

Chapter 4

The Battle of Abu Ageila, 1967

Sharon's division [at Abu Ageila] . . . fought a meticulously planned set-piece battle whose delicate combination of fire and movement would have delighted any staff officer addicted to sand tables and war games. Sharon combined heli-borne paratroopers, foot infantry, tank battalions and concentrated artillery fire in a concentric attack totally unlike anything the Israeli Army had ever done before. The conduct of the battle was rigidly centralized, unplanned movements were ruled out, and there was very little scope for command initiative except at the very top.¹

The strategic setting on the eve of the 1967 war differed dramatically from that in 1956: Israel now stood alone, while the Egyptians expected military support from Jordan and Syria. The Israel Defense Forces, which again opened hostilities, faced a large Egyptian field army in the Sinai. To penetrate into the enemy's depth, the IDF had to break through major formations near the border. If Israel was to emerge victorious from a war that would likely involve fighting on the Jordanian and Syrian fronts, it had to maximize its use of deception, surprise, and speed at the onset of the Sinai campaign.

These requirements placed great pressure on the senior Israeli commanders who made final preparations for taking the defensive complex of Abu Ageila. Their Egyptian counterparts, on their part, possessed a certain measure of confidence, for they knew that this time their operational reserves were positioned close to the frontline troops. In this new operational context, the IDF applied a distinctly different strategy, force composition, and tactics than it had employed at Abu Ageila in 1956. Ultimately, these innovations would lead to the surprising and impressive Israeli success at Abu Ageila and foster the collapse of the Egyptian Army on the second day of the war.

A Compromise Between Close and Deep Operations

Despite the presence of a seemingly indestructible foe at Abu Ageila, the Israelis were so able to exploit flaws in the Egyptian defensive system that they achieved victory in less than twenty-four hours. Much credit for the Israeli success in 1967 must go to Brigadier General Ariel Sharon, the *ugdah* commander, and his staff, who developed an intricate plan that departed in marked ways from the tactics employed in the 1956 battle. Nonetheless, successful strategic deception by the Israeli high command set the stage for Sharon's successful operation.

In the 1967 war, the Israelis intended to defeat the Egyptian Army in the Sinai as quickly as possible to avoid fighting simultaneously on two or more

fronts. To accomplish this objective, operational plans underwent several changes in the three weeks before the war, with the final version receiving approval by 1 June by the newly appointed defense minister, Moshe Dayan. Dayan hoped to defeat the Egyptians in three to five days, but he wanted to avoid seizing Gaza or the Suez Canal, the former because of its hostile Arab population and the latter because it might create an international crisis.²

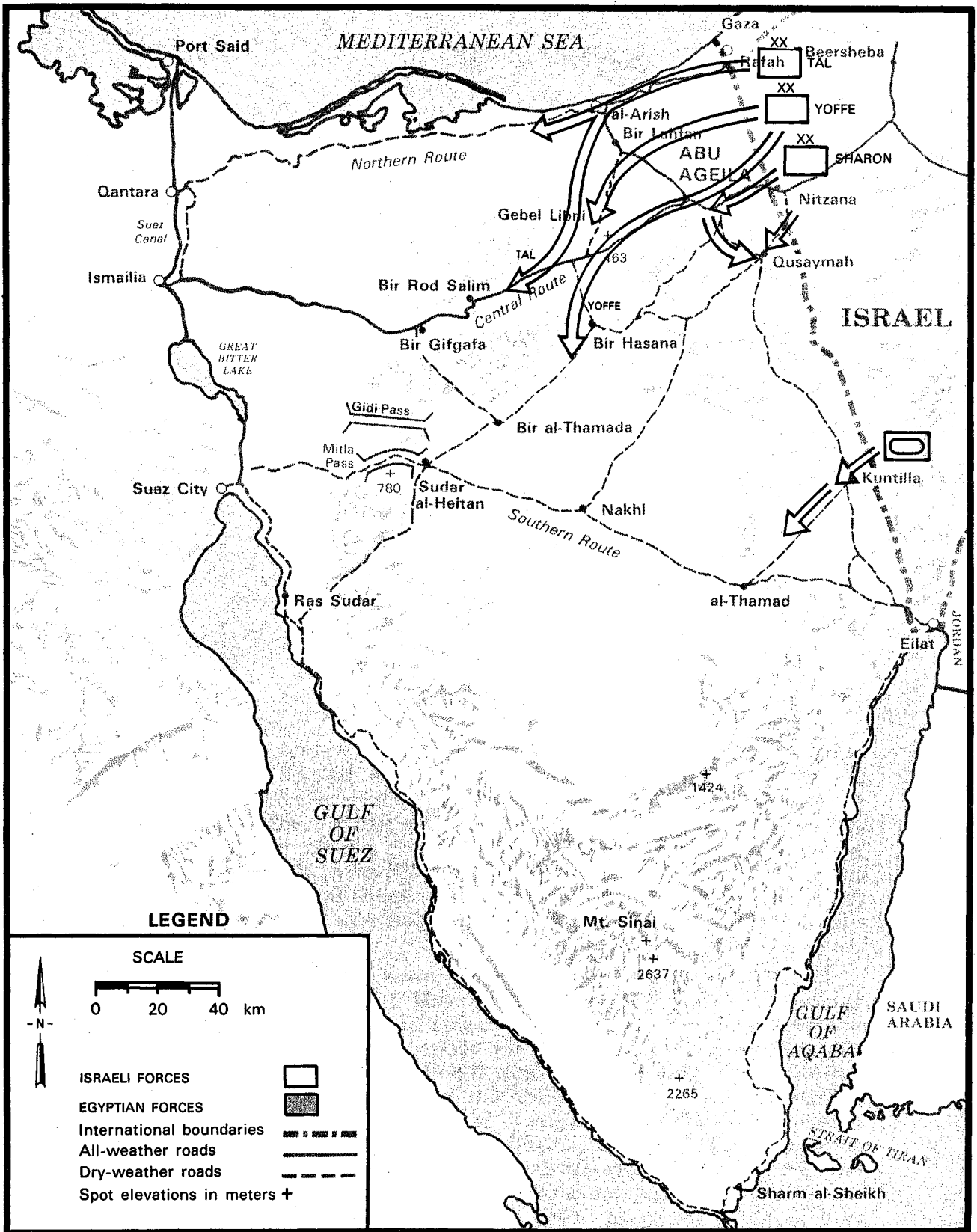
The Israelis drafted a detailed final plan for the first phase of the campaign, leaving subsequent phases general in scope. This approach reflected Israeli military doctrine, which views plans as only a basis for change and expects commanders to take the initiative in response to the friction of war. But the Israelis learned from the 1956 war that they must also plan carefully if they expected to break through Egyptian forward area defenses. In 1967, while the Northern and Central Commands maintained defensive postures, the remainder of the Israeli forces would concentrate on defeating Egypt.

The operational plan for the Southern Command called for the employment of three *ugdahs*, fighting in a three-phase campaign. First, the Israelis would penetrate the first line of defenses at al-Arish and Abu Ageila; second, they would destroy the second line of defenses at Gebel Libni and defeat any counterattack by Egyptian armor; and third, they would advance rapidly to the passes to prevent the retreat of the Egyptian Army. Support operations would take place at Kuntilla and in the Gaza Strip (see map 17).

Responsibility for the Sinai campaign fell on the shoulders of Brigadier General Yeshayahu Gavish, the front commander. Gavish, a graduate of L'Ecole de Guerre in Paris and former chief of the Training Department, planned to execute the initial main effort in the north at Rafah with an *ugdah* under the command of Brigadier General Israel Tal (who also commanded the Armor Corps). This *ugdah* included two armored brigades, a paratroop brigade, a reconnaissance battalion, and some divisional artillery. After taking Rafah, Tal was to seize al-Arish in a combined and amphibious assault involving a second paratroop brigade under the command of Colonel Mordechai Gur. Then, Tal was to send one force along the northern route to the Suez Canal, while a much larger force headed south toward the central route at Gebel Libni. Brigadier General Ariel Sharon, who also headed the Training Division, received a specially configured *ugdah* with the mission to take Abu Ageila.

Brigadier General Avraham Yoffe, in command of an *ugdah* consisting of two reserve armored brigades, was to move between Tal and Sharon with one brigade toward Bir Lahfan to prevent any Egyptian reinforcements from reaching al-Arish from Gebel Libni. While Sharon conducted mopping-up operations at Abu Ageila, Yoffe's second armored brigade was to link up with him at Gebel Libni by using the central route through Umm Qatef. With his two tank brigades, Yoffe was to help Tal defeat the Egyptian 3d Infantry and 4th Armored Divisions. Meanwhile, Sharon would concentrate his effort on taking Qusaymah and then head through Nakhl for Mitla Pass to cut off any Egyptian retreat from Kuntilla.³

This plan reflected a compromise by the Israelis between a concentration on the forward area battle and the deep battle. Israeli military strategy first called for the destruction of the frontline defenses at Rafah, al-Arish, and Abu Ageila. Success in this phase would depend on centralized synchroniza-



Map 17. The Israeli war plan (opening phases)

Photo not available.

tion of *ugdahs* and brigades, using the combined arms of infantry, armor, and artillery to seize forward defenses. A key to the forward and deep battle would be the operational maneuver to Bir Lahfan conducted by one of Yoffe's armored brigades. The Israeli General Staff expected to roll over the Egyptian 3d Division at Gebel Libni and then to conduct a major tank battle against a counterattacking Egyptian 4th Armored Division. For the phases of the campaign, the Israelis would rely heavily on tanks from the armored brigades belonging to Yoffe and Tal. Tanks would dominate the latter two phases of the campaign.

The IDF could have bypassed the Egyptians' strongest fortification at Abu Ageila altogether. Yoffe, for example, could have moved his entire *ugdah*—rather than just one of his two armored brigades—along the route to Bir Lahfan (positioned between Tal and Sharon). Or GHQ could have assigned Yoffe's second armored brigade to follow behind Tal through Rafah and al-Arish. Yoffe could have avoided the central route altogether, while Sharon merely pinned down the Egyptians at Abu Ageila. But according to Gavish, the front commander, the General Staff wanted to attack deep but did not want any one of its three *ugdahs* to overextend itself and leave its flanks or rear vulnerable to Egyptian counterthrusts.⁴ In this regard, Abu Ageila loomed as a major thorn to any deep operations—as it had in 1956. In Israeli planning, Abu Ageila clearly remained the main gateway to the Sinai.

