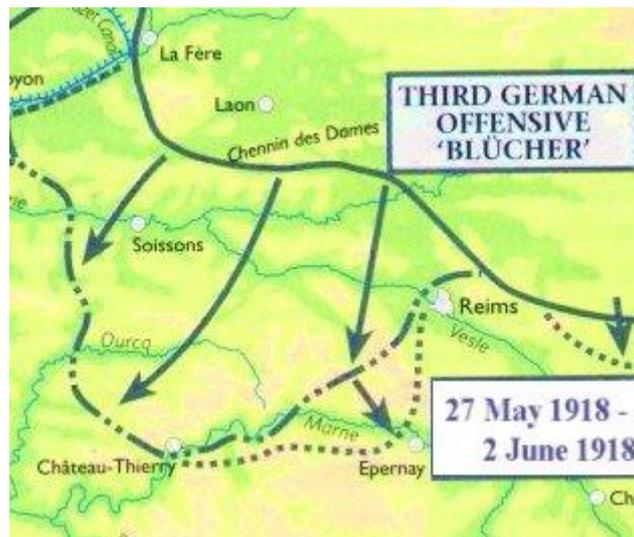




From the Front

May 1918



There appears to have been another major lull as Operation Georgette ground to a halt. Doubtless this was caused by a need for both the German and Allied armies to rest and regroup following the intensity of the battles of March and April. Certainly this is reflected in the Dewsbury casualty figures for May when the death roll dropped to 18.

However, the Germans were not due to give up their efforts



to breakthrough and finish the war before the advent of the huge numbers of fresh troops from the other side of the Atlantic. The next part of the Spring Offensive, known



as Blücher – Yorck after two of the Prussian Generals who fought against Napoleon, was designed to split the British and French forces thus making an easier prospect than fighting the combined force.

The German attack took place on the 27th May 1918 between Soissons and



Reims, the sector was held by six depleted British divisions who were recuperating after their exertions during the early spring.

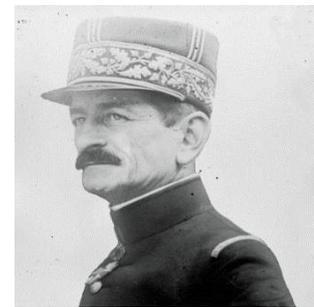
This action was known as the Third Battle of the Aisne and the focus of the attack was the capture of the Chemin des Dames Ridge,

which the Germans had held since the First Battle of the Aisne in September 1914. They had however, lost the region in 1917 when

General Mangin captured it during the Nivelle Offensive which was designated the second Battle of the Aisne.

The planning of the offensive was again executed by Ludendorff whose primary thinking was that success in this area would take the Germans to within striking

distance of Paris. This led to his belief that in turn this would cause the allies to mover forces from Flanders to help defend the French capital thus allowing the Germans to pursue their ambitions in Flanders.



The defence of the Aisne area was in the hands of General Denis Auguste Duchene commander of the French VI Army. He also had at his disposal the British IX Corps under Lieutenant-General Sir Alexander Hamilton-Gordon who actually held the ridge after being posted there for a refit.



The Germans began the morning of the 27th May with a bombardment (Feuerwalze) of the Allied lines with over 4,000 artillery pieces. Subsequently the British suffered heavy losses because Duchene was reluctant to abandon the Chemin de Dames Ridge after it had been captured at huge cost on the year before. He ordered the troops to huddle together in the front trenches, despite the orders of the French Commander in Chief Henri – Philippe Petain, as he realised the men were sitting ducks.





by Crown Prince Wilhelm.

The bombardment was followed by a poison gas drop and once this had lifted the main assault by 17 German Sturmtruppen divisions commanded



Taken completely by surprise and with their defences spread thin the Allies were unable to stop the Attack and the German army advanced through a 40 kilometre gap, reaching the Aisne in less than six hours. The Germans smashed through eight Allied divisions on the line between

Reims and Soissons, pushing the Allies back to the river Vesle, capturing 15 kilometres by nightfall.

Victory must have seemed near for the Germans who had taken just over 50,000 prisoners and over 800 guns. However, the advance towards Paris petered out on June 3rd as the Germans were beset with the familiar problems of supply shortages, fatigue, lack of reserves and many casualties. On June 6th the German advance was finally halted on the Marne, much the same as the experiences of 1914 were replayed.

