

Holy Lands

Resource Pack



The Plough Arts Centre
Youth Theatre Group
Holy Lands

The 16th (Royal Devon Yeomanry) Battalion,
the Devonshire Regiment, in Palestine, 1917

Resource Pack



The Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon
Incorporating the Royal Devon Yeomanry Museum



The Plough Arts Youth Theatre Group is working with the Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon on the national 'Away from the Western Front' project to help bring to light an important battle for the Royal Devon Yeomanry Battalion of the Devonshire Regiment. The battle of El Foka took place in Palestine on the 3rd December 1917. Although the regiment was defeated that day, suffering over 300 casualties within twenty four hours, the battle helped capture Jerusalem. The Youth Theatre group will create a performance to commemorate the anniversary of the battle focusing on the soldiers' potential emotional struggles fighting in the Holy Lands.

The Great War

The First World War had an enormous impact. It became known as the Great War or the War to End All Wars. It started on 28th July 1914 and peace was declared on 11 November 1918.

In 1914 the countries of Europe were divided into two large alliances. The Allies included the British Empire, France, Belgium, Russia and later the USA. The Central Powers included Germany, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey. When Archduke Franz Ferdinand, who was heir to the Austria-Hungary throne, was assassinated, Germany invaded Belgium and all of Europe was drawn into war.



During the war important leaders and the press often spoke of the Western Front. This was a line of trenches stretching through Belgium and France where the two armies had met and become entrenched for many years. Over five million British soldiers fought here from deep trenches in appalling conditions - including mud, rats and overflowing toilets.

British Soldiers in flooded trenches

Even though we hear most about the history of the Western Front today, only a fraction of the seventy million personnel who took part in the war fought there.

There were many battles taking place all over the world, away from the Western Front. Soldiers were sent from Britain to fight alongside allied armies in Africa, India and the Near East, including the Holy Land, also known as Palestine.



Woman placing flowers on Indian Troops

FORWARD!



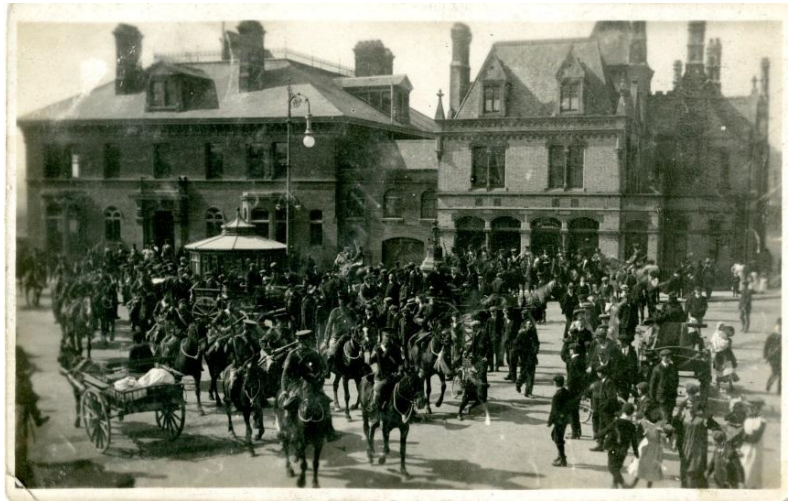
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Devon at War

When the war first broke out, you had to volunteer to fight. Many men in Devon thought it was more important to keep farming to supply the country with food. However Devon did already have volunteer soldiers such as the Royal Devon Yeomanry and the 6th Battalion the Devonshire Regiment.



The Royal Devon Yeomanry outside the Museum



Devon Yeomanry Soldier

The Devonshire Regiment fought on foot but the Royal Devon Yeomanry were cavalry which meant they fought on horseback. Thousands of Devon horses were bought by the government in the first few weeks of the war to help transport soldiers and equipment. If you wanted to be in the yeomanry you had to bring your own horse and so many soldiers were young farmers who owned horses. The War did not end as quickly as Britain hoped and so in 1916 conscription was introduced. This meant that any man between 18 and 50 could be called up to fight.

The 16th Battalion Devonshire Yeomanry was formed in Egypt on 21st December 1916 from the remains of the Royal 1st Devon Yeomanry and the Royal North Devon Hussars. Both groups had already fought in a terrible battle in Gallipoli (Turkey) where a lot of soldiers were killed, injured or became sick. They had left their horses behind in Britain and were fighting on foot as infantry.



Men who have just enlisted marching through Barnstaple Square



This poster was produced in 1915, to convince men to fight in the Great War.

Religious Background



Soldiers attending Holy Communion, WW1

As they mostly came from farming families, many of the soldiers who made up the 16th (Royal Devon Yeomanry) Battalion were from villages like Langtree, Meshaw and Black Torrington. A hundred years ago many people in these villages attended non-conformist or “low church” chapels instead of the parish church. This meant that the villagers studied the bible themselves and discussed the meaning of God’s words. Brought up studying the Bible and learning about Jesus Christ in Sunday School, these men would have talked about and imagined the Holy Lands of Palestine since they were children.

Entering the Holy Lands

When the 16th Battalion arrived in Palestine the army had been fighting the Turkish forces for a long time without success. So the government decided General Allenby should be in charge to finally win the battle for Jerusalem. General Allenby was a popular commander on the Western Front and his arrival was a great morale-booster for the troops. Soldier Walter Williams noted *...one of the greatest difficulties in Palestine is the supply of water. At one time, I remember we had only... two pints per day; it really was in short supply. Allenby well knew this and he would not make an advance until the water supply was arranged for.* Allenby’s plan was to make the Turkish think he was going to attack the important city of Gaza. He instead attacked Beersheba and then chased the surprised Turkish forces north towards Jerusalem.

