

# THE MILITARY HISTORY OF FREDERICK WILLIAM DELVES



One of Frederick's photographs that you kindly sent to us before we began to research his story. It is an excellent study of officers of a regiment of yeomanry and was taken in either Egypt or Palestine.

November  
2021

Based on official documents and compiled by  
fourteeneighteen | research

# The military history of Frederick William Delves

**BASED ON OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS AND COMPILED BY  
FOURTEENEIGHTEEN | RESEARCH**

## INTRODUCTION

We are very pleased to have been commissioned for this project. It has been a great pleasure to undertake the work and we sincerely hope that you find this report to be valuable.

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## RESULTS OF SEARCHES

### Army service records

You kindly sent us some documents that had been supplied by the Ministry of Defence (MOD). The Ministry continues to hold the service records of commissioned officers who served after 1922.

The National Archives in London (TNA) holds service records of commissioned officers who died in service or who were released from the army by the end of 1922. They are in two series, WO339 for officers of the regular army and WO374 for those of the Territorial Force. The records are undamaged but were greatly reduced in content by official “weeding”. Other elements of officer’s records (including confidential reports on their progress) were completely destroyed at the Army Records Centre by a fire resulting from the first air raid on London in 1940.

Frankly we are amazed that the MOD provided so little information. Officers’ service record files were usually subjected to official “weeding” before they went into storage.

We can confirm that no trace of any further parts of Frederick William Delves’s record can be found in these collections.

### Records of officers’ commissions, promotions, and appointments

The “Army List”, produced monthly and quarterly, was a statement of the current status of every commissioned officer. His commissions, promotions and appointments were usually announced in the “London Gazette”, which was and remains the official newspaper of the British Parliament.

Copies of Frederick’s entries in the “London Gazette” are attached, along with sample entries from the “Army List”.

### Campaign medal records

The records consist of an entry for the individual in a roll, which is essentially a list of men who qualified for a particular medal, and an index card which provides a reference to the roll(s) in which the soldier is recorded. The originals are held in collections WO329 and WO372 at TNA.

There is no doubt that (from the pattern of his service, explained below) that Frederick was entitled to the British War and Victory Medals. Yet there is no entry for him in the issuing rolls. Unlike men of the “other ranks”, officers needed to submit a claim for their medals, and it may be that Frederick never did so.

### Casualty lists

The official War Office casualty lists were reproduced in a number of British newspapers, both national and local.

Frederick was not named as a casualty at any time.

## Admissions to hospitals in theatres of war

Only a very small sample of military hospital admission registers has been retained. They are now held in collection MH106 at TNA.

Frederick's name appears in one of the registers which have survived. A copy is attached.

## Gallantry, bravery and other special awards

Unusual awards (including gallantry and bravery medals and mentions in despatches) were invariably announced in the "London Gazette", the official newspaper of British Parliament. This was usually followed a day or two later by a reprint in the "Times" and then the local press.

Frederick does not appear to have been the subject of any special award.

## National and de Ruvigny's Rolls of Honour

These rolls of honour were compiled on a subscription basis (in other words, the soldier or his family paid for an entry), which means that they are far from comprehensive although they do list many tens of thousands of men.

There is no entry for Frederick in either publication, but this is unsurprising. Officers who continued in service after the Great War rarely feature in de Ruvigny's and never in the National Roll.

## Local newspapers

Many regional and local newspapers are now available for digital search through the British Newspaper Archive.

Frederick is frequently named in local Yorkshire newspapers, mainly in connection with his activities with the Royal British Legion after the war, but we could find only one definite mention during the war itself, other than reproductions of the announcements made in the "London Gazette". A copy is attached.

## Operational records

All units were obliged to maintain a war diary while they were on active service. The diaries are held in collection WO95 at TNA.

We have attached copies of the war diaries of the units with which Frederick served overseas. The period of Frederick's service in Egypt and Palestine has not yet been digitised and we have instead attached digital photographs of the pages. We apologise for the quality of the images: the diary is faintly written in pencil and is not easy to photograph under the artificial light at TNA. It may be possible to obtain improved images via TNA's own reprographic service.



## Civil records

In order to more fully understand Frederick's background, and any effect it had on his service, we examined the primary civil records.

Copies are attached of Frederick's entries in the censuses of 1901 and 1911; his entry in a school register; his entry in the public register created in September 1939 (the names of three present remain official redacted); and his entry in the probate calendar of 1974.

## FREDERICK'S MILITARY HISTORY

### Commission and service at home

*24 June 1915*

Frederick William Delves was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant of the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Prince of Wales's Own (West Yorkshire Regiment). He had previously been serving as a cadet of the Senior Contingent of the Officer Training Corps at Leeds University.

The battalion was headquartered at Belle Vue Barracks in Bradford. It had recently raised the second of its reserve or training units, known as the 3/6<sup>th</sup> Battalion, and it is evident that Frederick was posted into this unit to begin his own training and to gain experience of command.

On 24 July 1915 the battalion finally left Bradford and marched out to a training camp at Skipton. A few days later, the "Bradford Weekly Telegraph" carried a group photograph of the battalion's officers just before they made tis move, and Frederick is featured in it.

The battalion later moved to Nottinghamshire, spending some time under canvas near Retford before going into huts at the large Clipstone Camp near Mansfield. In April 1916 it was renamed as the 6<sup>th</sup> Reserve Battalion.

*Date uncertain but between September 1915 and January 1916*

Frederick was eventually transferred to the East Riding of Yorkshire Yeomanry. The date of transfer is not clear, but after appearing in the Army List with the 3/6<sup>th</sup> Battalion in September 1915, by the edition of January 1916 he had been transferred.

At this time, the original regiment was serving in Egypt, but it had raised two reserve units. One, the 3/1<sup>st</sup>, had been absorbed into the 5<sup>th</sup> Reserve Regiment of Cavalry at York and is an unlikely posting for Frederick; more likely is that he went to the 2/1<sup>st</sup> East Riding of Yorkshire Yeomanry located at Beverley.

*At this early stage of the war, with the British Army being rapidly expanded and terribly short of officers, a man with a good personal background and education; who could ride a horse; who had funds to furnish himself with uniform and equipment and the not inconsiderable costs of mess and servants' bills; and who was generally "of the right stamp", was not likely to be rejected.*

*It was not until February 1916 that a universal and rigorous new system of training for officers was introduced, after which temporary commissions could only be granted if a man had been through an Officer Cadet unit. The training and selection course lasted four and a half months.*

*The 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion was a unit of the Territorial Force rather than the regular army, and technically Frederick was commissioned as an officer of that Force.*

*The yeomanry regiments were also units of the Territorial Force. They were mounted, and can essentially be viewed as cavalry.*

*The 2/1<sup>st</sup> East Riding of Yorkshire Yeomanry ceased to be a horse-mounted unit in July 1916, when it was converted to a cyclist regiment and relocated to Bridlington.*

## Service overseas

### October 1916

A document signed by Frederick in 1921 (part of the record supplied by MOD) states that he went to Salonika in October 1916. This has proved difficult to confirm. The Army List continues to state that he was of the East Riding of Yorkshire Yeomanry as until May 1917, when it begins to mention that he was attached to the *2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the East Yorkshire Regiment*. The battalion's war diary does not name him, but it appears that this is not untypical for that unit's diary.

*The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion had moved from France to Salonika in October 1915, and it then remained in that theatre for the rest of the war. Later in the report we have summarised the history and explained the structure and role of this unit.*

### 7 October 1917

The war diary of the *1/3<sup>rd</sup> County of London Yeomanry* mentions that 2/Lt F. W. Delves had arrived from the East Riding of Yorkshire Yeomanry. The regiment was in Egypt, having moved there from Salonika in June 1917. Shortly before, the "London Gazette" had listed Frederick's transfer from 21 August 1917. Later, it was also announced that Frederick was promoted to Lieutenant on the same date but this appears to be back-dated and for some time he continued to be referred to as Second Lieutenant.

*We have also summarised the history and explained the structure and role of this unit, and its fortunes can be followed in greater detail in the attached war diary.*

*The 1/1<sup>st</sup> East Riding of Yorkshire Yeomanry was also in Egypt. We speculate that Frederick may have been posted to it after his attachment to the East Yorkshire Regiment, even if only on paper before he went to the 3<sup>rd</sup> London Yeomanry.*

### Between 19 January and 17 February 1918

Frederick attended a cavalry officers' training course held at Zeitoun.

### 3 April 1918

Frederick was seconded to the Machine Gun Corps. He remained with his unit.

*The regiment was in the process of conversion to become a machine gun unit. On 7 April 1918, the amalgamation of the 1/1<sup>st</sup> City of London Yeomanry and the 1/3<sup>rd</sup> County of London Yeomanry began. In June 1918 it was formally renamed as "E" Battalion of the Machine Gun Corps and in the following August 1918 it was renamed as 103<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the Machine Gun Corps.*

### 24 May 1918

Frederick is listed amongst his unit's officers who embarked at Alexandria for service in France. His disembarked at Marseilles on 1 June 1918.

16 June 1918

The arrival report (part of the record supplied by MOD) states that Frederick left his battalion. This goes unremarked in the war diary of his unit, which at the time was still in training in a safe rear area. It goes on to state that he sailed from Calais to Dover on 23 June 1918.

## Final period of service at home

23 June 1918

Frederick was admitted to Queen Alexander's Military Hospital at Milbank in London. He had been sent there for surgery to correct what the hospital's register described as an "internal derangement of his right knee joint".

*The register states that his total military service was one year and eight months, of which ten had been with the "field force" (that is, overseas). These are clearly incorrect.*

12 July 1918

Frederick was moved to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Northern General Hospital at Beckett's Park in Leeds.

