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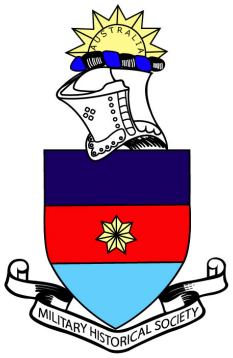

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VICTORIA CROSSES OF THE PALESTINE CAMPAIGN

Anthony Staunton*

The 15 Victoria Crosses awarded for the Palestine campaign is a small number compared to the 520 awarded in France and Belgium. Of the smaller campaigns, the number of Victoria Crosses awarded for Palestine was only exceeded by the 41 awards for Gallipoli and the Dardanelles and the 22 for Mesopotamia. Only one of the 15 Victoria Crosses for the Palestine campaign was awarded to an Australian. Ironically this was to the Australian Flying Corps and not to the Australian Light Horse. I say ironically because the Australian Light Horse, in particular the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Light Horse Brigades was the only force other than the New Zealand Mounted Rifles that fought in every major action of the campaign from the Battle of Romani to the capture of Damascus.

Romani

In January 1916, General Sir Archibald Murray was appointed commander of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force, which would shortly be renamed the Egypt Expeditionary Force. Murray decided to take the offensive and to move across the Sinai towards El Arish. His advance would be along the coast, but accompanied by the construction of a railway and a water pipeline. Water supply was the limiting factor in desert warfare and would have an influence on many of the battles. The Turks were also active and in August 1916 advanced on Romani but the Australian defence of the outpost line upset the Turkish plan of reaching the British flank at Romani unnoticed. At 4 am on 5 August the 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades, together with some British infantry, advanced with their bayonets and won a decisive victory. The advance across the waterless stretch to El Arish could go only as fast as the construction of the railhead and water pipeline and it was not until 21 December that the town was finally entered.

Lieutenant Frank McNamara

The next objective was the strong Turkish position at Gaza, on the Mediterranean, which anchored the Turkish defence line that ran 50 kilometres inland to the south-east and the town of Beersheba. In the air the British aircraft were inferior to the German machines, but in the period leading up to what was to be the First Battle of Gaza, British and Australian aircraft undertook numerous attacks against Turkish targets in Palestine. On 20 March 1917, four aircraft from No. 1 Squadron were detailed to attack a section of railway line in the vicinity of Tel el Hesi, about 30 kilometres south of Junction Station. A BE2c, piloted by Captain Douglas Rutherford, which was without an observer to save on weight, was hit by ground fire and forced to land. A large body of Turkish cavalry spotted the descending plane and commenced to gallop towards the scene. Lieutenant Frank McNamara, flying a Martinsyde, observed the predicament and landed close to the downed aircraft to pick up Rutherford. However, McNamara, who had been wounded, was unable to use the foot controls properly and his aircraft was wrecked in the attempt to take off. Having set the Martinsyde on fire, both officers dashed back to Rutherford's BE2c. After several anxious moments, they succeeded in starting the machine. With McNamara at the controls, they took off just as the cavalry burst into the clearing, firing wildly and yelling at the escapees. McNamara was awarded the Victoria Cross, the first Victoria Cross recipient of the Palestine campaign, the only Australian World War I airman to receive the award and the only Australian Victoria Cross recipient of the Palestine campaign.

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* Anthony Staunton presented this paper at the Perth Biennial Conference at Easter 2008.

Lieutenant General Harry Chauvel

Two attempts on 26 March 1917 and 19 April 1917, the First and Second Battles of Gaza, failed and the Turks accordingly strengthened their line, convinced they could hold southern Palestine. Following the second failure, new commanders were appointed and Major General Harry Chauvel of the Anzac Mounted Division was appointed commander of the Desert Column, which was shortly afterwards renamed the 'Desert Mounted Corps'. Chauvel was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant General, the first Australian to achieve this rank and became the first Australian given command of a corps. Chauvel took over from Lieutenant General Phillip Chetwode who was given command of the infantry corps known as Eastern Force. In May, Chetwode drew up a plan for the capture of southern Palestine by striking at Beersheba, the inland end of the Turkish line, with infantry and mounted troops. The plan would require seven infantry and three mounted divisions and would attempt to achieve surprise by deceiving the Turks that Gaza was again the focus of the attack. The main difficulty would lie in providing water for the infantry near Beersheba; the mounted troops would have to rely on what water they could find in and beyond Beersheba.

Shortly before McNamara was awarded the Victoria Cross, British forces captured Bagdad in Mesopotamia which is now modern Iraq. Several days after the Second Battle of Gaza the last two of the 23 Victoria Crosses awarded during the Mesopotamian campaign were awarded. All 23 awards for Mesopotamia were awarded before the first land Victoria Cross for Palestine was awarded in the period between the Second and Third Battles of Gaza.

Second Lieutenant John Manson Craig

In May and June the British forces kept up pressure on the Turkish forces with a series of successful raids. The exasperated Turks struck back at an advanced post of the 1/5th Battalion, the Royal Scots Fusiliers at Umbella Hills, south west of Gaza. At 6.15 am on 5 June 1917, the post was captured, with eight British soldiers killed, seriously wounded or taken prisoner. Second Lieutenant John Manson Craig immediately organized a rescue party and, after tracking the enemy back to his trenches, set his party to work removing the dead and wounded under heavy rifle and machine-gun fire. A non commissioned officer was wounded and a medical officer who went to his aid was also wounded. Second Lieutenant Craig went out at once and brought the non commissioned officer under cover. Going out a second time he was himself wounded but found a location for the wounded medical officer to shelter. Despite his wounds he deepened the shelter, ensuring that both wounded men were out of the line of fire, protecting them from further injury.

For his gallantry, Second Lieutenant Craig was awarded the first land Victoria Cross of the Palestine campaign. His battalion was a unit of the British 52nd Division which had already received a Victoria Cross at Gallipoli. Six months later, before the fall of Jerusalem, the division would be awarded a third Victoria Cross. In 1918, the division would be sent to France and, in the battles of the last hundred days on the Western Front, the division would be awarded two further awards. The 52nd Division, with awards for Gallipoli, and two each for Palestine and France, was the only division in World War I to be awarded Victoria Crosses in three different theatres of operations.

General Sir Edmund Allenby

In late June, Murray was replaced as Commander of the Egypt Expeditionary Force by General Sir Edmund Allenby, who had commanded the Third Army on the Western Front. Chetwode's Eastern Force was renamed XX Army Corps, and his plan to attack Beersheba was adopted by Allenby. The three mounted divisions were created by reducing each division from four to three

brigades. Allenby demanded reinforcements which he received. His infantry divisions were increased to seven with the 10th (Irish) and 60th (London) Divisions coming from Salonika, and the forming of the new 75th Division in Egypt from British and Indian battalions. He also received the artillery, ammunition and aircraft he requested.

Major Alexander Lafone

Four Victoria Crosses were awarded in the Beersheba area, one in the preliminary to the advance of the infantry, one on the day Beersheba was captured and two in the following week. On 25 October, the 8th Australian Light Horse Regiment covering the preliminary advance of the British XX Corps seized a series of low ridges near the Wady Hanafish. The Australians dug small redoubts on Hills 720, 630, and 510 giving the British possession of a large tract of country which had previously been no man's land. At 4.15 am on 27 October, a large Turkish force attacked the newly captured positions which were now held by the 1st County of London (Middlesex) Yeomanry, 8th Brigade, Yeomanry Division. The Yeomanry Division, along with the Anzac and Australian Mounted Divisions, was one of the three mounted divisions of Chauvel's Desert Mounted Corps. Hill 630 assailed by a force estimated at 2,000, gallantly and successfully resisted all day. The defenders of Hill 720 held out against superior numbers for over seven hours. They defeated the first two attacks from 1,200 cavalry supported by artillery and machine-guns, but were then overwhelmed and almost entirely destroyed. The defence of Hill 720 was commanded by Major Alexander Lafone. When all his men, with the exception of three, had been hit, Major Lafone ordered those who could walk to move to a trench slightly in the rear and from his own position maintained a most heroic resistance. When finally surrounded and charged by the enemy he stepped into the open and continued to fight until he was mortally wounded and fell unconscious. He was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross and is buried at Beersheba War Cemetery, which is now in Israel. The Middlesex Yeomanry Association commemorates Major Lafone and all who fell at Hill 720 at a memorial service each year at St Paul's Cathedral in London.

Corporal John Collins

On the night of 30 October, British infantry and Australian, New Zealand and British mounted troops moved through the dark towards Beersheba. At dawn, the British 53rd, 60th and 74th Divisions, supported by an artillery bombardment, attacked a 5-kilometre line of entrenched positions. It was during the attack by the 25th Battalion, The Royal Welch Fusiliers, 74th Division, that Corporal John Collins was awarded the Victoria Cross. By 10.40 am his battalion was forced to lie out in the open as artillery fire tried to destroy the enemy wire. Casualties from shell and machine-gun fire in the extreme heat were heavy and Corporal Collins carried many wounded to shelter. At 12.30 am the attack went forward and he rallied his men and led the final assault with great skill in spite of heavy fire at close range and uncut wire. He bayoneted a number of the enemy and with a Lewis gun section covered the reorganization and consolidation most effectively although isolated and under fire from snipers and artillery. Six weeks later in the fighting before Jerusalem he was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal. After the 74th Division moved to France in 1918, he was wounded in action and evacuated to England. However, he was well enough to receive both medals from the King at Buckingham Palace in an investiture on 1 June 1918.

Lieutenant Colonel Leslie Maygar VC

The infantry of the British XX Corps seized the outer defences of Beersheba shortly after noon but the strongly held Turkish position, Tel el Saba, resisted the Anzac Mounted Division until 3 pm. With time running out for the Australians to capture Beersheba and its wells before dark,

Chauvel ordered Brigadier General William Grant, commanding the 4th Light Horse Brigade, to make a mounted attack directly towards the town. In the most famous Australian mounted charge of the war, Beersheba was captured with nearly all the wells intact. The capture of Beersheba meant that the Turkish line was turned. However, among the Australian casualties that day was Lieutenant Colonel Leslie Maygar VC, Commanding Officer of the 8th Light Horse Regiment since 1915, who had been awarded the Victoria Cross in South Africa in 1901. After reporting to Chauvel's headquarters, Maygar had just returned to his unit when he was wounded by an attacking German aircraft. Maygar's horse bolted with him into the night and by the time he was found he had lost too much blood. He was taken to hospital at Karm, but died the next day. He was also buried at Beersheba War Cemetery.

Victory at Beersheba

The victory at Beersheba was followed by an advance into the steep hills of southern Palestine. About 18 kilometres north east of Beersheba is the huge mound of Tel El Sheria and about the same distance northwest of Beersheba is the prominent hill Tel El Khuweilfe. Both positions were strongly defended by the Turks.

Captain John Fox Russell MC

On 6 November 1917, at Tel El Khuweilfe, Captain John Fox Russell MC, Royal Army Medical Corps attached to the 1/6th Battalion, The Royal Welch Fusiliers of the 53rd Division, was cited for most conspicuous bravery displayed in action until he was killed. He repeatedly went out to attend the wounded under murderous fire from snipers and machine-guns, and in many cases, when no other means were at hand, carried them in himself although he was himself exhausted. He showed the greatest possible degree of valour. Two days after Captain Russell was killed, Tel El Khuweilfe was captured by the 53rd Division. Captain Russell had been awarded the Military Cross in the 1st Battle of Gaza. He is one of three Victoria Cross recipients buried at the Beersheba War Cemetery.

Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Drummond Borton, DSO

On 7 November 1917, at Tel El Sheria, Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Drummond Borton, DSO, was commanding the 2/22nd (County of London) Battalion, The London Regiment of the 60th Division. He deployed his battalion for attack and at dawn led his companies against the strongly held position. When the leading waves were checked by withering fire, he moved freely up and down the line under heavy fire and then led his men forward, capturing the position. At a later stage he led a party of volunteers against a battery of field-guns in action at point-blank range, capturing the guns and the detachments. His fearless leadership was an example to the whole brigade. He was awarded the Victoria Cross. On the same day, 50 kilometres to the west, seven and a half months after the first battle, Gaza fell. The next objective of the British forces was Jerusalem.

The drive towards Jerusalem

Following the collapse of the Gaza-Beersheba defensive line, the Turkish forces were in retreat and Allenby wanted to destroy or capture the retreating columns. The 7th Turkish Army withdrew to the north-east to cover Jerusalem, which lay in terraced rocky hills, while the 8th Turkish Army withdrew along the coast. The mounted troops tried to intercept the columns, but the Turkish flank guards fought too stubbornly for the horsemen to get through. Many Turks, some guns, and much transport were captured but these were largely the stragglers, with the main Turkish forces getting away. A continuing problem for the mounted troops was the difficulty in watering horses, which sometimes went without a drink for more than two days. While the

Australian Mounted Division remained in the Judean hills to guard the right flank, Allenby's main thrust drove rapidly up the rolling hills and plains, through the Jewish settlements, vineyards and orchards and on to Ramleh, Ludd and Jaffa.

Second Lieutenant Stanley Boughey

In the approach to Jerusalem it was almost entirely an infantry fight. The mounted troops scouted or covered the flanks and ran into several sharp fights, the heaviest perhaps being the vain attempt of a battalion of Turkish storm troops to break through the front of the 3rd Australian Light Horse Brigade at El Burj on 1 December. British infantry went to the support of the 8th Australian Light Horse Regiment. Second Lieutenant Stanley Boughey, 1/4th Battalion, the Royal Scots Fusiliers of the 52nd Division rushed forward alone with bombs, right up to the enemy, killing many and causing the surrender of a party of thirty. As he turned to go back for more bombs he was mortally wounded, just as the Turks were surrendering. Second Lieutenant Boughey was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross. He was buried at Gaza War Ceremony.