The French suffered over 98,000 casualties and the British around 29,000;



German losses were almost as great, if not slightly heavier. Duchene was sacked by Petain for his poor handling of the

Allied troops. The Americans had arrived and proven themselves in combat. They had originally been deployed in the quiet Saint – Mihiel Sector in Lorraine where they had their first significant engagement in the defence of Seicheprey on the 20th April. After the British had held off the Michael advance on the Somme the US 1st Division was moved to reinforce the line in that sector in mid

– April and launched their first attack of the war on Cantigny on the 28th May 1918.

However from the middle of the month it was noticed that the enemy's efforts were slowing down, even his gunnery rate slackened except for intensive bursts of heavy fire here and there. Opinion amongst the Allies was divided; some thought it meant that the German High Command had secretly acknowledged the failure of their stupendous effort which had begun on the 21st March. By remaining static had they decided to cut their losses by remaining on the defensive? Others thought differently and advocated that nothing short of a full revolution at home or in the ranks of the Army would cause Ludendorff et al to abandon their all out strategy in the belief that eventually they would triumph and smash the Allied armies on the Western Front! In other words it was held that the Allies were experiencing the calm before the storm just as they had in the days leading up to March 21st. The latter group believed that the Germans were using this lull to economise on their ammunition, whilst re-filling their dumps, unloading their stores of shells from light railways in preparation for the next attack. These strongly held views envisaged the Germans concentrating those division which are still undamaged by battle, reorganising divisions whose gaps torn by our gunfire and machine gun fire and rifle fire are being filled up by drafts from German depots, the gathering of ammunition stores, the regrouping of guns and the establishment of field hospitals for the wreckage that will follow the next storm.

In support of this it has been reported that our airmen out on reconnaissance see unusual activity on the German railways, a continual line of rolling stock and occasionally lines of marching men whilst remaining convinced that this is only the tip of the iceberg whilst the main activities take place under the cover of darkness.

Certainly the casualty figures corroborate the indications that the enemy is slowing down, records show that 18 men from Dewsbury lost their lives during May and this is a third of the total of the casualties for the peak month of April.

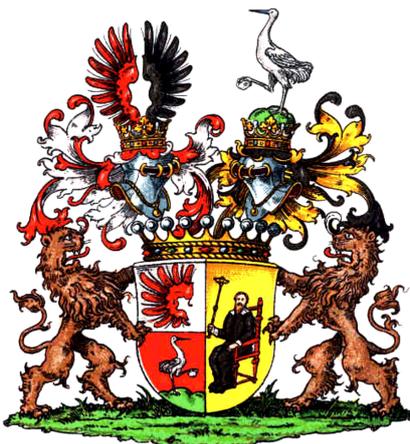
Famous Airman's Fate

Von Richthofen killed on the British Front!



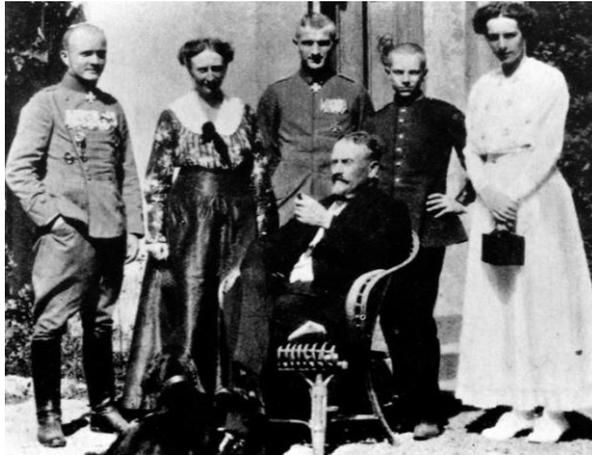
Towards the end of April great interest was aroused by rumours that Von Richthofen the most famous German air fighter of all had been killed and brought down in our lines, on the 23rd April 1918, aptly enough St. George's Day. It was only the day before that he had been announced by official German Communiqué that Rittmeister Von Richthofen, commanding their "trusty 11th Pursuit Squadron" had achieved his 79th and 80th victories in air combats. It will be a great blow to the morale of the German air pilots when they learn that he has, at last, been destroyed by the Allies!

Manfred Albrecht Freiherr von Richthofen is considered the ace-of-aces amongst the fighter pilots of World War 1, being officially credited with 80 Air combat victories.



He was a Freiherr (literally free lord) a title of nobility often translated as "baron". It was neither a given name nor a hereditary title since all male members of the family were entitled to it even during the lifetime of their father. Due to the fact that he painted his aircraft red he was dubbed "Der Rote Baron" or the Red Baron.