*This may have essentially been for administration and monitoring purposes while he was actually convalescing at home.*

It is not clear whether he ever returned to duty, but it certainly does not appear that he went overseas again before he ceased full-time service.

9 January 1919

On this date, Frederick was returned to the books of the 3<sup>rd</sup> County of London Yeomanry.

*We suspect that this may have been a purely administrative matter. The regiment's depot was located at St. John's Wood in London.*

It is difficult to be sure of exactly what happened, but at some point Frederick would have been "disembodied" (a term used by the Territorial Force to describe being stood down from full-time service) and at that point returned to his civilian life.

*On 29 September 1920, the regiment became the 5<sup>th</sup> (London) Armoured Car Company, technically a unit of the Tank Corps.*

25 October 1921

Frederick was transferred to the Reserve of Officers of the Territorial Army (the name having been changed in 1920). He had signed an application for this transfer on 13 September 1921 at his home at the Boat House, Colne, Lancashire. Frederick continued to be a member of this reserve until he reached the age limit on 4 December 1948, at which point he relinquished his commission.

*In 1920, personal numbers were introduced for officers: Frederick became 61756.*

*In 1923, the former 5<sup>th</sup> was renamed as the 23<sup>rd</sup> Armoured Car Company.*

## Campaign medals

His service overseas qualified Frederick William Delves for the two standard campaign medals: the British War Medal (essentially for all men who left their native shore) and the Victory Medal (for men who also entered a theatre of war). Opposite, left to right: British War Medal, Victory Medal. This combination was often collectively known as the “Mutt and Jeff”.

Officers were expected to submit a claim for their medals and Frederick’s apparent absence from the issuing roll suggests that he did not do so.



## HISTORICAL AND TECHNICAL INFORMATION

### The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the East Yorkshire Regiment

*To which Frederick was attached. The dates of his attachment are not certain but appear to be in the period October 1916 to October 1917.*

This unit of the British regular army was stationed at Kamptee in India when war was declared in August 1914. It was ordered home and eventually landed at Southampton on 23 December 1914, whereupon it proceeded to Hursley Park Camp near Winchester in Hampshire. The battalion was then placed under orders of a new formation that was being assembled in the area: the 83<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Brigade of 28<sup>th</sup> Division. The division was soon ordered to join the British Expeditionary Force in France and Flanders, and it landed in January 1915.

After taking part in the Second Battle of Ypres in April-May 1915 and in a supporting action to the Battle of Loos in late September 1915, the 28<sup>th</sup> Division was ordered on 19 October 1915 to prepare to sail to the Mediterranean. The first units left Marseilles for Alexandria (Egypt) five days later and all units (except XXXI and CXLVI Brigades of the Royal Field Artillery) were there by 22 November. The division was then ordered on to Salonika and completed its disembarkation there on 4 January 1916.

The background to the campaign in Salonika is complex in terms of politics, involving a tangle of Balkan nations and ethnic groups, but stems from the outcome of the 1912-1913 wars in the Balkans. The British forces became involved largely as a result of David Lloyd George's ambition to encourage all the Balkan countries to engage against Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria and thereby weaken Germany. The war in Salonika was fought between an allied coalition (France, Great Britain, Greece, Italy, Russia and Serbia) under the general control of France, and a coalition of Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and Germany.

*For a comprehensive and readable overview of the campaign in Salonika we recommend a book by Alan Wakefield and Simon Moody which has appeared with two titles: "Under the Devil's Eye: Britain's forgotten army at Salonika, 1915-1918" (London: The English History Press, 2004, ISBN 0750935375) and "Under the Devil's Eye: The British military experience in Macedonia, 1915-1918" (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2010, ISBN 1848844611). The latter is more easily obtained and much cheaper!*

The British Salonika Force included the following, along with army and corps troops units:

#### XII Corps:

- 22nd Division (from November 1915 onwards)
- 26th Division (from November 1915 onwards)
- 60th (2/2nd London) Division (December 1916 to June 1917).

#### XVI Corps:

- 10th (Irish) Division (in theatre October 1915 to September 1917)
- 27th Division (from November 1915 onwards)
- 28th Division (from November 1915 onwards).



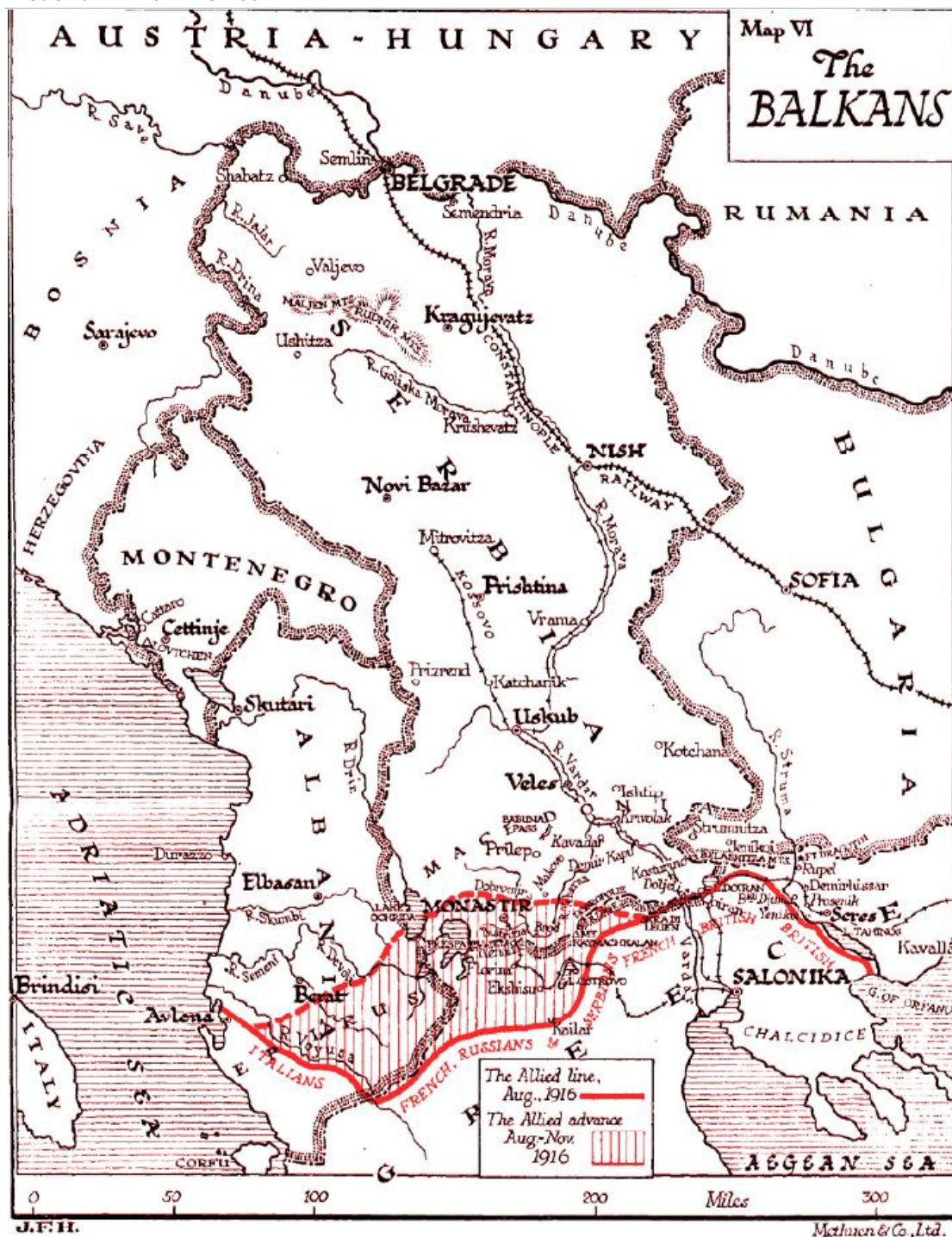


Figure 1: The Salonika theatre of war incorporated parts of today's Greece, North Macedonia, and Albania. The British-held sector lay north, northeast and east of the city-port of Salonika. For much of the conflict the front line was relatively static and as shown by the solid red line.