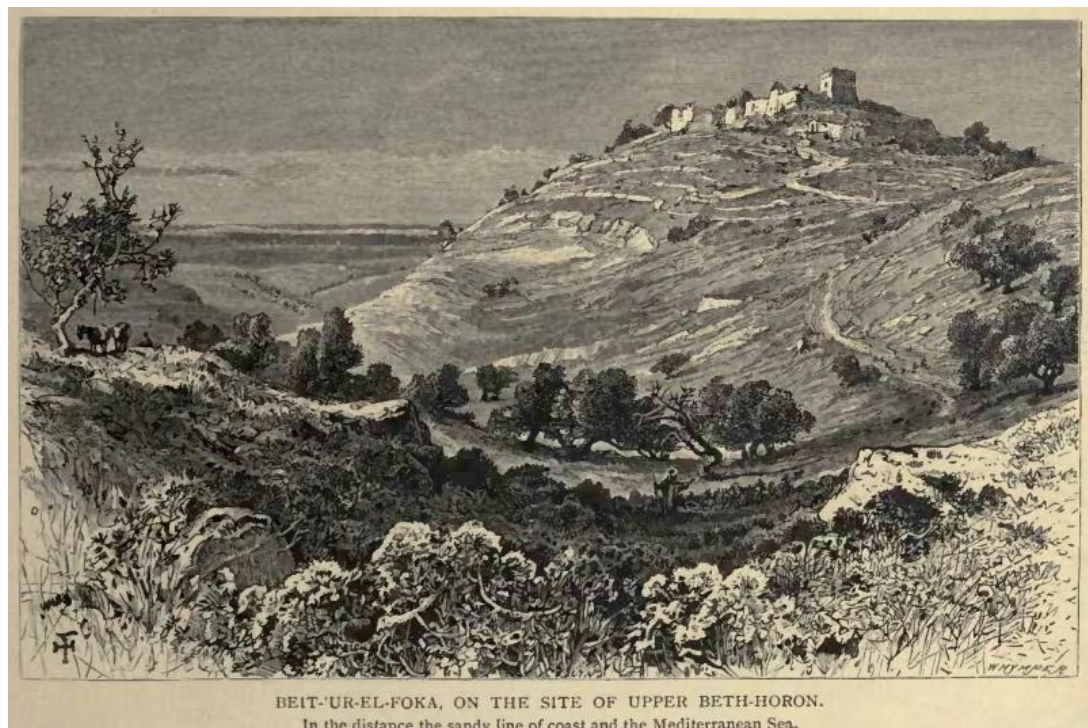


General Sir Edmund Allenby



The captured city of Gaza 1917

The 16th Battalion was involved in capturing Beersheba and then fought their way from Gaza up the coast towards Jerusalem. General Allenby knew water rations and medical treatment were very important to win the war, especially in the desert. And this is why on the 2nd December 1917 he asked Colonel Mardon of the 16th Battalion to capture the village of Beit Ur El Foka.



Beit Ur El Foka before the war (1880)

The Battle of El Foka

The modern village of Beit Ur Al-Fauqa (El Foka) is situated ten miles north west of Jerusalem on a hill. In 1917 it was important because there were wells there. The village was strongly defended by the Turkish forces and on the morning of the battle the soldiers had to fight hand to hand up towards the village walls. The 16th Battalion fought through the night and finally captured the village and one hundred and sixty prisoners by 3am.



Turkish Forces in Palestine

The village was surrounded by other hills including one behind which was supposed to be guarded by the 14th Black Watch. The Black Watch were a Scottish battalion and unfortunately had been given very bad maps which led them to the wrong hill, three miles away!

When the sun rose on the 3rd December the 16th Battalion realised the Turkish soldiers had encircled them and there was no escape. At 6am the Turkish started firing shells at the village before they began their attack. The soldiers fought bravely face to face with the Turkish for hours without rest until midday, when Colonel Mardon telephoned to instruct them to retreat because half of their battalion had been killed or injured.



Captured Turkish Sniper

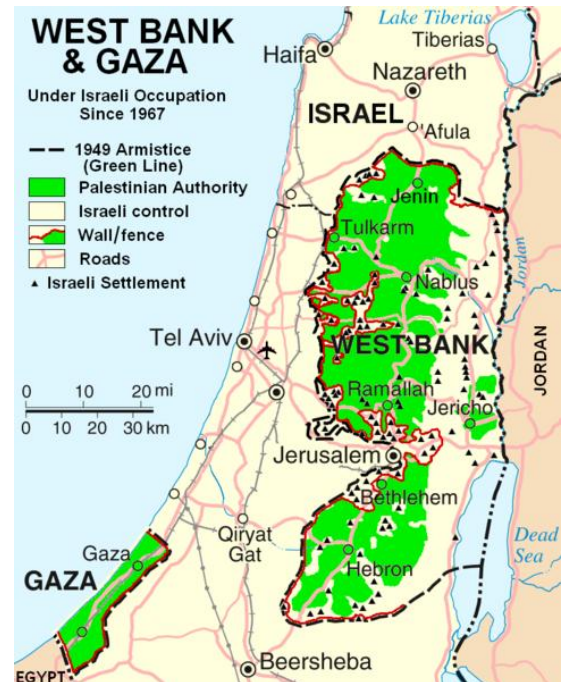
The 16th Battalion suffered 286 casualties that day - over half of their soldiers. Nine days later General Allenby captured Jerusalem after the Turkish troops surrendered. In February Sir Philip Chetwode, the 20th Corps Commander presented medals to the 16th Battalion for their bravery and remarked 'the battalion's fight was the biggest engagement of any battalion...and the Turks that day had sustained 1,100 casualties'.

Modern Day Palestine

Palestine has been the site of conflict for hundreds of years. It is considered holy by Jews, Christians, Muslims and Bahá'ís. Jerusalem is the holiest city to Judaism, the historical region of Jesus' ministry, and the site of the Isra and Mi'raj events in Islam. Since mediaeval times pilgrims have visited the Holy Land to confirm their beliefs and connect personally to the Holy Land. For example the Cave of the Patriarchs or Ibrahimi Mosque, is believed by Christians, Jews and Muslims to be the burial site of Abraham and his wife Sarah. All religions have to take turns to pray at the site and some parts have been separated into two to stop fighting.

During the mediaeval crusades European Christians tried to win back the Holy Land from the Muslims, who had conquered it from the Christian Byzantine Empire. When the First World War broke out the area was part of the vast Ottoman Empire, based in Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey).

Islam was introduced to Palestine in the 7th century. Since the 9th century most people have been Arabic-speaking Muslims. After the First World War the Balfour agreement gave support for a 'national home for the Jewish people'. After the Second World War, partly because of the Nazi Holocaust of the Jews, the United Nations recommended Palestine should be separated into Jewish and Arab States with shared control over Jerusalem.



Years of violent fighting between the new Jewish state of Israel and Palestine has resulted in the West Bank Wall being built in 2002, which the Israelis say is to protect them from attacks. However the Palestinians say it is a segregation wall that actually steals more land from their country.



West Bank Wall, Palestine



Old buildings in Beit Ur al-Fauqa

100 years after the battle, Beit Ur al-Fauqa (El Foka) village is within the West Bank, which has been occupied by Israel since 1967 and is surrounded on three sides by the Israeli segregation wall. This has made life very difficult as the village is separated from its school. The village holds about 800 people, similar in size to Langtree in North Devon.