He was born in Kleinberg, near Breslau, Lower Silesia now part of the city of Wroclaw was 2nd into a His father Philipp und sister Ilse



in Poland. His date of birth May 1892 and he was born prominent Prussian family. was Major Albrecht Karl Julius Freiherr von Richthofen and his mother Kunigunde von Schickfuss Neudorff. He had an elder and two younger brothers

Lothar and Bolko. At the age of four the family moved to Schweidnitz now in Poland. Like all typical aristocrats he enjoyed horse riding and hunting and at school he excelled at gymnastics, parallel bars being his chosen specialism and he won several awards.

He was educated at home then at school in Schweidnitz before commencing military training at the age of 11. Originally a cavalryman, he joined an Uhlan unit in 1911 (1st Emperor Alexander III of Russia Uhlan regiment (1st West Prussian) In May 1915 he transferred to the Air Service and quickly distinguished himself as a fighter pilot and became leader of his Jasta and then the larger fighter wing unit Jagdgeschwader 1 better known as the “Flying Circus” or “Richthofen’s Flying Circus” possibly because of the bright colours they adopted or because they moved frequently, often setting up tents and living on their airfields

The reason for his transfer appears to have been the fact that his



regiment was disbanded due to the limited call for cavalry following the adoption of trench warfare. On being nominated for transfer to the Army’s supply branch he is quoted as saying “I have not gone to war in order to collect cheese and eggs!”

From June to August 1915 he served as an observer on reconnaissance missions over the Eastern Front. He was transferred to the Champagne Front and is thought to have shot down an attacking French Farman aircraft with his observer's machine gun, the kill was not credited to him because the plane fell behind French lines and the victory could not be confirmed.

A chance meeting Boelcke led to him October 1915, In brother Lothar to Air Service, and in Bomber Squadron



with the German ace Oswald entering training as a pilot in February 1916 he encouraged his transfer to the Imperial German March Manfred joined the No 2 flying a two seater Albatross. At

first he was an indifferent pilot, struggling to control his aircraft and actually crashing on his first flight at the controls. He rapidly became attuned and was over Verdun on the 26th April 1916 when he opened fire on a French Nieuport shooting it down over Fort Douaumont; once again he received no credit.

He met Boelcke again in August after flying two seaters on the Eastern Front. This time Boelcke was looking for recruits for his newly formed Jasta 2 and he selected Richthofen to join this, one of the first, German fighter squadrons. Boelcke was killed during a midair collision with a friendly aircraft on 28th October 1916, an event witnessed by Richthofen.

On the 17th September Richthofen scored his first confirmed aerial victory in the



skies over Cambrai and honoured the fallen enemy by placing a stone on his beautiful grave. He contacted a jeweller in Berlin and ordered a silver cup engraved with the date and



type of aircraft he had shot down. He continued to celebrate each of his victories in this fashion until he had 60 cups by which time the dwindling supply of silver in Germany meant that he could no longer be supplied.

He developed into a fine squadron leader, not given to the aggressive tactics of his brother and he was not a spectacular aerobatic pilot like Lothar or Verner Voss, he

guided his men by the use of a set of maxims know as the Dicta Boelcke and was a noted tactician and fine marksman. Typically he would attack his foes from above with the sun behind him giving rise to the Allied adage “Beware of the Hun in the Sun”



His most famous adversary was the British ace Major Lanoe Hawker V.C. whom he shot down in November 1916 after a long dogfight. This convinced Richthofen that he needed an aircraft with greater manoeuvrability and he switch to the Albatros D.III in January 1917 scoring two victories before suffering an in-flight crack in the spar of the aircraft’s lower wing.

Richthofen flew the celebrated Fokker Dr.I triplane from late July 1917. This was the aircraft with which he was most commonly associated although he did



not use it exclusively until it was re-issued with strengthened wings in November 1917. In actual fact only 19 of his kills were made in this type of aircraft despite the link which is impregnated in the minds of his admirers. Indeed it was his Albatros D.III which he first painted bright red

which earned him his nickname and his reputation.

In January 1917 Richthofen received the much coveted “Pour le Mérite” or Blue Max following his 16th confirmed kill; this was Germany’s highest military honour at the time.