Corporal William Train

In early December, despite bitter conditions, the British fought to a position where Jerusalem was threatened from the west and south-west. In pouring rain on 8 December, the British infantry, with the 10th Western Australian Light Horse Regiment and Worcestershire Yeomanry attached, succeeded in breaching the Turkish defences and forced the evacuation of Jerusalem. During this fighting, at Ein Kerem, west of Jerusalem, Corporal William Train's company of the 2/14th Battalion, The London Regiment (London Scottish), was brought to a standstill when unexpectedly engaged at close range by a party of the enemy with two machine-guns. Corporal Train on his own initiative rushed forward and engaged the enemy with rifle grenades and succeeded in putting some of the team out of action by a direct hit. He shot and wounded an officer and killed or wounded the remainder of the team. After this he went to the assistance of a comrade who was bombing the enemy from the front. He killed one of enemy who was carrying the second machine-gun out of action. Corporal Train was awarded the Victoria Cross which was personally presented to him by King George V at Blendecques in France on 6 August 1918. Train was one of 20 Victoria Cross recipients presented with the Victoria Cross during five of the King's visits to France between 1914 and 1918.

Lance-Corporal John Alexander Christie

British forces entered Jerusalem on 9 December 1917. The last two Victoria Crosses awarded for 1917 in Palestine were awarded on the Mediterranean coast beyond Jaffa. On 21/22 December 1917, at Fejja, after a position had been captured, the enemy immediately made counter-attacks up the communication trenches. Lance-Corporal John Alexander Christie, 1/11th Battalion, The London Regiment, 54th Division, seeing what was happening, took a supply of bombs and went alone about 50 metres in the open along the communication trench and bombed the enemy. He continued to do this in spite of heavy opposition until a block had been established. On his way back he bombed more of the enemy who were moving up the trench. His prompt action cleared a difficult position at a most difficult time and saved many lives.

Private James Duffy

On 27 December 1917 at Kereina Peak, whilst his company was holding an exposed position, Private James Duffy, 6th Battalion, The Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, 10th Irish Division, a stretcher-bearer, and another stretcher-bearer went out to bring in a seriously wounded comrade. When the other stretcher-bearer was wounded, Private Duffy returned to get another man, who was killed almost immediately. The private then went forward alone and, under very heavy fire,

succeeded in getting both wounded men under cover and attended to their injuries. On 25 July 1918, he was invested with the Victoria Cross at Buckingham Palace by King George V.

Private Harold Whitfield

The first award for 1918 was in the same area as the last two awards for 1917, on the Mediterranean coast beyond Jaffa. On 10 March 1918, at Burj El Lisaneh, during the first of three counter-attacks made on the position which had just been captured by his battalion, Private Harold Whitfield, 10th Battalion, King's Shropshire Light Infantry, 74th Division, single-handed, charged and captured a Lewis gun, killed the whole gun team and turned the gun on the enemy, driving them back with heavy casualties. Later he organised and led a bombing attack on the enemy, again inflicting many casualties.

The German spring offensive on the Western Front, in March 1918, quickly ended plans in Palestine for an offensive. Sixty thousand British troops including the 52nd and 74th Divisions, twenty-two infantry battalions and most of the Yeomanry, were sent to France as reinforcements. Allenby had to reconstruct his British divisions—except the 54th—as Indian divisions, each with a British nucleus. The 4th and 5th Cavalry Divisions, were also formed with British and Indian cavalry. In June, the Imperial Camel Brigade was disbanded and its Australian members formed the 14th and 15th Light Horse Regiments of the 5th Light Horse Brigade and joined the Australian Mounted Division, which was now equipped with swords.

Rifleman Karanbahadur Rana

During the reorganisation of his infantry, Allenby was only able to undertake limited operations. In April, the infantry holding the coastal sector was to advance into Samaria where it was hoped to open a gap in the Turkish line that could be exploited by the Australian Mounted Division. However, there was a remarkable failure in security and Allenby's plans became known to the Turks who stoutly contested the infantry advance. The villages of Kefr Ah, Berukin, El Kefr, and Rafat were captured at considerable loss. It was in the fighting at El Kefr that Rifleman Karanbahadur Rana, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Queen Alexandra's Own Gurkha Rifles, 75th Division, was awarded the Victoria Cross. On 10 April 1918, Rifleman Karanbahadur Rana and a few other men crept forward with a Lewis gun under intense fire to engage an enemy machine-gun. The No.1 of the Lewis gun team opened fire but was shot almost immediately, whereupon Karanbahadur Rana pushed the dead man off the gun, opened fire, knocked out the enemy gun crew and then silenced the enemy bombers and riflemen in front of him. During the remainder of the day he did magnificent work provided covering fire during the withdrawal. What the citation does not say is that Rifleman Karanbahadur Rana's action rescued his company commander, Lieutenant Frederick Barter who had been lying for 5½ hours feigning death just 25 metres from the enemy. Lieutenant Barter had been awarded the Victoria Cross as a company sergeant major with the 1st Battalion, Royal Welch Fusiliers, at Festubert in May 1915 and was awarded the Military Cross for El Kefr. The Official Australian Historian C E W Bean wrote that 'Allenby did not forget the carelessness and lack of secrecy, and in subsequent operations the most rigid secrecy was insisted upon and maintained'.

Private Robert Edward Cruickshank

The British front had advanced eastwards into the Jordan valley and to the western shore of the Dead Sea. The Anzac Mounted Division entered Jericho on 21 February 1918. On 22 March, a bridge was built at Hijla and after 24 hours of fighting the main crossing at Ghoraniye was seized and bridged. Es Salt was taken on the 25th and two mounted brigades pushed towards Amman. By the morning of the 27th, Amman was being attacked and the railway north and south of the town was cut and blown up. However, the arrival of Turkish and German reinforcements proved

decisive. On 30 March the force was ordered to withdraw to the Jordan with only the Ghoraniye bridgehead retained. A second attempt was launched, this time towards the vital railway junction at Deraa, north of Amman.

On 30 April, while the British 60th Division attacked the Turks in the foothills, the leading brigades of the Australian Mounted Division dashed 25 kilometres north on the east side of the Jordan to the Jisred Damieh bridge. While the 3rd Light Horse Brigade seized Es Salt, the 4th Light Horse Brigade was to prevent Turkish reinforcements crossing from the west bank of the Jordan. The 2nd Light Horse and 5th Yeomanry Brigades were to attack the rear of the Turks facing the 60th Division. Both projects miscarried. The 4th Light Horse Brigade guarding the Jordan crossing was driven back in hard fighting, while the 60th Division did not achieve surprise and failed to dislodge the Turks in the foothills. Private Robert Edward Cruickshank, 2/14th Battalion, The London Scottish, became the third 60th Division soldier awarded the Victoria Cross.

On 1 May, Private Cruickshank volunteered to take a message to company headquarters from his platoon which was in the bottom of a wadi, with its officer and most of the men casualties. He rushed up the slopes but was hit, tried again and was again wounded. After his wounds had been dressed, he tried yet again, but was so badly wounded that he could make no further attempt. He lay all day in a dangerous position, being sniped at and wounded where he lay, but displayed great endurance and was cheerful and uncomplaining throughout. On 21 June 1918, he was be invested with the Victoria Cross at Buckingham Palace by King George V.

On 4 May the order to withdraw to the Jordan was again given. Cyril Falls, the British Official Historian of the Palestine campaign writing in the book *Armageddon 1918*, wrote that Allenby 'was not altogether candid in describing these two operations as "raids", because he had meant to retain most of the ground won, including Amman on the Hejaz Railway and Es Salt'.

Private Samuel Needham

In September, following months of reorganisation, the training of new troops and formations and the building up of supplies and ammunition, Allenby was ready to launch the final campaign. A little over a week before the offensive opened another Victoria Cross was awarded on the Mediterranean coast beyond Jaffa, to Private Samuel Needham, 1/5th Battalion, The Bedfordshire Regiment, 54th Division. On 10–11 September 1918 at Kefr Kasim, a British patrol was attacked by the Turks in considerable force, supported by very heavy fire. At a critical moment, Private Needham ran back, turned to face a fresh body of the enemy which was approaching and fired rapidly at about 40 Turks at only 25 metres range. This action checked the enemy and just gave the patrol commander time to get his men together again. Half of the patrol were casualties but they managed to get back all their wounded. *The London Gazette* announced the award of the Victoria Cross to Needham on 30 October 1918, the very day that Turkey signed the armistice to end the war in the Middle East. Sadly, less than a week later, he died of wounds on 4 November 1918. Needham was buried at Kantara, Egypt.

Ressaidar Badlu Singh

At dawn on 19 September, Allenby's infantry, supported by air and ground bombardments, broke at its coastal end, the Turkish line that stretched from the coast to the Jordan Valley. At 9 am, Chauvel sent the 4th and 5th Cavalry Divisions through the lines and along the coast, then across the Carmel range to reach the plain of Esdraelon, 50 kilometres behind the Turkish front, before dawn on the 20th. By evening Nazareth was reached, where General Liman von Sanders, the former commander on Gallipoli now commanding the Turkish forces in Palestine, had his general headquarters. Liman von Sanders and his staff managed to escape just in time.

The 4th Cavalry Division severed Turkish communications with the Jordan Valley by capturing Beisan. The railway line behind the Turkish centre was destroyed by the 5th Light Horse Brigade. Aerial bombing of Turkish signal centres blacked out news of the British breakthrough. The Turkish 8th Army on the coastal flank was completely destroyed, while the 7th Army, under Mustafa Kemal (who was a division commander on Gallipoli and as Atatürk would become the first president of modern Turkey) in the centre, was routed. Many troops from the 7th Army escaped across the Jordan River before this gap was closed on 23 September. It was on that date that the last Victoria Cross of the Palestine Campaign was awarded on the west bank of the River Jordan. When his squadron was charging a strong enemy position, Ressaidar Badlu Singh, 29th Lancers (Deccan Horse), 4th Cavalry Division, realized that heavy casualties were being inflicted from a small hill occupied by machine-guns and 200 infantry. Without any hesitation he collected six other ranks and with entire disregard of danger he charged and captured the position. He was mortally wounded on the very top of the hill when capturing one of the machine-guns single handed. All the guns and infantry had surrendered to him before he died.

Damascus

A week later Damascus was evacuated by the Turks and one month after that Turkey signed an armistice. In six weeks between 19 September and 30 October 1918, the British Army in Palestine which, included 14 Australian light horse regiments, captured 360 guns and 75,000 prisoners and moved the front forward 560 kilometres.

All 15 Victoria Cross awards for the campaign were for action in Palestine and in what is now Israel with no awards for either the Sinai or Syria. However, the *London Gazette* incorrectly states that four of the awards were for actions in Egypt and this error is repeated in the 1953 War Office list of Victoria Cross recipients.

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Appendix - Victoria Crosses 1914-1919

France and Belgium	520
Dardanelles (including Gallipoli)	41
Mesopotamia	22
Palestine	15
Atlantic	9
North Sea	6
North Russia 1919	5
East Africa	4
Italy	4
Balkans	2
North West Frontier	2
England	1
Strait of Otranto	1
West Africa	1
American Unknown Warrior	1
Total	634

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LIEUTENANT JOHN NAPIER MAGILL 96TH REGIMENT OF FOOT

Anthony F. Harris*

Despite the grand intent that the Province of South Australia would be founded on principles of self-sufficiency, it was not long before these principles evaporated and the Province became yet another Crown Colony, largely dependent upon Britain for financial support. Part of this support mechanism was the establishment of a military garrison; a feature that was initially felt unnecessary in view of the fact that the infant Province was intended to be fully self supporting, settled only by controlled immigration (financed by the sale of surveyed land) and free of a convict labour force. Although never utilizing convict labour, the best intentions of the founding fathers fell apart within about five years of formal white settlement and the first detachment of garrison troops arrived in Adelaide in October 1841.

This initial detachment of British soldiers, about one company of the 96th Regiment of Foot, arrived from Tasmania under the charge of Captain George Villiers Butler, Lieutenant F S Hugonin and Ensign C Sweetenham. It appears that Sweetenham left Adelaide by December 1841 and was replaced in March 1842 by the subject of this paper, Ensign John Napier Magill.[1]

Regrettably, practically nothing of a biographical nature has been found on Ensign Magill. His service record has not been located and nothing of substance has been found in the War Office Muster Rolls or other material in the AJCP microfilms, although it is recorded that he was on leave for two months immediately prior to his arrival in Adelaide.[2] He was a reasonably competent amateur artist (as indeed were many military officers, as the ability to make sketches of towns, topography etc. was of great advantage when on campaign). His ability in this regard will become apparent shortly.

Ensign Magill remained in South Australia for the whole term of the regiment's deployment in the colony. He was promoted to lieutenant on 22 July 1842 but other than that appears to have simply gone about his duties without any major (or indeed minor) incidents.