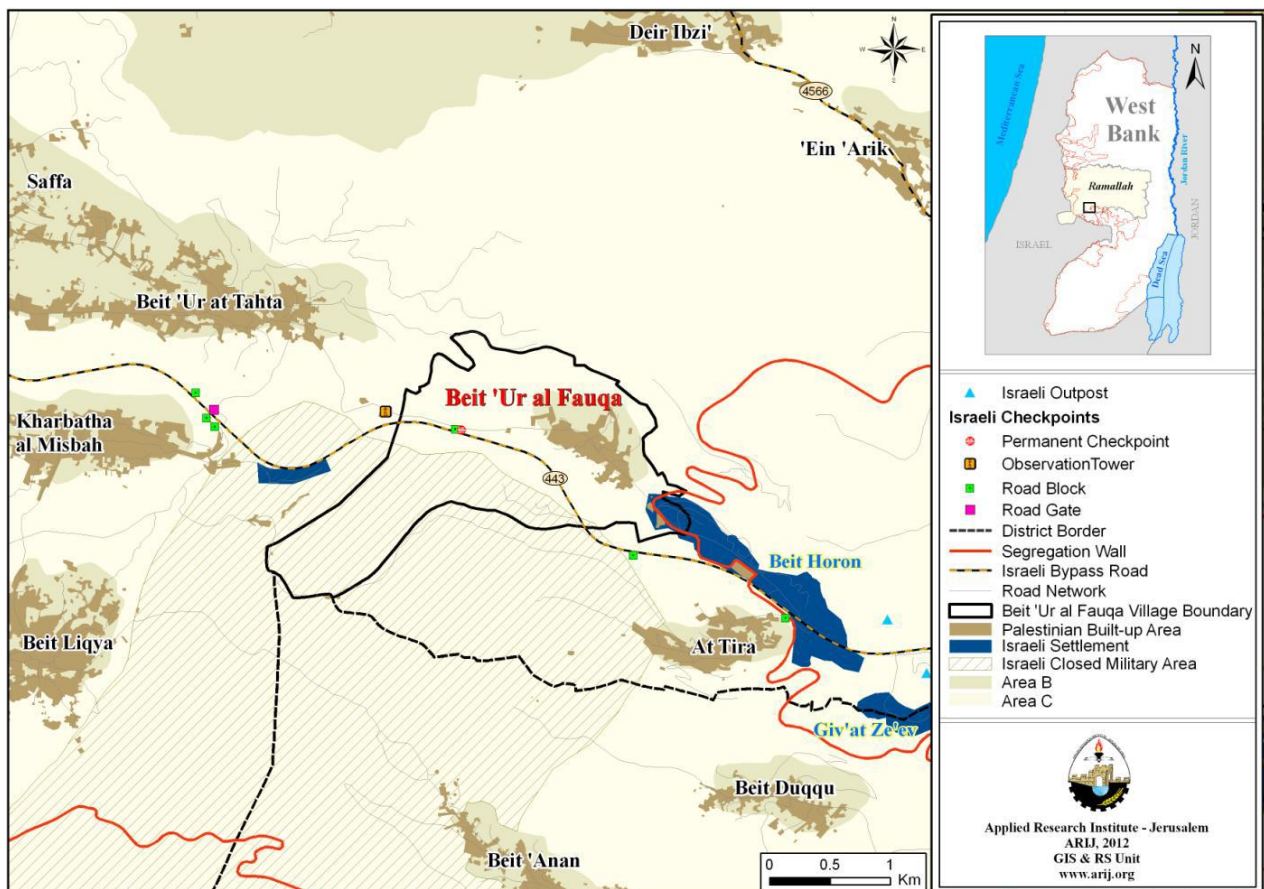
Modern day Beit Ur Al-Fauqa

The Ma'an (Ramallah) News reports:

“Up to 200 students from the villages of al-Tira and Beit Ur al-Fauqa now reach the school using a four kilometre route that runs along the separation wall... The route passes through sewage channels and regularly takes students up to 40 minutes to reach their school, as the channels are filled with rainwater in the winter and snakes in the summer”



West Bank Wall Checkpoint



War Diary Extracts: Horace Percival Crocker



Private Crocker served in the 16th Battalion and wrote diaries for most of his military service. On the day of the battle he was ill with an ankle infection. However he recorded the day to day activities and religious thoughts of the soldiers during their time in Palestine. He survived the war and returned to work on the family farm. His granddaughter remembers him being a very religious man who wouldn't do anything on a Sunday except attend church. These extracts have been selected to demonstrate Private Crocker's religious interests.

[At Gallipoli]

Sunday Oct 17th 1915

Another black day for us. As regards my health I was feeling much... I went to Holy Communion at 7.30 am which was held in the roadway by our camp... We heard a shell coming. The shell exploded about three paces from me and I was hit and had two cuts in the ribs and one in the rear of the shoulder. I don't know if it was a part of the casing of the shell or else it was the stones that it lifted in bursting. It was not much but if we had not ducked under the rock probably we should all have been hurt or killed.

Friday December 10th 1915

...took a walk over to the Greek village again. We went into the church. That was the best sight I had seen since leaving England. The church outside looked rather rough but inside everything looked pretty. There was a man inside the door to welcome us in. All the roof was sacred pictures all over, also the wall and a lot of sacred pictures fixed on the ledges. Although it was a fairly large Church I should say there was only room for about 80 to sit down. Outside at one corner there was one bell fixed. There was also a graveyard but only about a dozen graves could be seen. The date was 1877 by the look of it.

[In camp in Egypt]

Sunday March 12th 1916

Voluntary Church Parade in the 1st Devon Recreation tent. The Preacher took as his text Jesus of Nazareth is passing by and also told us the story of a High Commissioner in the War Office and the Nun that appeared to him.

Sunday May 28th 1916

We have no Church Parade now in the morn because of the heat and yet they make us take down our tents and stand in the open for inspection. In the night I went to Voluntary Service...

Tuesday June 6th 1916

In the night I had an awful fright by a snake. It was 9.40 pm. Sergeant Rawle had been ill all the day. I had just been after some medicine for him... when I returned to the tent again. Just as I was going in the tent I saw a snake by the side of Rawle. Rawle was lying on a blanket on the sand with only his shirt on, laying on his face and stomach. The snake took his course on to the top of Rawle and there stayed. I told Rawle to keep steady. Rawle knew by that there was something about. He said afterwards he thought it was a rat. The snake then turned about and came off his back the same way... and out under the tent. As soon as it was off from Rawle I told him to come out of the tent quick and told him what it was. I then got a stick and killed the snake...turned out to be one of the very worst in Egypt. They call it a Horned Viper, it had two horns...lucky...Rawle that he was not bit. If he had he would probably given up the Ghost quick.

Tuesday November 21st 1916

The most important thing is that in the night about half past eleven the Regs down below was very near washed away. They were in low ground and it appears that there was a cloud burst somewhere out in the Desert and the water came down this low ground like a River in fact it was a river. It drove the men on the high ground. The worst of it all was that we had a nice little Church built with mud and brick, so the water soaked away the Foundation and the whole thing fell.

Sunday February 4th 1917

Major Day was only able to give us one visit in the evening, when we had a Voluntary Service in the church Hut, of which I had to prepare and get lighted. And then I was called the church Warden by the men.

[In June, Private Crocker was sent on a training course in Egypt]

Monday June 5th 1917

My first day at school we did not do a lot. We had a lecture and a parade around the camp to find out different places and etc. Our parade hours was as follows: Reville 5, cup tea 5.30, parade 6 to 8. Breakfast 8.18, parade 9.30 to 12.30, Dinner 12.45, cup tea 4, Parade 4.30 to 6.30, Tea 6.45, Lights out 10.15. We used to get Wed. Sat and Sunday afternoons off I used to take Wed. And Sat. But Sundays stayed in Camp and studied my work a bit.

My first Wed. Afternoon off Sgt. O'Keefe and myself visited the Pyramids at Geeza. Went out by tram car. This was a place I had always been anxious to see but had not had the chance before now, but for all that it's not a great lot to see yet it's termed one of the seven wonders of the world.

My course at the School was for three weeks. One Wed. afternoon we visited the Museum and another afternoon I visited the Citadel both of which was very nice. In the museum I saw what was supposed to be the King of Egypt in the time of the children of Israel, dwelling down there who put such tasks on them and would not let them go away with Moses until God plagued the Egyptians to such an extent. Also saw the supposed mummy of his son that became King after his father was drowned in the red sea. At the Citadel the chief thing was the lovely Mosque that is built there. Its only about 130 yrs old and its nearly all built of Alabastre. Just one carpet in the centre of Mosque cost a thousand pounds. This supposed to be the second best mosque in the world. The best being at Constantinople. The architect after having planed and had built the mosque was given a lot of money to have his eyes cut out so that he should not build another like it anywhere. During my two first weeks we were kept well at it I mean studying and etc. The third week was mostly shooting and Examinations. We had eight examines altogether including the book. I had the highest possible marks for 7 of 8 and the 8th I dropped two points that was the written examine that just done me out of the Distinguished by one point; so came off as 1st Class Instructor.