Richthofen led his new unit to unparalleled success peaking during “Bloody April 1917” when he shot down 22 British aircraft including four in one day, thus raising his tally to 52

In July of that year the “Red Baron” sustained a serious head wound causing

disorientation and temporary partial blindness, He regained his vision in time to ease the aircraft out of a spin and execute a forced landing in a field in friendly territory. The injury required multiple operations to remove bone and splinter from the impact area. The victory was credited to Captain Donald Cunnell who was killed by German anti aircraft fire on the 12th July.

Richthofen returned to active service on the 25th July, against his doctor's orders although he went on convalescent leave from 5th September to 23rd October. His wound is thought to have caused lasting damage as he later suffered from post-flight nausea and headaches as well as a change of temperament, there is even a theory linking his injury to his eventual death.

In 1918 Richthofen had become such a legend that it was feared his death would be a major blow to the morale of the German people. In spite of this he refused a ground job stating that "Every poor fellow in the trenches must do his duty" He continued to fly despite rumours that the British had formed special squadrons to shoot him down and award an automatic V.C. to whomsoever shot him down.

Controversy has long reigned over the last hours of the Freiherr! He received a fatal wound whilst flying over

Morlancourt Ridge near the River Somme. At the time he was pursuing a Sopwith Camel piloted by a novice Canadian pilot, Lieutenant Wilfrid May of the 209 Squadron R.A.F. May had just opened fire on Von



Richthofen's cousin Wolfram and he had sped to the scene to protect him and continued his pursuit across the Somme where he was attacked by May's commanding officer Captain Arthur "Roy" Brown who had dived steeply at a very high speed and then had to climb just as steeply to avoid hitting the ground, Richthofen turned to avoid the attack and resumed his pursuit of May, It was during the latter stages of this pursuit that a single

.303 bullet hit the Red Baron damaging his heart and lungs. In the last few seconds of his life he managed to retain sufficient control to make a rough landing in a field near the Bray-Corbie road just north of the village of Vaux-sur-Somme in a sector controlled by the Australian Imperial Force.

So how is the question of “Who killed von Richthofen” to be answered? The R.A.F credited Brown with shooting down the Baron but it is now generally agreed that the single bullet which caused the fatal chest wound,



entered his armpit and exited near his left nipple, was actually fired from the ground. Brown’s attack was from above and behind and to the left of the “Rote Kampfflieger” and if he had been

hit by Brown’s guns he could not have continued his pursuit for as long as he did.

Brown himself never spoke of the event stating that the evidence was already there.

It has been suggested that Sergeant Cedric Popkin was the most likely candidate to have killed Richthofen, he was an Australian anti-aircraft gunner armed with a Vickers gun and fired at the Baron on two occasions and on the second occasion the sergeant was in position to have fired the fatal shot.



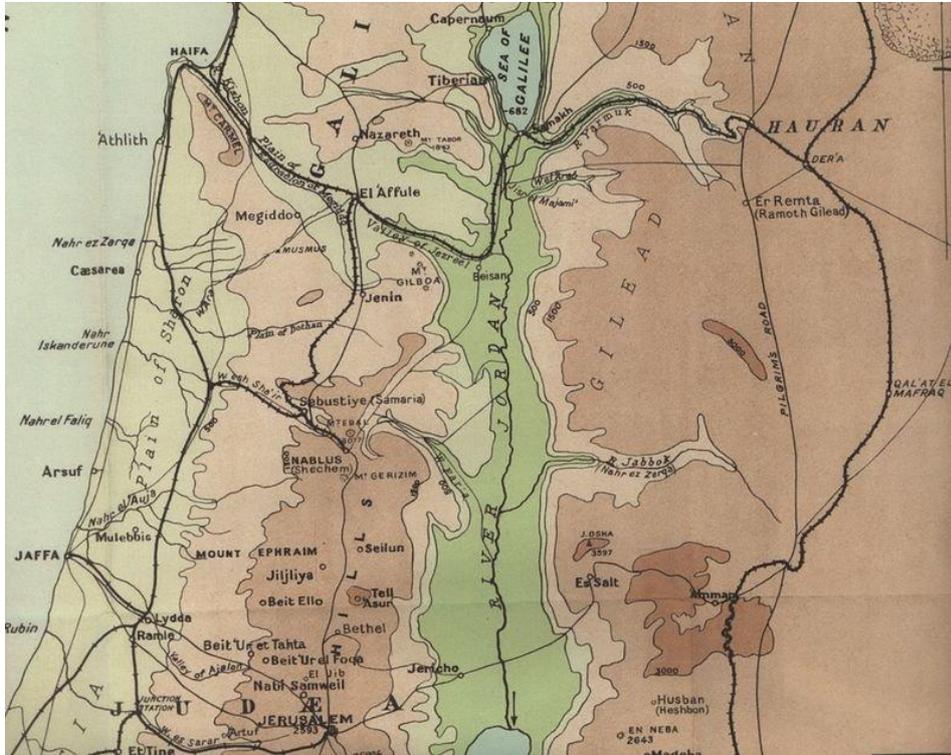
His body was buried, with full military honours, in the cemetery at the village of Bertangles near

