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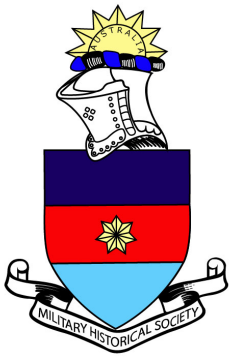

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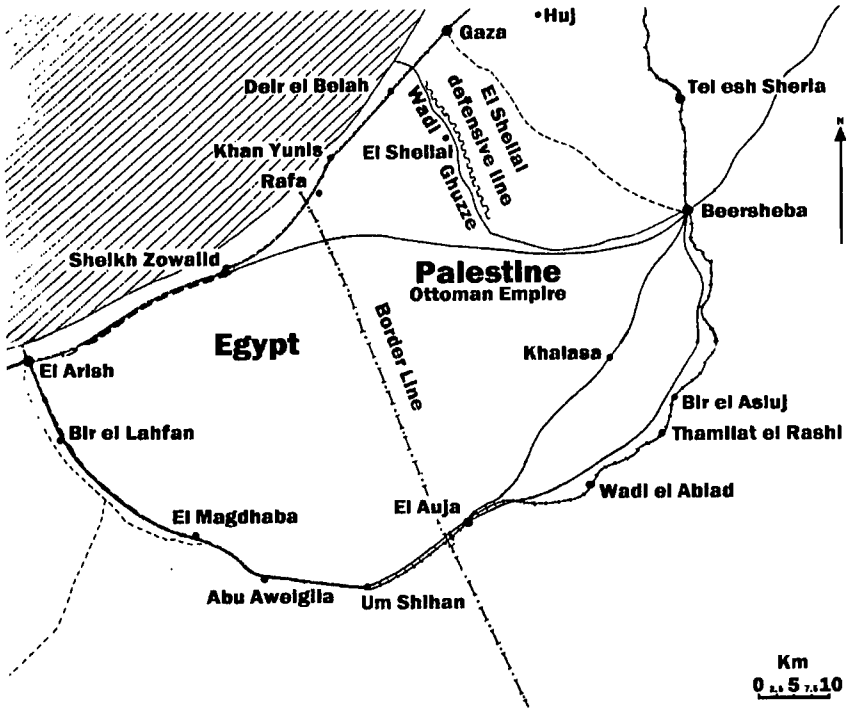
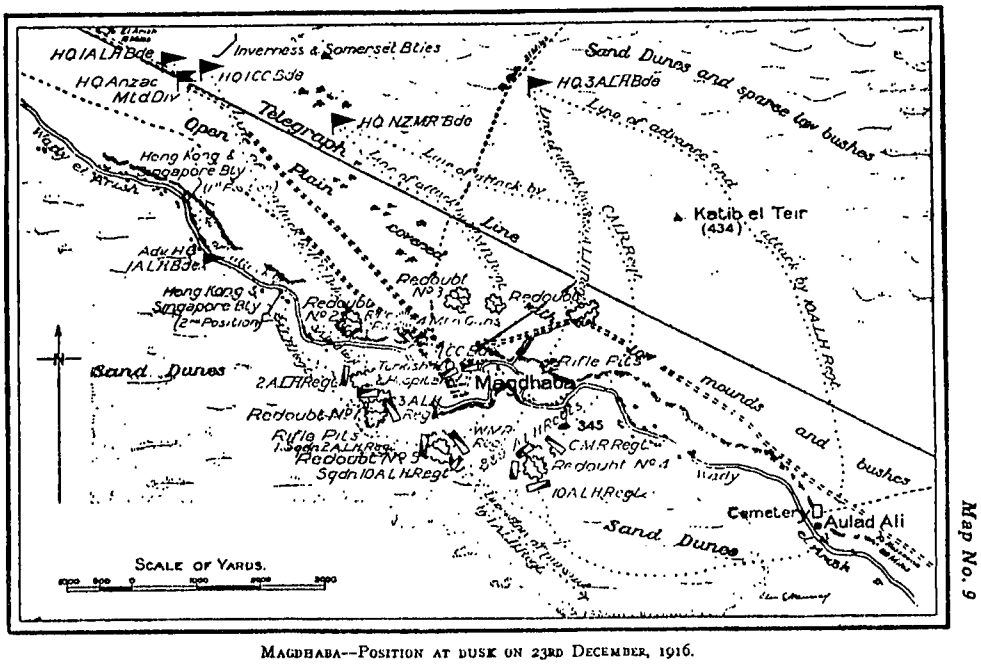


El Arish to Beersheba

(Map produced by Bill Woerlee, 2008)



Map No. 9

MAGDHABA—POSITION AT DUSK ON 23RD DECEMBER, 1916.