[In Palestine]

Tuesday October 30th 1917

...I applied for another pass to visit Jerusalem and went in the afternoon. This is the Jews' Sabbath so that the shops were mostly closed. This time I didn't stay shopping very much but had a walk around. I walked straight down to Jaffa Gate and then turned to the right and walked right around the City wall when I got on the far side the side overlooking the Dead Sea and River Jordan and the desert behind. When I got further around to the East I could have a good look up over the Mount of Olives...On Zion Hill is the large building called Omar which is supposed to be the spot where Abraham was going to offer up his son Isaac when God stayed his hand. It is the rock that the Mohammodans (Muslims) look upon as sacred as well as the Jews and Christians. Some also say it is where the Ark first rested after the Flood of the world. It is also said to be the spot where the Temple stood that Solomon built. On coming up the valley between the Mount of Olives and Jerusalem I came up beside the Garden of Gethsemane which is a very small place with a few VERY OLD olives there that is said to be the same that was there in Christ's time....I then came around to the Damascus Gate which I think was the biggest gate out of the lot...It was a long walk but at the same time I was well pleased with it. At one of the Gates facing the Jordan I managed to get a good look in around the inside of the wall.

[Private Crocker was away from his Battalion with an infected ankle during the Battle of El Foka – these are his comments on his return]

Tuesday Dec. 18th 1917

Well I found the Bn looking up better than I expected according to the rumours I had heard. However, there was a lot missing but was glad that Sergt. Bellew was alright for I had heard that he had also been killed in the Foka scrap. I found J. Champion alright for I was anxious on him. These are some of the names of my mates that I could not see. Sgt. Major Rawle, Sgts. Pike, Dart, Pickard, Miller, Chorley, Winzer, Ivey, L/Cpl Soper (Cousin) and a lot else.

This was a very unlucky trip for our Bn. It's a very short story. This village Foka is a little village on the top of a hill, immediately to it right and left and in front are hills all a bit higher. Our Bn was ordered to take the village on the night of Dec 2 and 3rd. They took it by surprise quite easy catching the Turks in bed and caused them heavy losses.

On the following day Dec. 3rd the Turks made several counter attacks and they were able to enfilade our poor chaps from the Hills on the flanks. Our men beat off several counter attacks, than the Turks bombarded the village very heavily. Our chaps tried to get some help in the way of reinforcements but none was able to be sent and after ours had had a rough trip the Gen ordered them to retire which they did but left a lot of their mates in the village either wounded or dead. I heard that the Turks was supposed to have killed all the wounded they found but where they did for certain I can't say.

[Written in Crocker's diary to be used in the event of his death] - John 5 24

Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story
Of the Christ who died for me
Sing it with the Saints in glory
Gathered by the crystal sea.

Good-bye One and All, Horace P. Crocker.
December 22nd Saturday 1917



Devonshire Regiment in Sheik Abbas, 1917



16th Battalion Devonshire Regiment inspection, Palestine 1918

Sunday, December 23rd 1917

In the morn I had to go out with some L. Guns to see if they would fire alright and through that I could not attend Holy Communion Service. In the afternoon we had Church service in the open on the side of a hill overlooking Jerusalem. It reminded me of the Sermon of the Mount. After the service, the Brigadier gave a little history of Jerusalem.

[In February 1918 Private Crocker took his opportunity to visit Jerusalem and other important sites of the Holy Land. His detailed description shows how excited he was and how important these holy places were to him]

Feb 14th 1917

Mr Dullam and myself from "B" Coy and 2 from each of the other Coys started off for a trip to Jerusalem, marched to Latrun and stayed there the night under canvas..

Feb. 15th 1917

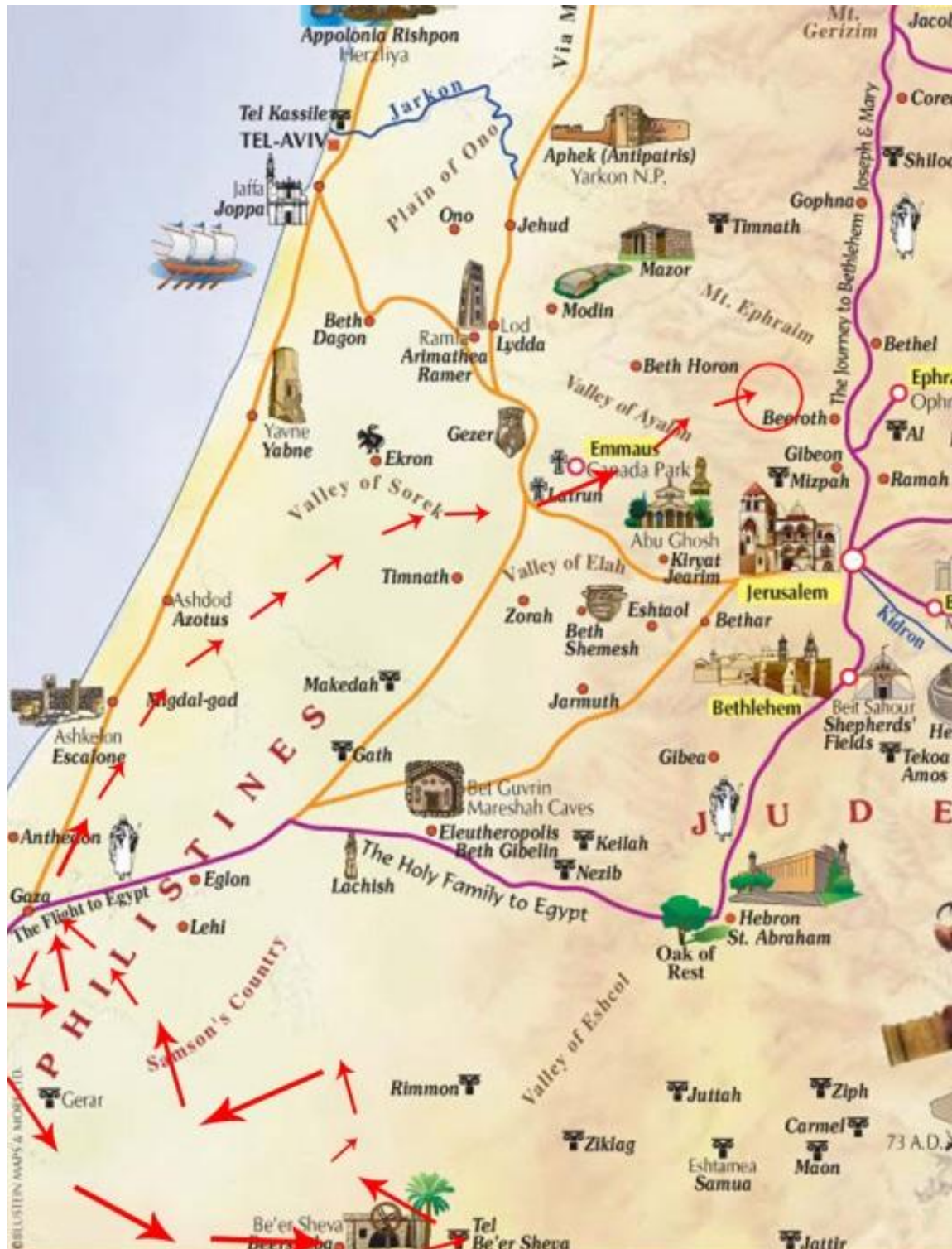
Got on a motor lorry at Latrun at about 8 a.m. and arrived at our destination about 10.30, that was under canvas about 2 miles out from Jerusalem on the Jaffa road. We had a bit of lunch and marched off for Jerusalem.

