

Steven Becker's reconstruction of the battle for Amman 30/March 1918

Battle of Amman

The Camel Brigade at this time consisted of the following troops;

Camel Bde HQ	BrigGen Smith		
1 st Anzac Battalion	LtCol Langley	1 st Co	Lt Nicholson
	Maj Nobbs (2ic)	2 nd Co	Capt Mills
		3 rd Co	Capt Hogue
		4 th Co	Capt Denson
2 nd British Battalion	LtCol Buxton	7 th Co	Capt Deas
	Maj Day (2ic)	8 th Co	Capt Tredinnick
		9 th Co	Capt Newsom
		10 th Co	Lt Lyall
4 th Anzac Battalion	LtCol Mills	13 th Co	Capt Howard
	Maj Hemphill (2ic)	16 th NZ Co	Capt Yerex
		17 th Co	Capt Hampton
		18 th Co	Maj Kessels
HKSB	Maj Moore		
26 MG Sqn	Maj Millar		
Camel FA	LtCol McLaren		

On the morning of the 29th March it was still raining and General Chaytor decided not to attack till more troops could be made available, he proposed and issued orders for the attack to be resumed at 2 am on the 30th March preferring a night attack to the folly of another daylight assault. The Camel Brigade spent a quiet morning as the enemy had withheld its fire thus allowing General Smith to visit with all officers to discuss the attack that night, he placed Lieutenant Fred Matthews in command of the 4th company allowing Captain Denson to command the 1st Battalion as Lieutenant Colonel Langley had been wounded in the face by shell fire.

In the afternoon two companies of the 2/18th (London Irish Rifles) Battalion of the 181st Brigade under Captain Crossby arrived to reinforce the Brigade for the night foray.

Because of the shortage of ammunition in the Hong Kong and Singapore Mountain Battery, Maj. Moore was forced to send back to El Salt for some of the reserve ammunition in addition as the enemy continued to shell the battery positions with one man killed and two wounded yet thanks to the British we did secure a little from the two newly arrived batteries of the IXth Mountain Artillery Brigade to continue the battle till more should arrive.

During the night the 179th Infantry Brigade and the remainder of the IX Mountain Artillery Brigade had been ordered by General Shea to Amman and were due from El Salt during the day and while these new troops rested Turkish reinforcements were seen arriving by train from the north. These fresh Enemy troops included parts of the 23rd and 126th Turkish Regiments, the Mule Mountain battalion and a company of the German 146th Regiment, quickly replaced the casualties and extended the defences to the north and south. The British reinforcements which had arrived (it was hoped) offset any Turkish build up, this and the intercepted wireless messages which said "that the Turks would evacuate the city" (although it proved to be false), had convinced General Chaytor to continue the contest.

During the night of the 29th the soldiers continued preparations till 10 p.m. when the attacking troops worked there way forward from the 7th company old position keeping low and moving in line, the men managed to crawl to within 50 yards of the enemy trench without being discovered. At midnight the sky was suddenly lit by flares and a heavy fusillade was sent at the old trenches however keeping low the exposed troops made no reply to this fire and it presently died down without any casualties. It was a cold and dark night as the rain fell and a slight wind was blowing the rain into the faces of the Turks while the men tried to rest soaked through with the enemy only a short distance away and waited apprehensively for the word to go.

As the tired troops 4th Battalion, moved into positions a High Explosive shell exploded among the men wounding Lieutenant Leslie Williamson in the wrist and Lieutenant Aubrey Reynolds in the leg and killing Sergeant Harry Robinson.