The 96th Foot served in South Australia until May 1846 when they were relieved by a company of the 11th Regiment under Capt. Robert Webster. The troops of the 96th left Adelaide by the *Brankenmoor* on 16 May[3] and returned to Tasmania to join their headquarters where a number of men from the SA detachment took their discharge. On 30 January 1847 another detachment of the 96th was formed and embarked at Hobart on the vessel *Java* for garrison duty in the Swan River Colony under Captain Robert Bush. They disembarked at Perth on 24 February, the garrison comprising four commissioned officers (including Lieutenant Magill), 5 sergeants, 5 corporals, 2 drummers and 95 privates; 107 n.c.o's and men in total.[4]

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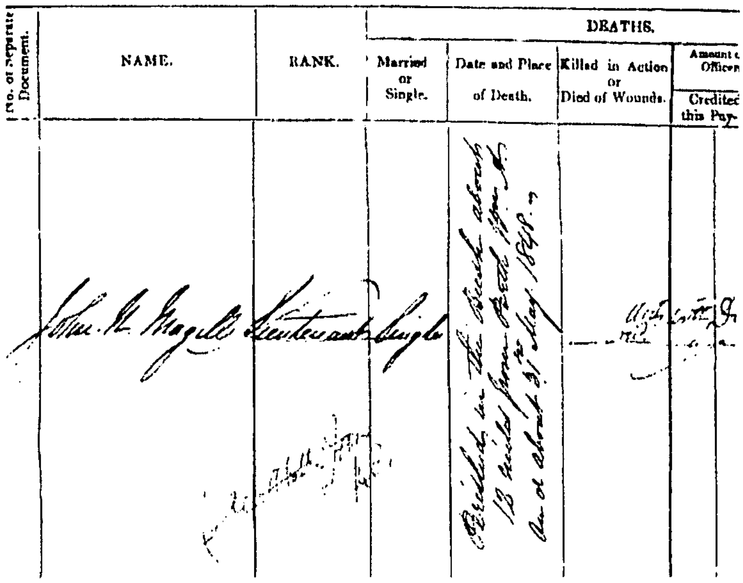
* Anthony Harris presented this paper at the Perth Biennial Conference at Easter 2008.
1 WO12 Muster Rolls, AJCP Reel 3890, Piece 9613, folio 189 (Oct-Dec 1841)
2 Ibid
3 Register newspaper, 20 May 1846
4 AJCP Reel 3895, Piece 9620, folio 327

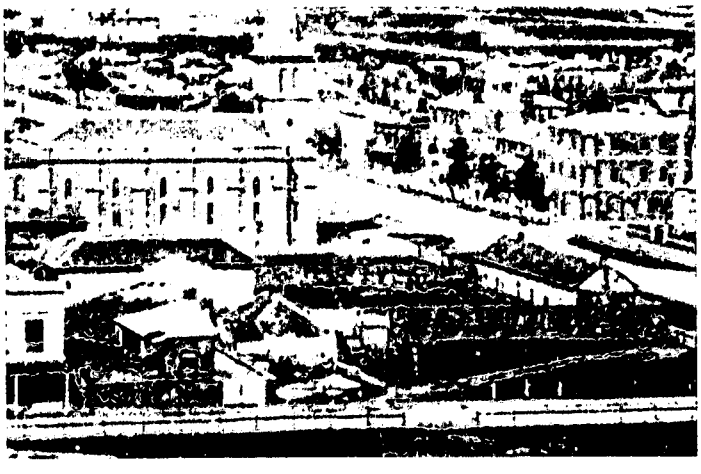


No. of Separate Document.	NAME.	RANK.	Married or Single.	DEATHS. Date and Place of Death.	Killed in Action or Died of Wounds.	Amount ... Officer ... Credited this Pay-
	John N. Magill	Lieutenant	Single	Perished in the Bush about 13 miles from [illegible] on or about 31st May 1848	—	

1. The British Army's official comment on the demise of John Napier Magill.

2. Southern building looking across the parade ground. 'Taken from the mess room (my sitting room)'.

3. 'From the side next to Mrs. Young's house while I stood in a field adjoining the premises outside the wall'. The arrow indicates the old barracks in Grenfell Street.



4. Site of the Flinders Street military barracks in the mid-1860's clearly showing the buildings depicted in Magill's two paintings (arrowed).

In September 1848 the newspaper, *The South Australian*, in reporting the latest news from other colonies, carried the header:

> SWAN RIVER
>
> By the *Champion* we have files of the Swan River papers up to the 2nd. instant [i.e. 2nd September 1848]. We subjoin the only extracts of interest, one of which gives the report of an inquest on the body of Lieut. Magill.5

All of the following information concerning the disappearance of Magill and subsequent events is taken from the evidence of Asst-Surgeon DeLisle and (now) Major Bush OC as presented in the newspaper article, plus other references from entries in the Western Australian newspaper of the day, *The Perth Gazette*.

Apparently, shortly after arriving in Perth, during March and April Lt. Magill had come under the medical supervision of Assistant-Surgeon Robert DeLisle, 'his malady being *delirium tremens*'. This, of course, is usually attributed to excess consumption of alcohol, but there seems to be no evidence or suggestion of Magill having a problem with drink. In the light of subsequent events could it be that his malady was not *delirium tremens* but something deeper and less easily attributable? The lieutenant returned to duty about the middle of April but a month or so later was complaining that 'his spirits were very depressed'. Dr. DeLisle recommended that he take some leave and have a break in the country for a change of air and surroundings. Magill obtained leave of absence until 31 May (confirmed by the Regimental Muster Roll for the quarter to 30 June 1848) and left Perth the following morning, Thursday 10 May. A press report states that 'He was alone, on foot, and had a double barreled gun with him, and powder and shot, but it is believed no compass'.6

Magill gave his intentions to visit 'Mr Samuel Moore, and of passing on from there to York and Toodyay, as circumstances might direct'. Less than a week later Dr. DeLisle received information that he (Magill) had not been seen at Mr. Moore's, nor was he known to have passed through Guildford. On Wednesday 16th May a search party comprising Major Bush, Mr Robert Hester (?), Asst.-Surg. DeLisle, and a party of soldiers and natives set out to find him:

> 'We came upon his track about a mile and a half from the Causeway, and followed it to the foot of the Darling Ranges where we lost it. We remained out for three days, and on the day following our return to Perth we, with the addition of Mr. Hillman, of the Survey Department, and Messrs. Hall, Cole and Ronayne resumed the search in the same direction for a week with no better success'.

It was supposed that Magill 'mistook the Canning [road] for the Guildford [road] as he was tracked down the former for about two miles, and in his endeavours to gain the Guildford , he must have lost himself' 7.Other searches were made; the deposition of Major Bush states that in addition to the two excursions taken by himself and Dr. DeLisle:

> A large party of volunteers...scoured the country in different directions for ten days, and patrols of soldiers went out daily for three weeks after the latest of the exploring parties. In fact a search was kept up for the deceased for six weeks after the first cause of alarm for his safety.

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5 State Library SA, The South Australian, 26 September 1848, p.2, cols. 2-4.
6 The Battye Library of Western Australia, The Perth Gazette, Saturday 20 May 1848, p.2 col.c
7 ibid

From the first search instigated to find Lt. Magill on 16 May, subsequent searches appear to have continued until around the end of June, but by 27 May the *Perth Gazette* had stated 'We are afraid all hopes must now be given up, of the unfortunate gentleman's ever being found alive'.8 Nothing further was heard of Lt. Magill until 27 August when a party of aborigines brought in a double-barreled gun and portions of clothing which were recognized as belonging to the missing man. Major Bush, DeLisle and Mr Hester again set out and located the remains near a tree as indicated by the natives about 13 miles from Perth. The site was at a spot four miles north of the point where his track had previously been lost and 'a full three miles from the nearest habitation, that of a person named Barndon'. The location is also elsewhere described as being near the Helena River, 'between the stations occupied by Messrs. Bardon (Barndon?) and R. Smith'. The fragments of clothing and personal effects confirmed the identity of Lt. Magill. A bullet hole was found in the nearby tree and a ball was extracted and it was concluded that the path of the projectile suggested that Magill had been sitting against the tree at the time of death. The report goes on at some length describing the lieutenant's camp site and discussing the clothing and effects at the site, the condition of the remains and speculation on the wounds to the body. It appears that the remains had also been disturbed by animals, probably dingoes. Apparently Magill had lit a fire and cooked some birds and had prepared a bed of 'blackboy' rushes, all of which led to the conclusion of the search party: 'that the discharge of the gun was accidental, or the effect of a sudden paroxysm of mental derangement caused by his having lost himself in the bush'. Besides his supplies of powder and shot, Magill also carried with him several changes of clothes, pipe & tobacco and money.

On the return of the searchers, a formal inquiry was held into the circumstances of Magill's death, the two principal witnesses being Assistant Surgeon DeLisle and Major Bush. Doctor DeLisle testified that when the deceased left Perth 'he was as sane as I have known him to be for the last three years' but he added that Magill had 'laboured under hypochondriacal delusions, such as believing that he heard persons talking to him', though admitting that he (Magill) was aware that these voices were 'mere delusions'. Major Bush also testified that 'I should not have suffered him to go on leave of absence, unless I considered him to be quite sane', and that at a recent Garrison Field Day the deceased went through his duty more smartly than usual. Bush also believed that on the day before Magill left Perth he appeared to be in his usual state of health and spirits. The Court came to the conclusion:

> We are of opinion that the death of the above named John Napier Magill was occasioned by a gunshot wound, but there is no reason to suppose that such wound was inflicted by the hand of any other person.

The remains of Lieutenant Magill appear to have been brought back to Perth and were interred (probably late August/early September 1848) with full military honours and with a large number of mourners in attendance. He was 28 years old. Unfortunately, there seems to be no evidence of the registration of his death 9 and the location of his burial is not known. The last mention of Lt. Magill appears to be in the Muster Rolls of the 96th Regiment that reads 'Perished in the Bush about 12 Miles from Perth W^{n}. A. on or about 31 May 1848.'10

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8 op cit, Saturday 27 May 1848, p.2 col.c
9 Battye Library of W.A., Index of Deaths Registrations.
10 AJCP Reel 3895, Piece 9622, folio 122

But this is not quite the end of the story; Lieutenant Magill left a legacy that now forms an important and otherwise undocumented aspect of the British Army in South Australia. It was mentioned earlier in this paper that Magill was a competent artist, and it is with this talent that he makes his mark. When the 96th Regiment arrived in the Colony they were housed in rented barrack accommodation situated in Adelaide's Grenfell Street. Twelve months later they moved to alternative barracks (also rented) in Flinders Street. Were it not for Lt. Magill exercising his artistic talents it is likely that there would by no images confirming the configuration of the Flinders Street complex which, as you will see by the illustrations, give a good impression of what the precinct looked like in the mid-1840's. The paintings are held by the National Library of Australia in the remarkable Rex Nan Kivell Collection. Both paintings have notes penned by Magill which aid in giving an exact location. There is also a somewhat later photograph, part of a panorama taken by the Adelaide photographer Townsend Durea in the 1860's, showing the site little changed; but it gives no indication that these are the buildings that formed the Flinders Street military barracks between 1842 and 1851.

The first image as you can see carries the simple title 'Taken from the mess room (my sitting room)'.[11] This building spans almost the complete southern edge of the site with Flinders Street behind and running parallel to the length of the building.

Image number 2 has considerably more detail in the notes.[12] Apart from the caption shown, the notes also mention the 'Old Barracks (Grenfell Street) in the distance' (the building marked with the arrow) and refers to the 'men's quarters, cook house, officers' messroom and married men's quarters, Dr. DeLisles and Congregational Chapel [and] a tradesman's cottage near Gawler Place'; the whole bearing the date 23 March 1844. Regrettably, none of these features is specifically identified, though the old barracks are clearly identifiable.

The third image is that by Townsend Durea giving a bird's eye view of the precinct.[13] The arrows indicate the two principal buildings pictured by Lt. Magill while clearly showing Flinders Street running from the lower right to the upper left of the picture, with Gawler Place running across the bottom of the image.

So despite his apparently unexceptional service as a garrison officer and a very tragic and lonely demise, Lieutenant John Napier Magill's efforts while filling in time during his off-duty hours did indeed result in a legacy for which Adelaide's historians can be truly thankful.

We can only wonder whether his distant family and friends were ever aware of what he left behind.

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11 National Library of Australia, pic-an5836942
12 NLA, pic-an5836943
13 SLSA, B 2125

"SOMETIME SOLDIERS!" (THE DE PIERRES FAMILY IN 200 YEARS OF MILITARY SERVICE TO FRANCE, BRITAIN AND AUSTRALIA)

Paul de Pierres*

Luck, fortune and coincidence are some of the imponderables of human existence. How the cards fall for each of us is predestined by chance or perhaps a higher authority depending on your personal beliefs. For my family the generations seem to have coincided with various conflicts which have seen them fighting for France, Great Britain or Australia. Here is my brief resume of those contributions.

Gabriel Theodore (Vicomte) de Pierres (my great, great, great grandfather) born in 1785, is believed to have done some service for Napoleon as his 'Saint Helena' medal has always been in the family's possession. However due to the records of the Napoleonic wars being destroyed in the 1870 uprising in the Paris communes, when the rebels torched the Grande Chancellerie, it has been impossible to detail his service. He was not at Waterloo! A good career move by some estimations! The title of Vicomte (Viscount) was conferred on him for 'services to France' by the King Louis the XVIII in 1816.

His son, Etienne de Pierres (my great, great grandfather) born in 1818, inherited the title of Vicomte. His service to France was as a member of the Chamber of Deputies, aide-de-camp to Louis Napoleon (the Prince President) and later to his wife the Empress Eugenie (whose son was killed with the British Army in the Zulu wars). Etienne de Pierres also held diplomatic posts for France which saw him acquire various foreign 'gongs' to put with his officer grade Legion d'Honneur. These include the Villa Vicosa of Portugal, Saints Maurice & Lazarus of Italy, Medijie of Turkey and Isabella la Catholic of Spain. Though always appearing very military I can not attribute any war service to him! However, his brother-in-law, Captain Herman Thorn, fought in the Mexican-American War of 1846-48, and then the early Indian Wars before drowning while trying to save one of his men in the Colorado River.