As mentioned earlier, the Israeli high command had developed a deception plan that led the Egyptians to expect the Israeli main effort in the south, between Qusaymah and Kuntilla. In response to this ruse, the Egyptian high command sent more forces to the south and reoriented its defensive concept for Abu Ageila, placing more emphasis on the area of Qusaymah than originally called for in Plan *Qahir*. As a direct result of this reassessment, the Egyptian commander of the 2d Infantry Division moved his command post from Abu Ageila to Qusaymah, where it stayed until the outbreak of war.⁵ This action left the Egyptian division commander physically removed from the main battle and placed greater responsibility for Abu Ageila on the shoulders of a brigadier general.

Sharon's Plan

Sharon, the *ugdah* commander responsible for seizing Abu Ageila, took advantage of the Egyptian division commander's focus on Qusaymah. Sharon wanted to capture Abu Ageila as quickly as possible, certainly by late morning of 6 June or D+1, since he needed one of Yoffe's armored brigades to pass through Umm Qatef on the central axis for the deep battle at Gebel Libni, some sixty kilometers from the border. This scenario, drawn up by the General Staff, compelled Sharon to move directly against Umm Qatef along the central route rather than to attempt an indirect approach through Qusaymah that would have pitted the Israelis against the Egyptian 10th Infantry Brigade as it approached the southern flank of Umm Qatef.

As the Egyptians were placing themselves unknowingly at a strategic disadvantage by their redeployment of forces to the south of the Sinai, Sharon prepared his *ugdah* for a well-coordinated, combined arms assault on Abu Ageila. In 1956, the Israeli 4th and 10th Infantry Brigades had been mobilized on the eve of the conflict, which allowed the reservists little time to prepare for combat. Some of the problems at Abu Ageila had stemmed from this poor preparation. In 1967, however, a good part of the reserves were mobilized for over two weeks before the war commenced, during which time they underwent vigorous training in anticipation of the armed struggle. Hence, the IDF as a whole was much better prepared for combat in 1967 than in 1956.

In Sharon's case, specifically, his *ugdah* had been training for over two weeks. Yael Dayan, who spent most of this period in the field with Sharon, described a typical day for Israeli soldiers:

... Their daily routine was simple. From 3:30 a.m. they were all in a state of readiness . . . They slept again from seven to nine and had breakfast at nine. Nine to eleven were hours of training, fortification, contests, and eleven to two rest again. Two to seven in the afternoon were hours of training, mostly marching—they did ten kilometers a day, fully equipped. At night, in rotation, 50 per cent of the soldiers were on watch, in ambushes or in a state of readiness in trenches.⁶

At night, the soldiers practiced "ad nauseum," according to Colonel Dov Sion, for assaults against a trench system, employing the same techniques that they would later use in attacking Umm Qatef.⁷

Such vigorous training helped prepare the reservists physically and psychologically for combat. The heightened tensions between Israel and her

Arab neighbors no doubt spawned a high level of motivation among the troops, who believed the survival of the Israeli state was at stake. In 1956, Yehuda Wallach, the commander of the 38th Task Force, did not have such a combat-ready, highly motivated force at his disposal.

To capture the fortification of Abu Ageila, Sharon prepared an elaborate plan based on a highly centralized command that he intended to decentralize in the midst of battle. In his view, "the attack on Abu Ageila was the most complicated [his] army [had] ever carried out."⁸ In describing the main lesson learned from the 1956 battle, Dov Sion, Sharon's chief of staff, said: "In 1956 our forces had not combined to direct a single blow but had operated separately, without recognizing sufficiently the nature of either the area or the target."⁹ Sharon wanted to ensure proper coordination of all forces in order to unnerve the Egyptian defenders through a concentrated assault at several critical points in the Abu Ageila defenses.

To accomplish his task, Sharon wielded a force that was truly a combined arms formation by Israeli standards of the time:

- the 14th Armored Brigade
- an independent tank battalion
- a reconnaissance force
- an infantry brigade
- a paratroop brigade of two battalions
- six artillery battalions
- an infantry brigade minus
- an engineering battalion (see figure 4)¹⁰

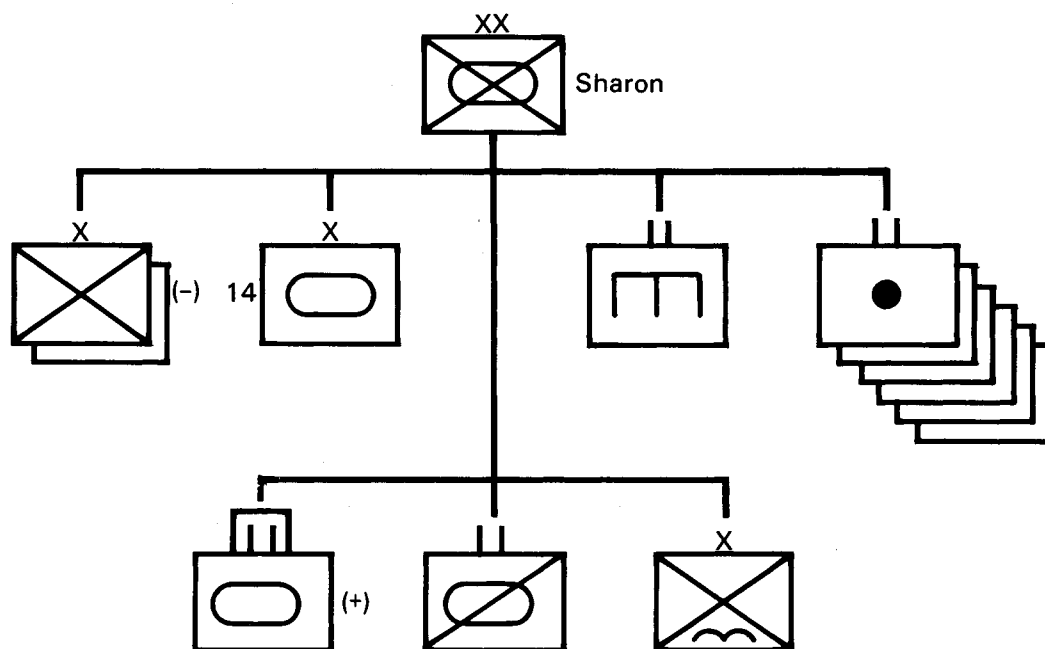


Figure 4. Sharon's *ugdah*

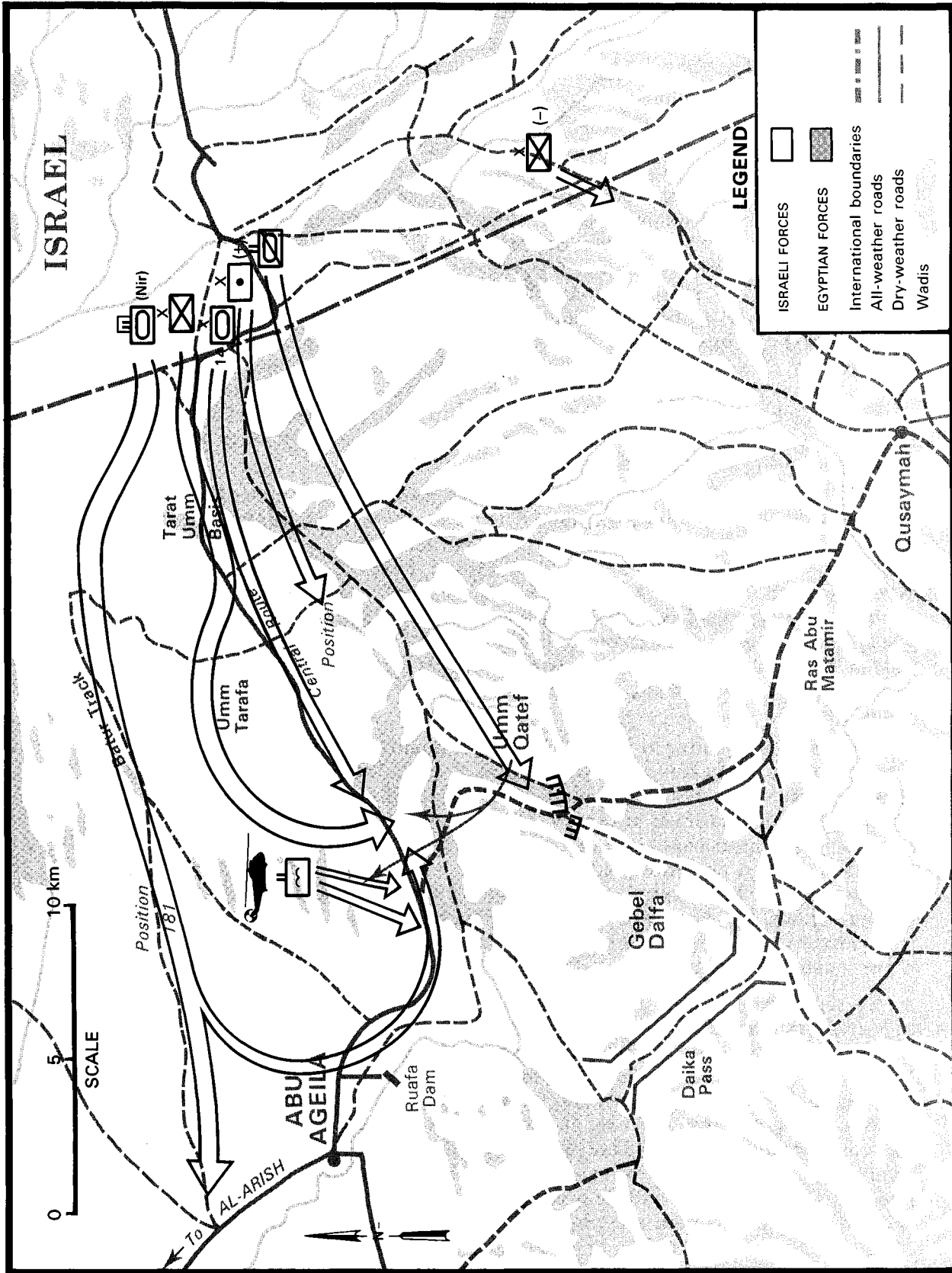
The size of Sharon's *ugdah* numbered around 19,000 men, a force somewhat larger than the Egyptians' 2d Infantry Division.¹¹