Mr Dullam and myself ordered a cab and drove to Bethlehem and went straight to the Church of Nativity. Bethlehem was a much bigger place than I thought it was. It was nicely situated on fairly high ground rather much facing the Holy City only there was another hill that blocked the view. This hill I've just mentioned we passed on the way and on it was a sort of a Church I think a Catholic and they call it Mary-est. Well on the way out we picked up an English talking bloke that showed us in around the Church of Nativity. He said it dated back to about 330 and it is reckoned to be built over the stable where our Lord was born. And it is also considered to have been kept as a Christian Church ever since.

The building on entering by the door facing Jerusalem appeared much the same as very old temples that was done around Egypt that was big and roomy with great pillars no seats much but carpets. There was a lot of nicely decorated candle sticks and lamps hanging from the roof. The Alters were decorated very grand. A door way between two Altars led us to a dark hall place and then we were supplied with a little taper candle thing and led into a darker pathway going down an incline to the Holy Place where our Lord was born. It was dimly lighted with a sort of night light that hung from the ceiling in lovely ornamented glass vases. The spot was mark by a lovely gold looking star placed on the ground being guarded around by a wire cage sort of a thing and cloistered all around with different precious gifts in the way of candlesticks and etc. This place was just on the right as we entered, around to the left was a place marked and fenced in with a wire cage and also night lights burning. This place was the manger which was there hewn out of the side of the soft rock, most of the coarse rock was draped over with lovely silks some of it being left uncovered to show the natural crib. There was also some nice ornaments.

In this dark Holy Spot was a sentry posted by our military authorities. They having sentries posted on all places that is looked upon as Holy. In all cases whether Christians Jewish or Mahamadians. After having a good look around we went out a similar dark path way the other side of the Holy Place out again in the big Church and then had a further look at the different Alters for different sects have their own Altars namely Greeks, Armenians and etc. We then had a look around on the outside and the place looked very very old and had much the appearance of the age that was told us. We then visited a shop or two and bought a few curios, after that drove back to Jerusalem reaching there about 5 p.m. We could not get any tea so went

without and visited the 60th Div Concert which was held in a zinc shed and it was very good indeed. Some of the soldier boys were painted and dressed to represent girls and you could not tell what it was girls to look at them or yet to hear them talk. We arrived back to camp about 9.30 and pretty hungry too.



Map of the Holy Land showing 16th Battalion route

Feb 16th - We had breakfast in good time and started off for the sights of Jerusalem. We were to meet by the Y.M.C.A. at 9 p.m. when we were going to be provided with a guide to take us around but on account of so many other parties we could not procure a guide for the morning as a matter of fact we didn't require him much for the morning, having no guide we started off for the Mount of Olives. On our way there we visited the Tomb and Temple of the Virgin Mary which lay in the valley near the Garden of Gethsemena, we then climbed up the rugged path to the top of the Mount of Olives. Here we visited the Russian Tower of Ascension which is a very high tower I should say at least 150 feet high we were allowed to go up in the tower and had a magnificent view of the Holy City and all the country around for miles and miles.

The Tower was skeleton sort of a tower. I mean there was a lot of openings only just the four corners being continuous walls right up and about every 40 feet a platform. About the third platform up there was an enormous bell weighing for certain over 20 tons. To ring it you had to swing the tongue and it was just as much as anyone could do to pull it across to strike the bell. This one bell very near filled the tower at that place. On the fourth landing up there were several bells. Two of them was just the size of the usual ones in English towers. Others were smaller. The smaller ones could be rung by one man all at once the tongues being connected together by chains, the man would have to be on the same landing no ropes were dropped to the bottom as is the case in England.

There was a twisting iron staircase all the way up. From the top we could see the Dead Sea and the Jordan just as it entered the sea but otherwise we could see but little of the Jordan. Could see the tower of the Church of Nativity at Bethlehem. There was several other large buildings on the Mount of Olives, mostly Russian. After having a good look around we started for the downward trip again taking a fresh track down, on nearing the bottom we came close by a large Russian Temple which is built or rather supposed to be built on the spot where Our Lord went to to pray when he returned and found His disciples asleep on the night when He was betrayed. After passing by that we entered the Garden of Gethsemena. There, there was some very old Olives which is considered to be the same as was there in the time of our Lord.

Now the Garden is very small I should say only about 10 Landyards, and only a small doorway to get in. The whole of the middle of the Garden is kept as a flower garden. There is a wall all around about 7ft high and a path just under with different designs and picture stood up against the wall all around. On entering the garden we turned to the right and followed the path around, the first thing we come too placed against the wall in the form of a memorial was a large Cross I think made of iron with I should say all the things on it that was such off used in crucifying our Lord. There was as I say the Cross, the nails, hammer, pincer, sponge, reed, spear, crown of thorns, raiment, dominals, cup, a hand and a whip, all this was hung on the cross. The next place we come too was just like a little green house, what this place represented I dont know. Than we came to a glass cage thing in side of which was a moulding painted to represent Our Lord in one of the stages when he was about to be crucified, there was about 17 or 18 of these cages around the garden against the wall, they were all much alike, generally showing our Lord carrying the Cross, each one being a stage further on finally we come to the picture where our Lord is being taken down from the cross which was the last. We than come out of the Garden and made for the Y.M.C.A. where we had tea and at 1.30 our guides was ready to take us in around the inside of the City Wall. We were about 12 altogether with one guide. He took us straight to the Jaffa Gate and was shown the big piece of wall that was taken down to allow the German Empire to ride in t in state namely with carriages and etc forming a train or a sort of a possession. The Jaffa gate was only just like a big iron door giving entrance to a sort of a porch in which turned sharp to the left so that is was almost impossible to get in there with a good size carriage. So that they had a great piece of the wall taken down that gived a straight entrance to the main street.

Up this main street we went just to our right hand was what they called David's tower. This was a sort of a fortress like place. A place built round, with a great dyke at the foot of the wall. There was a sort of a portable bridge to get across this dyke and I suppose in the time B.C. that when the City was likely to be attacked that all the citizens would get in this fortress and take away the portable bridge. On the inside of this place was a lot of peep holes sort of places. These holes was tall narrow ones I suppose for firing of arrows out through. There was a sort of a platform just where the portable bridge fixes on, facing the City from here Gen. Allenbury read his proclamation to the Citizens on His taking of Jerusalem on the 10th of Dec. 1917.

