 29 June 1917, and by General Edmund Allenby from 29 June 1917 until 1919. The EEF consisted of:

- UK – XX Corps, XXI Corps, Desert Mounted Corps, Imperial Camel Corps, Royal Flying Corps/Royal Air Force
- Australia – Australian Mounted Division, ANZAC Mounted Division, Imperial Camel Corps, Australian Flying Corps

- India – 3rd (Lahore) Division, 7th (Meerut) Division, 20th Indian Infantry Brigade, Imperial Service Cavalry Brigade, Indian Artillery & Support Troops
- New Zealand – ANZAC Mounted Division, Imperial Camel Corps
- West Indies – British West Indies Regiment
- Hong Kong & Singapore – Hong Kong and Singapore Mountain Battery
- France – French Palestinian Contingent, French Régiment Mixte de Cavalerie
- Palestinian and British Jews – Jewish Legion
- Kingdom of Hejaz & Emirate of Nejd and Hasa – Arab Regulars & Irregulars

Who Were They Fighting Against?

The Ottoman Eighth Army under Jevad Pasha, the Seventh Army under Mustafa Kemal Pasha, and the Fourth Army under Jemal Mersinli Pasha. The Ottoman force also had German troops in support.

Overview

The Sinai and Palestine Campaign lasted from 28 January 1915 to 30 October 1918. Although elements of the Ottoman Army took time to mop up, their ability to continue the war was ended with the decisive Allied victory in the Battle of Megiddo fought from 19 to 25 September 1918.

The commander of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF), General Allenby, had planned the final destruction of the Ottoman Army, using the mobile warfare experience he gained in the Boer War. With the Ottoman forces encamped and re-grouping on the plains of Megiddo, Allenby sought to trap the Ottoman forces, prevent any escape routes and then launch a co-ordinated attack with cavalry, infantry, artillery, armoured vehicles and aircraft to annihilate them in one fell swoop. He skilfully deploy his forces before launching a surprise attack, with infantry and artillery closing on their positions, the Desert Mounted Corps used deception and speed to encircle them and prevent escape.



NAM. 1978-11-157-20-47 Tank advance, c1918

As the Desert Mounted Corps surrounded the Ottoman Army, Arab rebels launched hit and run attacks on the Ottoman's lines of communication. British and Indian Divisions began an all-out frontal assault, battering the Ottoman Armies at Sharon and Nablus. In the classic set-piece Battle of Sharon on 19 September, following accurate and deadly creeping artillery barrages, the infantry of XXI Corps attacked in formation, punching holes through the Ottoman defence, and allowing the Desert Mounted Corps to pour through into the Ottoman rear positions, creating havoc and sowing panic. They then advanced many miles capturing key strongholds at Afulah, Beisan, and Jenin. Over the next few days the mounted units swept through the region destroying isolated units, taking many German and Ottoman stragglers

prisoner, and also securing Nazareth, Haifa, and Samakh.

Having achieved the desired breakthroughs at Sharon by the evening of 19 September, the Battle of Nablus was begun with XX Corps directly attacking the Ottoman Army's well-defended frontline in the Judean Hills. A mixed mounted and infantry detached unit known as Chaytor's Force captured the vital Jordan River crossings after an artillery barrage had softened up the Ottoman Eight Army. At the same time the Ottoman Fourth Army came under sustained attack in the Hills of Moab, and at Es Salt and Amman. The battles raged throughout the night and into the next day allowing the XXI Corps to begin outflanking the Ottoman Eighth Army.



NAM. 1999-10-8-8 Australian cavalry waiting just outside Nablus, 1918

Meanwhile the Desert Mounted Corps has completed their encirclement on the Ottoman Army, securing the important defiles of the Carmel Range in the early hours of 20 September. The Ottoman and German Armies were trapped, and the Entente forces also held aerial and numerical superiority. The Australian 5th Light Horse captured Nablus, whilst a devastating aerial bombardment cut off the line of retreat along the Wadi el Fara road. Waves of

British and Australian aircraft passed over the Ottoman column of retreat every three minutes. Although the attack was intended to be sustainable for up to five or six hours, the Ottoman forces were totally destroyed within 60 minutes. The wreckage and carnage of hundreds of vehicles, wagons, guns, and dead or wounded troops were scattered along a stretch of road over 9.7km (6 miles).