Etienne's eldest surviving son was Stephane-Henri de Pierres(my great grandfather) born in 1843. He also inherited the family title and trained as an army officer before joining the colourfully named 'Chasseurs d'Afrique' (Hunters of Africa) as a subaltern. He spent long periods in Algeria helping put down various insurrections before joining the French Expeditionary Corps to Mexico in 1863, where the Emperor Maximillian decorated him with the Order of Guadeloupe. On receiving this prestigious honour, he is reputed to have said "Maximilian ... thanks!" or was it "Thanks a million, Max!". He returned to France for the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 and was captured at the disastrous battle of Sedan after having his horse shot dead under him! During Sedan the superior Prussian Artillery led to a French surrender with some 38,000 casualties to the Prussians' 3,000. Incidentally Stephane's brother Herman de Pierres, also gave a life of military service to France in China, Algeria and the Levant with the French Navy, and in Mexico (as a French marine at the battle of la Puebla - a qualified French victory) and France 1870. His only son, Joseph de Pierres, died of illness in the French Army during the Great War.

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* Paul de Pierres presented this paper at the Perth Biennial Conference at Easter 2008.

Next to my grandfather, Guillaume Charles de Pierres, born in 1880. He did his mandatory National Service with the 33rd Artillery Regiment at Poitiers in the early 1900s and, when the Great War broke out in 1914, he immediately returned from Australia to serve, leaving behind the farm where we are today after sending his new wife back to her family in Sydney. His bi-lingual proficiency soon saw him detached to the French Military Mission to the British Army. He served throughout the bulk of that bloody conflict as a sergeant with 'K' Battery, Royal Horse Artillery. He was promoted in the field at Zillbecke in Belgium and was with Major Palmer, the battery commander, when he got an immediate DSO. Late in the war he fell foul of the system when a British officer reading his mail for censorial purposes made a disparaging remark about the content. This was a bad mistake as he was promptly felled for this poor behaviour leading to a court martial for grandfather and a return to the French Army! He had a dreadful war and saw hundreds of men killed!

The following is an extract from his diary:-

> On the morning of the 11th mess carts arrived for the other units but ours never turned up and our situation became unpleasant. Some who were very hungry had breakfasted on scraps left in the basket we carry on the limber and when the mess cart failed us it meant no food for a day or two should we go into action as expected. Then Captain Clarke said "I will go to Arras and buy some supplies" but the Major told him he could not be spared, nor any officer, in case they were called into action. Then Major Palmer said "Would you go de Pierres?", I replied "Yes, of course", in no enthusiastic mood! The town behind us was being shelled at regular intervals and we could hear the shells passing over. Somehow they must have noticed my lack of keenness because Major Palmer turned and said to me "de Pierres you must not go if in the least it doesn't suit you!" I replied "I am here for that but if you have moved into action before I come back, how will I find you?" His answer was to follow such a road until I met the wagon lines and, if at all possible, there would be someone there to meet me. So I went and did my job and found bread and all that was needed. I also had the chance to notice that the shells we had heard were not fired in vain! Horses and men were pulled on to the footpath, mangled or cleanly killed, to make way for the motor traffic.
>
> I regained our bivouac grounds to find the battery had gone and I did not waste any time but went straight on according to Major Palmer's orders. I rode until no more traffic existed on the road, then I went on one more mile on a deserted track but became doubtful and scared. Shells started bursting in fours each side of the road and in front and behind me; shrapnel banged through the trees, a bit high luckily, and I had no idea where my battery was! I could not see the wagon lines or the man who may have been waiting for me and therefore my fear found an excuse in these facts and I re-tracked to get some information. I knew it was my duty to go, my mess mates were fighting and had only had a very light breakfast to keep them up. Some had only had a whisky before they left and it was up to me to get to them. I inquired at both Brigade and Divisional HQs and finally received some information. I went off again and I knew it meant I had to go a mile further forward than I had before! At one crossroads I noticed that where the first time there had been half a dozen men and horses dead beside the road, the number had doubled!
>
> I breasted the deserted road at a good trot, the only living things I could see were a clump of men sheltering behind a tank. The shelling had not slackened but became brisker and as I went the road became more and more torn about, strewn with Boche ammunition and all sorts of wreckage! My mount, Violet, shied at all these obstructions although she behaved wonderfully when the shells burst close. At last I spotted the farm but just before I reached it a Captain of Infantry got out of his trench and shouted "Stop, dismount, can't you see you are being sniped at?" "Well I heard a few bullets", I answered "but I did not think they were meant for me". Then he continued "You can't go any further mounted, do you know you are quite close to the enemy?" I then rode to the farm, dismounted, hooked my horse to an iron gate and joined a party of thirty dismounted cavalry holding their horses behind a small mound and then proceeded on foot to look for the battery. I searched in vain. Meanwhile, the Boche shelling had

developed into a really severe barrage all around the farm, so I headed into the building to try and get some news on the battery. In the cellar I found a few men but they did not know anything. They were a field ambulance of the infantry and I thought that if 'K' Battery were nearby any wounded would surely come to this field ambulance. I waited about two hours, looking through the door. One shell burst amongst the cavalry horses killing six and some men only a few yards from my mare. She was badly shaken as it was a big shell and I saw her jerk at the reins. For a minute I thought she was gone but the knot held fast and she stood. I got sick of seeing those shells fall with great accuracy and I retired to the cellar where it was warmer. Then a shell hit the farmhouse, and there was smashing of crockery and all sorts of noises for a minute or two.

After I had been there two hours it was evident that I was not going to get any news of 'K' Battery and besides, a snow storm had begun and for fear of getting lost in the coming blizzard, I got back on my horse and made back across country as the road was impassable now having been torn out in all its width in many places. I galloped for a mile and reached the crossroads and noticed that the number of men and horses 'laid out' had greatly increased! I finally reached the bivouac grounds and met an officer who told me that the battery were withdrawing from action that evening. As he gave me that information, I noticed our mess and water carts going northward. I galloped after them but my mare fell in to a boggy trench, and for five minutes I could not disengage myself. As soon as I released my leg in one of her efforts to struggle up, I cut her girths and she managed to get out, but then the wagons got stuck! Luckily a kindly RFA Captain nearby gave us horses and men to pull them out. The blizzard was quite on us by then, my mare had lost a shoe in the bog, and I could not ride. Just to top it off mines laid by the Boche before he retired started to go up all along the road where we bivouacked. One exploded just behind me and a hail of mud flattened me on the road. I then took the wagons to where I thought the battery would return and, after obtaining some straw for the horses (the only food they had had all day), it was nine or ten pm. I struggled through the slush to some tents which happened to be occupied by some people we knew. They made us welcome and revived me with a good stiff rum. They also lent me some clean socks as my boots had been unable to stand the strain of five days snow and had split. Our friends, Canadians by the way, made everything ready to receive my officers and gave me a good stretcher in a tent. How I could have slept had I had enough blankets!

The War Diary for 'K' Battery RHA on the 11 April 1917 read:-

Came into action at Orange Hill just west of Monchy and did some good shooting on the Germans retiring in the open, but heavy snow stopped all observations about 5 pm. The cavalry advanced and held the line in spite of heavy casualties until relieved by the infantry. The battery lost seven men and two horses. Pulled out of action before dark and marched to bivouac at Arras Racecourse in snow and sleet.

This was typical of the grind and attrition on the Western Front that my grandfather and so many others endured. His final military service was in the Volunteer Defence Corps during World War 2.

His youngest brother, Stephane, who had enlisted in the French cavalry around 1912, took a commission as a platoon commander in the 371st French Infantry Regiment in 1915. During bitter hand to hand fighting in the Vosges Mountains in the east of France at le Vieil Armand, he was twice awarded the Croix de Guerre before posthumously winning the Legion d'Honneur. In October 2007 we made a sentimental visit to his headstone at the village of Moosch and saw the rugged terrain where he was killed.

His citation for France's highest award reads:-

Died for France – a young officer of the greatest valor and model military heroism, having given his men a superb example was mortally wounded in a trench as he led the defenders there to resist a violent enemy attack at Hartmanswillerkopf.

My grandfather's other brother, Charley, having taken Australian citizenship around 1912, joined the British Army and was commissioned from the KRRC as a subaltern into the 5th Dragoon Guards. He arrived at the front just before the Somme offensive in 1916, and was soon buried by a large shell at Bernifay Wood, losing an eye to a shrapnel splinter. After convalescence he was posted to the Intelligence Corps as a field agent. Incidentally I considered it a real coup to have had his service medals issued by the British medal system in the 1980s. He also did some resistance work during World War 2.

Also during the Great War my paternal grandmother's brother (my great uncle) Stanley Marden, an Australian, flew with the Royal Flying Corps and my maternal grandfather Richard Paul Vincent embarked with the 24th Battalion AIF only to nearly die of viral meningitis in the UK and to be repatriated, but to never really recover, and to steadfastly refuse a TPI pension!

I might add here that I am immensely proud to mention the service of my wonderful grandmother Winifred de Pierres who loyally followed her husband to France, with a small child, to support him despite incredible hardships and the attrition that German U boats were wreaking on the allied shipping in the Mediterranean...a true heroine ... but no medal for her!

So I come to my father Henri Jacques Stanley de Pierres. Born in France in 1918, he was mobilised into the French Colonial Army in 1939 and sent to French Indochina where he joined the 5th Colonial Artillery Regiment as a gun layer on the French '75s'. His eighteen months at Saigon and Cap St. Jacques (Vung Tau) were most memorable for the malaria he contracted, the forefathers of the Viet Cong, the Viet Minh, killing French soldiers, the takeover of Vietnam by the Japanese, and helping hold down soldiers while the doctor treated them with the most primitive methods for VD! Luckily he made it back to Australia unscathed (except for the malaria), before Pearl Harbour. It is a little known fact that the Japs slaughtered thousands of remaining French soldiers in Indochina towards the end of World War 2. My father's final military service was in the Australian VDC after being rejected by the AIF for manpower reasons in 1943.

His brother, my uncle Robert de Pierres, joined the RAAF in 1942 and was posted to 31 (Beaufighter) Squadron at Coomallie Creek, near Darwin, in August 1943 as a navigator/air gunner. On the 19 October 1943 while attacking Japanese installations on Tanimbar Island his pilot, Frank Cridland, was mortally wounded by ack ack fire. I can modestly but proudly say that an eyewitness account confirms that my uncle died a true Australian hero. The account of his death can be read in the book "Search and Destroy" by his Commanding Officer William Mann DFC who has reconfirmed the events of that day to me in person. I would now like to read you the brief details of that action:

> The formation had gradually climbed to 2,000 feet, a more comfortable height where they would stay, flying at economical cruise to conserve fuel. About to call for a visual damage report, the CO saw the aircraft on the outer left was lagging behind. He called over the radio. "Beau One, come up level, are you having trouble?" There was no answer. "Beau One, are you receiving?" There was still no answer. He should have had a return call from the pilot or navigator. "Deputy Leader, take over and continue, I am investigating Beau One. They may have trouble, will advise." Pulling throttles he dropped back and, swinging to port, drew level and sat in formation within a few feet of Beau One. From twenty feet he could see F/O Cridland, head down, slumped forward against his harness. The navigator was standing on the closed hatch in the entry well behind him. He could reach forward to grasp the controls from behind the pilot. In this way he could only control the pitch of the aircraft up and down and keep the wings level. He could not reach the rudder bars position, unless he sat in the seat but

there was no way of getting the pilot out and taking his place. It was absolutely impossible and, even if he could, he was not trained to fly the aircraft.

The navigator P/O de Pierres, wore no headset but at signs from the CO, slipped the phones from the pilot's ears and quickly donned them, grasping the controls again. To the CO's query; "Can you hear me?" the Nav nodded a quick assent. The microphone for the set was not attached or reachable. "Is Frank alive?"nod of assent. "Where is he hit?" The Nav pointed to the lower abdomen. " Badly?" A nod of assent. "Is he conscious?" A shake of the head. There was only one thing to do. "You have to save yourself, do exactly what I say. Where's your parachute?" The Nav pointed behind him with his thumb. "Scramble back, clip it on and go over the side. It's got the dinghy with it and we'll have a Catalina on the way. GO NOW, without rudder the aircraft will start to spiral at any moment. Leave your pilot, you can't help him. MOVE, for Christ's sake, MOVE." The Nav looked over and slowly shook his head. He was not going to leave his pilot! The CO was desperate, pleading, ordering, cajoling but it was no use. Seeing the starboard wing starting to drop, he redoubled his efforts but it was still no use. The Nav refused to leave. He would not let his pilot die alone. Frustrated and helpless, the CO could only watch as the wing continued to drop without the rudder's correcting influence into a spiral dive. The Nav, turned, one arm around his unconscious pilot, raising the other in a final wave, as the aircraft rolled into a plunging dive to the sea below. Squadron Leader Mann assures me he recommended my uncle for an award but that it never progressed from RAAF HQ Darwin. One wonders what more was required to at least be mentioned in despatches!

Three of my father's first cousins also deserve mention for their war efforts. Madeleine de Pierres fought with the French Resistance and the FFI and received the Croix de Guerre from General de Gaulle. John Marden was lost on air operations and Bill Nolan received an MBE for his contributions in North Africa and at D-Day with Royal Armoured Corps. To round off our World War 2 service my dear old Mum did about twelve months in the RAN towards the end of the war as a driver, with American servicemen being her greatest threat by far!

Jumping forward some years it was my turn. Born in 1949 I took the Queen's shilling (courtesy of the National Service ballot) in 1969. After training, I finished up in Phuoc Tuy Province, South Vietnam with 'A' Coy, 3rd Battalion RAR (incidentally where my father had been in 1940-41). I was just a 'baggy-arsed' rifleman carrying an SLR, M79 grenade launcher and the usual forty kilograms of water, food and ammo. Politics shortened our tour and I must say that at the time I didn't complain. However, as my good mates point out - I wasn't there long enough to get the Vietnamese Campaign Star! I will say that I spent virtually my whole tour in the bush and it was the hardest work, physically and emotionally, that I have ever done ... and that includes a lifetime of farming!