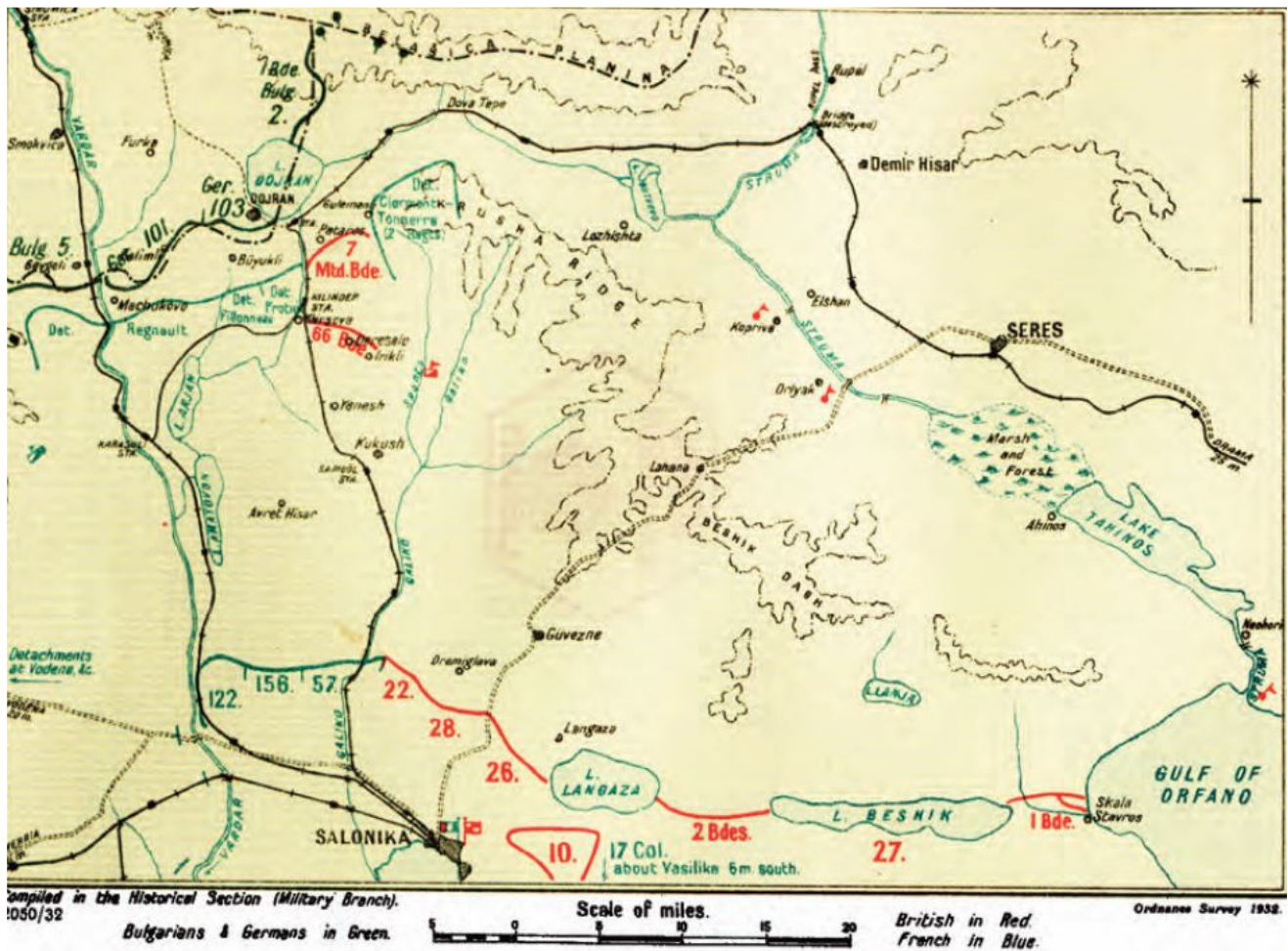


Figure 2: From the British Official History. Situation 20 April 1916. The British had occupied a defensive line north and east of Salonika since the arrival of the force in late 1915. An advance from this entrenched camp began in April 1916. British forces shown in red. 7th Mounted Brigade and 66th Infantry Brigade have reached the area south of Lake Doiran (Dojran), with French forces on their left. The British line links up as far as the Gulf of Orfano. Further forces soon advanced to contact and then dug in. To the north, the British were now in the hilly and mountainous region facing Lake Doiran. To the northeast, in the valley of the River Struma facing Seres.



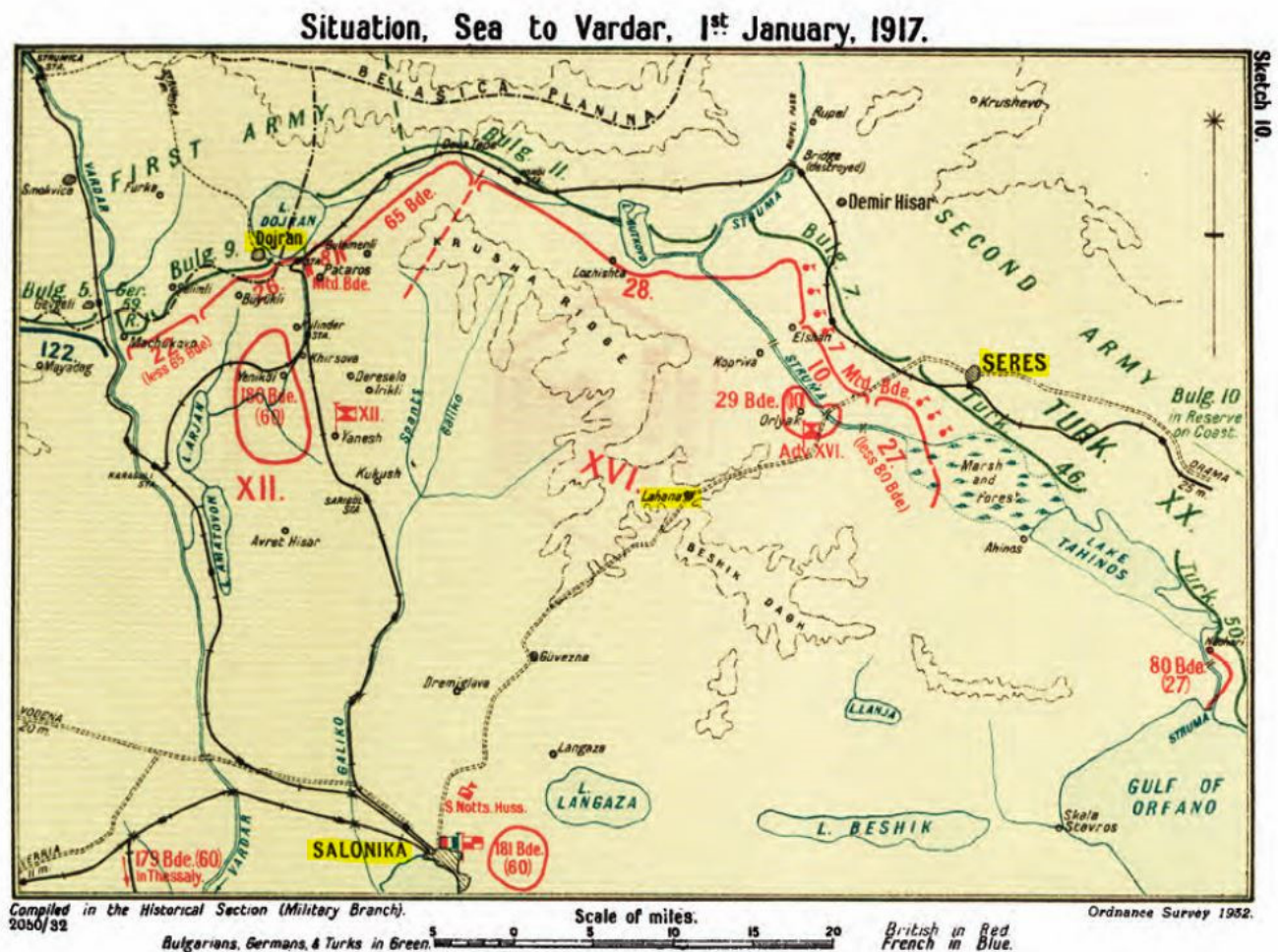


Figure 3: The British Salonika Force is now operating on two main fronts. The roads to these fronts from Salonika via Sarigol and Lahana are key supply routes. Note the location of 28th Division, holding the line in the centre and north of the British front. It was in this area throughout Frederick's time in this theatre of war. This puts him valley of the River Struma: it was malarial, and losses to malaria exceeded those to enemy action throughout the campaign. There was no major fighting for some months.

The period of late 1916 was characterised by a number of small offensive actions. The 28<sup>th</sup> Division is formally recognised as having taken part in one of them, which took place on 31 October 1916 and is known as the "capture of Bairakli Jum'a". It is possible that Frederick had arrived for his attachment to the battalion by the time that this operation took place.

On 11 October 1916 the battalion carried out a probing attack on the defended village Barakli Jum'a, which is a village three miles on the enemy side of the River Struma and nine miles northwest of Yenikoi, west of Seres (see Figure 10, above). This was a localised operation, carried out to support a larger French offensive elsewhere in Salonika. It proved costly: 98 men of the battalion became casualties. It was decided that a larger force would be necessary to capture the village.

On 14 October the commander of XVI Corps received orders to work out plans for the capture of Barakli Jum'a. In preparation for the attack which went in on 31 October, the battalions of 83<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Brigade,

including the 1<sup>st</sup> York & Lancaster Regiment, quietly advanced and captured without any serious opposition on 26 October 1916 the villages of Elshan, Ormanli and Haznadar. The battalion was held in reserve when the rest of the brigade attacked Bairakli Jum'a, as shown below.

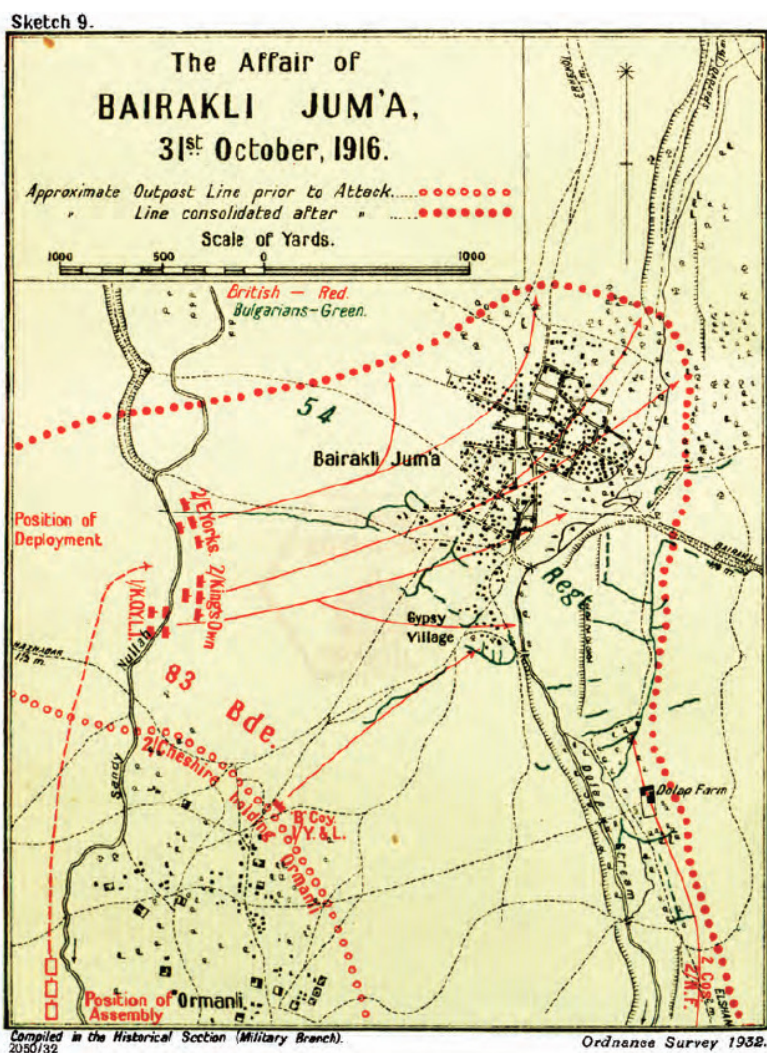


Figure 4: British Official History.