(Map extracted from: Gullett, HS, *The Australian Imperial Force in Sinai and Palestine: 1914 - 1918*, 10th edition, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1941, Chapter 14.)

Magdhaba and Kress

By Bill Woerlee1

> Unpleasant and serious concerns for Christmas! If the British at Magdhaba decided to go onto el Auja and Beersheba, there was nothing in their way to stop them. The way to Jerusalem was open to the enemy. I raised the alarm and sent units to Beersheba and el Auja by lorry and marching. I was upset over losing our poor comrades around Christmas but it did not change things. On the early morning of 24 I went back to Beersheba. There I received the reassuring message that the British had ridden back to El Arish during the night of 23 to 24. They were obviously satisfied with a local success.2

With this quick summary, General Friedrich Freiherr Kress von Kressenstein,3 passed his judgement over the Allied victory at Magdhaba on 23 December 1916 led by General Chauvel 4 and men from the Anzac Mounted Division.5 At the heart of this comment was the accusation by Kress that Chauvel failed to vigorously exploit the victory at Magdhaba by capturing Beersheba and then possibly Jerusalem, all of which, according to Kress, were available for seizure with little difficulty. In the mind of Kress, such an action was something a competent German General might have undertaken given similar circumstances. Alternatively, the judgement by Kress might be seen as an effort to deflect attention away from his evident failure to provide Magdhaba with adequate means to resist an attack.

This paper aims to examine the validity of this assessment in light of the information and resources available to Chauvel when the Battle of Magdhaba concluded. Included are all logistical and combat resources at El Arish and Magdhaba, coupled with the signals, intelligence reports, threat assessments, post battle reports, and other information that could shape a decision at 4.30 pm, 23 December 1916.

The story of the battle at Magdhaba had its genesis in events that unfolded some two weeks before as the Egyptian Expeditionary Force contemplated a battle against the Turks at El Arish.6

In the Sinai, Djemal7 Pasha's8 forces were in disarray when the movement of the British railway line reached a point about 20 km west of El Arish. Turkish strategy was to keep a full day's march from the rail head in order to avoid any contact with the overwhelming numbers of Allied

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1 Bill Woerlee is a consultant who lives in Canberra.
2 Kressenstein, Friedrich Freiherr Kress von, Mit den Tèurken zum Suezkanal, (1938), pp 207-8.
3 General Friedrich Freiherr Kress von Kressenstein [24 April 1870 – 16 October 1948] General Officer Commander of the Suez Expeditionary Force which raided the Suez Canal in January 1915 and again in April 1916. He was commonly known as Kress.
4 General Sir Harry Chauvel [16 April 1865 - 4 March 1945], General Officer Commander of the Anzac Mounted Division until 1917 when he was promoted to command the Desert Mounted Corps consisting of the Anzac Mounted Division and Australian Mounted Division.
5 During the attack on Magdhaba, the Anzac Mounted Division left El Arish with the 1st & 3rd LH Bdes, New Zealand Mounted Rifle Brigade and it was accompanied by the Imperial Camel Corps, and three Artillery formations: the Inverness and Leicester Batteries, Royal Horse Artillery; and, The Hong Kong & Singapore Battery, a composite force of about 7,000 men.
6 Implicit in the analysis but no overtly stated are assessments of as the ability for the mounted troops to remain effective as a force after a period of sustained combat for many concurrent days without regular supply. The four occasions taken into consideration includes the breakout of 7 November 1917, the two Es Salt raids of March and April 1918 and the September breakout of 1918. Each example demonstrated that the proposal of Kress examined in the essay was well within the ability of the mounted troops.
7 Ahmed Djemal Pasha (Turkish: Ahmet Cemal Paşa) [6 May 1872 – 21 July 1922] led the Ottoman army against Allied forces in Egypt. His First and Second Suez Canal Offensives failed.
8 Turkish officers' were granted honorifics to describe the different ranks: Effendi - Lieutenant and Captain; Bey - Major and Colonel; and, Pasha - General.