There are a couple of recent footnotes to our family's war service history. They are that my niece, Anna Walmsley, has done a tour as an Air Traffic Controller at Baghdad Airport with the RAAF and my cousin's daughter Yvette Beatty also served with the Royal Australian Navy in the Gulf. They are both well out of it now!

So that is the story of the de Pierres family over the last 200 years, from a military perspective. Unremarkable when compared to many others but, when you consider that our chosen vocations were mainly as farmers, then I think you will agree it's been a reasonable effort.

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BRITISH MUSKETRY TACTICS IN THE 18TH CENTURY

Tom Johnstone

Introduction

Many historians, military commentators and historical fiction writers have written stirring accounts of the musketry exchanges between French columns and British infantry in line. Describing how massive French columns were repulsed by a British line two ranks deep, they usually write of continuous rippling fire. Yet most of them offer no explanation or description of the actual firing drill; or of the tactical organization and drill necessary to achieve such effective musketry. This article aims to give a short description of the organization and drill, of both the British and French musketry doctrine. It will also give a comparative description of the effectiveness of each doctrine, and will present a contemporary description of an engagement between two Irish battalions; one serving with the British army and one with the French army in Flanders, during the War of the Spanish Succession of 1702-1714 as an example.

Musketry Development in the Seventeenth Century

During the European wars of the late 17th and early 18th Centuries battle tactics underwent drastic changes. The pike was discarded in favour of the bayonet, which was first used at the siege of Bayonne, and from whence its name is derived. Even the humble bayonet changed quickly from the early plug-into-muzzle type which prevented the musket being fired, to the socket type which fitted over the musket muzzle and allowed the musket to fire, but made it more difficult to reload. The bayonet, providing as it did a close quarter stabbing weapon, caused the pike to become obsolescent.

With the musket now the principle military weapon for defence and attack, all European armies sought its improvement. The matchlock was gradually superseded by the flintlock, in the British Army from 1690 and in the French Army in 1703. With all infantry now armed with an efficient musket and bayonet, battles would mainly be fought by exchanging musketry fire at ranges of up to 100 metres in line against infantry and in square against cavalry. The tactics used by commanders to fight their battles, were developed around the basic infantry or cavalry unit, the infantry battalion and cavalry regiment. Although the cavalry tactics developed by Gustavus Adolphus - massed cavalry in-line shock action, was largely unchanged, infantry musketry tactics changed profoundly. This dramatically altered the nature of the infantry battle.

The Weapon

The military flintlock musket that was to be known to generations of British soldiers as *Brown Bess* was introduced generally into the army in the early part of the 18th century. It was a large 10-bore musket, 59 inches long with a barrel of 46 inches. It had brass mounts, trigger guard and butt plate, three brass tipped pipes to hold a ramrod, and steel sling swivels. A buff leather sling was attached to the front of the trigger guard and near the end of the musket stock. The ramrod was made first of wood then of iron. The Brown Bess was usually stamped with "Tower" and had a crown and broad arrow. It also had a storekeepers number. It weighed approximately 9 lbs without the 17 inch socket needle bayonet, which when fixed fitted over the muzzle and was held fast by a boss. In the next one hundred and thirty odd years of its in-service duty, it was to undergo many modifications, chiefly length of barrel. The musket used so successfully by Wellington's army was known as the India pattern. It had a barrel of 39 inches and was stamped with 'Tower', a Crown and 'GR'. Its triangular socket bayonet was 17 inches long.

The Battalion Organization

A battalion in Marlborough's army consisted of nine companies; eight line companies and a grenadier company. Wellington's battalions had an additional 'light' flank company. Each company was about 100 men strong, a platoon was in fact a half-company. To facilitate the easy deployment into square from either line of battle or column of route, the battalion was divided into four divisions of two companies. Marlborough's battalions when formed in line had the platoons of the grenadier company deployed on each flank of the battalion; sometimes supported by a 2 or 4 pounder 'infantry gun'.

The grenadier company was the battalion's elite company, consisting of the tallest and strongest men. In addition to musket and bayonet, they were armed with sword, axe and carried a pouch for grenades. These latter were hollow iron spheres filled with gunpowder with a short-time fuse. Because the wide-brimmed hat of the time could interfere with over arm grenade throwing, grenadiers were issued with tall mitred headgear, which increased their apparent height still more. They were intended to lead assaults on fortified places. Moreover, it was usual for the grenadier companies to be grouped to form 'storm battalions' in siege operations.

When formed in battalion square the grenadier company was divided into four sections and deployed on the vulnerable corners of the square, sometimes with an infantry gun positioned diagonally to each other and positioned with the ability to cover all four faces of the square with enfilade fire. In the second half of the 19th Century, Gatling-guns were deployed in the same way.

A battalion formed for battle in line of companies in two ranks; with the colours in the second rank at the centre of the line. To meet various tactical situations on the battlefield, the battalion commander had a number of options. His first decision was whether to engage by fire from the entire battalion, or by platoon fire. If he elected for battalion volleys there were two options; a volley by two ranks, a volley by one rank with the front rank holding its fire, as a reserve firing (known as the 'fourth fire'). Should he decide on platoon fire, the battalion delivered its volleys in three firings, with each platoon nominated to a firing and was given a specific number in an 'order of firing' in the first, second or third 'fire'. Fire orders in this instance were delivered by platoon commanders. The commanding officer usually positioned himself either on foot close to the Colours or on horse back behind the Colours. The second-in-command (the lieutenant-colonel), was positioned with a supernumerary rank of NCOs behind the second rank. He would assume command if the colonel 'fell'.[1]

Directly a platoon had fired its volley, each man was trained to reload independently so as to be ready when the platoon was again ordered to 'give fire'. This was commonly abbreviated to the simple 'fire' which later became standard practice. Constant barrack square drill of each movement of the reloading procedure eventually made every man perform the functions almost automatically. Aiming at targets was perfunctory. Sometimes, sergeants armed with spontoons simply levelled the muskets. A good battalion could deliver a constant rate of three firings in one minute. The first three volleys of each firing were easy because each man had a loaded weapon to begin with: thereafter training and experience told. But, all things being equal, over two thousand musket balls striking massed enemy ranks in the first minute of action could have devastating effects. Even Napoleon's Old Guard at Waterloo quailed before its blast.

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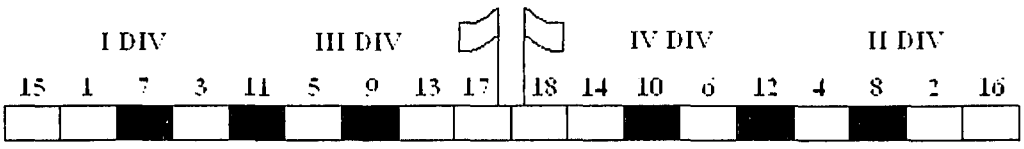
1 Kane, Br-Gen Richard, *Campaigns of King William and Queen Anne; from 1689 to 1712; Also, a new system of military discipline, for a battalion of foot in action with the most essential exercise of the cavalry.* J. Milan, London 1745; p.1.

Regiments were exercised together on 'field days'. Kane reports that on one of these occasions the officers of one regiment did not perform as well as they ought, and "of which the General very justly took publick notice".2



Battalion in line two ranks deep3(3)

Key ☐ Platoons of the First Fire, ■ Platoons of the Second Fire, ___ Platoons of the Third Fire

Numbers indicate the order of discharging

French Tactical Organization

Unlike the British, the French battalion when deployed in line was massed in six ranks deep, and trained to fire by ranks. Then having fired his weapon, each infantryman wheeled to his right and marched between the files to the rear of his file where he then reloaded his musket. At the commencement of a fire-fight, it allowed six volleys to be delivered fast. This was to remain the standard French method of infantry deployment in battle almost until the French Revolution, when it changed to three ranks. However with the destruction of the royal army the revolutionary government had to rely on a conscripted *levé en masse* to protect the young republic. The commanders of this largely untrained new army relied on massive columns to punch holes in an enemy line irrespective of losses and Napoleon continued its use with the *Grande Armée*. It was an effective doctrine until faced by a highly trained and tightly controlled British force operating on ground of its own choosing.

Against the British line where every man could fire his musket simultaneously at a designated target, massed ranks six deep made a significant target, even for inaccurate 18th century musketry at one hundred yards. Overlapping the French column, fire from the British line enfiladed their massed enemies flanks as well as front with deadly destruction.

The first recorded account of two opposing battalions each using French or British musketry tactics in action, took place during the Battle of Malplaquet in 1709. There, in an historic engagement between two Royal Irish Regiment's, one in the French service the other in the British, an exchange of volleys proved the effectiveness of British drill and tactics. 'For', wrote Captain Robert Parker, 'were we not the same men?'

Two of the most successful British commanders were Marlborough and Wellington. Both commanders were blessed with superb Quartermaster-Generals, William Cadogan and George Murray respectively, who carried out the function of a modern chief of staff. The commander could therefore concentrate on strategy and tactics in accordance with the principles of war of their time. Although they differed in their conduct of operations (Marlborough usually relied on manoeuvre, speed and surprise. Wellington preferred a defensive/offensive posture). Both commanders had to rely on not always willing allies, Dutch, Germans and Austrians or Spanish and Portuguese; their British infantry battalions formed the solid core of their army. Both were at the heart of their intelligence service. However, Wellington's army had the benefit of a long tradition of good musketry being decisive in many continental battles. Conversely, the army

2 Kane, p. 115.
3 Ibid., diagram XI.

Marlborough commanded was still in the development stage. Indeed some regiments had only recently been raised and were without any tradition.

However, those regiments which had been raised in the time of Charles II and James II had been had been in action together in both Ireland and Flanders since 1690, Under King William III they had won some notable victories, and were professional soldiers. As well as drilling their men, some commanders put their thoughts on tactical development on paper. Brigadier-General Richard Kane of the 18th Royal Irish produced the first detailed description of British platoon firing in word and diagram.

While commanding the 18th at Malplaquet, described as Marlborough's bloodiest battle, in an isolated part of the field, almost in a private war, the 18th met and defeated its *alter ego* in the French service.

> The Regiment of Foot that I served in, is well known by the Title of the Royal Regiment of Ireland, from which Regiment I may without Vanity say, our British infantry had the Ground Work of their perfect Discipline.4 (4)

The Royal Irish Regiment

At Malplaque the Royal Irish had arrived late onto the field and as a consequence were deployed on the extreme right of the British line almost acting in isolation. According to Captain Robert Parker they marched:

> To an open (sic) in the wood, it was a small plain, on the opposite side of which we perceived a battalion of the enemy drawn up. Upon this Colonel Kane who was then at the head of the regiment, having drawn us up and formed our Platoons, advanced gently towards them, and the six platoons of the first fire made ready. When we had advanced within a hundred yards of them, they gave us a fire of one of their ranks, whereupon we halted, and returned them the fire of our six platoons at once; and immediately made ready the six platoons of our second fire, and advanced upon them again. They gave us the fire of another rank and we return them a second fire, which made them shrink [decrease]; however they gave us the fire of a third rank after a scattering manner, and then retired into the wood in great disorder, on which we sent our third fire after them and saw them no more. We advanced cautiously up to the ground they had quitted and found several of them, killed and wounded; among the latter was one Lieutenant O'Sullivan, who told us the battalion we had engaged was the Royal Regiment of Ireland in the French service.5

Parker attributed the success of his regiment to the double factors of weight of ball and musketry practice.

The weight of the British at 16 bullets to the pound of lead against the French 24 bullets to the pound, made it significant heavier; Parker declared "it will make a considerable difference in execution." And about the tactics he insisted:

> The manner of our firing was different from theirs: the French at that time fired by ranks, which can never do equal execution when six platoons are fired together. This is undoubtedly the best method that has been discovered for fighting a battalion.6

Parker attributed the success of his regiment to the double factors of weight of ball and musketry practice. Parker declared "it will make a considerable difference in execution." Raised by the Earl of Granard at the time of the Restoration on the command of King Charles, it was composed of the independent companies that had garrisoned Ireland since Cromwell's conquest. It fought

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4 Kane, p. 1.
5 Parker, Captain Robert. *Memoirs of the most remarkable transactions*, London, 1741, p.164.
6 Ibid., p. 165.

at the Boyne, Limerick, Athlone and Aughrim. When in 1694 the regiment arrived in Flanders a dispute arose concerning its seniority in relation to other regiments of the army. When the matter came to the attention of King William he referred it to a board of general officers to decide. They, being colonels of their own regiments, Captain Robert Parker considered, they had a vested interest in the case, and decided against the incomers.[7] The Board told the King that "although that regiment had been raised in the time of King Charles, it had been on the Irish establishment, and that all regiments raised in Scotland and Ireland 'have no rank until they enter into England'. The King himself thought the General Officers had acted with Partiality but as he had referred the matter to them, so he confirmed it.'[8]

At the taking of Namur in 1695, King William's only success that year, the 18th Foot, gained the first battle honour awarded to a British regiment, and the title of the Royal Irish Regiment. At Malplaquet, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Richard Kane, the 18th Royal Irish was well up to establishment. It had two majors, nine captains (including the adjutant, Captain Parker), eleven lieutenants, and twelve ensigns; giving all the line companies a captain, lieutenant and ensign. The grenadier company which in action was divided into two wings could have at least two extra subalterns. There was also a quartermaster, surgeon and chaplain. All of the officers of captain and above and three lieutenants had fought at Blenheim five years before and in the intervening battles of the war of Spanish succession. The Royal Irish had distinguished itself at the siege of Namur in 1695. Of the four storming battalions, the 18th alone planted their colours at the head of the breach on the fortress ramparts. It should be noted that Namur had been partially fortified by Marshal Vauban, the acknowledged siege master of the 17th Century.