The morning of the 30th March did not brood well for the Allied cause as rain fell heavily over the battlefield and as preparations continued the Camel brigade had moved into position in the dark. General Smith had ordered the assault to be carried out by a mixed force from the Brigade under command of Major Day, he assembled two sections from each of the 4th, 7th, 9th and 18th companies in the first wave under Captain Newsam while the remainder of the companies under Captain Deas formed the second wave in all about 200 men. The first lines in both waves were Cameleers while the two companies of the 2/18 London Battalion under Captain Crossby formed the second lines in both 1st and 2nd waves they also had about 200 men, the 8th and 10th company under Captain Tredinnick were in support with 120 men and the 2nd company and the Machine Gun Squadron were held in reserve to provide fire support. On the Brigades left flank the 2/18th London Battalion (less the two companies detached to the Camel Brigade) were to attack along the ridge towards Pt 2828 to pin down Turkish fire while the New Zealand Brigade with the 4th Anzac Battalion would attack Hill 3039.

Promptly at two am the limited artillery fire fell on Amman and the surrounding area, this time the advance was not to start till news came that the attacks on both flanks had been successful and were now clear, as the troops waited in their exposed position the limbs of the men cramped as they waited in the cold till the word came at 3.30 am and the signal was given by Captain Newsam with a blast on his whistle.

The troops rose quickly (shaking out their cramps) into the assault and at once gained the first line of Turkish trenches on hill 400 showering the confused and surprised enemy with bombs, the fighting was short and deadly as the enemy fought hand to hand, some stayed to fight, more raised their hands while others ran taking pot shots as they disappeared into the darkness yet thankfully the fighting lasted only a few minutes before taking between 28 and 60 prisoners including two officers and killing the remainder. Captain Arthur Newsam was killed shot in the back by an enemy soldier who it was said had surrendered and a machine gun was captured by a soldier in the 7th company who having lost his rifle was armed only with two tins of bully beef while Private Archie Searle shot down five Turks with five rapid shots.

The men having secured the first trench now pushed on to capture the second line acquiring it as the Turks broke and ran back into the city, Lieutenant Fred Matthews of the 4th company rushed after them with a collection of men and entered the city. There in the dark and rain they hid in the outer buildings however the hail of fire from the Citadel stopped any further advance and Privates Carl Pearce in the 4th and Bill Thornton from the 18th company was killed during the fighting.

On the left flank the attack by the 2/18th London along the 2828 ridge had at first succeeded yet had broken down under heavy fire and the lack of pressure from this battalion allowed a number of Turkish guns to be turned on the exposed Camel Brigade these inflicting many casualties with their enfilade fire which soon forced the abandonment of the city by Lieutenant Matthews whose men could not be reinforced because of this fire, he ordered the men back to the positions won during the night where the remainder of the troops had consolidated in the enemies trenches and waited until the dawn. While taking a message back to HQ Private Gus Jennison was shot in the head and killed. At 2 am the 4th Anzac Battalion was to advance with the New Zealand Brigade to attack Pt 3039 which required them to advance over 1500 yards of exposed ground, along the way the troops had to bypass a strong enemy position on the route before assaulting the first enemy trench. The men of the Battalion were all fatigued most not having rested for the last few days yet despite the bitterly cold and wet night all were ready for the attack.

The attacking force deployed along the form up point on the Quseir track with the Auckland Mounted Rifles and 4th Anzac Battalion in the front wave and the Canterbury and Wellington Mounted Rifles in the second wave. The 4th Battalion had the 16th New Zealand Company in front for the attack with the 17th company under Captain John Hampton in support both deployed in two lines while part of the 13th company was held in reserve, with the remainder of the company watching the breaks in the Hejaz Railway.

The advance went well from the start General Meldrum had planned his attack skilfully and the wind and rain helped by blowing into the faces of the enemy. Two troops of the Auckland Mounted Rifles secured the strong point in front of Pt 3039 allowing the remainder of the force with the 16th company to assault the foremost trenches which were captured at the rush with the bayonet taking the enemy by surprise, the garrison (who stayed) were all killed while the others ran away in the dark and 23 prisoners and five Machine guns taken. Lieutenant George Sanderson of Battalion HQ who had been ill and advised to remain behind, however had insisted on joining in the attack was killed during the assault. Veterinary Sergeant Matthew Kirkpatrick of the 16th company who in the last days had been busy caring for the many injured animals took part in the assault doing excellent work with the bayonet and clearing a section of trench allowing the objective to be gained by 2.40 am. Private Eric Tapfield of the 13th

company had the misfortune to be accidentally killed during the advance when he progressed too far in front of the line and was mistakenly shot; he was found dead when the line reached him.