To gain a better numerical advantage over the Egyptians for his assault on Abu Ageila, Sharon took steps to draw the Egyptian division commander's attention away from Abu Ageila, thus discouraging him from dispatching reinforcements from Qusaymah. To deceive the Egyptians, a reduced infantry brigade comprised of two reserve battalions of infantry and a small tank contingent of less than company size deployed to positions opposite Qusaymah, feigning an attack against the Egyptian 10th Infantry Brigade.¹² Sharon hoped the Egyptians would swallow the bait, and they did. The Egyptian high command, by informing its field commanders that the Israeli main attack would occur in the south, unconsciously helped steer the Egyptian division commander into Sharon's trap. If the Egyptians did not fall for this wile, however, Sharon wisely planned to position a blocking force on the Qusaymah Track, just south of Umm Qatef by way of a route that ran south of the Turkish Track (see map 18). This specially tailored force consisted of a tank company of AMX-13s, a company of motorized infantry, a platoon of engineers, and a battery of heavy mortars.¹³

Unlike in 1956, the Israelis were determined at the outset of their campaign in 1967 to send an armored force to the rear of Ruafa Dam with two missions: first, to block any Egyptian reinforcements coming from either Gebel Libni or al-Arish; and second, to assault Ruafa Dam and Umm Qatef from the west. The imperative to open the central route for Yoffe's second armored brigade coupled with the presence of the Egyptian 10th Brigade at Qusaymah militated against using Daika Pass to attack these objectives. But Sharon knew of the feasibility of using Batur Track, just north of the central route. The difficult mission of using this avenue fell to Lieutenant Colonel Natke Nir.

For this task, Sharon gave Nir an independent armored battalion of approximately forty-five Centurion Mark 5 tanks retrofitted with 105-mm guns—in essence, a mobile group organized into three armored companies, a company of mechanized infantry on half-tracks, a company of 120-mm mortars, a reconnaissance company, an engineer platoon, a platoon of SS-10 and SS-11 French antitank guided missiles, a reinforced maintenance platoon, and ten half-tracks of supplies (see figure 5). For his operation into the rear of Abu Ageila, Nir answered directly to Sharon, who must have experienced great anxiety about the fate of this mobile group intruded between the jaws of two enemy divisions.¹⁴

To reach Abu Ageila, Nir faced two major Egyptian forces: the infantry and artillery battalion at Position 181—reinforced by a tank or antitank company—and at least a tank battalion of the 6th Armored Regiment near Awlad Ali. The danger to Nir as he moved to Ruafa Dam was the possibility of a quick Egyptian reinforcement of Position 181 with tanks from Awlad Ali. Should he succeed, Nir was also vulnerable to attack by a tank regiment from the Egyptian 3d Division. The most risky part of Sharon's plan thus involved Nir's force. In the event of trouble at Position 181, Sharon was prepared to transport a battalion of paratroopers by helicopter to help Nir.¹⁵ Once Nir reached the dam area, however, he was on his own until his expected



Map 18. Sharon's plan of attack

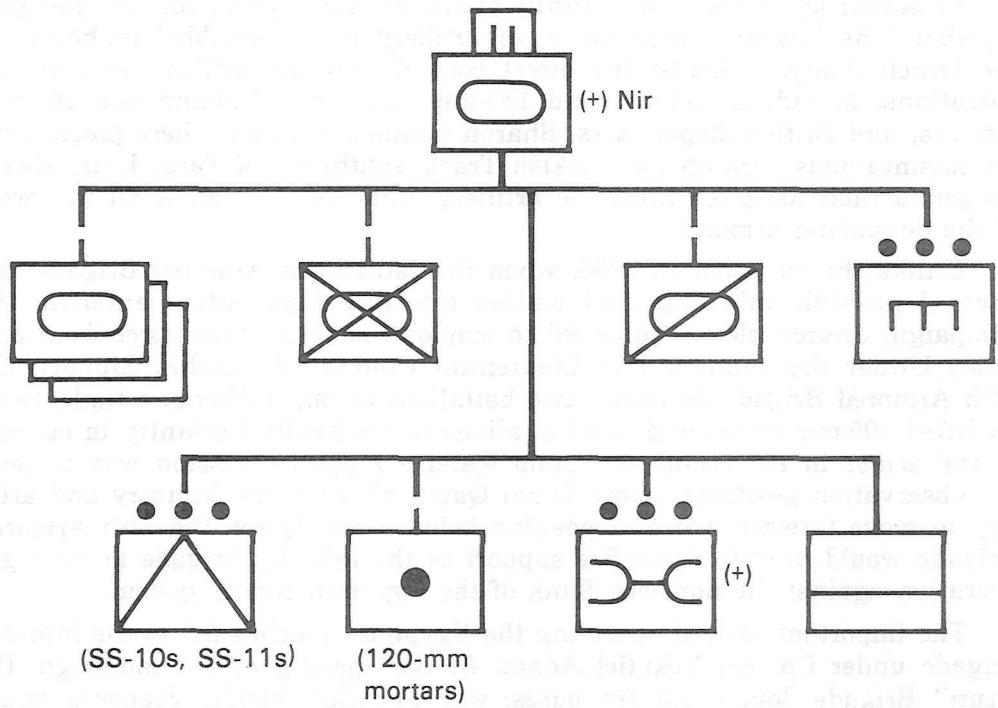


Figure 5. Nir's mobile group

linkup with Israeli forces breaking through at Umm Qatef. From Nir's perspective, timing was of utmost importance for the survival of his meager force in the Egyptian tactical rear.

Three Centurions of Natke Nir's battalion in readiness for a move into the rear of Abu Ageila

Mid-East Wars: Israel's Armor in Action



To soften up the Egyptian fortifications at Abu Ageila, Sharon gathered together "the largest concentration of artillery ever assembled in battle by the Israeli Army."¹⁶ Under his direct control were six artillery and mortar battalions, including 105-mm and 155-mm howitzers, 120-mm and 160-mm mortars, and British 25-pounders. Sharon planned to deploy these pieces near the mountainous area on the Turkish Track, southwest of Tarat Umm Basis. To get to their assigned area, the artillery units were to follow on the heels of the advancing armor.¹⁷

Unlike the situation in 1956, when the Israeli 7th Armored Brigade had several possible missions and waited two full days before entering the campaign, Sharon clearly intended to employ his entire tank force from zero hour. Under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Mordechai Zippori, the 14th Armored Brigade contained two battalions of Super Sherman tanks (with modified 105-mm guns) and two battalions of mechanized infantry in support of the armor in its assault on Umm Qatef.¹⁸ Zippori's mission was to seize the observation positions before Umm Qatef, allowing the infantry and artillery to move forward. Once in position before Umm Qatef, the 14th Armored Brigade would provide direct-fire support to the infantry brigade in its night operation against the northern flank of the Egyptian trench system.

The important task of capturing the Egyptian trenches fell to the infantry brigade under Colonel Yekutiel Adam. At the opening of the campaign, the "Kuti" Brigade, loaded aboard buses, was to follow behind Zippori's armor and artillery and dismount at Tarat Umm Basis. After a ten- to twelve-kilometer trek on foot through the sand dunes, Adam was to attack Umm Qatef from the north, with each infantry battalion taking one line of trenches. Rather than split their infantry brigade into two forces—one attacking the northern flank and the other the southern one, as had taken place in 1956—the Israelis opted instead to concentrate the entire infantry brigade in a single attack from the north, thus maximizing the effects of shock and surprise. In addition to these three infantry battalions, one of which was composed of reservists, Adam had a company of combat engineers. As his force cleared the Egyptian trenches, the *ugdah's* battalion of combat engineers would move in from the east to clear the minefields in front of the trenches for the passage of Zippori's tanks.¹⁹

In 1967, as in 1956, artillery was "the heart (*qalb*) of the Egyptian positions"—the key to their defensive potency.²⁰ With the Egyptian artillery out of the picture, Sharon felt he had an excellent chance for quick success: not only would Umm Qatef lose much of its fire support, and hence its combined arms nature, but a bold military strike into the heart of the defensive complex might just unnerve the Egyptian defenders throughout. As noted after the war by the chief correspondent of the Israel Army Broadcasting Service: "Silencing the enemy artillery was the first objective in securing mastery of Abu Ageila."²¹

Sharon, a master paratrooper, assigned the critical mission of silencing the Egyptian artillery to his paratroop brigade led by Lieutenant Colonel Danny Matt. Using helicopters for transport, a battalion of paratroopers would land on a flank of Abu Ageila and then proceed on foot to assault the artillery positions, while the remainder of the *ugdah* carried out its synchronized attacks on Abu Ageila from the east and west.

In drawing up his bold and complicated plan, Sharon felt very much the paratrooper, and Yael Dayan, for one, discerned the special bond between the *ugdah* commander and his paratroopers:

Arik's [Sharon's] voice changed some when he talked to Danny [Matt] the paratroopers' commander. He had been the commander of the paratroopers before, still wore a red beret, and they were his boys. He knew them all by first name and they were his men, and somehow he gave me the feeling he was talking to a brother in whose hands he entrusted a hard job.²²

Sharon was fortunate to have Matt's paratroopers, which were assigned to the *ugdah* at "the last minute."²³ Sharon's plan thus took its final shape just on the eve of hostilities.

A Comparison of Forces

In the critical area of leadership, the Israelis held a clear advantage over the Egyptians. The Egyptian division commander was new to the Sinai theater, and his chief of staff was new to his position. Although nothing is known of either man, their performance during the battle suggests weak leadership. The Israelis, on the other hand, clearly assigned some of their best commanders to fight at Abu Ageila, men who also knew the terrain well.