Further localised operations in which the 28<sup>th</sup> Division participated were on 15 May 1917: the capture of Ferdie and Essex Trenches (near Barakli Jum'a), and 16 October 1917: the capture of Barakli and Kumli. Frederick William Delves had certainly left the battalion by the time the latter took place.

## The British infantry battalion

The battalion was the standard operational unit of all British infantry during the Great War.

Each battalion belonged to a regiment. The battalion had administrative links to the regiment's depot and (until the system was substantially changed in 1916) would generally receive reinforcement drafts from training units belonging to the same regiment. The battalion's regiment gave it a badge and insignia, tradition and history that was used as an important part in developing a soldier's feeling of belonging and esprit de corps.

A battalion usually came under command of a brigade (often called an infantry brigade to distinguish it from a cavalry brigade). The principal exception to this was when certain battalions were designated as Pioneers (used for manual labour).

The battalion consisted of a headquarters, four companies and its transport. Until late 1915 it also had a Machine Gun Section. At full establishment in 1914 it consisted of 1,007 men, of whom 30 were officers.

### Battalion headquarters and transport

The battalion was usually commanded by a Lieutenant Colonel with a Major as Second-in-Command. A Captain or Lieutenant filled the role of Adjutant (in charge of administration); a Captain or Lieutenant was the Quartermaster (responsible for stores and transport); an officer of the Royal Army Medical Corps was attached to work as the battalion's Medical Officer. A Chaplain from the Army Chaplain's Department was assigned.

Headquarters also included the Regimental Sergeant-Major (RSM, the most senior Non-Commissioned Officer) plus a number of specialist roles filled by Sergeants: Quartermaster, Drummer, Cook, Pioneer, Shoemaker, Transport, Signaller, Armourer (often attached from the Army Ordnance Corps) and Orderly Room Clerk. A Corporal and four Privates of the Royal Army Medical Corps were attached for sanitary and clean water duties; a Corporal and 15 Privates were employed as Signallers; 10 Privates were employed as pioneers (on construction, repair and general engineering duties); 11 Privates acted as drivers for the horse-drawn transport; 16 acted as stretcher-bearers (these often being the musicians of the battalion band); 6 Privates acted as officers' batmen (personal servants) and two as orderlies for the Medical Officer.

### Companies

The four companies were usually lettered A to D, although some battalions used 1 to 4, P to S or W to Z. Each numbered 227 heads when at full establishment.

The company was commanded by a Major or Captain, with a Captain as Second-in-Command. Company HQ included a Company Sergeant-Major (CSM), a Company Quartermaster Sergeant (CQMS), two Privates acting as batmen and 3 as drivers.

The body of the company was divided into four Platoons, each of which was commanded by a subaltern (a Lieutenant or Second Lieutenant). The company consisted of 8 Sergeants, 10 Corporals, 4 Drummers, 4 Privates assigned as batmen and 188 Privates. Each Platoon was subdivided into four Sections. The Platoons of the battalion were usually numbered 1 to 16, with 1 to 4 being in "A" Company, 5 to 8 in "B", and so on.



In 1914 the soldiers in a Platoon were essentially all riflemen, armed with the .303-inch SMLE rifle and sword bayonet.

#### Battalion transport

The battalion had 13 riding and 43 draught and packhorses to draw its six ammunition carts, two water carts, three General Service Wagons (for tools and machine guns), and the Medical Officer's Maltese Cart. The battalion signallers had 9 bicycles.

When it was deployed onto a road in regulation fashion, the battalion's transport occupied 210 yards of road space, and the fighting portion (men marching with some officers mounted) a further 590 yards.

#### *Changes during the war*

The Machine Gun Sections were withdrawn from infantry battalions when the Machine Gun Corps came into existence in late 1915, and in the case of most of the battalions already overseas this was implemented by the section being transferred to the MGC.

A series of developments changed the tactical organisation of the battalion (theoretically the pioneer battalions would be trained in such things but in practice their work remained strongly focused on manual labour). In 1914 the soldiers in a Platoon were essentially all riflemen, armed with the .303-inch SMLE rifle and sword bayonet. British General Headquarters issued the key training pamphlet SS143 ("Instructions for the Training of Platoons for Offensive Action") in February 1917. This implemented a new tactical structure based on learning gained in the recent Somme offensive. It is regarded as a key step in the development of the eventual war-winning "all arms" fighting. The Platoon would when going into attack be led by riflemen, with specialist rifle grenadiers and bombers (hand grenade men) in close support. Each Platoon would have a section armed with the light Lewis machine gun to provide supporting fire and to engage targets as they arose.

The composition of the platoon was now to be a Platoon HQ (an officer (subaltern) and four men), with a Rifle section, Rifle Grenade Section, Lewis Gun Section and a Bombing Section (each Section being one 1 NCO and eight men). The riflemen were also to be trained to use the rifle grenade and also to be able to move into the Lewis Gun or Bombing Section as need arose. The Bombing Section was to be composed of two specialist throwers, two bayonet men and two riflemen, with two others who carried supplies of bombs. They worked in concert, so for example when attacking an enemy pillbox the Lewis guns and rifle grenadiers kept it under fire while the riflemen and bombers work around the flanks and get behind it.

By 1918 all men were trained in the use of the hand and rifle grenade and specialist Bombing Sections disappeared. The Platoon was reorganised as three Sections (each armed with rifles, bayonets, grenades and rifle grenades and soldiers with flexible skills to use them all) and the Lewis Gun Section with two gun teams. Battalion HQ was also equipped with four Lewis guns.

The battalion's overall firepower greatly increased during the war, notably by the addition of 36 Lewis guns (two for each of the 16 Platoons plus four with Battalion HQ).

Battle experience also led to orders to ensure that battalions would leave behind a number of men when going into action, to form a nucleus for rebuilding, in the event of heavy casualties being suffered. A total of 108 all ranks, consisting of a mix of instructors, trained signallers and other specialists, were to be left out.

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## The 1/3<sup>rd</sup> County of London Yeomanry (Sharpshooters) (Territorial Force)

*To which Frederick was posted in October 1917, and with which he continued to serve until its conversion to a machine gun unit and until he was returned home for medical treatment in June 1918.*

The 3<sup>rd</sup> County of London Yeomanry (Sharpshooters) became a mounted regiment of the Territorial Force when it was first established in 1908, although it can trace its heritage back to the Second Boer War of 1899-1902 and the raising of a volunteer unit of men who were first-class rifle shots and good horsemen. It was headquartered at Henry Street in St. John's Wood. During the Great War it raised two reserve units, eventually to be known as the 2/3<sup>rd</sup> and 3/3<sup>rd</sup> County of London Yeomanry. Only the original, the 1/3<sup>rd</sup> County of London Yeomanry, served overseas.

By the time that Frederick joined it as a junior officer, the regiment had gained much war experience. It had served in the Gallipoli campaign in 1915; been on the defence of the Suez Canal in Egypt during 1916; and spent the period from November 1916 to June 1917 in the theatre of war in Salonika. It then returned to Egypt. During much of the time at Gallipoli and Salonika, the regiment had been dismounted and the men effectively employed as infantry.

When the regiment returned to Egypt it was under command of the 8<sup>th</sup> Mounted Brigade, which was then placed under orders of a new formation, the Yeomanry Mounted Division. This was renamed as the 1<sup>st</sup> Mounted Division in April 1918.

During 1916, the British force which had hitherto mainly been concerned with ensuring the defence of the Suez Canal began to push forward along the Mediterranean coast of the Sinai peninsula and into Palestine. Progress was slow, for there were no roads across the barren desert, a railway had to be laid and wells opened if a large-scale force was to be supplied. A number of relatively small-scale battles took place as the key villages and oases were captured. The British force eventually ran into a strong defensive line that had been constructed by the Ottoman forces between the coastal town of Gaza and inland to Beersheba. The force participated in two failed and very costly attempts to break this line, the First (26 – 27 March 1917) and Second Battles of Gaza (17 – 19 April 1917). Frederick arrived just in time for the third, and as it turned out most successful, attempt. On 7 October 1917 when the war diary reported Frederick's arrival, the regiment was camped at the beach near Marakeb (this is actually Tel-el-Marakeb and is situated near Rafa, about twenty miles south of Gaza). During the third attack on Gaza, which took place on 31 October, the regiment was held in readiness but was not ordered into action. It finally began to advance a few days later.