As the men consolidated the captured position shooting came from the second line of Turkish trenches 300 yards ahead and the second wave of the Canterbury and Wellington Mounted Rifles moved up and captured them with 14 prisoners and a machine gun, more machine guns and prisoners were taken as the New Zealand troops concentrated while others moved around the hill to clear it of all the enemy. The 16th company as per orders was moved up to join the second wave and with troops of the Canterbury Mounted Rifles attacked the third trench, the enemy fire was heavy yet mostly high and as the troops secured this last trench on top of hill 3039 the enemy fled towards Amman, the casualties thankfully during the assault were light.

The warming rays of dawn showed to General Chaytor that the only success during the night had been limited to Hill 3039, a number of trenches captured by the Camel Corps in front of Amman and 171st Infantry Brigade to the north of the city and all were all in danger of destruction as the enemy quickly organized a number of counterattacks against the ground lost during the night, the first of which came in on both sides of Hill 3039.

The defence of the Hill had placed the 4th Anzac Battalion on the far right or eastern flank of the NZ Mounted Brigade with the Wellington Mounted Rifles on the Battalions left flank. All the Battalion worked on stone sangers during the night, these were built for protection as the rocky ground allowing the shallowest of holes to be dug and once daylight came it was found that the soldiers were too exposed on the top of hill so most were withdrawn to the rear trenches leaving only one section of 10 men and two Lewis guns of the 16th company to hold it.

At 5 am the first attack came in supported by shell fire which smashed the stone Sangers the men had built for protection as shell and rock fragments sprayed the area. The shelling lasted an hour at which point the exposed section of Cameleers were withdrawn. By 9 am 500 Turks were seen massing to the north and at 9.30 they attacked yet despite the bravery of the enemy the attack was beaten off by New Zealand troops with the help of captured machine guns. The Hong Kong and Singapore Battery had attached a section of guns to support the New Zealand Brigade in its attack however counter battery fire had smashed one of the guns sights and ammunition now ran out and the section was forced to retire to the main position.

Despite this setback the Turks tried again and during this attack someone was heard to order a retirement this allowed the front trenches to be abandoned and the New Zealand trenches were lost as the troops fell back to their second line. This order was reported by the New Zealand Mounted to have come from the Camel Brigade however it was more probity a German or Austrian officer who spoke English which fooled the fatigued troops.

This mix up was soon sorted out by the officers and a counterattack by the New Zealanders drove the Turks out of there ill gotten gains and down the hill at the point of the bayonet and the use of the bomb, the Adjutant Captain Alex Watt and the Regimental Sergeant Major Bob MacLean were wounded in the counterattack and Lieutenant's Charles Thorby and Arthur Crawford of the 16th company inspired their men in the charge who with Sergeant Harold Jones as they coolly rallied their men and led them back into the enemy trenches. Captain Stan Howard advanced with elements of the 13th company as the Turks made a fight of it however the men would not hold back and soon the enemy was driven off and despite the casualties the men stood on top of the hill shooting down at the panicked survivors as they fled back to Amman, the 16th company lost Sergeant Colin Campbell and Privates Carl Bailey, Roland Wilkie killed during the fighting. In the 17th Company Lance/Corporal Stan Campbell was manning a Lewis gun when he was shot down, his brother Norm was the No 2 on the gun and quickly took his place only to be killed soon after, the Campbell brothers had enlisted in the 6th Light Horse Regiment in 1915 from Scone NSW before transferring to the Camel Corps, they died together on the barren heights of hill 3039.

While the New Zealand Brigade fought gallantly for there hard won gains on Hill 3039 the Camel companies under Major Day in front of Amman were subjected to attacks in force as the enemy was only 200 yards away, Major Julian Day was severely wounded in the arm and shoulder as the men sheltered from enfilade fire from artillery and machine guns in which during this heavy shell fire a force of over 100 Turks attempted to recapture their trenches and reached to within 30 yards before the fire cut them down and repulsed the attack with substantial loss, this assault was repeated again during the day as attacks continued without respite, the 10th company lost Sergeant Stuart Craggy (reported MIA) and Lance/Corporal Wilfred Lyth killed during this attack.