Sharon, a natural leader, but difficult to control, would prove to be one of Israel's top field commanders—although one of its most controversial. During the early 1950s, he commanded the elite and secretive Unit 101 that conducted daring reprisal raids across the border against Arabs. When the IDF merged Unit 101 with the paratroopers, Sharon played a major role in molding the Paratrooper Corps into the IDF's elite ground force. In the Sinai campaign of 1956, Sharon, who commanded the 202d Paratroop Brigade, drew criticism for his part in the Mitla operation, during which he disobeyed Dayan's explicit order and assaulted Egyptian positions at the eastern entrance to the pass at a needless cost of 38 killed and 120 wounded, while seizing no ground. A number of Israeli paratroopers refused to serve under Sharon after the war because of this fiasco, and Dayan, under pressure from many families of the fallen soldiers, removed Sharon from command after the campaign and sent him to study at the British Staff College at Camberley. After his return from England, Sharon held marginal positions in the IDF until his fortunes began to rise again in the early 1960s. In 1965, Sharon received command of both the Training Department and a reserve *ugdah*.²⁴ In 1973, he would lead Israeli forces in crossing the Suez Canal to the west bank, an operation he had helped the IDF plan before the war as head of the Southern Command. In 1982, he would be Israel's defense minister during the invasion of Lebanon.

For the execution of his complicated plan at Abu Ageila, Sharon was blessed with excellent officers. Danny Matt, the paratroop commander, had been with Sharon when Unit 101 merged with the paratroopers back in the early 1950s. In the 1973 war, Matt, by now a colonel, would lead Sharon's *ugdah* in crossing to the west bank of the Suez. Yekutiel Adam, the colonel commanding the attacking infantry brigade at Abu Ageila, rose to the rank of major general and served as deputy chief of the General Staff during the critical period of IDF reform after the 1973 war. He eventually lost his life in the Lebanese invasion of 1982, the highest ranking Israeli to die in combat.

Photo not available.

Mordechai Zippori, the commander of the armored brigade, would attain the rank of brigadier general and command the Armor Corps in the 1973 war. Nir, the Centurion battalion commander, clearly demonstrated his bravery during the 1967 battle at Abu Ageila and had to undergo numerous operations for wounds received at Ruafa Dam. Despite the seriousness of his wounds, Nir returned to the IDF and commanded a tank brigade in the 1973 war, ending his military career as a brigadier general.

The Israelis not only had the advantage in leadership but also in manpower and weapons. Sharon's plan gave the Israelis a marked superiority in numbers of troops at Abu Ageila—14,000 Israelis pitted against 8,000 Egyptians. When it came to tanks, the Israelis also possessed a clear advantage: against 66 Egyptian T-34 tanks, with their 85-mm guns, the Israelis set 150 tanks—AMX-13s, Centurions, and Israeli Shermans—with 105-mm guns. In addition, the Egyptian T-34 tanks were outclassed by the Centurions and Super Shermans' longer range guns—and the Israelis had 100 of these tanks. Moreover, the Egyptians dispersed their tanks, placing some in defilade positions—an unwise step that prevented their concentration in counterattacks against Israeli penetrations. For artillery, the Egyptians relied mainly on Soviet-made 122-mm field guns and 152-mm howitzers, about seventy in number.²⁵ The 122-mm Soviet guns outranged the Israeli 155-mm

howitzers by 5,000 meters and placed the Israelis at a distinct disadvantage in artillery, compelling them to respond with Matt's paratroopers.

Any advantages that the IDF held at the onset of hostilities could change dramatically, however, depending on how fast the Egyptians committed their tanks at Awlad Ali to the main battle and how the high command supported the defenders at Abu Ageila with the forces available to the 3d Division at Gebel Libni. But as we shall see, the Egyptian command fell short in these two critical areas.

The Exploitation of Egyptian Operational Vulnerability

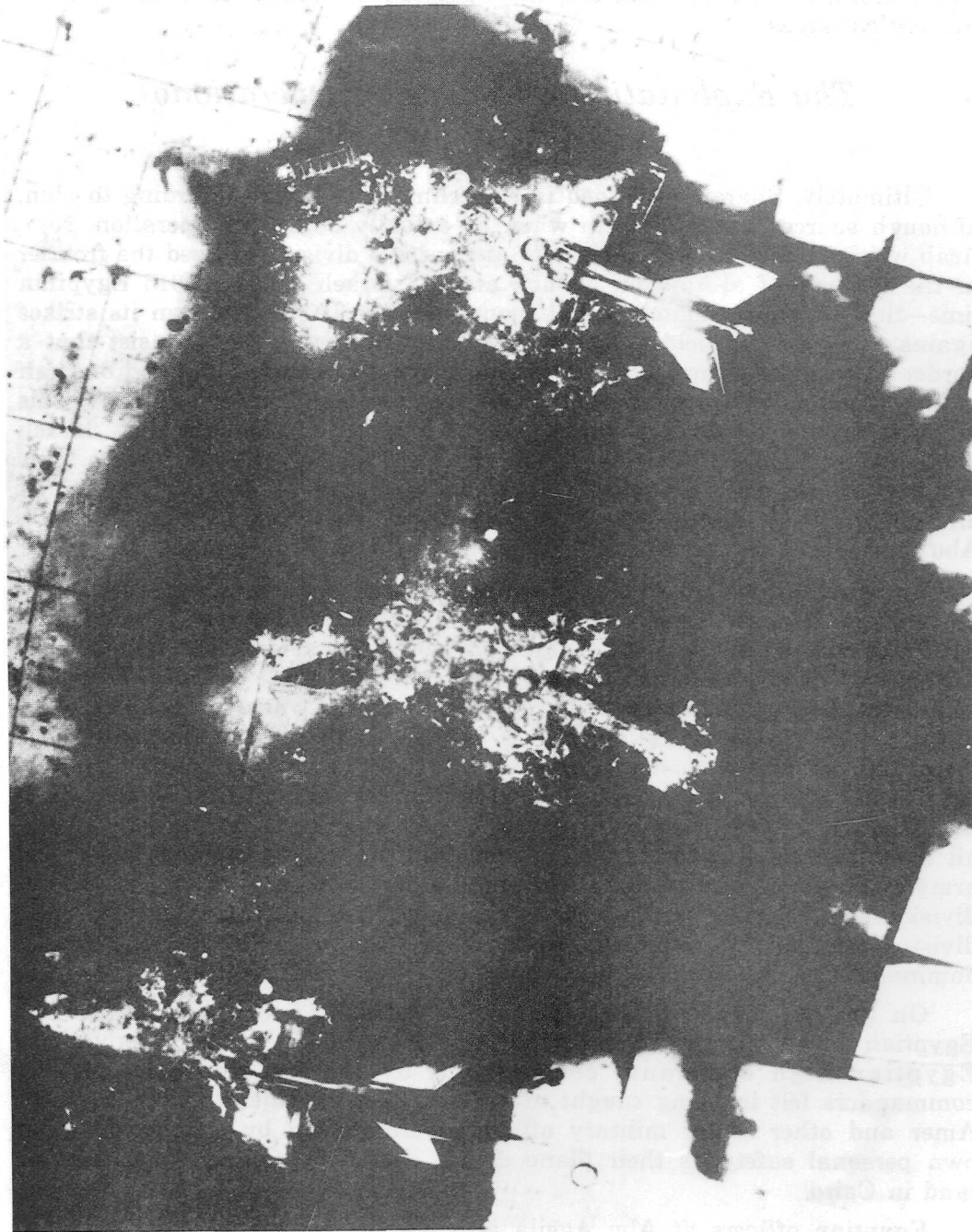
Ultimately, Sharon succeeded in encircling Abu Ageila according to plan, although sources disagree as to when he actually began his operation. Non-Arab writers claim advance elements of Sharon's division crossed the frontier in the vicinity of al-Auja on 5 June at 0815 Israeli time or 0915 Egyptian time—that is, approximately a half hour after the IAF had begun its strikes against Egyptian airfields. The Egyptians, on the other hand, insist that a border clash before Tarat Umm Basis had actually occurred one and one-half hours beforehand but that the Egyptian high command failed to react to this incident.²⁶ This controversy aside, after three hours of bombing runs, Israeli pilots had succeeded in destroying 85 percent of the Egyptian Air Force. This devastating air operation left the Egyptian defenders at Abu Ageila without air support. Thus, Sharon was able to maneuver his troops for the assault on Abu Ageila without the intervention of the Egyptian Air Force.

The Israeli air strikes caught Egyptian senior commanders away from their units. Field Marshal Amer; General Muhammad Sidqi Mahmud, the Egyptian Air Force commander; and Lieutenant General Anwar al-Qadi, the Egyptian G3 were all in an airplane with other senior officers en route to Bir al-Thamada to inspect the Egyptian troops stationed in the Sinai when the IAF launched its offensive. Unable to land for over an hour because of these air attacks, Amer did not arrive back at GHQ until 1030 Egyptian time or 0930 Israeli time; Amer suffered the additional humiliation of having to use a taxi to get from the Cairo Airport to his command post. Meanwhile, as the IAF struck, all the senior tactical commanders—including the front commander, the field army commander, the air force commander of the Sinai district, and all the division commanders—were at Bir al-Thamada awaiting Amer's arrival. Some division commanders, avoiding travel during daylight hours when the Israelis dominated the sky, failed to reach their units until that evening.²⁷

On the morning of 5 June, the IAF had struck a major blow to the Egyptian Armed Forces. Moreover, surprise and shock reigned throughout the Egyptian high command, compounded by the disorientation senior commanders felt in being caught away from their headquarters. In addition, Amer and other senior military officials were shaken by concern for their own personal safety as their plane circled cautiously for an opportunity to land in Cairo.

Egyptian officers at Abu Ageila also felt the impact of this first blow. Major General Sa'id Naguib, the commander of the 2d Infantry Division, was

probably one of those commanders who arrived at his command post on the evening of 5 June. In reaching Qusaymah, he had traveled through an open area infested by IAF sorties. Thus, the 2d Infantry Division had been functioning without its commander during the initial critical hours of the land campaign, at a time when surprise, shock, and confusion permeated the Egyptian command structure.