The Ottoman forces around Nablus were also defeated by 21 September, allowing XX Corps to concentrate on rounding up prisoners. By this stage the Australian Light Horse had been upgraded to proper cavalry. Now armed with sabres, they had opportunity to use them in brutally over-running German and Ottoman troops at Samakh.

On 22 September, British, New Zealand, Indian and West Indian Soldiers entrapped the Ottoman 53rd Division headquarters, capturing their divisional commander, and a further 600 prisoners with few casualties. They also secured the Jisr ed Damieh bridge across the Jordan River.

Elements of the Ottoman Fourth Army were deployed away from the destruction at Sharon and Nablus, and still posed a risk. Receiving word of the losses at those battles, they began a northward retreat. Again British and Australian aircraft caused heavy losses on the retreating forces, as Chaytor's Force took Es Salt and Amman on 25 September. The last desperate elements of the Fourth Army reached Ziza, and found their path blocked by the Anzac Mounted Division, who had previously encircled them. Realising they were being pursued by Arab irregulars that held a strong hatred for them after years of occupation, they surrendered en masse rather than face slaughter at the hands of the Arabs. The Ottoman Army had been defeated in six days.

Outcome

- At Megiddo, the Entente alliance had inflicted losses on the Ottoman Army of over 25,000 killed, wounded or captured, and effectively ended their ability to continue the war. Of the remaining strength, less than 6,000 had

avoided capture.

- The way to Damascus, Beirut and Aleppo now lay open. Stragglers that had escaped the destruction at Megiddo continued to filter north, in the forlorn hope of regrouping once more. What followed was one of the most remarkable military pursuits in history. Chauvel led the Desert Mounted Corps northward, covering 167km in three days, crossing the Golan Heights.
- Early in the morning on 1 October, the most advanced unit, which was the 3rd Australian Light Horse Brigade under the command of Major Harry Olden entered Damascus in pursuit of fleeing Ottoman troops, but was obliged to accept the city's formal surrender, much to the annoyance of Lt-Colonel Lawrence, who had planned a grand ceremony in support of the Arab rebel's claims to self-rule.



NAM. 1953-07-25-31 9th Hodson's Horse in General Chauvel's march through Damascus, 1918

- Between 19 September and 2 October, the Australian Mounted Division

alone had taken 31,335 prisoners with only the loss of 21 killed and 71 wounded of their own.

- Meanwhile the 3rd Indian (Lahore) Division headed to Beirut, and the 7th Indian (Meerut) Division towards Baalbek. Homs was also captured on 16 October. Lawrence's arrival in Damascus allowed Chauvel to continue his pursuit north, covering a further 300km to Aleppo, which soon fell on 25 October. Five days later the Ottoman Army capitulated, suing for peace. This climactic battle on the plains of Armageddon saw the end of the 600-year old Ottoman Empire and victory in the Middle East.
- The Sinai and Palestine Campaign, culminating in the decisive Battle of Meggido (Armageddon) brought to an end the 600-year old Ottoman Empire, and ended the First World War in the Middle East.

Stats & Facts

- The whole campaign lasted 3 years, 9 months and 2 days.
- For the whole campaign, British Empire forces suffered over 550,000 casualties
- During the campaign, over 75,000 Ottoman soldiers were taken prisoner.
- To support the campaign in Sinai and Palestine, a 411km (256 miles) railway was built from Kantara in Egypt and Haifa in Palestine. The rate of construction for the railway was about 32km (20 miles) a month.
- Alongside the railway a pipeline was also constructed for keeping frontline troops supplied with fresh water.
- Unlike on the Western Front where cavalry were limited by trench warfare for much of war, mounted troops including British and Indian Cavalry and Australian and New Zealand Light Horse were hugely effective.
- The cavalry charge of the Australian Light Horse was one of only two British cavalry charges during the whole war, and one of the last to ever take place. Ironically, Light Horse are not actually cavalry, but instead 'mounted rifles' that usually ride to battle, dismount and then fight on foot. As such, they didn't carry swords or lances, and instead charged wielding just their bayonets. After the battle they were upgraded to cavalry and

equipped with swords. The Light Horse Charge was over 6.4km (4 miles) within sight of Ottoman artillery.

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NAM. 2011-06-2-1 Battle of Meggido, 1918

- The Battle of Megiddo was fought on the “Plains of Armageddon”, described in the Biblical Book of Revelation as the place which great armies would gather for an epic battle marking the end times of the apocalypse. Some practitioners of the Bahá’í Faith believe that the battle in 1918 may have been the one predicted in the Book of Revelation.