*Figure 5: From the photographic collection of the Australian War Memorial (Museum). "An aerial view of the Australian Light Horse camp on the beach at Marakeb, near Rafa". This was taken a few weeks before Frederick's arrival.*

On 21 October, the regiment began to move by stages towards the Gaza front, going via Khan Yunis and Hiseia. Five days later, it proceeded to the front line (dismounted) and next day came under an enemy attack in which the regiment sustained a number of casualties. This was certainly Frederick's first time in action since his arrival in the Egypt-Palestine theatre. An extract from the description of this action, from the British Official History, is reproduced below.



Figure 6: part of a large fold-out map contained with Lieutenant-General Sir Archibald Wavell's 1927 book "The Palestine campaigns", illustrating the entire area in which the regiment saw action during Frederick's time with it.



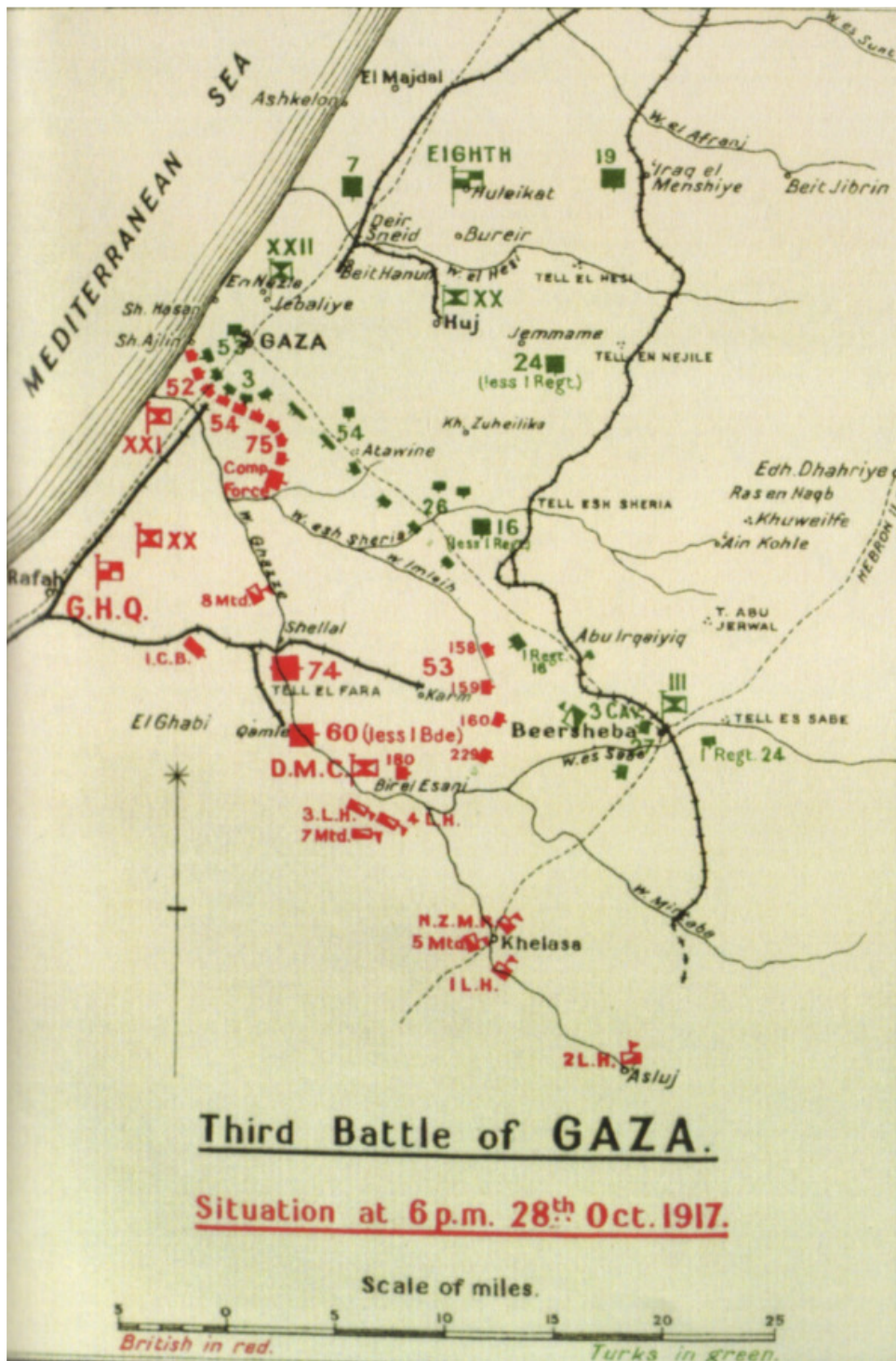


Figure 7: from the British Official History. The breakthrough Third Battle of Gaza. The area shown lies to the east of the Sinai peninsula and is now in Israel, with the disputed Palestinian territory around Gaza on the coast. The battle opened on 31 October. Note the location of 8<sup>th</sup> Mounted Brigade (shown in red as "8<sup>th</sup> Mtd") on the Wadi Ghuzze northwest of Shellal. The primary breakthrough came on the right flank, with the Desert Mounted Corps (mainly Australian units) capturing Gaza. The attack at Gaza itself was primarily to pin down the enemy there while the Beersheba attack went in, but success on the right soon led to the capture of Gaza itself.



On the night of the 26th the 8th Mounted Brigade, temporarily under the orders of the 53rd Division, took over

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from the Australian Mounted Division a long outpost line from El Baqqar on the right, along the Wadis Hanafish and esh Sheria, to a point south of El Mendur. The Hants Battery R.H.A. accompanied the brigade and was disposed to cover its right flank. Orders had been received that the right of the line from El Baqqar to a point 3 miles west of Bir Ifteis was to be held at all costs. The rest was merely to be occupied by a line of standing patrols, because, as has previously been explained, a brigade of the 53rd Division was entrenched behind it. The line was occupied by the Middlesex (1/County of London) Yeomanry on the right, the 3/County of London Yeomanry on the left, and the City of London Yeomanry in reserve, north-west of Kh. Khasif.

After a quiet night, a post west of Bir el Girheir, where a troop of the Middlesex Yeomanry under Captain A. McDougall was dug in, was suddenly attacked in great strength at 4.10 a.m. on the morning of the 27th. Two troops of the Middlesex from support were sent forward to work round to the right of the post. In face of heavy fire they advanced to within view of it, to find that it was almost surrounded by the enemy. A squadron of the City of London Yeomanry from reserve, under Major L. P. Stedall, succeeded in reaching a very slight hummock 200 yards south of the hill occupied by the post. It was here under very heavy machine-gun fire which—so small was the cover—just grazed the horses' saddles after the men had dismounted, and was pinned to the ground. Yet though it could not reach the post, it prevented the enemy from surrounding it completely. The Middlesex troop itself made a magnificent defence all day in a support trench, until late in the afternoon the advance of infantry of the 53rd Division induced the enemy to withdraw.

The right-hand post of two troops north of El Baqqar had less good fortune. It also was attacked by several squadrons, which, sweeping round its right, forced the guns of the Hants Battery near Kh. Khasif to withdraw. Here, too, relieving troops failed to reach the position, though they prevented the enemy from making further progress. The last message from Major A. M. Lafone, in command of the post, contained the words, "I shall hold on to the last." A little later a mass of Turkish cavalry was seen to surge

right over the position. It had then held out for just seven hours.<sup>1</sup> 1917.  
29 Oct.

The total losses of the 8th Mounted Brigade in this very gallant action were 10 officers and 69 other ranks, mostly belonging to the two posts of the Middlesex Yeomanry. The resistance of these posts in face of overwhelming odds had prevented the enemy from taking full advantage of this reconnaissance in force—carried out by an infantry regiment and the *3rd Cavalry Division*<sup>2</sup>—and perhaps from digging himself in upon the position. Had he done so, he could have rendered work on the railway impossible, and would have been extremely difficult to dislodge. On the approach of the British infantry and the 3rd L.H. Brigade the Turks withdrew all along the line, and the position was occupied by the 53rd Division.

Now the advance began to quicken, the water preparations having been nearly completed. By the morning of the 29th the A. & N.Z. Mounted Division was at Khelasa, with its leading brigade still at Asluj; the Australian Mounted Division had its head at Khelasa and its tail west of Esani; the 74th Division had moved forward a brigade to the right of the 53rd, which was holding open the line of advance at El Baqqar; the head of the 60th Division was about Maalaga, and its rear had closed up to Esani. Thus, while the left flank of the advance was covered by the 53rd Division, the 60th and 74th each provided protection to its own front. The Yeomanry Mounted Division had moved from the shore to the Ghazze between Shellal and Tell el Fara; and the 10th Division, previously stationed at Rafah, was also on the move forward.

The advance was a monument to staff work and skill in the memorizing of almost featureless country by guides—junior officers for the most part—who carried out hasty reconnaissances. From first to last it was conducted without a hitch.