Swift Sword: The Historical Record of Israel's Victory, June 1967

Three destroyed MIGs on a runway at Imshas during the 1967 war

Toward Umm Qatef

In the meantime, Sharon's *ugdah* began its operation according to plan. While Nir set off with his armored battalion on the Batur Track, Zippori divided the 14th Armored Brigade into two separate forces. Lieutenant Colonel Sasson took one armored and one infantry battalion down a path just north of the central route to flank Tarat Umm Basis, while a second force, under Lieutenant Colonel Herzl, also composed of one armored and one infantry battalion, moved along the Turkish Track toward Position 236. Behind these two armored forces came the engineer battalion, whose mission was to clear the road for the artillery battalions and the infantry brigade. The reinforced reconnaissance force took a path south of the Turkish Track to reach its designated blocking position on Qusaymah Track. Concurrent with these opening moves at the border, a reduced Israeli infantry brigade, supported by air strikes, began its probe of the Egyptian frontier positions at Gebel Sabha for the purpose of gaining the undivided attention of the Egyptian 10th Infantry Brigade stationed at Qusaymah.

At Tarat Umm Basis, Zippori encountered stiff resistance from the Egyptian 2d Reconnaissance Battalion, but after a fight lasting approximately two hours, the Egyptians finally retreated westward. The Israelis then continued their advance with tanks and half-tracks to their next objectives—Umm Tarafa and Position 236. Both Egyptian positions fell quickly. With the success of these engagements, the road to Umm Qatef became clear for the

Photo not available.

advance of Israeli artillery and infantry. By midafternoon, both Israeli armor forces, supported by mechanized infantry, were within range of Umm Qatef, and a fight broke out; at the same time, the IAF conducted strikes against Egyptian artillery positions and supply depots within the main defensive perimeter. The Egyptians managed to maintain accurate artillery fire, pinning



Brigadier Generals Sharon (left) and Gavish (center) at the battlefield, Abu Ageila

Swift Sword: The Historical Record of Israel's Victory, June 1967

down the Israeli tank force around Umm Tarafa. A frontal attack was clearly out of the question, and Sharon made preparations for a night assault.²⁸

During the action, Sharon had followed closely behind his armor force, his advance headquarters consisting of three half-tracks: his own, the communications van, and the command post for the artillery. Other vehicles included two jeeps with machine guns mounted in front, two smaller jeeps, and the supply command car.²⁹ The success of the complicated and intricate Israeli plan depended on the commander's close proximity to the main battle, so Sharon located himself near Umm Tarafa to observe the battle.

Around 1300, Sharon ordered Adam to move up the infantry brigade that had been resting just inside Israel. Carried forward in a long train of civilian vehicles, the brigade made an easy target for the Egyptian Air Force. As Yael Dayan noted: ". . . The road looked like a highway on a holiday. Bumper to bumper, vehicles moved safely with the caravan of buses—in their original colors of blue and turquoise, original signs of a 'Egged Tours'—carrying the infantry brigade. The danger was obvious; they were fully exposed and blocked in."³⁰ Fortunately for the Israelis, 85 percent of the Egyptian Air Force lay destroyed on the ground and could not provide any air support to the defenders at Abu Ageila. Moreover, a mild sandstorm, lasting a couple of hours in the early afternoon, fortuitously provided the cover needed by the Israelis to move their artillery and infantry into their designated assault positions against Abu Ageila.³¹

Adam and his infantry brigade traveled on civilian transports as far as Tarat Umm Basis, where they dismounted and marched to Umm Tarafa. At this ridge, the dismounted infantry veered northwest into the sand dunes eight to ten kilometers to positions on the northern flank of Umm Qatef. By 2230, the Israeli infantry was ready for its assault on the Egyptian trenches.³²

The Encirclement of Abu Ageila

While the 14th Armored Brigade headed toward Tarat Umm Basis, Nir embarked with his independent armored battalion on the long and perilous journey into the rear of the Egyptian defenses at Ruafa Dam. Nir had received Centurions for his mission because these tanks, with their wider track spans, were able to cross desert terrain better than the Super Shermans that comprised Zippori's armored force. At around 0920, the Israeli mobile group easily overran the Egyptian infantry platoon at the observation post east of Position 181.³³ Taking Position 181, where the Egyptians had positioned a large force of infantry, artillery, and antitank weapons, would prove much more difficult. Hampering Nir in his mission was his scant intelligence concerning Position 181; he was not sure what to expect there.³⁴

The Egyptian defenses at Position 181, some two and one-half kilometers in length and three and one-half kilometers in depth, offered stiff resistance to Nir's first attack, and the Israelis would have to make at least one more assault to take the position.³⁵ Nir, unsuccessful in his first attack, withdrew his force some two to three kilometers and reorganized for another effort. He felt great pressure to succeed, knowing full well how much hinged on his

performance. Should he fail, Sharon might have to commit an assault battalion of paratroopers in a night operation to help take Position 181. Such an attack, however, would interfere with Sharon's plan for an assault on the artillery within Abu Ageila's main perimeter. Fortunately for the Israelis, the Egyptians remained passive, a tactical mistake that stemmed in part from their lack of astute and bold leadership.

To aid Nir in accomplishing his mission without the assistance of Matt's paratroopers, an Israeli helicopter from Sharon's headquarters took the task force commander aloft to observe the tactical situation for himself. Armed with this new data, Nir divided his force into three parts. His two tank forces made wide flanking maneuvers, while his company of mechanized infantry prepared for a frontal assault. The IAF provided close air support, including the use of napalm. By late afternoon, the Egyptians abandoned their positions, but in the struggle for Position 181, Nir took heavy losses, including a company commander, several platoon commanders, and eight tanks.

After reorganizing his force, Nir dispatched a tank company to Awlad Ali to establish a blocking position on the road between al-Arish and Abu Ageila. Despite assistance from the IAF, this tank force had to return after beating back an Egyptian armor counterattack between 1845 and 1900. At 2200, Nir received word from Sharon to bypass the Egyptian position at Awlad Ali and instead advance on Abu Ageila. To protect the paratroop landing site southeast of Position 181, Nir left part of his force at Position 181 and arrived at Abu Ageila around midnight with only a tank company of seven or eight tanks, a company of mechanized infantry, and the 120-mm mortar company.³⁶ Here, he divided his force, leaving one part to watch for any Egyptian reinforcements coming from the direction of al-Arish or Gebel Libni. With the rest of the force, Nir assaulted Ruafa Dam, as ordered by Sharon.

Controversy surrounds the initial deployment of the paratroop battalion under the command of Danny Matt. According to Israeli planning, the paratroopers were to land in helicopters on Gebel Dalfa and then proceed downhill to neutralize the Egyptian artillery. At the last minute, however, for reasons that remain unclear, Sharon changed the landing site to the sand dunes north of the central route.³⁷

Official Egyptian sources dispute this Israeli version of events and instead argue that the paratroopers did in fact land on Gebel Dalfa in the early evening but had to withdraw because of fierce and accurate artillery fire.³⁸ In any case, Sharon, secure in the knowledge that Position 181 had fallen to Nir's forces, may have changed the location of the paratroop landing to the northern flank at the last minute. Even if the Egyptian sources are correct, Sharon, nonetheless, demonstrated a flexibility that proved decisive in the battle for Abu Ageila.

Sharon relied on the paratroopers to deliver the key blow that would knock out the Egyptian artillery and crumble the Egyptian defenses. Three waves of 6 helicopters, CH-34 Choctaws (known to the Israelis as S-58 helicopters), were assigned to transport 200 paratroopers to their landing site.

At 1900, the first wave of helicopters landed several kilometers north of the central route. These choppers drew the attention of the Egyptians, who promptly directed artillery fire on them. Fearing his helicopters might be

destroyed by this intense fire, Matt moved the landing site for the next waves to a position farther north. The remainder of the paratrooper force now had a longer trek through the sand dunes. To take full advantage of the fighting skills of his paratroopers behind enemy lines, Sharon opted to delay his timetable for the set-piece attack against Abu Ageila. Matt's main force finally arrived at the main perimeter around 2330.³⁹

To complete the encirclement of Abu Ageila, the *ugdah's* reconnaissance force had to position itself on Qusaymah Track to prevent the commander of the Egyptian 2d Division from dispatching troops to help the defenders at Umm Qatef. The Israeli force charged with this mission had to traverse difficult terrain and apparently experienced unexpected delays. It was unable to consolidate its blocking position until 0330 on 6 June, well after Sharon's division had begun its synchronized assault on Abu Ageila.⁴⁰ The feigned attack by the infantry task force opposite Qusaymah, however, accomplished its goal in diverting the attention of the Egyptian division commander from Abu Ageila so that there was no need for an Israeli blocking force on Qusaymah Track.

A Critical Moment in the Campaign

During these opening moves lasting over twelve hours, the Egyptian command's responses left much to be desired. Senior commanders appeared to be suffering shock and confusion at the destruction of the Egyptian Air Force on the ground in the opening hours of the war. More aggressive action on their part might have altered the outcome of the battle for Abu Ageila or at least delayed defeat. At one point in the operation, two difficulties had beset the Israelis on which the Egyptians might have capitalized. Nir had his problems at Position 181 and the reconnaissance force experienced delays in reaching its blocking position on Qusaymah Track.

As a result of these difficulties, a modicum of hesitancy and uncertainty surfaced among senior Israeli commanders, who now expressed reservations concerning Sharon's intricate plan. Late on the evening of 5 June, Gavish, the front commander, feared for the success of the operation and asked Sharon to delay his attack until the morning of the 6th, when the IAF could help him.⁴¹ Apparently, even Major General Yitzak Rabin, the chief of the General Staff, joined in the discussion.⁴² At this critical time in the operation, Yael Dayan became aware of anxiety among Sharon's men: "Toward ten o'clock I could sense an added nervousness. Commanders asked more often whether there were any changes."⁴³ At this point, based on his discussions with Sharon, Gavish decided to send a part of Yoffe's force at Bir Lahfan to help Nir in his assault on Ruafa Dam. At 2200, Colonel Avraham Adan received word to move out immediately with a tank force for Abu Ageila, but he was called back before reaching Awlad Ali because his help was no longer needed.⁴⁴

The sudden dispatch of Adan to Abu Ageila indicates that at one point in the operation, the Israeli senior command had serious reservations about Sharon's ability to attain his objective. Indeed, the front command and GHQ even cut substantially into the size of Yoffe's operational maneuver force at Bir Lahfan to ensure the seizure of the forward tactical area at Abu Ageila.