> The Lord Cutts with the grenadiers were beat off before they got halfway up the Breach as was also two of the Battalions but our Regiment and the others that were within the walls of Salfine-Abbey, having a greater distance could not come up to the breach until they were beat off, however we mounted the very Top of it; but by reason of a strong retrenchment which the Enemy had thrown up on the Inside, we could proceed no further; so we were obliged to retire, and made the best of our way back.[9]

The losses to the 18th, which Kane recorded, were substantial. Those killed were the lieutenant-colonel, four captains and seven subalterns. The wounded, the colonel, three captains and ten subalterns with 271 other ranks killed or wounded. Among the wounded was the regimental historian Robert Parker, who that day he was the ensign chosen to carry one of the Colours, being thus a marked man for enemy fire. He was lucky to have survived. The casualties were quite severe being about fifty per cent of the regiment's effective battle strength.

The storming of the breach at Namur by the 18th, showed the French garrison commander, Marshal Boufflers and the relieving force commander Marshal Villeroi, that the place was untenable. As a result Villeroi burned his camp and retired. Next day Boufflers beat the 'chamade' (parley) and asked for and was granted honourable terms of surrender, by the commander on the spot, the Elector of Bavaria. Bouffelers led the French garrison of mounted horse, foot, six cannons and about the same number of wagons down the breach to evacuate the place (thereby showing the breach was 'practical'). But King William had a sting in store for Marshal Boufflers, which may illustrate a certain Machiavellian element to his character.

Earlier in the year Dixmude and Deynse had surrender having been given terms which should have allowed them to march out with the honours of war. Instead, the garrisons were imprisoned on orders of King Louis. At Namur, William now declared that he, the commander in chief, had

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7 Parker, p. 219.
8 Kane, pp. 16-17.
9 Ibid., p. 23.

not been a party to the terms of Bouffler's surrender, which had been negotiated by the Elector of Bavaria. Accordingly, on William's orders, Boufflers himself was detained until those garrisons had been released. When they were returned to duty, the commanders of each place were tried by general court-martial, found guilty of inadequate defence of both places, and cashiered.10

Shortly after the capture of Namur, King William honoured the 18th.

> The King beheld this action from rising ground at the Back of Salfine-Abbey from whence he took particular notice of our Regiment when he saw us alone mount the top of the breach and plant our Colours thereon, for which his Majesty the winter following to honour the Regiment with the Title Royal of Ireland and gave Commissions accordingly.11

The conferring of the title 'Royal' did something to alleviate the resentment felt by the regiment at their loss of seniority of six higher number than that which they had expected. Perhaps this is what King William intended when he made the award. But the wound was not altogether healed. At the end of the War of Spanish Succession in 1713, the Royal Irish, with the support of the Duke of Ormonde, who had replaced Marlborough as commander, appeal again for the restoration of their proper seniority. Another board was set up, this time in London, and they decided in a report to Queen Anne, that were they to allow the claim of the Royal Irish, the precedent set would therefore allow the Scots Guards to appeal for seniority over her English Guards. That settled the matter. The Queen decided that the seniority of the Royal Irish would be as had been determined by King William.12

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Note. Marlborough had great consideration for his men, even in the middle of a battle or siege, and for this reason his soldier nickname was 'Corporal John'. An illustration of this care is given by Richard Kane. During the siege of Bouchain in 1711 (where Parker commanded the grenadier company) the 18th had been brought forward to assault a strong detached work at Wavershein (Wavrechin) containing the main French army. When they arrived and beheld the strength of the defences, the 18th felt very exposed. It seemed to Kane the French were holding their fire and praying the British would attack, he wished fervently the Duke was present. Just then Marlborough did arrive, and exposed himself to observe the enemy positions before riding away. Shortly afterwards orders arrived for the 18th to withdraw. Kane p. 99.

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10 Kane and Parker. Both had no sympathy for the cashiered officers.
11 Kane p23.
12 Parker p220.

1473 PRIVATE JAMES NOTT 1ST BATTALION, GORDON HIGHLANDERS

Steve Childers

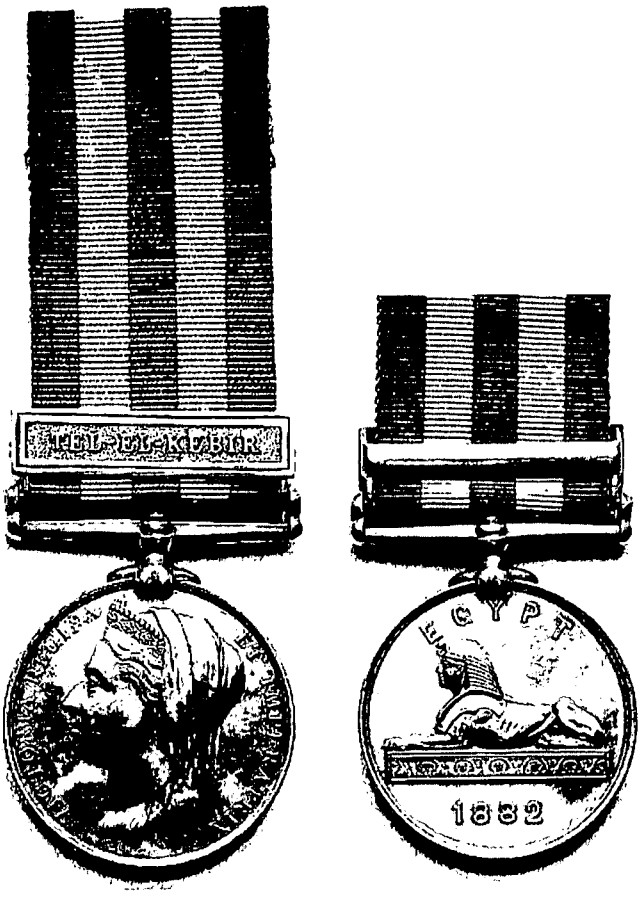
James Nott was born circa 1861-62, the son of William, a pensioned soldier and Sarah Nott, a needlewoman. The family lived in Sherborne, Dorset and although James's father, aged 41, died in mid to late 1861, the family remained in the area where Sarah was to eventually remarry in 1864. James had one brother, one sister and two step-brothers and together they are listed on the 1871 census as living at 33 Clatcombe Farm, Sherborne, with James listed as a scholar, aged 9.

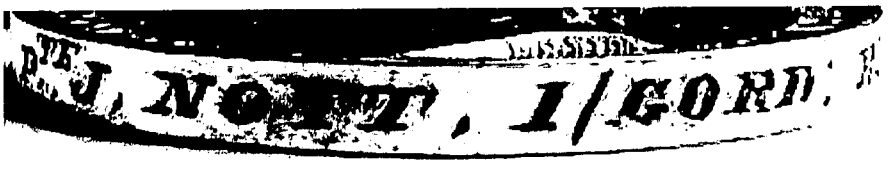
On 3 April 1879, aged about 18 years, James enlisted into the 39th Brigade at Dorchester, being paid 6½d rail fare and sent on 10 February 1880, for service with the 75th Foot, soon to be 1st Battalion. Gordon Highlander's. He joined the 75th at Aldershot on 12 February; however he didn't get off to a good start being placed in confinement from 20 June until 22 August. Nott remained with the 75th moving from Aldershot to Chatham on 30 October, where the regiment only stayed for a short time before moving to Malta, arriving there on 19 March 1881.

Following the outbreak of hostilities in Egypt the regiment sailed for Alexandria, arriving on 7 August 1882. For some unknown reason Nott didn't join the Gordon's out in Egypt until 8 September (it may be that he was part of the rear party or that he was sick when the regiment had initially embarked), in any case he did arrive just in time to take part in the march to Kassassin, the starting point for the advance on Tel-El-Kebir. The 1st Gordon Highlanders formed the right centre of the Highland Brigade in its famous bayonet charge against the Egyptian entrenchments at Tel-El-Kebir on 13 September 1882. Due to the open desert on the approach to Tel-El-Kebir the march into position by Wosleley's forces had to be made at night.

The following narrative by William Melven, MA gives an excellent description of the part played by the Highland Brigade at Tel-El-Kebir:

> The Highland Brigade moved parallel to the railway and fresh water canal, and at a distance from them of about 2000 yards, and was guided in its westward march by Lieutenant Wyatt Rawson, RN., who rode opposite the centre of the brigade, and kept his course by the stars. Only one brief incident marked the march, when, on a short halt being called, the right and left wings advanced after the centre stopped, and, swinging round, "absolutely faced each other at a distance of some fifty yards." Had either mistaken the other for a body of Egyptians, the result might have been serious; but the error was at once discovered and rectified. About a quarter before five on the morning of the 13th, just as signs of daybreak began to appear, a few scattered shots, the sound of a bugle in front, and a dark line looming above the sand hills, showed that the time had come. The order was at once given, "Fix bayonets!" and just as this was done the whole line of entrenchment in front was lit up by a blaze of rifle-fire. The order was to attack with the bayonet without firing, and "at the magic word 'Charge!' the whole brigade sprang to its feet and rushed straight at the blazing line." The distance to be traversed was only some 150 yards, but in that short space nearly 200 men fell. The point attacked by the Highlanders was almost in the centre of the enemy's line, and, occupying the highest ground, was, with the bastions on either side, the key to the whole position. Bearing the entire brunt of the earlier portion of the assault—for it attacked just before daybreak, while the right-hand portion of the attacking force was still over 1200 yards distant—and exposed to a heavy fire from almost overwhelming masses of Arabi's troops, the brigade suffered a momentary check; but General Hamley met this by pushing forward some small bodies he had kept in reserve at the ditch, and on the arrival of the 60th and 46th regiments—which formed the reserve behind the Highland Brigade—he advanced with the whole body against the lines of entrenchment already mentioned as leading back towards Arabi's camp. "Up the bank," says one of the Black Watch, "we went, and it was full of men, and they turned on us like rats in a trap; but the infantry did not stand long. However, honour to whom honour is due— the artillerymen stood to their guns like men, and we had to bayonet them.





The Egypt Medal 1882-1889 with clasp Te-el-Kebitr awarded to Private John Nott 1st Battalion Gordon Highlanders

> As soon as that job was done; I saw two regiments of cavalry forming up on the right. 'Prepare for cavalry' was given, and in less time than it takes to write this we formed in a square, and were waiting for them; but when they saw this they wheeled to the right-about and off; they would not face a square of Scottish steel." The fighting was indeed over, and all that remained for the Highlanders to do was to occupy Arabi's camp and capture the railway station. They "had done their work; they had secured a number of trains, the engines only escaping; had captured the immense commissariat stores and thousands of camels; and by seven o'clock had sat down comfortably to breakfast on the scene of the victory." The assault began at five minutes to five, the station was captured at half-past six, and at seven the whole brigade was again in order. "Thus," says General Hamley, "in that interval of time, the Highland Brigade had broken, under a tremendous fire, into the middle of the enemy's entrenchments; had maintained itself there in an arduous and dubious conflict for twenty minutes; had then captured two miles of works and batteries, piercing the enemy's centre, and loosening their whole system of defence; and had finished by taking the camp and the railway trains, and again assembling ready for any further enterprise. No doubt these troops were somewhat elated—perhaps even fancied that they had done something worthy of particular note and remembrance. And, in fact, the Scottish people may be satisfied with the bearing of those who represented them in the land of the Pharaohs.
>
> The total loss of the second division was 258 killed and wounded—a large number as compared with the casualties among the other troops engaged. The loss of the Gordon's at Tel-el-Kebir was one officer and four non-commissioned officers and men killed, and one officer and 29 non-commissioned officers and men wounded. On 14 September the battalion marched to and occupied the important railway junction at Zagazig, proceeding by train the following day to Benha, and on the 17th to Tantah where it received the surrender of the Salahiek Garrison, consisting of 3000 infantry, one regiment of cavalry, and 24 guns. At Tantah, a halt was made for several days, there being among both officers and men a considerable amount of sickness brought on by the hardships endured, and the unhealthy climate. On 28 September, the regiment proceeded to Cairo, and, after taking part in the great review held by H.H. the Khedive on the 30th, went into quarters at the Citadel, where it remained as part of the Army of Occupation until February 1884.

It was around this time that Nott is listed on the musters as being sent to England (20 September 1882), which may have been a result of the sickness mentioned above. Even though Nott is listed as sent to England, it is at this point that he disappears from the musters altogether, never arriving at Depot or appearing on their muster. Nott had in fact returned to the UK where he was suffering from phthisis pulmonalis (tuberculosis of the lungs). At 03:30 am on 7 January 1883, following 2 months and 15 days of illness Nott died of phthisis pulmonalis at Aberdeen Military Hospital. He was 21 years old.

Sources:-

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Musters (WO/16/2236, 1959, 1960, 1961)
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THE PRO-BOER BUSHMAN'S BIBLE

Max Chamberlain*

It has been said that the Sydney *Bulletin* reflected a spirit of nationalism tinged with republican ideas emanating from the bush, and moulded opinion more than the daily papers. When the Boer War broke out, its cartoons attacked participation as supporting the powerful capitalists of the Rand. It referred to 'Cohentingents' as though the Rand-lords were all Jewish, which was not true. It described the pro-Imperial dailies as jingoistic and pro-Gore.