Amiens on the 22nd April 1918. Six of No 3 Squadron’s officers served as pallbearers and a guard of honour from the Squadron’s other ranks fired a salute. Memorial wreaths were presented from other squadrons stationed in the area one of which was inscribed with the words, “To Our Gallant and Worthy Foe.”



The War in Palestine

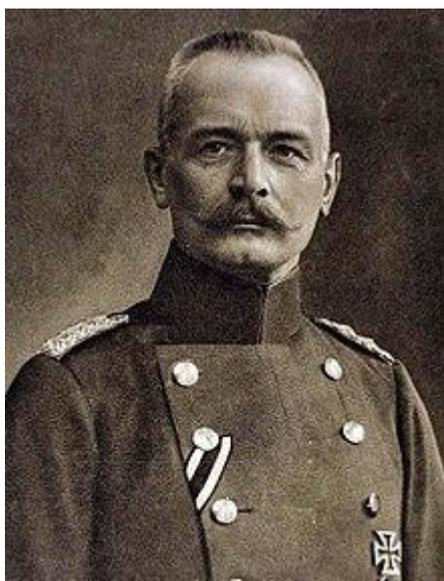
Despite General Allenby's triumphal entry into Jerusalem the war in the Middle East is by no means over. In the latest development his forces drove the



Turks out of Es Salt, which is high on inaccessible, and forced them down the mountain road towards the Hadjaz Railway and before their foot-weary infantry could

rest the ANZAC Cavalry and the Imperial Camel Corps made them fight at Amman, an important railway centre. The combined forces have already performed an outstanding military feat by blowing up the railway bridges and culverts north and south of the town cutting off communication with Medina, all this in heavy rainfall.

During the winter of 1917/18 the considerable territorial gains around Jerusalem were consolidated and the Front Line established. This was pushed eastwards by



the Egyptian Expeditionary Force in February 1918 with the capture of land stretching down the Jordan Valley leading to the capture of Jericho. The passage of the River Jordan was affected by an Empire force of Australian swimmer who crossed the fast-flowing river whilst under fire. Pontoon bridges were quickly constructed and the infantry (notably the 60th London Division) and the mounted troops

established bridgeheads on the eastern bank. They then proceeded towards Amman where they were to cut the railway line by destroying large sections of the Hejaz railway. Amman was heavily defended by Turkish and German troops or the Fourth Army, the latter being commanded by General Erich von Falkenhayn.

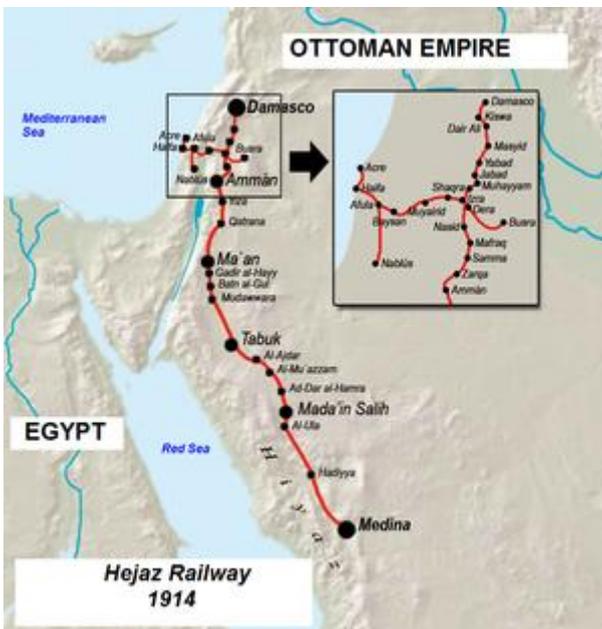


The prelude to the attack was to take the form of diversionary attacks coordinated by Colonel T. E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) on the Hejaz railway station at Deraa. This mighty railway line ran from Constantinople



to Damascus, continuing southwards through eastern Syria all the way

down to Medina. The headquarters of the Ottoman 4th Army was located in Amman and the headquarters of the Yildirim Army Group commanded by Otto Liman von Sanders was located at Nazareth, the Tulkarm garrison was commanded by Yasin al-Hashimi who also commanded the Ottoman troops in battle. About 4 to 5,000 German and Ottoman troops with rifles,



machine guns and 15 units of artillery defended positions covering the railway viaduct and tunnels in the Amman area whilst another 2,000 Ottoman soldiers defended the region towards Es Salt. The assault battalions which consisted of between 300-350 officers and men were armed with light machine guns and given four week's training in German Stormtrooper tactics. Lieutenant General Philip Chetwode's