At this critical point in the war, the centralized, ingenious nature of the Israeli war plan became clearly evident. With Yoffe's force at Bir Lahfan, Gavish had the flexibility to help Israeli forces at either Abu Ageila or al-Arish. By this time, Tal had seized Rafah but would not reach the outskirts of al-Arish until 0300 on 6 June and only take the city at 0900. Rather than keep his entire force at Bir Lahfan in case Tal experienced difficulties, Gavish willingly risked sending Adan to Ruafa Dam, even though Yoffe was engaged

Photo not available.

in a fire exchange with the Egyptian relief force. A setback at Abu Ageila would jeopardize Yoffe's second tank brigade's ability to pass through and smash the Egyptian second line of defenses at Gebel Libni.

Sharon, for his part, felt compelled to continue with his night operation to adhere to the timetable for the deep battle of phase two. He apparently possessed good intelligence on the Egyptian defenses at Abu Ageila and felt confident to continue with his intricate plan.⁴⁵ Fortunately for the Israelis, the Egyptians did not dispatch major reinforcements to Abu Ageila.

The Paratrooper Penetration, 5—6 June

The most difficult part of the operation still lay ahead for Sharon. Getting his various forces to their assigned positions before Abu Ageila was one matter, but coordinating their assaults on the defensive complex depended on the exercise of centralized command and control coupled with the acumen to decentralize authority to subordinate commanders at the proper moment.

While his main combat forces made last-minute preparations, Sharon ordered his six battalions of artillery to commence a short but massive bombardment of Abu Ageila. This deluge, of unparalleled magnitude, lasted from 2245 to 2315. Later, Sharon noted its unusual intensity by observing: "For half a hour the fire was tremendous—I have never seen such fire in all my life."⁴⁶ When the Egyptian artillery answered this barrage, it no doubt revealed its own position to the Israeli paratroopers poised to enter the defensive complex.

The Egyptians, by their own admission, seriously erred in not anticipating an Israeli attack from the north against their artillery positions behind Umm Qatef. No minefields or extensive array of barbed wire had been placed on their northern flank to slow down an attack by special assault forces. Furthermore, battery positions within the main complex, although designed to withstand artillery fire and air bombings, were not equipped to handle an attack by paratroopers.⁴⁷

This Egyptian vulnerability was particularly significant since artillery formed the core of the defensive concept for Abu Ageila. Nor was such an attack from the north unexpected based on past experience. In the 1956 battle, Colonel Matawalli had traversed these northern dunes during his retreat on the night of 1—2 November, and the Israeli paratroopers used a route only a short distance east of that employed by the Egyptian 6th Infantry Brigade eleven years earlier.

For his attack, Matt divided his paratroop battalion into three companies, with each platoon targeted on an Egyptian gun emplacement. The paratroopers, armed with submachine guns, grenades, and knives, began their attack a half hour before midnight, fanning out to attack the artillery battalions behind Umm Qatef. Darkness slowed their progress, and some paratroopers experienced difficulty finding their way. Despite their initial advantage in surprise, the Israelis encountered some stiff resistance from the Egyptians, who recovered from their initial shock and committed infantry units in hand-to-hand combat. After over ninety minutes of fighting, Matt ordered the paratroopers to move against the batteries near Ruafa Dam. Then,



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Colonel Danny Matt's paratroopers in action after a night drop on Egyptian artillery positions

Sharon finally signaled Matt to withdraw his forces to avoid friendly fire from the Israeli tanks breaking through at both Umm Qatef and Ruafa Dam.⁴⁸

Though the paratroopers did not destroy all the Egyptian batteries, they did achieve a major success by effectively disrupting Egyptian artillery fire. In essence, the Egyptians had lost the combined arms nature of their defense,

which helped the Israeli infantry and armor brigades in their assaults on Umm Qatef. In their operation behind the Egyptian first echelon, the paratroopers also helped demoralize Egyptian troops in the trenches by blurring the distinction for them between front and rear, by threatening an attack on them from two directions, and by creating the impression in the Egyptians' minds that they were being cut off from withdrawal or relief. When the Israelis attacked a convoy bringing supplies and troops to Umm Qatef from the direction of Ruafa Dam, the ominous explosions from successful Israeli attacks could be seen for miles around.⁴⁹

Egyptian defenders at Umm Qatef became acutely aware that there was trouble in their rear. This realization adversely affected the fighting performance of some frontline soldiers, who now felt dangerously exposed to the possibility of a knife or bullet in the back. In fact, a number of Egyptians fell to friendly fire in the ensuing confusion.⁵⁰ Thus, the paratrooper battalion helped bring about the collapse of Abu Ageila by attacking the Egyptians at a crucial and vulnerable point and unbalancing their defenses.

Israeli Infantry into the Trenches

The second major tactical surprise achieved by Sharon occurred on the northern flank of the Egyptian positions at Umm Qatef. The Egyptians, who believed that the sand dunes in the north presented an insurmountable barrier to attackers, failed to mine their left flank. This omission, in retrospect, proved

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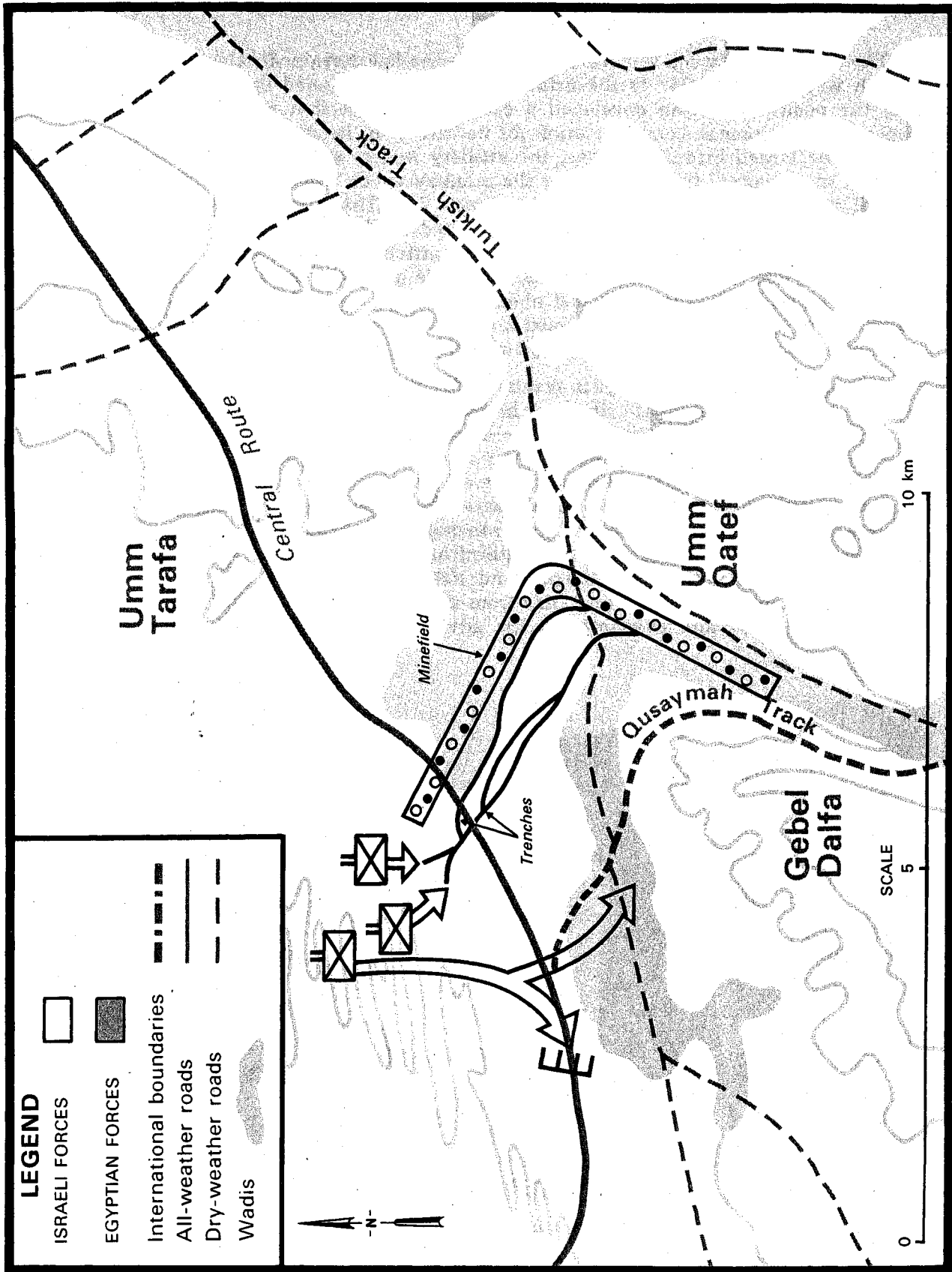
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a grave mistake, as the Egyptians admitted later.⁵¹ Others had made the same wrong assessment before them. For example, S. L. A. Marshall, who visited Israel to gather material for his book on the 1956 war, had reached an identical conclusion: "Neither this ridge (Umm Qatef) nor the two behind it could be outflanked from the north because of an impassable natural obstacle."⁵² Nonetheless, Sharon achieved two tactical surprises by attacking from the north: the first against the artillery and the second against the forward infantry—even though the Egyptians were awaiting his attack. In 1956, the Israelis had achieved no such surprises in the heat of battle.