The lack of enthusiasm for the war in Sydney was attributed to New South Wales having derived no glory from the earlier intrusion into the Soudan campaign in 1885 (4 Nov 1899), but within a fortnight crowds lined the streets of Sydney for hours in the pouring rain to farewell the troops.

'As the men are paid 4s 6d per day they are not volunteers but mercenaries.' (23 Dec 1899) With an average wage of 2s 6.5d per week, perhaps unskilled workers may have found the military pay attractive, but when later the Imperial draft contingents were paid ls 2d per day recruiting was even more enthusiastic.

'We are sending them as carpet-baggers. They are merely the latest style of Australian commercial travellers.' (4 Nov 1899) Loyalty to the Empire meant fat orders for Australian produce which would lay the foundation of a permanent market, the *Bulletin* said, but no large economic benefit resulted from participation.

The *Bulletin* continued such criticism right up to the end of the war. Ironically, the encouragement given by the pro-Boers was considered to have been responsible for the prolongation of the war. Even the tragic death of its own contributor, 'Breaker' Morant, evoked no regret in its pages, a 1902 article referring to the Bushveldt 'Buccaneers'.

Despite the prevailing spirit of utopian nationalism with the approach of colonial federation in the 1890s, the presumed influence of the *Bulletin* was not demonstrated in this war, as the bushmen volunteered in their thousands. Support for a stronger imperial federation perhaps reflected Australian concerns for the effects on national security of a militaristic Japan.

A century later, however, much of the writing about this war seems to express biases derived from the conveniently accessible, simplistic *Bulletin* captions and paragraphs, which, although suited to our cynical times, were not the true reflection of majority opinion in Australia during the South African War.

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* Max Chamberlain. *Australian tales of the Boer War*; papers presented to the Anglo-Boer War Study Group of Australia since 1997.

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MIDSHIPMAN ARMITAGE AND THE LOSS OF THE BALLARAT

Greg Swinden

It is well known that during World War 1, over three hundred thousand Australian troops were transported by merchant ships to the Middle East and Europe. Less well known is the fact that the same merchant ships also transported hundreds of RAN personnel. Throughout the period 1914–1919 there was a steady stream of RAN officers and ratings traversing the oceans of the world, as passengers in merchant ships, on their way to join ships in the North Sea, Mediterranean, the Pacific and South East Asia. Many also returned to Australia, via merchant ship, to take up new postings or for discharge as medically unfit. A few of these men died en route, from illness or injury, but none from enemy action. One man, Midshipman George William Armitage, however had the dubious honour of being onboard the troopship HMAT *Ballarat* when she was sunk by a German U-Boat, in the English Channel, on 25 April 1917.

Armitage was born at Houghton, South Australia, in July 1899 and joined the navy as a member of the first entry of cadet midshipmen to the RAN College in 1913. After graduation from the College in 1916, Armitage and his 22 fellow class mates, were promoted to midshipman. They were then attached to HMAS *Cerberus* (the old monitor based at Williamstown Naval Depot) to await a merchant ship that would take them to England to join ships of the British Grand Fleet. Armitage was one of six midshipmen allocated to the battleship HMS *Canada* based at Scapa Flow. Amongst this draft to *Canada* was Midshipman John Collins (later Vice Admiral Sir John Collins) who became the first RAN College graduate to become the Chief of Naval Staff.

On 17 January 1917, the newly promoted Australian midshipmen joined the troopship A5 (RMS *Omrah*) for passage to England[1]. Armitage, however, was not amongst them. As a result of illness he was left behind and was not fit to travel until mid February. On 19 February, he joined the troopship A70 (HMAT *Ballarat*) at Port Melbourne and departed Australia for the war. During his time in *Ballarat* he was officially posted to HMA London Depot which was the standard procedure for all RAN personnel traveling in troopships from Australia to England (and vice versa) during World War 1.

Ballarat was a P&O passenger liner built in 1911 whose master on this voyage was Commander G W Cockman, DSC, RNR (as was typical of the times many Merchant Navy officers held commissions in the RN or RAN Reserve). The ship was on her 13th troop carrying voyage of the war and had onboard over 1550 Australian personnel including AIF re-enforcements (mainly infantry but also men for machine gun companies, light railway units and medical units). There were also chaplains, female nurses, civilian munitions workers and a single RAN midshipman. She also carried a mixed cargo of copper, gold bullion, bags of wheat and general stores. The crew of *Ballarat* consisted of about 220 personnel being the ships officers, seaman, stokers, cooks and stewards, wireless operators, sickbay staff and a gun crew. The bulk of the crew were merchant mariners but generally the wireless operators, signalers and gun crew were RN or RAN Reserve personnel.

After leaving Melbourne she crossed the Bight to Albany where she arrived on 24 February. After a brief stay she proceeded to Fremantle where she arrived three days later. Shore leave was allowed and some superstitious stokers deserted the ship believing her 13th voyage was unlucky.

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1 The Royal Mail Steamer *Omrah* arrived in England in early April 1917. *Omrah* continued as a troopship until sunk by a U-Boat on 12 May 1918 off Cape Spartivento, Sardinia.

After leaving Fremantle in early March, the *Ballarat* crossed the Indian Ocean and arrived at Capetown, South Africa; it was here that the troopship re-coaled. The quality of the coal taken onboard at Cape Town was to prove to be inferior and hamper the ships passage northwards.

On 23 March 1917, *Ballarat* sailed from Cape Town leaving behind the usual assortment of sick troops in hospital and 'overstayers' of leave. The troopship headed north along the African coast and reached Sierra Leone on 6 April. She then linked up with a convoy of other ships on 10 April for the final passage to England, but she soon began to fall behind due to the poor quality of coal taken onboard at Cape Town and could only manage nine knots (compared to her normal speed of 14 knots). The ship's master requested approval to divert to St Vincent (southern Portugal) for coaling but this was refused and the rest of the convoy slowed down to match *Ballarat's* slower pace.

While the AIF troops onboard undertook a variety of communal duties and training to keep them occupied the young Midshipman Armitage was most likely kept employed by the ship's officers on bridge watches and seamanship training, which was standard practice for junior naval officer embarked in troopships. As an officer he was also kept apart from the main body of troops and avoided their overcrowded living conditions and poor food.

By early on the morning of 25 April 1917, the convoy had reached the English Channel and the convoy was ordered to disperse with *Ballarat* directed to head into the port of Plymouth; escorted by the destroyer HMS *Phoenix*[2]. As it was Anzac Day, the embarked AIF men were allowed a day of relaxation and began to prepare for disembarkation that evening. At about 1400, however, the quiet of the day was shattered when a single torpedo struck the ship right aft; destroying the starboard propeller and flooding the engine room as well as putting the ships 6 inch gun out of action. The main steam pipe was fractured and the ship eventually slowed to a halt.

Ballarat had been sighted by the German submarine UB 32 about 40 kilometres south west of Wolf Rock. The commander of the U-Boat ordered a single torpedo fired at the midships section of the troopship, but the torpedo had been sighted by the ships lookouts and Cockman ordered the vessel to turn away from the torpedo track. The turn almost allowed the torpedo to pass down the ships starboard side, but luck was with the Germans that day and the troopship was hit in the stern. The troopship began to settle slowly and this allowed ample time for the crew and embarked troops to conduct an orderly transfer to the destroyer *Phoenix* or to leave the ship in the lifeboats. Other ships, including the destroyers HMS *Hardy* and HMS *Lookout*, were dispatched to assist with the pick up the troops and the ship's crew. Not a single life was lost in this operation and all personnel were disembarked that evening at Devonport and spent the night in the Naval Barracks. The next day, the men were dispersed to their training bases and Armitage began his journey north to Scapa Flow by train.

Meanwhile, back in the English Channel, the Royal Navy drifter *Midge* took the deserted *Ballarat* in tow and began the attempt to get the vessel to port. The next day, however, the ship continued to fill with water and she eventually sank in 44 fathoms of water 13 kilometres off the Lizard in Cornwall. Commander Cockman was congratulated by the Admiralty for his actions in attempting to avoid the loss of his ship and also for getting the entire crew and embarked troops off without a single casualty. King George V also complimented the embarked troops for their actions in the orderly evacuation of the ship.

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2 HMS *Phoenix* - An Acheron class torpedo boat destroyer commissioned in 1911 and sunk on 14 May 1918 by U-27.

Armitage joined HMS *Canada* in early May 1917 and served in her until October 1918. Although *Canada* was a veteran of the Battle of Jutland in May 1916 her career in 1917-18 was notably quiet; either spent at anchor in Scapa Flow or the arduous patrolling of the North Sea, in all types of weather, in search of the elusive German Fleet which, after Jutland, remained mainly in port. In late 1918, he was transferred to the Australian destroyer, HMAS *Torrens*, where he obtained his Bridge Watch Keeping Certificate. He then pursued an unremarkable career in the RAN, as a Seaman Officer, serving in a variety of ships including the destroyers *Huon*, *Stalwart* and *Success* and the cruisers *Melbourne* and *Sydney*. He was promoted to sub-lieutenant in 1918, lieutenant in 1920 and lieutenant commander in 1928. While temporarily attached to the seaplane tender HMAS *Albatross* in 1929/30 he was court-martialled for being absent without leave and was severely reprimanded and also lost a years seniority. In July 1930, there was a general reduction in RAN personnel numbers as a result of the Depression 3 and, he was placed on half pay for a year. In July 1932 he was effectively discharged from the Navy by being transferred to the Emergency List of Officers.

George Armitage secured a job in the Taxation Department as a clerk, in April 1932, and returned to his native South Australia. He returned to naval service in July 1941 and served in the shore bases *Torrens* (South Australia), *Cerberus* (Victoria), *Lonsdale* (Victoria), *Brisbane* (Queensland) and *Moreton* (Queensland). During the period September 1942 to January 1943 he was briefly in command of the converted ferry HMAS *Koopa* (employed as a depot ship for Fairmile motor launches in Moreton Bay). On 8 April 1943, he was discharged as permanently unfit for naval service and resumed his job with the Taxation Department.

Overall George Armitage had a long but unremarkable career in the RAN spanning two world wars and the peace that intervened. Despite his lengthy career perhaps his most exciting memory was that day in April 1917 when a torpedo slammed into the stern of the *Ballarat* and eventually sent her to her final resting place at the bottom of the English Channel.

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3 During the period 1929–1933 a large number of naval personnel were discharged and recruiting virtually stopped in order to reduce overall Defence costs during the Depression. Personnel were offered the opportunity to be discharged, but when not enough men came forward men were involuntarily selected for discharge. In some cases this was done by ballot but in most cases this was done by divisional officers who selected the less capable men or those who had earned themselves a reputation as 'trouble makers'. Officers selected for 'reduction' were generally the less capable or those who had blotted their 'copy book' in some way.

HMAS *PATRICIA CAM*: AUXILIARY MINESWEEPER 'LOST IN ACTION'

Les Hetherington

Under the trees in the reserve around the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne, in a section allotted to the Royal Australian Navy, are a number of bronze plaques which commemorate the ships and men of that service. Among them, under the Navy's insignia, are two which refer to an unusual group of vessels caught up in the conflict around Australia during the Second World War: the auxiliary minesweepers. One plaque acknowledges 'H.M.A.S. *Goorangai* and minesweepers', and the other 'H.M.A.S. *Patricia Cam* lost in action January 22nd, 1943'.1 The plaques are reminders of the service these small vessels – 35 in all – and their crews rendered to Australia at a time of national crisis. For the crew of the *Goorangai*, and for several of the crew and passengers of the *Patricia Cam*, this service required of them the ultimate sacrifice.

The *Goorangai* and *Patricia Cam* were among eight fishing trawlers operated out of Pyrmont in Sydney by Cam and Sons that were requisitioned and converted for military purposes by the Navy during the war. Among the others, following a pattern of naming the small vessels after family members, were the *Mary Cam*, *Alfie Cam*, *Olive Cam* and *Keith Cam*. Cam and Sons had its origins in the settlement of Italian migrants in New South Wales in the 1880s. With them were Rocco and Caterina Caminiti, whose surname was only later shortened to Cam. At different times a sailor, farmer, fishmonger and greengrocer, Rocco Caminiti left his sons with a maritime heritage, and they became fishmongers in Sydney. Rocco's son, Carlo – known as Charlie – Cam, developed the business in the 1920s and 1930s, so that by 1939 it was a large concern operating a fleet of sea-going trawlers. The *Patricia Cam*, built locally at Brisbane Water in 1940, was named after the daughter of Rocco Cam junior, Charlie's son. Rocco was a director in Cam and Sons and later established his own successful business, R E Cam and Sons2.

The auxiliary minesweepers were armed with Oerlikon anti-aircraft guns and Vickers and Browning machine guns. They were then stationed in groups around Australia, at Adelaide, Brisbane, Darwin, Fremantle, Hobart, Melbourne, Newcastle and Sydney3. By the time the 300-ton *Patricia Cam* was requisitioned, in March 1942, the *Goorangai* had already been sunk when struck accidentally in Port Phillip Bay by the troopship MV *Duntroon* on the night of 20 November 1940. The *Goorangai* had been doing duty off the Victorian coast, clearing mines laid by a German raider that had sunk two ships. All 24 hands were lost.4

The *Patricia Cam*, after re-fitting, sailed to Darwin, arriving there on 5 April 1942 via Brisbane, Townsville and Thursday Island. While stationed at Darwin the vessel was used to re-supply isolated coastal posts. On 22 January 1943, under the command of Royal Australian Naval Reserve officer Lieutenant Alexander Cecil Meldrum, it was headed for Wessel Island, near the

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1 See 'War Memorial in Australia. Shrine of Remembrance Unit Plaques – Navy', at http://www.skp.com.au/memorials/pages/30334.htm, and http://www.shrine.org.au/files/documents/background-information.pdf.