We then marched up Zion Street, not far up before we come to a Temple on the left side we went in around and found it very similar to other Temples of Egypt very nicely decorated. This Church was called the Church of St. James why it gets this name is because its built or supposed to be built on the spot where St. James was beheaded. It was an Armenian Church. We come out from there and proceeded up Zion Street and shortly come to Zion Gate thats a gate facing towards Bethlehem. This Gate was probably rebuilt by the Crusaders but probably a very old gate as in the very olden days it is considered that most of the Holy City was up around that end namely nearly half a mile further S.West on higher ground called Zion. This was about the time of David.

We went through Zion Gate way of course than outside of the City where it now stands but the ground which was originally the City. We walked about 200 yds when we come to a big German Catholic Church. This Church was built and given to the Kaiser by the (King) of the Turks on the Kaiser's visit to the Holy City a few years ago. The Kaiser in return gave it to the German Catholic's living in the District. .This was a lovely built Church on the top was a sort of a balcony all the way around, we went up and had a fine view, you could also just see the dead sea from here. There was still a German priest in this building.

We than proceeded a little further and came to the supposed Upper Room where Christ had the last Supper with His Disciples before the Crucifixion. This was a fairly roomy building with three pillars in the centre. The building is used now a good deal now by the Islams as a place of devotion for it's under the same roof as where it supposed to be David's Tomb. We than had a look into David's Tomb which was only out another doorway at the other end of the building. Having seen that which was only a place screened off in an ordinary room where the remains was supposed to be we again retraced our step back to Zion Gate and in through and down a street to our right to a spot some way down where we could very easily mount the wall and look out over. Here we were pointed out the field of blood or the Potters field or the field of the 30 pieces of Silver that Judas betrayed our Lord for. We were also shown the village of Siloam and the place where Bethany lay just behind a hill from us.

As we looked out over from here we were looking over a valley called the Valley of Josaphat, where the Jews and also the Mohamadians believes that the judging will take place at the last day. Some of them reckons the judging will take place in this manner how that there will be a bridge from the Holy City to the top of Mt. Of Olives only the width of an horse hair and those that can walk across it will be alright and if they can't well they'll go under. The Jews and the Mahomedians have their Cemeteries as close as possible to the bottom of this valley and then they reckons they won't have far to go on the last day. There is also the old tombs of the prophets just by the Jewish cemetery, there is one in particular much bigger than the rest or rather has a bit of a statue built over it that is supposed to be Absoloms tomb. After this we trotted down a bit lower and come to another gate called the dung gate, this was a small thoroughfare and I suppose where all the rubbish is thrown out.



General Allenby entering Jerusalem, 11th December 1917

We then turned left handed and soon came to what is known as the Jews' wailing wall. Now why this is termed the wailing wall is I suppose because it's the most suitable spot but it's about 50 yds of the boundary wall of the Temple Area. This Temple area I will say more about later. Here at this spot the Jews come in great numbers and wail and worship, they wail because they can't go on the Old Temple Area. Now this Old Temple Area is a piece of ground about 35 acres on which is considered that Solomon's Temple stood. There is no Solomon's Temple there now but very probably the pillars and stones are utilised in building mosques and etc. This place is just on the side of the hill looking toward Mt. of Olives and a tremendous lot of work and labour must have been done to get it practically level and a lot of it is paved over with enormous large stones which is considered the only work of Solomon's temple that is still remaining.

Now this big place was the Jews' chief place for devotional purposes and etc in very olden days. When the Turks took hold of the land or I should say when it got overpowered by Mahomedians, the Mahomedians took possession of this Temple area altogether and wouldn't allow a Jew inside. They have the authority to do as they like to a Jew if they catch him inside this area, they may kill him outright there and then if they wish. That is why the Jews wail on the outside of the wall. It is rather amusing to watch them by this wall. It was a very old bit of wall, about 30 ft high, about 5 ft high there was a bit of a ledge that was the top edge of the bottom stone where the mortar is broken away a little.

All the Walls are built of very large stones. On this ledge the Jews rest there book and read away from it in a singing tone and all the time they sway to and fro just like the pendulum of a clock and when they've had enough of that they will walk along by the wall kissing it all the way and wailing but a lot of them I noticed was not taking it to heart very much while there was some that did. I saw more kissing there in five minutes than in the whole of the time since leaving England. In fact that put me in mind of the girls again (nuff said).

After we left this spot we went into the Temple area, a place 35 acres in size and nothing is allowed to be done in it. I mean it is kept entirely enclosed and practically private except for Muslims. On this Area there is two large Mosques one called El-Aksa and the other Omar we had a look in Aksa but could not Omar.

The Mosque Omar is supposed to be built around the rock on which Abraham was about to offer his son Isaac when God stayed his hand and told him of a ram caught in a thicket. Just outside of the Mosque Omar there is another small dome place what I mean by dome is a place with a dome roof. A dome roof is a roof just the shape of say half of an orange or a football, nearly all temples have this shaped roof and any sound echoes ever so. Well this small dome is supposed to be built over the spot where Solomon David and other old kings used to judge and they reckon that there is an invisible chain from the top of this little straight to Heaven. It was supposed to be there that King sat when two women brought two babies to him one dead and the other alive and they both said the live child was hers. We then walked towards the City Wall facing Mt. of Olives, mounted the wall by aid of a set of steps and just out over was a small Chapple, supposed to be built on the spot where St. Steven was stoned to death outside the City Wall.

From this spot we could have a broad view of the Garden of Gethsemane. From this spot we moved up around to our left coming to the what used to be the Golden Gates but this Gate is now closed up I don't know how long ago it was done, not long ago I should think by the look of it. This is done by the Mohamedians but for what reason I'm not certain on.. It's something to do with regards to Jesus Christ entering that Gate on Palm Sunday and He said he should do so again, going further up along on the inside of the wall we came to Solomons Tomb. The next thing we came to was the Church of St. Anne.

This is practically a new Church and a very nice Church indeed. The site was given to France or rather the French by the Turks in recognition of the help that the French gave the Turks in fighting against the Russians some years ago. The next thing we come to was the Poole of Bethesda and this spot looked to me to be the real spot as it was probably 2000 years ago. This is the poole that we read about in the 5 chapter of St. John 1st to the 9 verses where Jesus told the man to take up his bed and walk. There is still the five arches and looks very very old as a matter of fact that have been buried over and even houses built on it. To approach the place you come upon some old ruins and there find a hole with a set of steps made of old greenish stones leading down into the dark. The guide striking matches led us down the steps to a depth of about 50 ft and there was the pool of water with the five arches over it keeping up the roof, the whole place was like a black hole leading away back under from the foot of the step. I should say it measured about 12 foot wide and 36 long, only at the end near the steps was a bit of a space where you could stand, at the far end the water appeared to be very deep.



Jerusalem in 1917

Coming on the top again our guide told how that twice there had been houses and etc built over this spot and then a sort of a temple was built there and not many years ago some person I think a Frenchman took it in hand to search for this poole. He took away most of the temple and a lot of the ruins of the old houses and found the poole down at the depth I've just mentioned, just the altar part of the wall is still standing now.