infantry. Since the railway line progressed at an average rate of about 1.5 kilometres per day,9 this gave the Turkish General Staff a good timetable for the Allied rate of advance towards El Arish. The Turkish forces facing the Allied advance numbered some 7,000 combat troops, a force about one third of those available to the Allies. The numerical inferiority meant that they could only play a passive delaying and harassing role rather than an active counter attacking function. While they counted off the Allied railway kilometres, the Turks understood that their occupation of El Arish was only tentative to the extent that the timetable for eviction was dependent upon the work rate performed by the Egyptian Labour Corps which was tied to the slow supply of rail lines. Finally, the day arrived when the railway and all its incumbent potential threats forced a decision upon the El Arish garrison.

By about 15 December 1916, spirited debate erupted between the Ottoman General Staff in Constantinople and the field Generals regarding the best strategy to pursue at El Arish. By necessity it was a slow debate via a telegraph line as no telephone lines existed. All telegrams needed to be encoded, then transmitted by Morse Code, then decoded. If a mistake was made in the coding it created havoc and delayed the conversation even further.

Under these great communications difficulties, the Generals attempted to deal with the crisis facing them. Three options lay before the Generals: to launch a pre-emptive attack on the Allied forces as they had done at Romani in April; to hold on with an energetic defence and retreat as occurred at Bir el Abd and Bir el Mazar; or, to withdraw without offering battle.10 The Turkish compromise decision of 16 December was to retreat without offering battle and thus preserve their forces while simultaneously leaving a strong rear guard to form a garrison at Magdhaba, some 32 km south east of el Arish. The final role of the Magdhaba garrison was to be determined at some later time.

The key function allotted to Magdhaba by the Ottoman forces was to serve as an intermediate freight point between El Auja and El Arish. To furnish protection and a labour force, it was garrisoned by about 300 troops from the 80th IR (Infantry Regiment). Freight movement was facilitated a 600mm gauge light railway or tramway line, commonly known as a decauville line. The rail link extended from the rail terminus at El Auja, Palestine, through to Magdhaba. While not possessing any Decauville locomotives, it was serviced by some 380 horse and camel drawn freight trolleys. 11

After the decision to withdraw from El Arish transpired, Turkish engineering troops began removing the line. Since the track was constructed with ready-made sections of light, narrow gauge track fastened to steel sleepers, the track was portable and easily disassembled for transport. By 23 December, the line had been removed from Magdhaba to Abu Aweigila leaving the garrison in an isolated position although the small supply depot at Um Shihan remained.

On 17 December, the order was given to withdraw the El Arish garrison of about 7,00012 men and reform this force along the massive earthen fortifications completed beside the Wadi Ghuzze and pivoted upon the headquarters at El Shellal. A force of about a thousand Syrians would remain at Magdhaba while the balance of some 6,000 men would make the full round journey. The intent was to bolster the defences of Magdhaba from this Syrian force who were

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9 Letter from Desert Column Headquarters, C/144/52 to OC Military Railways, dated 27 November 1916 and signed by Lieut. Col. VM Fergusson, AWM 45 11/15.

10 Turkish General Staff, Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi, IV ncü Cilt, Ankara, 1978, p. 426.

11 Intelligence Summaries, General Headquarters, Egyptian Expeditionary Force, AWM4, 1/9/10 - December 1916.

12 British Intelligence estimates of the numbers around the El Arish area were as at 3 December - El Arish: 1,485 men and 9 guns; Bir el Masaid: 5,430 men, 12 guns & 5 machine guns. Intelligence Summaries, General Headquarters, Egyptian Expeditionary Force, December 1916, AWM4-1-9-10.

predominantly from the 80th IR. The Turks withdrawing from El Arish began their trek through Magdhaba and then onto El Auja and subsequently to their points of concentration, a journey of about 190 km which for the infantry, meant a about a seven-day march. Supply depots were maintained along the marching route to ensure sufficient rations were available, thus enabling the men to march with the lightest possible loads. The marching timetable was staggered to avoid congestion along the route with the last troops scheduled to depart from El Arish on 20 December.[13] The reason for taking the circular route rather than the coastal road lay more with protection of the withdrawing force from any harassment by the British navy which was very effective in delivering devastating cannonades upon targets of opportunity to distances of up to 15 km inland. Kress ordered the revival the old defensive perimeter at Magdhaba which in the past was based upon five redoubts interconnected with trenches.[14] The fortifications had fallen into disuse and the repeated kamseens had filled the trenches with sand. The immediate task was to remove the, an undertaking that remained incomplete when Allied forces arrived six days later.