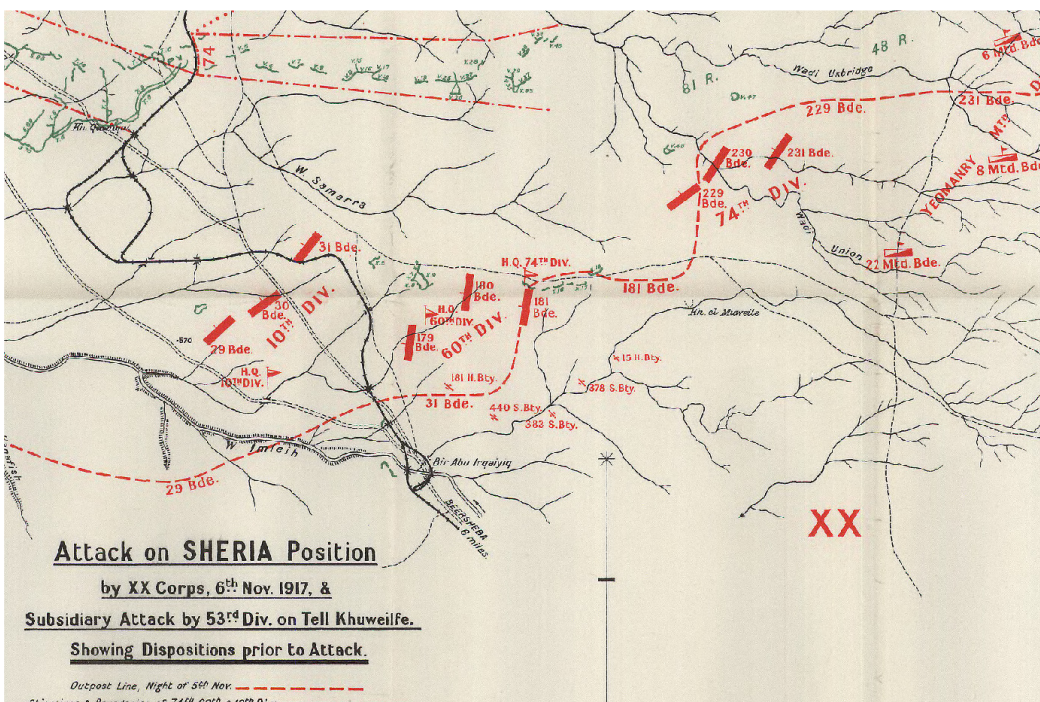
<sup>1</sup> There were only three survivors of the garrison of this post. They related that it was heavily and persistently shelled by the enemy in the intervals between mounted attacks. One charge was brought to a halt almost on the lip of the trench, 15 dead being counted within 20 yards of it. Finally the garrison was reduced to five, who withdrew to a trench just behind the original line. Major Lafone sprang out into the open to meet the last charge, and was ridden down. He received the posthumous award of the Victoria Cross.

<sup>2</sup> See Note at end of Chapter.

Figure 8: British Official History description of the attack on 8th Mounted Brigade a few days before the Third Battle of Gaza.



## The military history of Frederick William Delves



*Figure 9: the next action in which the regiment participated was a development from the success of the breakthrough at Beersheba: the attack on the Sheria position on 6 November 1917. The 8<sup>th</sup> Mounted Brigade played a supporting role on its right flank, north of Beersheba.*

enlarged the bridgehead to a depth of a mile and a half.

The Yeomanry Mounted Division accomplished a considerable march in the course of its movement to the left flank. First of all the 6th and 8th Mounted Brigades had to be sent to Tell el Hesi to water ; then the division marched to Faluja, to which its rations had been sent, then it set off westward and arrived at Majdal in rear of the A. & N.Z. Mounted Division between 6 and 7 p.m. The 6th Brigade had covered at least twenty miles. But a much greater march was made by the New Zealand Brigade, which was ordered on this date to rejoin its division at Hamame. It left Beersheba at 4.30 p.m., halted to rest and water at Kh. Jemmame in the early hours of the 12th, and reached Hamame at 11 p.m. ; thus covering a distance of 52 miles in 18½ hours. The total distance covered by the Auckland Regiment was over sixty miles, because it was near Tell el Khuweilfe with the 53rd Division when the order to march was received. The Camel Brigade reached Julis during the afternoon of the 11th, and returned to the command of the Desert Mounted Corps.

On the 12th November a minor but still important

*Figure 10: the Yeomanry Mounted Division is repositioned to support the next phase of operations, marching across from the right (east) to the left (west) of the British front.*

was expected of him.<sup>1</sup>

At 10.30 a.m. a squadron of the 3rd County of London Yeomanry, 8th Mounted Brigade, galloped up to Yibna. A small body of Turks which had been covering the place withdrew at its approach, but there was still machine-gun fire from within this large village. With the co-operation of a squadron of the Bucks Hussars, 6th Mounted Brigade, it was cleared an hour later. Major-General Barrow issued an order to the 6th Mounted Brigade to move on Maghar and to the Camel Brigade to attack the villages of Qubeibe

*Figure 11: 13 November 1917.*



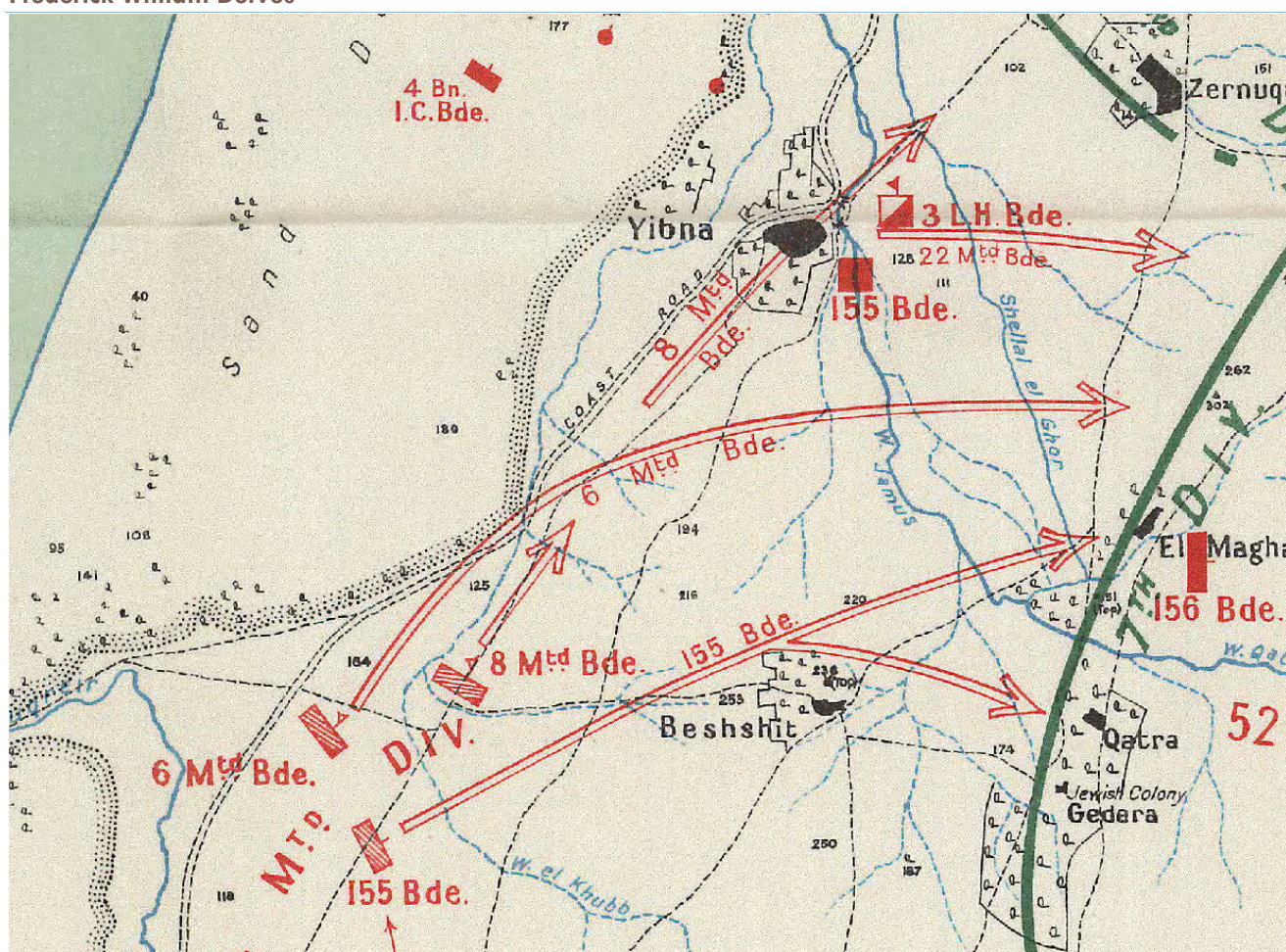


Figure 12: Part of a map from the British Official History, illustrating the action of 13-14 November 1917 known as the "Attack on Junction Station". The area shown is north of Gaza. Note the location of 8<sup>th</sup> Mounted Brigade, advancing through Yibna.

day.

Though the infantry was to take over the task originally allotted to the Australian Mounted Division, the Yeomanry Mounted Division's advance was not cancelled. Its orders were to move straight on Ram Allah by way of Beit 'Ur et Tahta, the Lower Bethoron of the Bible, a hill village 7 miles north-east of 'Amwas. The advanced guard of the 8th Mounted Brigade, the 3rd County of London Yeomanry, struggled forward to within two miles of Beit 'Ur et Tahta by an abominable road, and the 22nd Mounted Brigade reached Shilta. Nearly all wheeled transport and the Leicester Battery had to be sent back to Ramle, the Hong Kong Mountain Battery being attached to the division instead of the horse artillery.

Meanwhile on the coast patrols of the A. & N.Z. Mounted

Figure 13: 18 November 1917. The advance continues.



Battle of  
**NABI SAMWEIL,**  
21<sup>st</sup> November, 1917.  
Capture of Nabi Samweil by 75<sup>th</sup> Division, and  
Attack on Beitunye by Yeo. M<sup>td</sup> Div.