The responsibility for seizing Umm Qatef—the key terrain at Abu Ageila in both wars—fell in 1967 to the infantry brigade commanded by Adam. To seize the position, Sharon developed a complicated plan that required close cooperation and precise communication for its execution. Before the commencement of the Israeli infantry charge, the artillery was to mark the site of the northern most part of the trenches for the infantry which would then attack—each of the three battalions taking one trench line. The vanguards in each battalion would carry fifty of their own colored flashlights—red, green, or blue—to mark the forward progress of their particular unit. A company of tanks from Sasson's tank battalion was to provide direct fire support for each battalion. The idea was to shoot just ahead of the advancing infantry to help clear the way. As the infantry occupied an area, the engineer battalion would begin clearing the minefield for the penetration by armor.⁵³

Adam, however, did not plan to commit all three of his infantry battalions to battle at once (see map 19). Instead, he assigned the first two trench lines to his two battalions of regulars, while the third battalion—comprised of reservists—formed the brigade reserve ready to provide assistance to the other two battalions should the situation warrant. As soon as the two infantry battalions reached the central route, the reserve battalion would then go into action against the third trench line. In anticipation of an Egyptian counter-attack with armor, Adam configured his third battalion so that one company possessed antitank weapons, bazookas, and 106-mm recoilless rifles to block the anticipated move of Egyptian tanks from the west. To ensure proper coordination and avoid any casualties to his advancing infantry from friendly

Photo not available.



Map 19. Adam's assault on the trenches of Umm Qatef

fire, Adam gained control of the six battalions of divisional artillery as their mission changed from general to direct-fire support.⁵⁴

Adam's infantry brigade caught the Egyptians completely by surprise, and the Israelis experienced little difficulty getting into the two lines of trenches. But the Egyptians recovered quickly and began putting up a stiff resistance, even to the point of hand-to-hand combat with bayonets and knives. During the confusion, Israeli infantry in one trench became lost and crossed over into the next trench, where they ran into their colleagues from the other battalion. Only the flickering colored lights saved Israelis from falling to friendly fire.⁵⁵

The infantry brigade managed to capture the Egyptian colonel in charge of Umm Qatef, whose bunker was located in the second trench line sited on the military crest. To stop the Israeli penetration, the colonel had been trying to communicate with his artillery in order to direct fire on the Israeli section of the trenches.⁵⁶ An hour or so after midnight, Israeli infantry units finally crossed the central route and began attacking the southern half of Umm Qatef, while the engineer battalion worked feverishly to clear a path through the minefield for the passage of Israeli armor.⁵⁷

Adam, following Sharon's plan, committed his third battalion as soon as he received word that his other two battalions were attacking Umm Qatef south of the central route. The reserve battalion did not find a third trench line, for none existed, and after groping around in the dark for a while, Adam ordered it to break ranks and clear the area. His company of antitank weapons had already taken up positions on and near the central route to stop any Egyptian tanks moving from the direction of Umm Shihan to reinforce Umm Qatef.⁵⁸

Israeli infantry after capturing the trench system at Umm Qatef

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Courtesy of Maj. Thomas P. Odorn

The remains of an Egyptian soldier at Umm Qatef, 1988

Penetration by Israeli Armor

Around 0230, the Israeli engineers managed to clear a small path for the passage of Sasson's armored battalion. Rather than commit his mechanized infantry first, Sasson dispatched a platoon of four tanks, led by another tank containing the company commander. As this armor unit moved cautiously through the narrow passageway, one Israeli tank hit a mine and became immobilized, preventing the movement of the other tanks in the battalion. The company commander decided to continue on with his mission in support of the third infantry battalion, which was already positioned on the central route behind Umm Qatef. The engineers now struggled at "a murderous tempo" to clear another path for the remainder of Sasson's battalion, and Israeli commanders became concerned over the fate of Israeli tanks within the main perimeter of the Egyptian defenses. As the platoon of Israeli tanks finally approached the reserve battalion of Adam's brigade in its blocking positions, control of the small armor force passed to the infantry commander. Eventually, the Israeli engineers succeeded in their task, and by 0400 on 6 June, the remainder of Sasson's tank battalion began entering into the main perimeter (see map 20).⁵⁹

While the battle for Umm Qatef raged, Nir launched an attack on Ruafa Dam, which contained the headquarters for the Egyptian 12th Infantry Brigade. There, the Egyptian brigade commander had apparently remained throughout the battle.⁶⁰ Nir's attack from the rear must have come as a surprise to the Egyptians and served to deflect the Egyptian brigade commander's attention away from Umm Qatef to the situation directly threatening

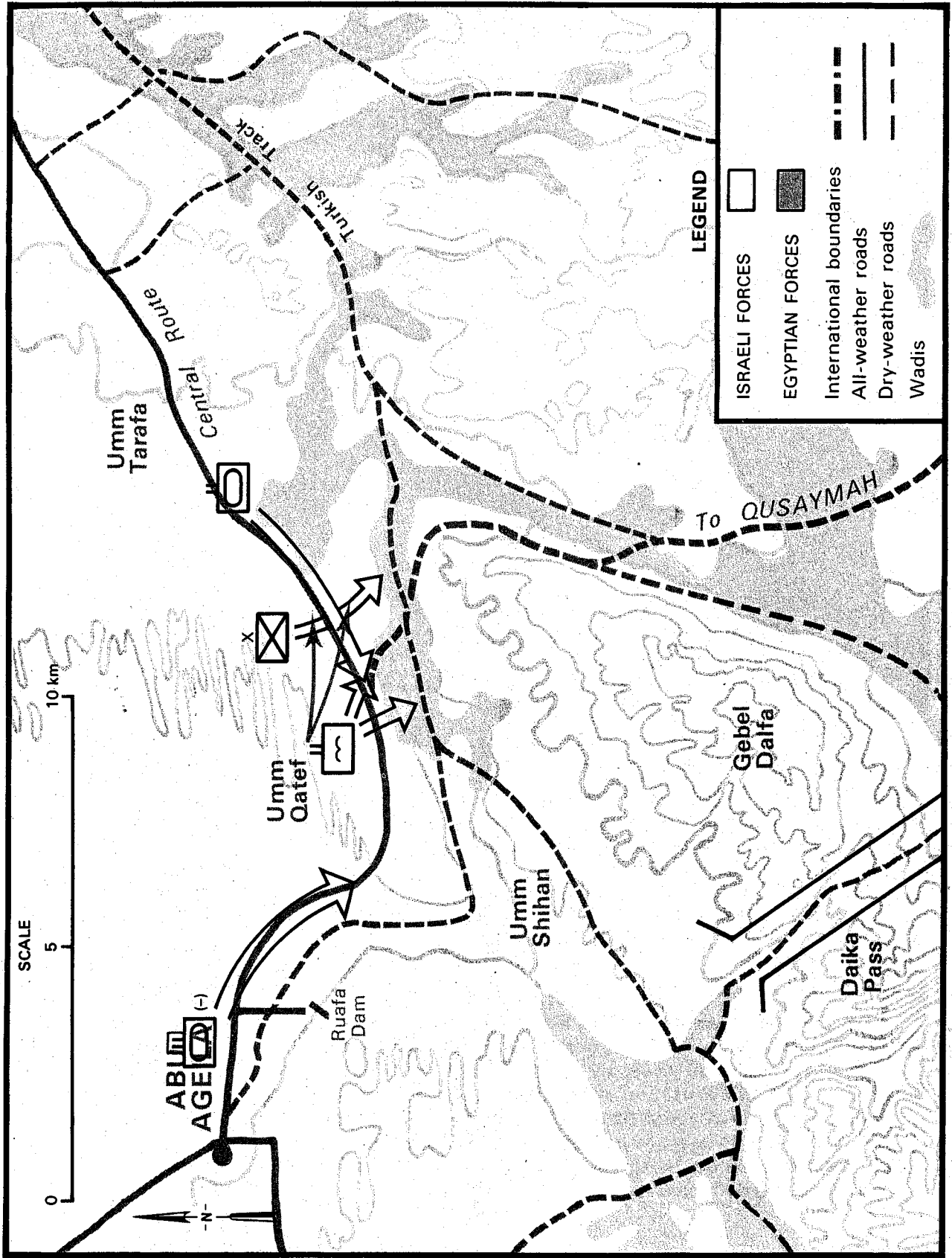


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his own bunker. The Egyptian commander was thus experiencing immediate problems just as his troops were entering the most chaotic stage of the battle.

After seizing the dam area, Nir organized his forces for the push eastward to link up with Sasson's tanks approaching from Umm Qatef. Nir's force breached the central route and began to move cautiously in an easterly direction. At the same time, Sasson headed westward from Umm Qatef with his armored battalion. At this point in the battle, Sharon assigned Nir's battalion to Zippori, the commander of the 14th Armored Brigade. Zippori promptly ordered Sasson's tanks to stop firing. When Nir continued to receive fire, Zippori knew his men were not firing at each other, as had occurred in 1956, so he radioed to Sasson to continue the attack against the enemy.⁶¹

The Egyptians reacted belatedly to this initial penetration by Israeli tanks from the east. Rather than launch his entire force in a counterattack during the first Israeli penetration at Umm Qatef, the Egyptian commander of the 288th Tank Battalion (minus) remained relatively idle. Once Sasson entered the defensive perimeter with his battalion, the Egyptian commander ordered his crews to prepare a stopping line in the Soviet manner.⁶² Accordingly, the crews transformed the T-34s into antitank weapons, and from around 0400 to 0600, Israeli and Egyptian tanks engaged in close combat. As the battle

Photo not available.

progressed, the Egyptian tankers found themselves surrounded by Israeli tanks. By 0600, the Egyptian defense had crumbled with only a few pockets of resistance still remaining for Israeli infantry to mop up. During this time, the second armored brigade from Yoffe's *ugdah* passed through Abu Ageila on the central route.⁶³ When the battle for Abu Ageila ended, the victory had cost the Israelis at least thirty-two men killed in action and nineteen tanks destroyed, while the Egyptians lost forty tanks and an unknown number of men killed.⁶⁴

The Collapse of the Egyptian Army

Shortly after 0700 Egyptian time, or 0600 Israeli time, GHQ in Cairo learned of the loss of Abu Ageila.⁶⁵ The rapid fall of the well-fortified position no doubt surprised, shocked, and demoralized senior officers and influenced Field Marshal Amer to order a general withdrawal of Egyptian forces to the west bank of the canal.⁶⁶