The force defending Magdhaba was commanded by Kadri Bey, the CO (Commanding Officer) of the 80th IR, a Regiment that was administratively allotted to the 27th ID (Infantry Division) although it was attached to the 3rd ID for the most part of 1916. The primary force consisted of two under-strength battalions of about 600 men each.[15] There were the 2/80th Battalion commanded by Izzet Bey and the 3/80th Battalion commanded by Rushti Bey. Counted in this force was one curious, and in the end fateful, decision to leave at Magdhaba a token force of a platoon[16] from the 80th MGC (Machine Gun Company) who were armed with only one machine gun. The balance of the company consisting of three platoons, each armed with a machine gun, was sent to Shellal.[17] The force was supported by a Mountain Battery of four outdated Krupps 7.5cm Gebirgskanone M 1873 guns on loan from the 1st Mountain Regiment as the full 80th IR artillery battery was, at that moment, stationed at Nekhl. Added to Magdhaba garrison was a camel company without camels and a number of other military service units.[18] The majority of the men at Magdhaba were Syrian conscripts who did not possess the same commitment to the war as the Anatolian Turks and so were viewed by their Ottoman officers as being of lower quality and dubious loyalty.[19] Contrary to this Ottoman belief and to the credit of the men, they bravely withstood the Allied onslaught for over eight hours.

At the time Magdhaba was being garrisoned, the force was given only 40 horses and 51 camels,[20] a number barely sufficient to undertake supply work for the 1,400 men stationed at Magdhaba, indicating that raiding the Allied line was, for the moment, a low priority. More than likely, the task assigned to Magdhaba was to primarily withstand an attack as part of a rear guard

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13 General Staff, Headquarters Anzac Mounted Division, AWM4, 1/60/10 - December 1916.
14 Turkish General Staff, op. cite, p. 429.
15 The organisation of Turkish infantry formations from smallest to largest – squad, platoon, company, battalion, regiment, division, corps and army. There were usually 3 Battalions to an Infantry Regiment although at times 4 Battalions were attached. Infantry Regiments were the equivalent to the Allied Infantry Brigades.
16 A Turkish squad contained between 6-10 men, depending upon the strength of the unit.
17 Turkish General Staff, op. cite, p. 439.
18 Ibid, p. 429.This included elements from the 8th Engineers Battalion, 3rd Company; 27th Medical Company; 43rd Mobile Hospital; and, the 46th Cooking Unit.
19 The nature of the polyglot and multi-ethnic composition of the Ottoman Empire meant that ethnic elements within the Empire had little sense of identification with Ottoman goals. The only group that firmly embraced the Ottoman participation were the Anatolian Turks, the bedrock of the Ottoman Empire. The Syrians were alienated from Ottoman rule, especially after the capricious and despotic behaviour exercised by Djemal Pasha in Damascus during 1915. From that time Syrian loyalty was always suspect.
20 General Staff, Headquarters Anzac Mounted Division, AWM4, 1/60/10 - December 1916.

force. One other role seemed to be assigned to Magdhaba which related to the string of garrisons forming the Turkish left flank Sinai occupation force. The main garrisons included Nekhl and el Kossaima. If the Magdhaba garrison lingered after the completed withdrawal of the Suez Canal Expeditionary force, then its role would become more of a political statement that the Ottoman forces remained in Egypt. Their role would be moot as the isolated garrisons could perform no useful military function. The Generals could not make their minds up on this matter leaving the role of Magdhaba ill defined and confused.