Meanwhile Lieutenant Leonard Brothers of the 9th company help organize the defence after Captain Newsam's death as the enemy fire increased killing Privates Stan Stanfield and Herb Thoday and under this fire Private Bob Robertson carried messages from company HQ to Captain Deas however despite the courage of the men they were ordered to hold the captured trenches as the supporting artillery ran short of shells while some batteries had ran out. The Hong Kong and Singapore battery was now down to only three guns as one had been put out off action with shell splinters and with no ammunition left little could be done to help the men.

At 2 p.m. General Chaytor had ordered one last attack be made by the Infantry in the north yet it had little hope of success and with its failure the exhausted troops could do no more yet hold on. Lieutenant Herbert Denley was

killed and Lieutenant Thomas Smith mortally wounded while attending to the defences, Private Arthur Mills of the 7th company found him self cut off with a number of wounded men as Turkish counterattacks came in, he held the line encouraging the men around him and providing first aid to the wounded. At 4 p.m. the troops were ordered to retire back to the original positions abandoning the captured works however because of the danger this was not attempted till dusk. Once it became dark the troops departed under Captain Deas direction back to the lines having buried the dead and carrying back the many wounded. This was accomplished without the enemies knowage even though they were only a few hundred yards away with Lieutenant Matthews commanding the rear guard with the 4th company, as the worn out troops moved back in the darkness all the wounded were recovered however a few may have been left behind as some were reported missing later. The total Cameleers casualties in the attack were 4 officers and 40 men in the 2nd Battalion killed and wounded with about 20 Australian casualties.

The 2/18th London battalion reported the lost of five men killed and two officers and 4 men died of wounds with the wounded unknown while supporting the action on the 30th.

Meanwhile on Hill 3039 the Battle still went on as the enemy kept throwing attack after attack at the New Zealanders. The next came at 4 p.m. and fell on the Camel Battalion where the Turks out flanked the Cameleers line on the right and managed to gained a lodgement, Lieutenant Charles Thorby a butcher from Dannevirke NZ gathered a few men about him and led a counterattack to drive the Turks out yet was killed in the valiant attempt, while Corporal John McMillan carrying a Lewis gun advanced on the enemy firing his gun from the hip however he was soon killed, then Private Dave McConnell who had joined the attack by garbing a sack full of bombs, threw them with deadly effect until shot down, as Private Len Pask went out rescuing the wounded however thanks to the support of New Zealand reserves which in turn out flanked the Turks the attack was driven off. The casualties continued to mount in the battalion and the 17th company lost Corporal Bert Lincoln (reported MIA), Lance/Corporal's Bill Brown, Eric Cheney (reported MIA), Privates Cliff Jenkins (reported MIA) and Percy Collins killed while the 13th company lost Corporal George Haag (reported MIA), Lance/Corporal Les Delaney (reported MIA), Private's Bill Temple and Will Trenaman (reported MIA) killed, the 16th company lost Sergeant Charles Lovett, Private's Gilbert Alexander, Tom Bowman, John Craig, Rupert McKenzie, Sid Mills and Doug Walker killed.

During the day communication between Battalion HQ and the forward companies was constantly broken by shell fire which fell regularly over the exposed hill, Sergeant Albert Hooper was kept out continually repairing broken telephone lines at great risk to himself. Communications were accentual to the defence which enabled reinforcements to be switched from one threaten point to the next and under the able command of Lieutenant Reg Jephcott never failed. At 5 p.m. another attack came on with the support of three enemy batteries yet again it was stopped with assistance of the recently arrived Somerset battery using the last of its available ammunition.