After this we were taken to the Chapple of Flagellation. This is a small Church built over the spot where our Lord was scourged. From this place we walked a short distance where we came to a Arch over the Street with a little room on the top of it. This Arch is supposed to be the spot where Pontious Pilate stood upon when he gave his decision concerning our Lord, when he washed his hands and said I find no fault in Him. Another arch is joined to the one I've just mentioned this one there is a French Convent built over and around. The Sister showed us around the Convent. The Chapple was very prettie. This second arch I've just mentioned formed the wall at the back of the Altar all in its rough state.

It was now near 4 o'clock and at that time we were allowed inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. So we made tracts for it on our way we passed a new church. We didn't stay to have a look around it but our Guide to us said it was a German Church and that the Kaiser was the first man to preach in it. That rather surprised me. Not long and we reached the famous Church of the Holy Sepulchre. This Church is in several different compartments or rather several different Chapels, different Sects having its own Chapel but all claims a rite to the Holy Sepulchre.

The first part of the building we came into which was just like a big Hall just in the centre of this was a big marble slab, this was called the Stone of Unction, supposed to be the stone on which Our Lord was embalmed.

We than entered another part of the building which was supposed to be Calvary, but there's a lot of tradition about the matter. General Gordon reckons that Calvary is a different place altogether outside of the now City Wall. Well this place where they reckons our Lord was crucified is marked now by a Shrine of Our Lord on the Cross just to the right of this is another Shrine of The Virgin Mary, just between the two is a place where you can see the natural rock with a rent in it which was supposed to have been done by the earthquake that happened just as our Lord died on the Cross. What struck me most was to see all the jewellery and other valuable gifts hung around these Shrines especially the Virgin Mary.

These gifts, as I said once before, is given by pilgrims that visit the place. In the Virgin Mary's Breast was a sort of a spear this was to denote her sorrow showing how it struck Her to the heart for the spear was supposed to be piercing Her Heart.

We then went through another opening into another part of the building. This was the largest chapel of the whole Church and was the Greek part. Just in the centre of this building was a sort of a ball or globe and this spot they termed as the centre of the world. Just at the other end of this building was the entrance to the Holy Sepulchre. Only about four could go in the Sepulchre at once and you was provided with a taper to see with when you went in. As I say it was only large enough to hold about four persons at once. It was like many of the other places dimly lighted with sort of night lights. The bench was shown which was supposed to be the one Our Lord was laid on of course cut on the natural rock.

Most of the remainder of walls was draped with silk ornaments paintings and etc. We were then took down some steps just to the rear of the Holy Sepulchre down into some more old sepulchre and was shown how the bodies used to be put away, of course this was all in its rough natural state.

We again retraced our steps to the entrance of the Holy Sep. and then outside of the building and down around some slippery steps into a sort of a Cave that is immediately under Calvary. Here was several shrines and paintings. This is the supposed spot of where Adam lay or was burried. Here we were also shown the rent in the rock. In another part we were shown where that the original cross on which our Lord was

crucified on was found by Queen Constantine. She was supposed to have found several crosses and to know the original one was found in this way that when it touched the dead, they would receive life again. This cross was sent to Italy and no one seems to know what has become of it. This about ends our sightseeing, we made our way to the Jaffa Gate again and as we couldn't buy any tea we made for our little camp, had supper and went to bed fairly tired.



Feb.17th 1918

Turned out and had breakfast and again made of for Jerusalem for a short time just to buy a few things from the Y.M.C. to send home to Blighty. Mr.Dullam and myself went on this trip, returned again at 11a.m. had dinner and prepared for our return journey to unit.

On Monday Feb.25th we not being many miles from Foka, Sgt.Daniels and myself had a walk up to see if we could find any more of our missing men. We couldn't find anything fresh, saw a lot of graves of our poor mates that paid the toll.

Sunday March 3rd 1918

Taita (North) – 7.30 Holy Communion, 5.15 p.m. voluntary C of E Service near by the road when the Chaplain asked us the question of how much we thought of our religion compared with the other duties of life. The weather was bright and fine rather cold at night.

War Diary Extracts: Herbert Cecil Algar



Pt. Herbert Algar (back centre)

Private Algar joined the Yeomanry when war broke out and served in the 16th Battalion. He was at El Foka on the day of the battle. He survived the war and returned back to his family in Devon. Years later his war time dairies were discovered in an attic and through a campaign by the BBC returned to his family who donated them to the museum. Private Algar often attended Holy Communion and in his diary refers to the Biblical names of places where was stationed, such as Judaea and Gad.

[In camp in Egypt]

July 1st 1916

Bishop of Jerusalem held a confirmation service here. About 29 confirmed.

July 9th 1916

H.C.(Holy Communion) in morning, Church Parade in evening. Our Capt Hugo – awarded the MC.

Sept 14th 1916

Our new Chaplain arrived from England. Capt the Rev Campbell Douglas. Preached his first sermon to us. Preached splendidly & held us spellbound on the lesson about the Prodigal Son. Sure to be a favourite amongst us.

Nov 22nd 1916

Was awakened at 1am by the Trumpeters sound the Alarm. Hurriedly dressed & found that the Camp was being flooded by water coming from the main Wadi. Ayre & Lanarks lines already undulated. We “stood too” in our lines as they were not swamped as yet. At 1.45 am water reported subsiding. Our dear little Church’s foundations were washed away & the whole fell in much to our great sorrow. Had rain for an hour. First time since we have been here – 8 months & also for ten years in this part of Egypt.

[In Palestine]

April 5th 1917

Left Rafa at 7am & marched till 11am where we halted for the day. Beautiful scenery & walking thro' lanes just like at Home. Khan Unis.

April 25th 1917

Awfully hot day. Shortage of water just about dead with thirst. Drank washing water.

May 19th 1917

Took over 1st line of trenches at Sheik Abbas Ridge. 2,000 yards from "Achmid". Very hot. No water.

Feeling the effect of having no water. I took from 7pm to 2am today in trying to get up water from the men. Got some eventually. Went down A1.

Oct 21st 1917

Church in morning & also HC. Helped to rescue a fellow from drowning in afternoon. Church in evening. Splendid service & preaching

Nov 24th 1917

Resting. Went over & had a look around Gaza & Ali El-Muntar, the former place where Samson took away the City Gates & the latter where he dropped them on the hill – a distance of two miles. Orders for a 15 mile march tomorrow. Had overcoats & two days extra rations to carry.

Nov 26th 1917

On again at 7am for another 12 miles. Passed thro' the old ancient city of Ashdod & could see Gad in the distance. Arrived at ___ & stopped the night. Plenty tired enough. The pack is the only trouble. More iron rations issued. Lot more dropped out. We are all getting fed up in the march to Jaffa (Joppa)

Dec 1st 1917

Very cold up here on the hills of Judea by night. Stayed here the day & also night. Jocks captured two hills.

Dec 2nd 1917

Moved again this morning into a big Wadi. Pretty safe here. Had a letter from Dorothy. Rumours of an attack on the village of Fauker (El FOka) by the Devons. Rumour true. Moving off for the attack at 11pm

Dec 3rd 1917

We captured the village at 1.30 this morning but had very heavy enemy enfilading machine gun fire, which played havoc with us. Lt Bragg was killed in the attack & our Company Commander – Capt Fox, Lt Tudor-Pol, Lt Forbes & Lt Murray – four of our five Company Officers – were wounded in the morning. Turks counter attacked three times in large numbers & as we were only a Battalion & could not get up reinforcements we had orders to retire as we had suffered heavily & got back safely. The rifle & machine gun fire was awful & how we all were not hit I don't know. At the Roll Call we had only 128 men left out of nearly 540 & had lost 13 Officers out of 20.