Kress inspected the garrison at Magdhaba on 22 December 1916 and made the following observations:

> I drove from el Auja to Magdhaba, in order to visit the regiment. There were five substantial redoubts constructed with minor communication trenches that surrounded the garrison. Like everywhere, unfortunately it was missing war material necessary to create obstacles. ... I was satisfied with the spirit and health of these troops and the arrangements made. 21

Kress recognised the weakness of the force but gambled upon an even weaker response from any attacking Allied cavalry. The assumption relied upon the distance and lack of water resources between El Arish and Magdhaba making it difficult for any cavalry to sustain itself in the field over a longer period than a day. After that, any attack would be called off. To ensure the lack of water, the Turks destroyed the wells at Bir el Lahfan, about 15 km south east of El Arish along the banks of Wadi El Arish, about halfway between Magdhaba and El Arish. Results from the Turkish demolition were discovered by the men of the 3rd Squadron from the Auckland Mounted Rifles22 early in the morning of 22 December.23

Reinforcing Kress's belief in a weak Allied response was German and Ottoman contempt for the leadership qualities displayed by the officers with the Anzac Mounted Division. The last few months were packed with examples. After the successful 9th LHR (Light Horse Regiment) action at Bir Hamisah on 5 August 1916 leading to its capture, General Antill24 of the 3rd LH Bde (Light Horse Brigade) remained satisfied with a good local victory. Unfortunately, through resting upon the result for whatever reason, Antill failed to develop the result of the victory by cutting off the enemy's line of retreat northwards.25 This tactical failure allowed over two thirds of the Ottoman forces engaged in the battle to escape. Similarly, without proper scouting Chauvel, ordered the Anzac Mounted Division into an attack that almost proved disastrous as the men rode straight into a bog which the Turks had transformed into a well laid out killing zone.26 Good fortune avoided a slaughter. The Allied victory at Romani is still a matter of debate as to whether it was won by the Allies or conceded by Kress when the Ottoman troops retreated. The subsequent victories at Bir el Abd, Bir el Mazar and now El Arish were created by Turkish withdrawals as part of the Kress fighting withdrawal strategy rather than by Allied battlefield ability or victories.

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21 Kress, op. cite, p. 207

22 Nicol, C.G., The Story of Two Campaigns, Official war history of the Auckland Mounted Rifles Regiment, 1914 - 1919 in the Battlefields of Gallipoli, Sinai and Palestine during WWI, Wilson and Horton, 1921, p. 132.

23 General Staff, Headquarters Anzac Mounted Division, AWM4, 1/60/10 - December 1916.

24 General John Macquarie Antill [26 January 1866 - 1 March 1937] General Officer Commanding the 3rd Australian Light Horse Brigade until 8 August 1916.

25 This included a 1,000 man force from the 39th IR, the 603 and 606th MGC's, a mountain battery, and a company of engineers. From this number, about 700 men escaped to Bir el Abd leaving behind 308 prisoners including Germans from the MGC's.

26 Gullett, HS, The Australian Imperial Force in Sinai and Palestine: 1914 - 1918, 10th edition, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1941, p. 171.

Also the actual reason for General Chetwode[27] emphatically ordering the attack on Magdhaba remains part of the historical debate. Chauvel's plan was to move on and attack Turkish concentrations either at Magdhaba or Rafa with the sole object of expelling the last Ottoman troops from Egyptian soil. Chetwode sent Chauvel a letter on 21 December with orders to prepare for an attack on Magdhaba for 23 December.[28] The situation was crystallised with the confirmation of the orders when Chetwode landed by boat at El Arish at 10 a.m. on 22 December.[29]

> The three Brigades Anzac Mounted Division, and Camel Brigade (less one Battalion) were to march that evening as soon as they had drawn supplies and move via Magdhaba on Abu Aweigila and Ruafa with the object of capturing as many enemy remaining there. The force to return as soon its mission was accomplished ... These orders were handed to the Anzac Mounted Division.[30]

Chetwode's orders were clear about the objectives. In addition to the specific locations, the orders were in line with the military doctrine exercised by the mounted troops during the Sinai Campaign. They were to engage the Ottoman forces for a day and then to withdraw regardless of outcome. Chauvel was expressly ordered never to deliberately expose the light horsemen in combat engagements that would potentially incur large numbers of casualties. The men were too valuable as mobile troops and more pragmatically, very difficult to replace.