*(Yeo. M<sup>td</sup> Div. is shown at 3 p.m., 75<sup>th</sup> and 52<sup>nd</sup> Divisions at 6 p.m.)*  
*Defences of JERUSALEM under construction are shown by green dashes.*

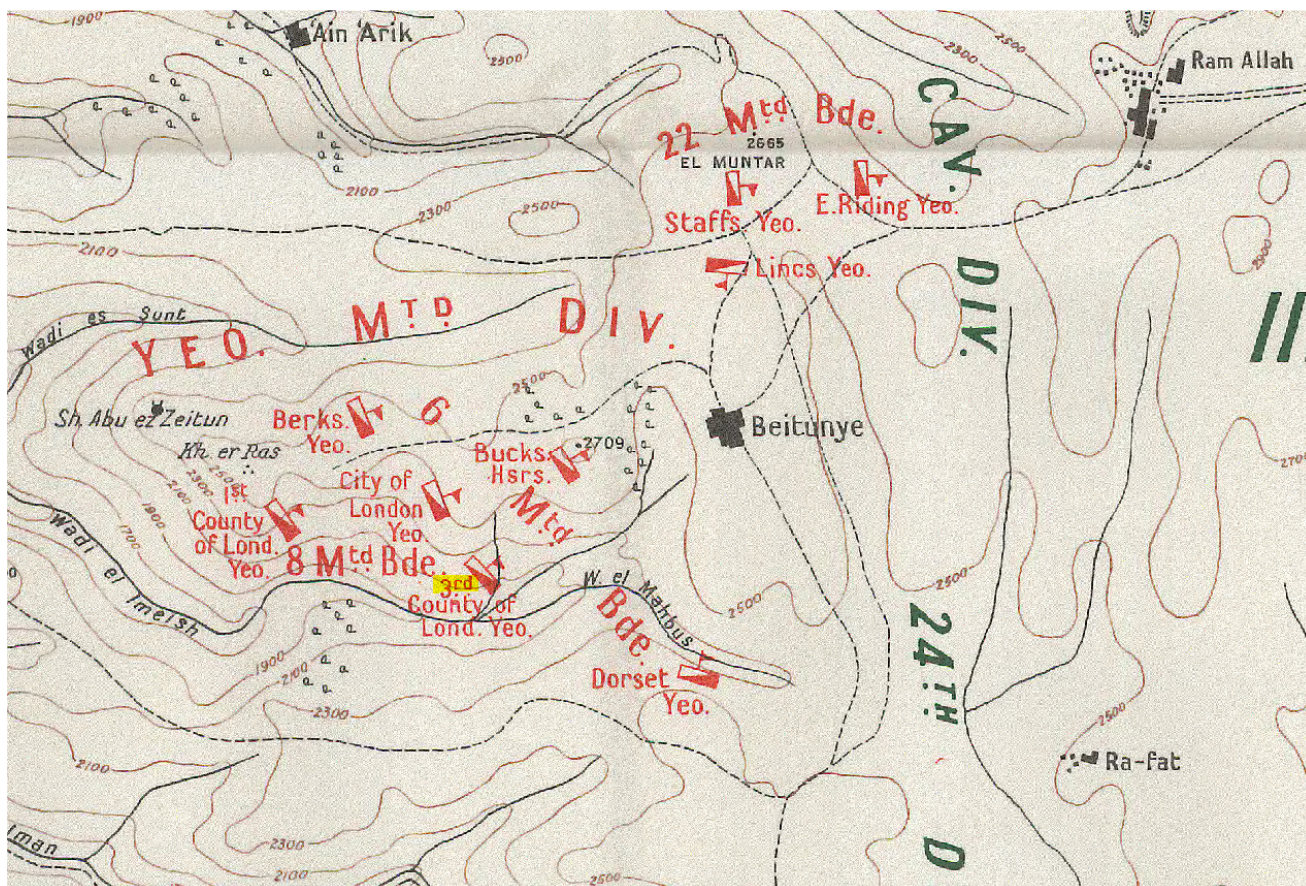


Figure 14: by 21 November 1917, the battle had spread into the difficult, barren country of the Judean hills and the Yeomanry Mounted Division was now northwest of Jerusalem. Frederick's regiment would soon be in Ram Allah.



The Yeomanry Mounted Division, having crossed the front of the 52nd, was now on the left flank of the advance. Major-General Barrow ordered the 8th Mounted Brigade to move on Beitunye, 3 miles south-west of Bire, and the 22nd on 'Ain 'Arik, on the track from Beit 'Ur et Tahta to Ram Allah and Bire. These troops were thus called upon to advance across one of the roughest and bleakest areas of the Judæan Hills. The 8th Brigade passed through Beit 'Ur et Tahta, but was soon afterwards held up in the Wadi es Sunt, which runs through a deep valley north-east of the village, and spent the night there halted in the rain. The 22nd Mounted Brigade also made slow progress, partly owing to the time taken in crowning the precipitous heights on either side of its line of march, but still more owing to the nature of the track. The column had to move in single file, and was nearly six miles long. Little opposition from the enemy was met with, but every time a horse foundered as a result of lack of water and of fatigue during the previous week, every time a camel escaped his miseries by deliberately (as it appeared) dying in his tracks, a halt had to be made while the carcass was dragged off the path. The brigade

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eventually bivouacked just west of its objective, the village of 'Ain 'Arik. Rations could be brought by the train no farther than 'Annabe, about 12 miles as the crow flies west of 'Ain 'Arik, and had to be fetched thence by units with pack-animals, in hastily-made canvas sacks, or at best with half limbers. Several regiments got none that night, and the most fortunate received them very late. 1917. 19 Nov.

The sudden break in the weather, though not unexpected—for the early rains were actually rather overdue—had vastly increased the difficulties of a task already hard. The roads in the hills, even before the rain fell, were worse than had appeared from the reports of agents, and the Palestine Exploration Fund map was all too flattering to them. Already the three divisions were in trouble with their transport; troops and animals alike were fatigued, though all the worst lay ahead. Neither the camels nor their Egyptian drivers were suited to rugged country of this nature or to the climate. The Egyptians had proved themselves efficient, tireless, and cheerful in the plain; but the rocks, the cold, and the rain bewildered and terrified them. There were instances of extraordinary devotion to duty in their ranks, but in many cases their spirits were broken by their miseries and it was hard to prevent them seating themselves by the roadside in the belief that only death would deliver them. Nor was it only in the hills that the rains affected the troops. In the plains the bottoms fell out of the roads by which their supplies were moved, and a few days later the flooding of the Wadi Ghazze temporarily cut the broad-gauge railway line.

On the 20th November the 75th and Yeomanry Mounted 20 Nov.

parties of infantry from the 156th Brigade.

The Yeomanry Mounted Division further north continued its attempt to reach Bire. As the 22nd Mounted Brigade was held up in front of 'Ain 'Arik in very rugged country, Major-General Barrow ordered the 6th Brigade, followed by the 8th, to move through Beit 'Ur el Foqa (Upper Bethoron), a mile and three-quarters E.S.E. of Beit Ur et Tahta, on Beitunye,  $3\frac{1}{4}$  miles further east. East of Foqa rises a steep ridge, known as the "Zeitun Ridge" (from the shrine of a sheikh of that name at its western end), which was to see heavy fighting on several occasions during the next two months. It is narrow from north to south, but nearly two miles long from west to east, fairly flat on the top but with steep sides, rising nearly 1,100 feet in three-quarters of a mile. The advance from Beit 'Ur et Tahta, where the 6th Brigade had bivouacked the previous night, was not contested until the Dorset Yeomanry in the van descended at 11.30 a.m. from the hills on which Foqa stands and found the enemy holding the western rim of the Zeitun Ridge above. The Berks Yeomanry, moving up on the left, succeeded in working its way on to the edge of the ridge near Kh. er Ras, but no further progress was made. The Berks lay out all night on the ridge, facing the enemy at close quarters, in torrents of rain, their horses in the deep valley below. Meanwhile the 22nd Brigade, meeting with little opposition, struggled into 'Ain 'Arik, leading its horses, the head of the column reaching the village at 2 p.m. and the tail not till about 10 p.m. Two squadrons of the Stafford Yeomanry, pushing on towards Ram Allah, established themselves on a hill known as El Muntar, a mile north of Beitunye.

Thus the night of the 20th November, by which time General Bulfin had hoped to be astride the Nablus road at Bire, found him far short of his goal. It is true that the most advanced of the mounted troops, the Stafford Yeomanry on

Figure 15: 20 November 1917.