XX Corps was given oversight of the invading force under the command of Major General John Shea commander of the 60th London Division which was supported by the ANZAC Mounted Division, the Imperial Camel Corps, a Light Armoured Car Brigade and the 10th Heavy Battery of the Royal Garrison Artillery. Planes were also in attendance the Germans using the Albatross DV,

Rumplers and Halberstadt all with similar air speeds as the British Bristol Fighters. However, on several occasions during the concentration of Shea's force German and Ottoman aircraft bombed their camps which had been left unprotected by British Empire aircraft.

Edward Chaytor commanded the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade the 2nd Light Horse Brigade and the Imperial Camel Corps which advance to attack from Amman from Es Salt. The Forces had to be amalgamated and reinforced and this involved troops marching considerable distances to reach the assembly point and this picture shows the inevitable progress of the infantry, the Light

Horse Division also had to face Muster before tackling the difficult terrain of the Jordan Valley during which they had to climb directly above the Valley up to the plateau riding towards



Amman following tracks further south. It was recorded that the one track called



a metalled road is practically impassable for wheels; the mass of deep sticky mud had to be left to the Infantry whilst the cavalry went over mountains so steep that there were few goat and

sheep tracks. Nearly all the troops had to dismount and pull their horses and mules behind them. These men with nerves of steel performed a remarkable feat in just getting to their destination and having got to the Hedjaz Railway their engineers made the most of their opportunities to destroy important positions while the troopers engaged the reinforced Amman garrison. Additionally on the way they had captured over 75 prisoners

Edward Chaytor

On the 22nd March the Force crossed the Jordan but could not move far from the left bank owing to the jungle and Turkish machine guns. At night the troops widened the bridgehead and the cavalry crossed the river and forced the Turks back whilst bridges were being built. All during this time the Turks incessantly shelled the road but despite this the Allied forces were able to transport a number of machine heavier guns over the swollen river. The enemy held several strong positions about 8 miles east of the Jordan, when dawn broke on Sunday to reveal atrocious weather. Sleet and heavy rain were present and would persist throughout the campaign. A wonderful array of moving troops was revealed, during the night the Londoner's had crossed the river with cavalry units at their flanks. The enemy left his fastness and made up the mountain road as fast as he could. The Turkish rearguard suffered badly the Allied infantry Lewis-gunned a battery and captured it and sent the remnant of the rearguard toiling up the road. Only at one place on the on the road to Es Salt did the Turks offer any resistance, they held a pass where there is a road bridge over the Wadi Shaid and put up a stern resistance, however, during the night they were driven from it when heavy rain was falling.

So precipitate was the enemy retreat that there was no time to destroy the ammunnition dumps it became impossible to estimate the actual amounts captured, although 20 German lorries are known to have been taken. Some Light Horse and Mounted Rifles were working east while the infantry were penetrating the thick mist and cloud near Es Salt, the town garrison moved towards the railway line, they were hunted but the Allied Mounted troops made only slow progress the distance, as the crow flies travelled, was probably doubled by the necessity to use winding mountain tracks, towards the end of the journey the country was so terrible rough that some of the cavalry had to leave



horses three miles behind. The Turks entrenched at Amman were thoroughly hammered whilst the station with made up trains was shelled continuously by heavy bombardment and many of its buildings damaged. The enemy was reinforced in considerable numbers from both north and south but whilst the Allies made strong holding attacks on Amman some daring demolition parties moved out on either flank and blew up the two arched bridge and several culverts to the south, destroying one five mile stretch of the railway in the process.

At the beginning of April it was decided that the positions gained were unsustainable due to the hostile nature of the terrain and lack of road communication and



that retreat was inevitable. The total casualties for both infantry and mounted divisions were between 1,200 and 1,348. The 60th Division suffered 476 infantry casualties including 347 wounded and the ANZAC Mounted Division suffered 724 casualties including 551 wounded.