As the long day wore on General Shea on hearing of the progress of the Battle asked General Chaytor his chances of success "if he could take the city" which he replied "little to none and only if reinforced with more guns and troops" these were now not available to Shea and he knew the battle was lost. The word was sent out at 5.45pm that the contest was over and all troops were ordered to be prepared to retire back across the Jordan.

In the late afternoon a supply column had arrived bring a little food and ammunition and a soldier was dispatched up to the hill with a camel carrying a bag of rations and two fantasies of hot tea he also carried the battalions withdrawal order which was gladly received as well as the tea.

That night the Army began to move back as the New Zealanders and 4th Anzac Battalion received their orders around 6 p.m, they began moving down from Hill 3039 at midnight with the many wounded carried in blankets as the rear guard covered the withdrawal however the Turks did not bother them.

The Camel Brigade began its return movement at 4.30 am Lieutenant Bob Love commanded the rear guard and once the troops began to move he was informed that a man was missing, he retraced his steeps in the dark to search for the missing man who in the meanwhile had returned and found instead a four man post over looked in the darkness. The Brigade reached Ain es Sir by 7.15 am on the 31st March and although the enemy pressed the rear guard causally, the Camel Brigade was ordered to get clear acting as escort to the supply train and the wounded who were suffering terribly. The column moved slowly as there were not enough charots for all the wounded and some had to be strapped to the backs of horses until they could be placed in ambulances. At 10 am the troops continued threw rain and mud some men of the 1st Battalion picked up refugees struggling along the track helping the many women and children fleeing Turkish oppression. The Brigade finally crossing the Jordan on the 2nd April after eleven days from the commencement of the raid, the camels had not had the saddles off their backs for eight of those days and when they did their flesh came away with them.

The Raid on Amman was tactically a defeat in which the main objectives of the raid were not all achieved although it was claimed as a victory by General Allenby. There were many reasons for the failure of the Amman Raid these included the delayed crossing of the Jordan River, the foul weather and the unexpected strong defence of Amman all

had contributed to the result, the men as always fought well yet had suffered from the conditions with the march up to Amman and the battle, all the animals and men had suffered much and were worn out by fatigue and heavy losses. One of the success of the raid was that the enemies reserves had been drawn to Amman, enough troops had been moved north from the Tafilah Force to help the Emir Feisal in his campaign against the Maan garrison and attention was drawn east away from Allenby's future planned offensive.

However the Turkish resistance at Amman had restored their confidence in its troops which had been low following their defeats in November and December 1917 and allowed the Turks to plan a major offensive aimed at the reorganizing British Army in April.

The Casualties for the Camel Brigade were reported in the War Diary as 5 officers and 56 men killed and 17 officers and 232 men wounded while 11 men were reported missing total 321.

The casualties by Battalion were the Australians of the 1st Battalion with 2 other ranks killed and 1 officer (Lieutenant Colonel Langley) and 9 men wounded.

The 2nd (British) Battalion reported losses as 3 officers (Captain Newsam, Lieutenant 's. Denley and Smith) and 24 other ranks killed and 7 officers, 112 men wounded of which 9 other ranks died from wounds and 1 man was reported wounded and missing.

The Anzacs of the 4th Battalion had 2 officers (Lieutenant Thorby (NZ) and (Lieutenant Sanderson) and 29 other ranks killed with 5 officers and 117 other ranks wounded of which 1 officer (Lieutenant Adolph (NZ) and 5 other ranks died of wounds while 10 men were reported missing. Of this total the New Zealanders of the 16th company had lost 1 officer and 12 other ranks killed with 1 officer, 2 other ranks died of wounds while the wounded were not recorded whereas the Australians lost 1 officer and 17 men killed with 5 officers and 99 men wounded which 6 men died of wounds.

The Hong Kong and Singapore Battery had 1 other rank killed and 1 officer and 5 men wounded, the Brigade Machine Gun Squadron had 1 man killed and 2 wounded.

No soldiers in the Camel Brigade were captured during the four day Battle in front of Amman and the missing were all believed to have been killed or wounded and or later accounted for.

Hope you now understand what I have written if you have any questions please ask
cheers

S.B