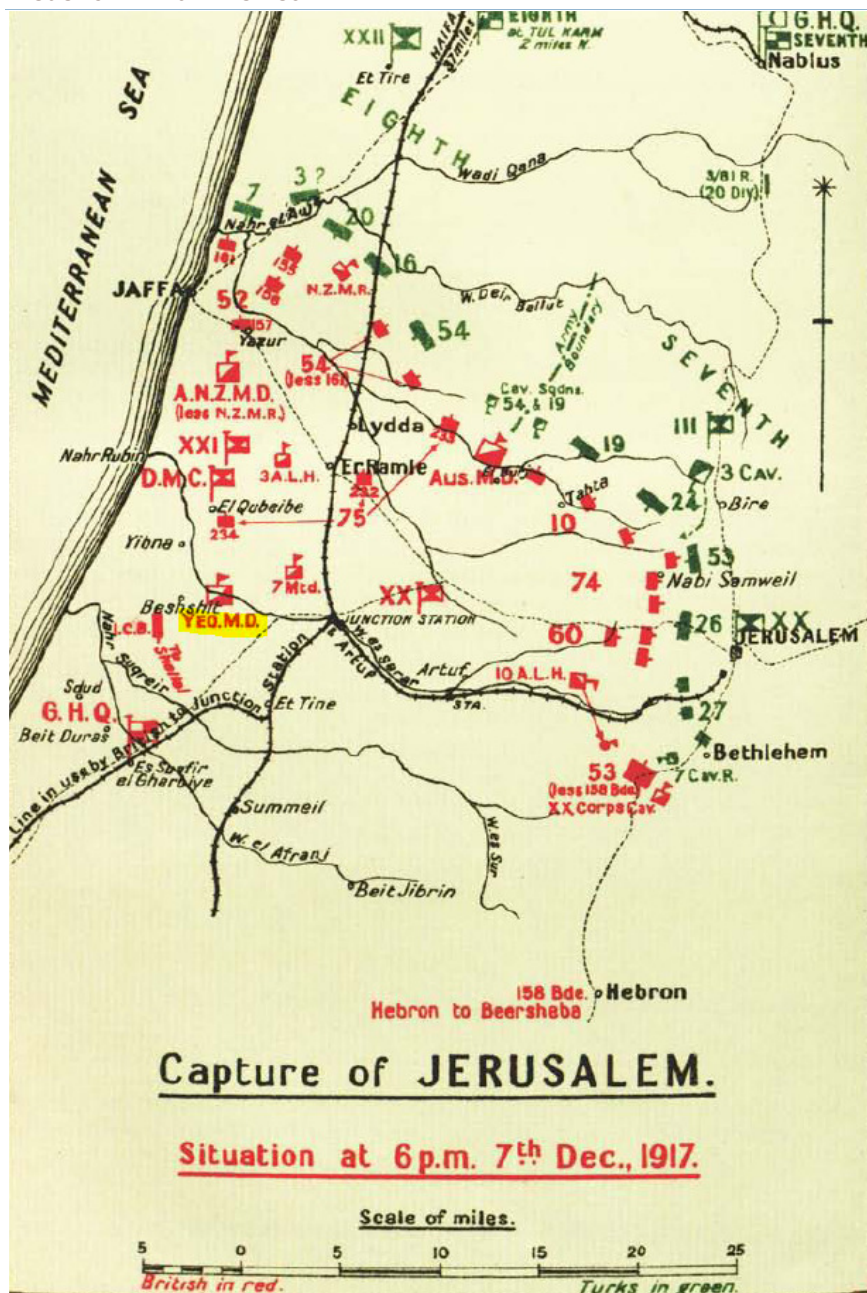
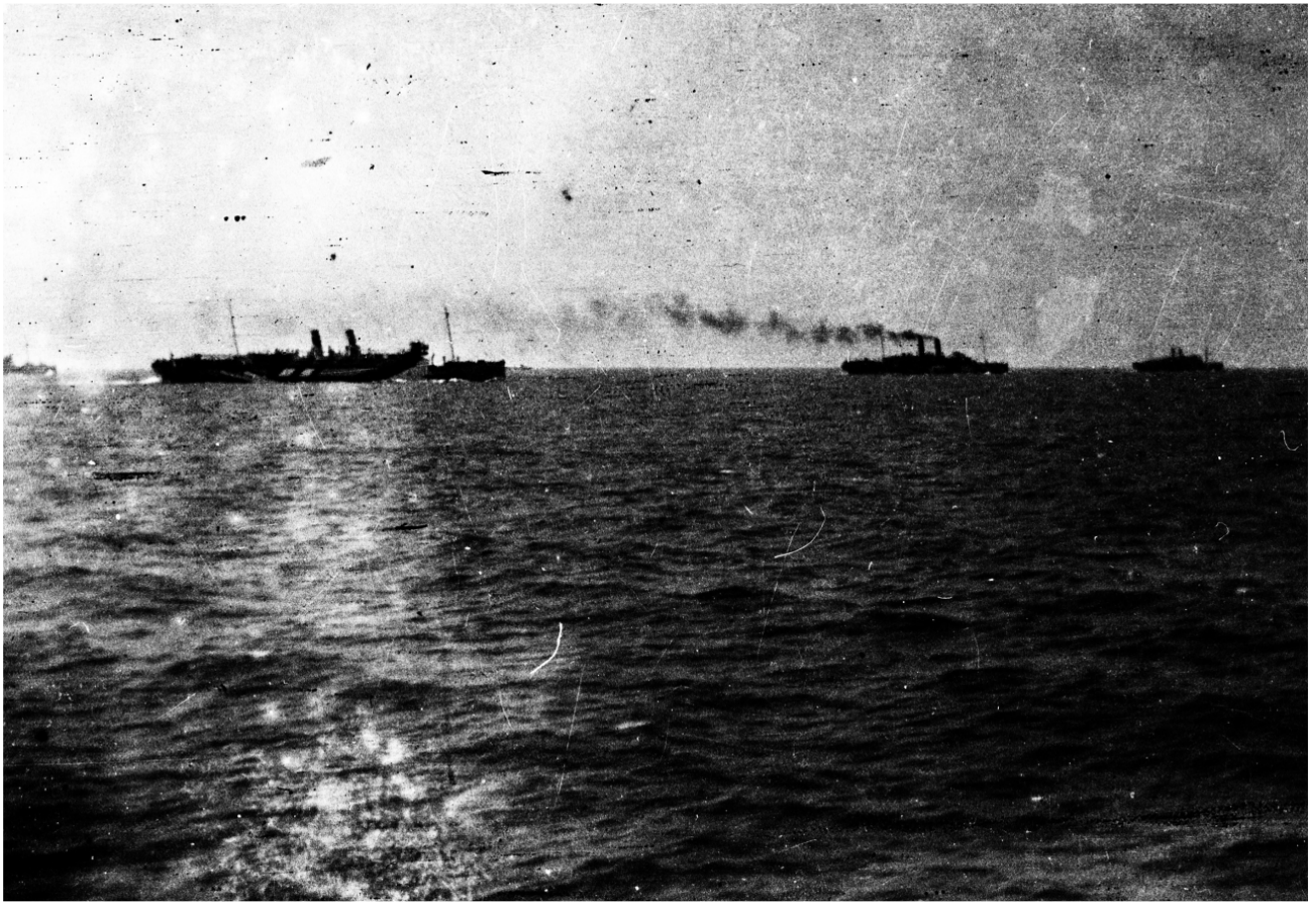


Figure 16: By the time of the next major British operation, the capture of Jerusalem, the 8th Mounted Brigade had finally been withdrawn for rest in reserve.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Mounted Brigade took no further part in major fighting. During January 1918 it was withdrawn to the south of Gaza, and Frederick's regiment moved to Belah. In April 1918 the Yeomanry Mounted Division was renamed as 1<sup>st</sup> Mounted Division and restructured, and the 1/3<sup>rd</sup> County of London Yeomanry began its conversion into a unit of the Machine Gun Corps when it left Palestine by railway on 8 April and went to the main British base at Kantara in Egypt.



*Figure 17: One of Frederick's photographs. It is very difficult to know, of course, but we speculate that this may be the convoy that took his unit and others from Egypt to France in 1918.*

## The regiment of Yeomanry

The Yeomanry regiments were mounted units of the Territorial Force.

The composition details given below come from “War Establishments of the Scottish Horse Mounted Brigade” dated August 1915 but apply to all such regiments, including the 3<sup>rd</sup> County of London.

Regimental Headquarters

Officers of the regiment 4 (Lieutenant-Colonel in command; Major 2-in-C; Adjutant; Quartermaster)

Officers 6 others, attached (Medical Officer of the Royal Army Medical Corps; Veterinary Officer of the Army Veterinary Corps; 4 Interpreters)

Staff-Sergeants and Sergeants 5 (Acting Regimental Sergeant Major; Regimental Quartermaster Sergeant; Transport Sergeant; Acting Sergeant-Cook; Acting Sergeant-Trumpeter)

Artificers 2 (Farrier Quartermaster-Sergeant; Saddler-Sergeant)

Artificers 1 other, attached (Armourer of the Army Ordnance Corps)

Men 16 (Orderly Room Clerk; Orderly attached to CO; 2 Orderlies attached to MO; Orderly attached to VO; 11 officers' batmen)

Men 12 others, attached (3 of the Royal Army Medical Corps; 5 of the Army Service Corps; 4 interpreters' batmen)

Total: officers 10, other ranks 36

The headquarters transport was provided by Horses 33 riding; 12 draught.

Bicycles 5.

### Machine Gun Section

Officer 1 (Lieutenant or Second Lieutenant)

Sergeant 1, Corporal 1, Privates 12, Drivers 8, Batmen 2

Total: officers 1, other ranks 24

Horses 17 riding; 16 draught.

### Squadrons

A regiment had three Squadrons when on active service.

Officers 18 (1 Major, 1 Captain, 4 Lieutenants or Second Lieutenants in each Sqn)

Staff-Sergeants and Sergeants 30 (Squadron Sergeant-Major; Squadron Quartermaster Sergeant; 8 Sergeants in each Sqn)

Artificers 21 (1 Farrier Sergeant, 5 Shoeing Smiths, 1 Saddler in each Sqn)

Trumpeters 6 (2 per Sqn)

Men 345 (8 Corporals, 90 Privates, 5 Drivers, 12 batmen in each Sqn)

Men 6 others, attached (2 Army Service Corps Drivers in each Sqn)

Total: officers 18, other ranks 408

Horses 393 riding; 48 draught and pack.

## SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS

### Regimental records

With Frederick William Delves being a relatively junior regimental officer, there is a small chance that he will be named in material held by the archives of his former regiments. It may be worth contacting the archivists for advice.

*Prince of Wales's Own (West Yorkshire Regiment)*: the regiment's archive is now held in the York Army Museum at Tower Street in York.

*East Yorkshire Regiment*: the regiment's archive is in the same location in York.

*3<sup>rd</sup> County of London Yeomanry*: the regiment's archive is in the Kent and Sharpshooters Yeomanry Museum located within Hever Castle, Edenbridge, Kent, TN8 7NG.

### Local records

Although our search of the British Newspaper Archive proved to be rather threadbare for the war period, it is possible that Frederick is named in other local publications local to his home: newspapers that have not been digitised, parish magazines, local organisation journals, and so on. The archives for Bradford would appear to be good place to begin enquiries, although clearly Frederick was at Colne in Lancashire after the war and that may be worth a try, too.



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