Further shock occurred when Cairo realized its grave mistake in failing to anticipate the movement of an Israeli armored force to Bir Lahfan. At first, the Egyptian high command failed to realize the serious threat to their

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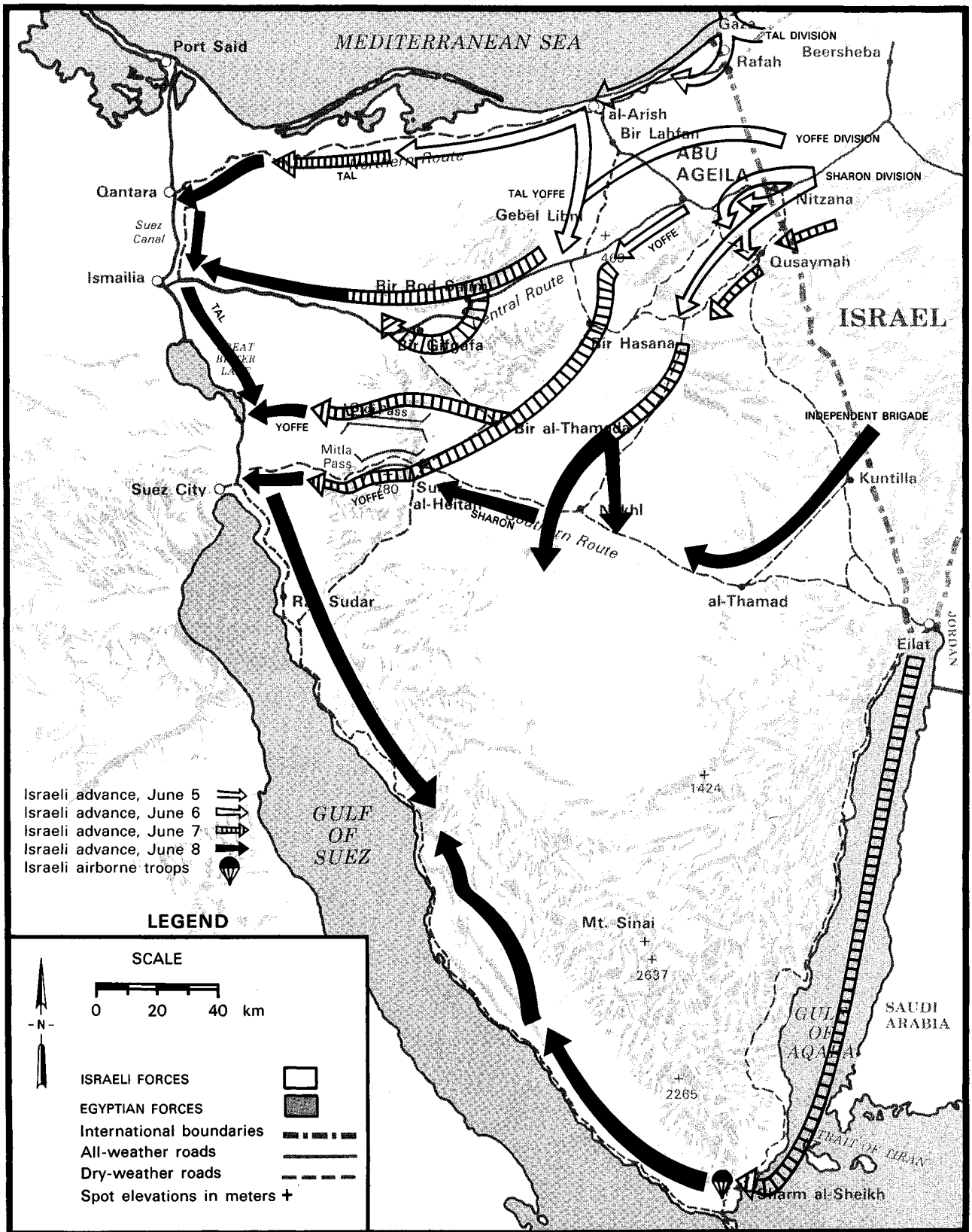
operational depth. Throughout 5 June, Amer still expected the Israeli main attack in the south, somewhere between Qusaymah and Kuntilla, and thus kept a good part of his army ready for this expected onslaught.⁶⁷

By the late morning of the 6th, however, Amer was in a state of panic. The force sent by the Egyptian 3d Infantry Division to al-Arish had failed to break through at Bir Lahfan, and by noon, it was withdrawing to the second line of defenses at Gebel Libni and Bir al-Hasana. At this point, the Egyptian high command realized the gravity of its mistake in not anticipating a major operational maneuver along the route to Bir Lahfan. Now, the Egyptians faced two major Israeli forces descending on Gebel Libni, one from Bir Lahfan and the other from Abu Ageila.⁶⁸

That afternoon at around 1630, Amer—badly shaken by recent events on the battlefield—issued a general withdrawal order to his forces in the Sinai, but one that failed to delineate any phases in the withdrawal. He just told the Egyptian Army in the Sinai to reach the west bank in one day's time. This decision eliminated the Egyptians' ability to manage the battlefield. Units simply raced to the Suez Canal, in some cases outpaced only by their division commanders.⁶⁹

Through intelligence sources, the Israeli high command learned of the Egyptian general withdrawal order. Consequently, late on the 6th, Gavish held an important meeting with his *ugdah* commanders Tal, Yoffe, and Sharon. After some discussion and exchanges of views, Gavish decided to take advantage of the Egyptian Army's apparent collapse and ordered Israeli units to race to the passes ahead of the retreating Egyptian forces. Tal was to take the central route, while Yoffe headed for the Giddi and Mitla Passes; Sharon would try to cut off the Egyptian forces in the south. In conjunction with the land forces, the Israeli Air Force was to conduct deep interdiction strikes at the passes.⁷⁰ The insertion of Israeli paratroopers at Giddi and Mitla—timed to coincide with the arrival of Israeli tanks units—would have overwhelmed the Egyptians. But GHQ urgently needed its available paratroop brigade for the struggle in Jerusalem.

Gavish's quick thinking led to success (see map 21). A number of Israeli units reached the passes to block the retreating Egyptian forces, although

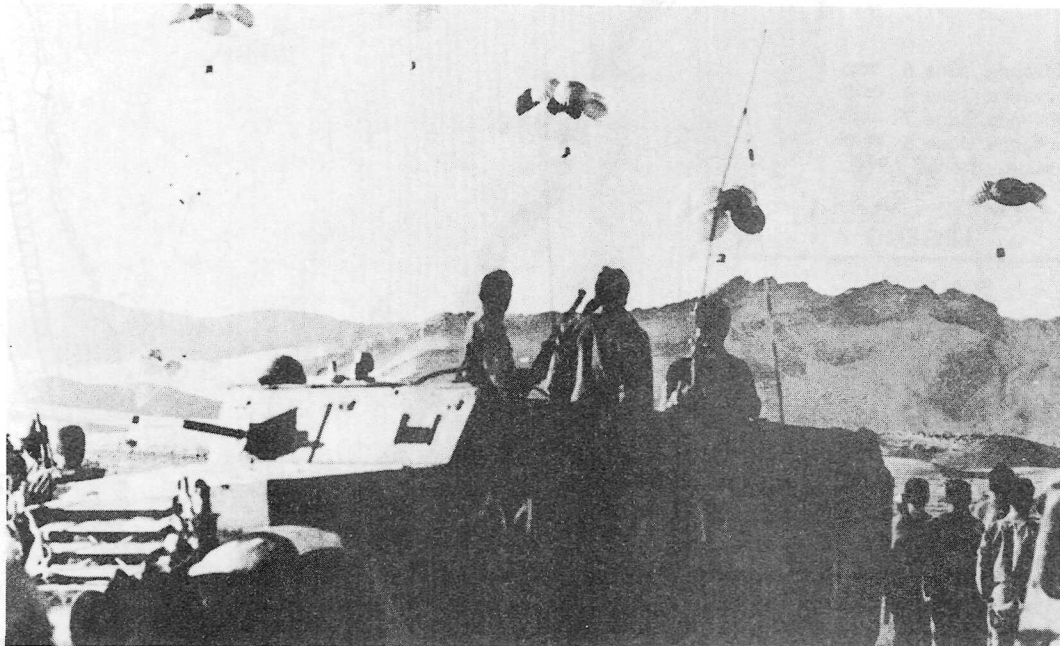


Map 21. The Six Day War: Egyptian front



Mid-East Wars: Israel's Armor in Action

Egyptian T-54 burning after the battle for Bir Lahfan



Mid-East Wars: Israel's Armor in Action

General Yoffe's division receiving supplies at Gebel Libni

Photo not available.

Photo not available.

many Egyptians had managed to escape to the west bank of the Suez Canal. Sometime during 7 June, Dayan dismissed his own strategic concerns and ordered Gavish to seize the Suez Canal and occupy Ras Sudar on the Gulf of Suez.⁷¹ By the end of the next day, after four days of war, the Egyptian Army was in ruins, having lost 80 percent of its equipment. Israeli victories in the forward tactical areas of Rafah, al-Arish, and Abu Ageila had led to the IDF's successful pursuit of the Egyptians to the sealed off passes, where they were defeated. The Sinai was left completely in Israeli hands.

Sharon, for his part, found his next task after the battle for Abu Ageila a mere exercise in troop movement. After giving his *ugdah* a much needed rest during the remainder of 6 June, he dispatched a part of his force to take Qusaymah the following morning, the 7th. By the time the Israelis arrived there, however, the Egyptian 10th Infantry Brigade had already departed. In fact, the Egyptian division commander had crossed over to the west bank of the Suez Canal in the early hours of the morning of the 7th.⁷² Naguib had lost the battle for Abu Ageila in less than twenty hours, as the IDF dramatically reversed its performance of 1956. In the campaign as a whole, the IDF had used its battalions, brigades, and *ugdahs* in an integrated and synchronized fashion to inflict a stunning defeat on the Egyptian Army.