Dec 4th 1917

Moved into Battalion HQ for a Rest. Our Brigadier Gen spoke well to us. Am feeling very stiff & depressed

Dec 5th 1917

Our Divisional Gen – Major-Gen Girdwood came & congratulated us on our good work. Heavy rain throughout the night.

Dec 6th 1917

Congratulatory telegram to the Devons from our Corps Commander – General Chetwoode. Still resting

Dec 7th 1917

Left again today & went as far as the WS's old bivouac. Heavy rain thro' the night

Dec 8th 1917

Showery all day. Marching all night. Arr at the Latin Church. Felt homely to hear a church clock & chimes.

Jan 22nd – 25th 1918

Nothing much of importance. Had parcel containing Xmas Pudding from Home. Very nice. Weather still holding fine

Private Algar copied out the following poem by a fellow member of the Regiment in Memory of Pte F Mitchell of Bodmin, Cornwall, who died of wounds April 21st 1917.

He carried his pack on his aching back
O'er many a league of sand
And we all loved the Lad with the smile so glad
On the hills of the Holy Land.

For the boys one & all will answer the Call
When there's work that they've got to do
But few can be glad when things go to the bad
Yet he was one of the few.

T'was on Gaza's Hill mid the battle's thrill
Where death lurked on every side
When there came a shell from the big guns bell
And his luck was out and he died.

He was first to fall at the Reaper's Call
And we knew him for one of the best
But God loved the lad with the smile so glad
And took him Home to his rest

Cpl H Moxon R 1st DY
Palestine 24/4/17

Anonymous Account of the Battle

This article, documenting the battle of El Foka, was written by an unknown soldier and published in The Weekly Dispatch (war time newspaper). It was sent to Pte. Crocker in Palestine by his mother and he included it in his diary.

STORMING HEIGHTS IN THE HOLY LAND MOONLIGHT BATTLE AMID THE SACRED HILLS THE PRICE OF VICTORY December 1917

A little affair that happened up in the hills not far from the Holy City. We had bivouac'ed in a deep wadi close to the outpost line screened from the view of the Turks by overhanging ledges of rock. Our line of communication was precarious, the pass through which supplies reached us being enfiladed at several points by Turkish machine guns hidden away in the slopes of an adjoining hill. By "we", I mean a battalion of splendid West Country dismounted yeomanry of a breed alas! likely to grow scarce as the war goes on. Water and rations were short. The Turks held a village immediately above us and that village contained two deep and reliable wells. Our job was to take the village and secure the wells. We paraded at 8p.m. It was very dark; the moon was due to rise at 1a.m. We had a long difficult climb before us. Owing to the steepness of the track and the boulders in the way .we set out in Indian file struggling up towards a point where deployment would be possible.

We were travelling light having dumped our packs in the wadi below, indeed to have attempted that climb in full marching order with an assault at the end of it would have been well-nigh impossible. Some cover was afforded on the lower slopes of the hill by a ragged grove of fig trees intersected by the stony ruins of an ancient walled Roman garden. At one point we crossed a Roman track once an important thoroughfare still in fair repair and dating back to 70 B.C. This track led up into the village then on across a ridge of hills and finally down into the Great City itself.

NO SIGN OF THE ENEMY

At midnight we emerged onto the bare hill about half-way from the summit. The position was suitable for deployment .We were still advancing snake wise in Indian file when the order came down the line to halt. Battle of Foka continued.

It was very dark and very, very cold. We could hear the hungry howl of the jackals in the wood on our left, otherwise there was no sound. Of the Turks we could see nothing. The hill sloped steeply up before us, terraced with rocky hedges forming ideal cover for machine guns and snipers. Here and there as we advanced we were certain to discover caves in the hillside veritable traps of death for the unwary. The order to deploy was passed down .It was now nearly 1 a.m. The moon would soon be up. We were to advance in waves. The waves curled around the hill on two sides uniting to surge up and forward when the moon should rise.

Waiting in the cold and dark is unpleasant under all circumstances. This was no exception. The men were in splendid spirits however and showed no signs of nerves. Suddenly the moon was up in her true Assyrian

splendour. We could see every detail of the task before us. First a climb up over the boulders and rocky crags, then the assault of the natural breastworks surrounding the hill crest then the rush across the open plateau, and finally the storming of the village, the white walls of which we could clearly see against the skyline. It is certain that we were instantly seen by the enemy, but no shots were fired although we were well within range.

The advance began. Still no sign of the Turks and silence was sinister and canny. A glorious view of the hilltop, orange groves and ravines stretched around us right away down towards the plains and the sea.

What blasphemy it seems to make war in such beautiful surroundings high up in the Holy Hills of Palestine. The battle unfolded in the usual orthodox fashion in such affairs. Our machine guns firing overhead affording us some support. Turkish snipers were concealed everywhere. The shot straight, fought coolly and only threw down their rifles when our men had arrived within a few yards of their hiding place. Machine guns blazed away at us from caves; men began to fall – the second wave went forward at the trot to reinforce the first; bayonets were fixed, the breastworks were reached and the enemy driven across the open plateau and down the hill on the other side where a thick wood afforded excellent cover.

THE SEAMY SIDE OF WAR.

All this sounds being simple, but it was a long, bloody, heart-rending business. The ground was strewn with wounded curling and uncurling in their agony, and many lay still for ever. Our force split up, half attacked and cleared the village, the other half lined the hill crest to the North and East awaiting the inevitable counter-attack. It was not long in coming. The enemy surged out of the wood led by English –talking officers and came stealing toward us. We kept them at bay with hand grenades, there was no decent field of fire either for our machine guns or riflemen. Turkish snipers in the trees picked off our men one by one. The latter were compelled to lie out flat on the bare rocks no cover being available. Meanwhile the village had been cleared except for usual crop of snipers hidden away in deep cellars who come to the surface later to continue their deadly work. Sunrise found us still on the hilltop. Reinforcements arrived none too soon. The enemy attack developed on several sides and the guns peppered us unmercifully from the neighbouring crest. Every man fought for dear life and seven counter-attacks were beaten off. We held on all the morning. The line was reinforced but the men were picked off one by one and the line was getting weak. It was about 2 p.m. when the final counter-attack took place. A barrage put on the hill by the enemy enabled them to advance and never shall I forget the cry which was given by them. It was enough to make any man's blood run cold. Both sides fought like demons with hand grenades but all was in vain.

The word to retire was given and many left the village but never to reach the wadi below, the men being knocked over in every direction with shells, machine gun and rifle fire, We were glad to find out later that many of our boys which were reported missing were safely in hospital and doing well and we hope those that are taken prisoners are treated well. We must remember if they are prisoners of war they are still in God's hands. Since then we have had our own back again, Jerusalem has fallen, the village retaken and the Turks driven miles beyond. But many of our best pals lie buried of the top of the hill within sight of the Roman walls out of the chaos at last. I can imagine many less attractive gateways to the wider world beyond.



The Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon
Incorporating the Royal Devon Yeomanry Museum