2 Information provided by the Cam family and New Italy Memorial Committee, New Italy Memorial Souvenir Brochure, 8 April 1961.

3 *The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History*, Melbourne, 1995, page 82. See also http://users.chariot.net.au/~lenshome/minesweepers.htm

4 See http://home.vicnet.net.au/~maav/goorangai.htm and http://www.ahoy.tk-jk.net/macslog/HMASGoorangai.html

Gulf of Carpentaria, with a crew of 18 and several passengers, among them Methodist missionary the Reverend Leonard Kentish.

The crew were an 'all-Australian' mixed group, having been brought together from New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia. Forty-one year old Lietuentant Meldrum was from New South Wales, his second in command, Lieutenant John Leggoe, thirty-three, from Western Australia[5]. Both had joined the navy after the war began, Meldrum in July 1941 and Leggoe in August 1942. Though several years younger than either, Petty Officer Hulbert Challender, a Tasmanian, had more naval experience, having enlisted in 1934. Lieutenant Meldrum had been with the *Patricia Cam* since October 1942 but Lieutenant Leggoe joined the ship only on 14 January 1943.

In early 1943, although allied victories at sea the previous year and on land in Papua in January saw an end to Japanese advances towards Australia, there continued to be a risk of enemy attack on this country, particularly in the north, and particularly from the air. Tragically, the *Patricia Cam* was caught by one of these attacks, and, on 29 January 1943 the *Sydney Morning Herald* recorded the sinking by 'enemy sky raiders' of 'a small Allied merchant ship' off Wessel Island at the north-eastern tip of Arnhem Land. This was later revised to 'a small Allied ship'. It was, in fact, the *Patricia Cam*.

At approximately 1:30 pm on 22 January, a Japanese Naval Air Arm floatplane from the 734th Kokatai had attacked out of the sun, dropping a bomb as it passed low over the vessel. It was possibly an AICHI E16A-1 'PAUL' naval reconnaissance-dive bomber, as it was land-based at Dobo, in the Aru Islands[6], rather than sea-borne, and had a rear gunner (other floatplanes of which photographs are held at the Australian War Memorial are either carrier borne or single seater). The *Patricia Cam*'s crew was taken by surprise and there is no indication they had time to return fire using the guns with which the ship was fitted. The bomb hit the *Patricia Cam* amidships and it sank very quickly. One crewman was killed and the rest of the passengers and crew took to the water. The Japanese plane returned and dropped a second bomb, killing another crewman and two of the passengers. It then repeatedly strafed the survivors without inflicting further casualties. Finally, it landed and took Reverend Kentish prisoner before flying off. Kentish was executed at Dobo on 4 May 1943. The two crew members killed were Ordinary Seaman Neil Gray Penglase and Able Seaman Edward David Nobes, both from South Australia.

Most of the survivors of the attack were able to hold on to one of the *Patricia Cam*'s life rafts, which had remained intact, but two crewmen had only a hatch cover to help them stay afloat. The two, Ordinary Seaman Andrew Alexander Johnston and Engine Room Artificer 4th Class William Robson Moffitt, initially recorded later as 'missing presumed dead', drifted away from the others and were lost during the night. Eighteen survivors landed on the isolated, rocky coastline early on 23 January, but another crewman, Stoker 2nd Class Percival James Cameron, and a passenger died that day as a result of injuries. The survivors were quickly located (not before Lieutenant Meldrum had gone for help with local indigenous Wessel Islanders, walking

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5 AWM78, 291/1, Patricia Cam – voyage report for 18 March to 5 April 1942. Details of the crew of the Patricia Cam are taken from the Australian Navy List 1943-1946, Australian War Memorial World War Two nominal roll, Roll of Honour, and AWM124, 4/423 – Casualty Lists HMAS 'Armidale, 'Matafele', 'Patricia Cam' and 'Vampire', and records held at the National Archives of Australia (series A6769 and A6770, Royal Australian Navy, World War Two service records). The Australian War Memorial also holds a photograph of the survivors of the sinking, which provides some information about its circumstances.

6 1000 kilometres NNE of Darwin and south of Irian Jayu.

35 miles through rough scrub to a Coastwatching Station) but were not finally rescued until 29 January, when they were picked up by the motor launch HMAS *Kuru*[7].

The rescued crew were taken back to HMAS *Melville*, the naval shore establishment at Darwin. The officers at least were given only a brief period to recuperate after their ordeal. In early February, Lieutenant Meldrum was posted to HMAS *Penguin* in Sydney. Lieutenant Leggoe was discharged from hospital on 10 February and remained at *Melville*. Lieutenant Meldrum may have been prematurely returned to duty, and received further medical examination later in the year, in July 1943, though he returned to full duty in mid-August. He subsequently served at *Penguin* and at HMAS *Ladava* (Milne Bay) and Madang in New Guinea, but was again in ill-health in April 1945, and was discharged in June 1945. Lieutenant Leggoe served out the war, his final posting being the corvette, HMAS *Bathurst*. Petty Officer Challender completed his naval service in the destroyer HMAS *Bataan*, and was discharged in July 1946.

Despite the loss of two of their trawlers, the Cam family prospered again after the Second World War. In 1961, their operations were described as 'a vast business enterprise in the fishing and allied industries', and R E Cam and Sons was advertised as 'the largest State-wide wholesaler of quick-frozen foods and sole distribution agent for' a range of products. From among the requisitioned vessels the firm re-purchased the *Olive Cam* at least, in 1946, and returned it to work as a fishing trawler. She ran aground in stormy weather and sank south of Eden, on the New South Wales coast, in November 1954. The wreck is now a recognised scuba diving location[8], as is the *Goorangai* site, designated a Historic Shipwreck in 1995. A memorial cairn was also erected in memory of the *Goorangai* and her crew at Queenscliff in 1981. The location of the wreck of the *Patricia Cam* is documented, but is sufficiently isolated for it to be briefly confused in 2002 with the similarly-sized *Sanyo Maru*, a Japanese pearling ship sunk in a gale in the same waters in 19379.

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7 Accounts of the sinking of the Patricia Cam can be found at http://home.st.net.au/~dunn/japsbomb under 'hmaspatriciacam'and 'kentishaffair'; http://www.dcdsca.nt.gov.au/dcdsca/intranet.nsf/NTL; and www.navy.gov.au/spc/history/ships/patriciacam.html .

8 See http://www.michaelmcfadyenscuba.info/articles/olivecam.htm

9 See http://www.abc.net.au/rn/science/ss/stories/s468639.htm

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SECOND AFGHANISTAN GEORGE CROSS

Anthony Staunton

Since the commencement of operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, two Victoria Crosses and four George Crosses have been awarded to British forces. The most recent award being the George Cross to a Royal Marine in July for gallantry in Afghanistan. In December 2006, a posthumous Victoria Cross was awarded to Corporal Brian Budd and a posthumous George Cross was awarded to Corporal Mark Wright. Both awards were for Afghanistan and both Budd and Wright belonged to the Parachute Regiment. The recipient of the Victoria Cross for Iraq, Pte Johnson Beharry and the two George Cross recipients for Iraq, Trooper Christopher Finney, of the Blues and Royals, commended for gallantry in a friendly fire situation and Captain Peter Norton, Royal Logistics Corps, commended in a minefield incident in which he was seriously wounded, all survived to receive their awards from the Queen.

The George Cross to Royal Marine Lance Corporal Matthew Croucher in July 2008 is only the seventh individual award of the George Cross gazetted since the George Cross award to Victorian Policeman Michael Pratt 30 years ago for gallantry in 1976. The 1200 word citation for the award to Lance Corporal Croucher:

P903233G Lance Corporal Matthew Croucher, Royal Marines Reserve[1]

Throughout December 2007 and January 2008, Forward Operating Base Robinson, an International Security Assistance Force/Afghanistan National Army location situated 10 km to the south of Sangin, had been targeted relentlessly by an enemy seeking to inflict death and grievous injury on Coalition Forces. Complex and highly effective improvised explosive devices had been deployed by the Taliban throughout the Forward Operating Base's area of responsibility with deadly success. Movement around the Forward Operating Base location was fraught with danger and exceptionally high risk for troops, whether vehicle borne or operating on foot. Tasked with conducting both overt and covert patrolling to disrupt and interdict enemy forces, 40 Commando Battle Group was determined to regain the initiative.

Lance Corporal Croucher was deployed to Helmand Province, Afghanistan as a reconnaissance operator in 40 Commando Group's Commando Reconnaissance Force, elements of which were operating from Forward Operating Base Robinson.

On 9 February 2008, the Commando Reconnaissance Force was tasked to conduct reconnaissance of a compound in which it was suspected that Taliban fighters manufactured Improvised Explosive Devices. Lance Corporal Croucher's section was deployed on this highly dangerous and challenging operation. In the early hours, utilising night vision devices and under constant threat of attack from Improved Explosive Devices or enemy ambush, the Commando Reconnaissance Force successfully negotiated the complex and varied terrain between the Forward Operating Base and the suspect compound, and established an over-watch position to observe for any sign of activity.

In order to determine conclusively that the compound was an Improvised Explosive Device manufacturing site, the decision was made to send a small four man team, which included Lance Corporal Croucher, forward to conduct a very high risk "close target reconnaissance". This required the team to enter the compound. It was believed to be occupied. The team moved forward with extreme caution and stealth and successfully gained entry into the compound without incident. After 30 minutes on task, and having identified numerous items that could be used by insurgents to manufacture Improvised Explosive Devices, the team commander gave the order for the team to extract back to their pre-arranged rendezvous point with the remainder of Commando Reconnaissance Force.

Lance Corporal Croucher was at the head of the group as they commenced the extraction; behind him, approximately 5 metres away, the Team Commander and another Marine were in the open and fully

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1 *The London Gazette*, Thursday, 24 July 2008, p. 11163-11164

exposed, with the fourth team member a short distance behind them. As the team moved silently through the still darkened compound, Lance Corporal Croucher felt a wire go tight against his legs, just below knee height. This was a tripwire connected to a grenade booby-trap, positioned to kill or maim intruders in the compound. He heard the fly-off lever eject and the grenade, now armed, fell onto the ground immediately beside him.

Instantly realising what had occurred, Lance Corporal Croucher made a crucial and incredibly rapid assessment of the situation. With extraordinary clarity of thought and remarkable composure, he shouted "Grenade", then "Tripwire" in an attempt to warn his comrades to find cover before the grenade exploded. It was clear to him that given the lack of cover in the immediate vicinity, he and the other team members were in extreme danger. Due to low light levels, he was unable to determine the type of grenade and therefore had no way of knowing how long the device's fuse would take to function. With his comrades totally exposed and time running out, Lance Corporal Croucher made the decision not to seek cover or protection for himself, but to attempt to shield the other members of his team from the impending explosion. In an act of great courage, and demonstrating a complete disregard for his own safety, he threw himself on top of the grenade, pinning it between his day sack, containing his essential team stores, and the ground. Quite prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice for his fellow Marines, Lance Corporal Croucher lay on the grenade and braced himself for the explosion. Meanwhile, the Team Commander, upon hearing the initial shouted warning, dived to the ground. The rear man in the team was able to take cover by stepping back around the corner of a building; the other team member was unable to react quickly enough and was still upright, fully exposed within the lethal range of the grenade.

As it detonated, the blast effect of the grenade was absorbed by Lance Corporal Croucher and the majority of the fragmentation was contained under his body. Miraculously, his equipment and protective clothing prevented any lethal shards hitting his body and he suffered only minor injury and disorientation from the effects of the blast. Lance Corporal Croucher's day sack was ripped from his back and was completely destroyed; his body armour and helmet were pitted by grenade fragments. A large battery being carried in the side pouch of his day sack, for his team's Electronic Counter Measures equipment, also exploded and was burning like a flare as a result of the grenade fragments breaching the outer case. Incredibly, the only other injury was a slight fragmentation wound to the Team Commander's face.

The others escaped unscathed. Without question, Lance Corporal Croucher's courageous and utterly selfless action had prevented death or serious injury to at least two members of his team. Immediately following the explosion they manoeuvred tactically back to their rendezvous location. After confirming with the Troop Commander that no significant casualties had been sustained, the decision was made to interdict enemy forces attempting to conduct a follow-up to the incident. As anticipated, enemy activity was observed by Commando Reconnaissance Force and Lance Corporal Croucher, having refused to be evacuated, along with other members of his team, engaged and neutralized one enemy fighter.

Throughout his service in Afghanistan, Lance Corporal Croucher has served with the utmost distinction. His actions on 9 February 2008, when he willingly risked his own life in a most deliberate act of self-sacrifice to save his comrades from death or serious injury, were wholly typical of the man. During a previous engagement at Forward Operating Base Inkerman on 9 November 2007, Lance Corporal Croucher helped save the life of a fallen comrade who had received a serious gunshot wound to the chest during a ferocious fire-fight with the enemy. For twenty minutes, whilst the company medical assistant was pinned down by enemy fire, he applied life-saving first aid which stabilised the wounded man until medical assistance arrived and the casualty could be extracted. Meanwhile, on 16 November 2007, whilst providing intimate security to a night air drop in the desert near Forward Operating Base Inkerman, Lance Corporal Croucher was injured in a road traffic accident. Evacuated to the UK with a suspected broken leg, he was determined to return to theatre and, following intense physiotherapy, he returned within a matter of weeks to resume his duties with Commando Reconnaissance Force.

That he was willing to risk all in order to save the lives of his comrades is indisputable; that he possesses an indomitable fighting spirit is abundantly clear. Lance Corporal Croucher is an exceptional and inspirational individual. His magnificent displays of selflessness and gallantry are truly humbling and are the embodiment of the finest traditions of the Service.

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