One apparent factor influencing Chetwode was a piece of information which had just come to hand. The British Intelligence section had decoded a Turkish message, dated 21 or 22 December, ordering the Magdhaba garrison to withdraw to El Auja. [31] This made Magdhaba an easy target as the garrison would be preparing to retreat rather than to fight and so their capture would be a good propaganda coup, an essential part of selling the ubiquity of British power to the local inhabitants. General Dawnay[32] was emphatic on the propaganda value of quickly capturing places like Magdhaba and Rafa. He wrote a memo about the underlying British Sinai strategy in a letter to the CO Desert Column. He says:

> The actual results to be achieved by our operations in Northern Sinai must depend very largely on their moral effect. It will be necessary at all costs to try to give the enemy - and not only the enemy but also the Arab population in Southern Syria near the Egyptian Frontier - an exaggerated impression of our mobility and power to strike. [33]

Supporting the intelligence report detail is the action of Kadri Bey who managed to send most of his baggage train and non essential personnel to El Auja before the Allied forces arrived,[34] an action indicating an impending withdrawal. In contrast, the message decoded by British Intelligence appears dissimilar to Kress's commentary since he makes no mention about withdrawing the garrison subsequent to his visit on 22 December.

The attack on Magdhaba was undertaken the next day, 23 December, after an all-night march by the Allied force. Chauvel employed a classic encirclement of Magdhaba to prevent retreat. Since the encirclement perimeter was too far for a mounted division to effectively envelop, the thinly

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27 General Philip Walhouse Chetwode, 1st Baron Chetwode, 7th Baronet of Oakley [21 September 1869–6 July 1950]. Chetwode was transferred to Egypt in December 1916 commanding the Desert Column in the Egyptian Expeditionary Force

28 Letter from Chetwode to Chauvel, dated 21 December 1916, AWM 45 11/15.

29 General Staff, Headquarters Anzac Mounted Division, AWM4, 1/60/10 - December 1916.

30 Ibid.

31 Sheffy, Y., British Military Intelligence in the Palestine Campaign 1914-1918, London, 1998, p. 207.

32 Brigadier General Guy Payan Dawnay, [b. 23 March 1878, d. 19 January 1952], Central Staff, Egyptian Expeditionary Force.

33 Letter from Central Staff, Eastern Force, O.Y.2/16 to CO Desert Column Headquarters, dated 18 December 1916 and signed by Brig Gen GP Dawnay, AWM 45 11/15.

34 Turkish General Staff, op. cite, p. 429.

held parts of the line proved to be porous, with small groups of Turks slipping through the cordon almost at will, a fact that Chauvel's air scouts reported upon with regularity.

Another weakness of the encirclement tactic was the inability to concentrate forces at any one critical point for a decisive assault. This happened to Chauvel as the numbers committed to the encirclement meant the troops were unable to concentrate sufficiently to make headway in specific attacks for most of the day. The Ottoman forces vigorously beat off any attack that did form. So energetic was the defenders' shooting that most contemporary Australian Regimental war diaries and the subsequent post war unit histories mention the formations receiving fire from many Turkish machine guns. In fact, as already mentioned, the Turks had only one machine gun at Magdhaba. At 2.50 p.m., after a futile day which produced some casualties but achieved nothing by way of gain, Chauvel sent out the following order to his generals:

> As enemy still hold out and horses must be watered the action will be broken off and the Force withdrawn. Each Brigade will be responsible for its own protection during the withdrawal. Hour of withdrawal to begin at 1500.35

So there it was in black and white. The overall attack failed and was to be called off at 3 p.m.. If the withdrawal had occurred at the time ordered by Chauvel, Kress's belief in his plan for the defence of Magdhaba, with all its incumbent assumptions, would have been vindicated.

But battle plays cruel tricks on assumptions. Small actions can sometimes have large consequences swinging a battle either way. In this case, the victory hung entirely upon a simple action. General "Fighting" Charlie Cox36 of the 1st LH Bde anticipated the contents in the message he was about to receive from the oncoming messenger. Instead of receiving the message and reading it, Cox is reputed to have said to the messenger: "Take that damned thing away and let me see it for the first time in half an hour!"37 Just prior to this, he had ordered his men to conduct one final assault upon the key Ottoman No. 1 Redoubt. This was his last throw of the dice. Fail and he would be censured for disobeying an order. Cox's men did not fail him. In company with the Imperial Camel Corps their attack led to a breakthrough and subsequent surrender by the defenders of the redoubt. From there on, the defence perimeter for the Turks began to unravel. In rapid succession, the second redoubt to fall was captured by the 1st LH Bde - 2nd and 3rd LHRs. This brought with it the capture of Kadri Bey and the collapse of any coordinated resistance. The final coup de main was administered by the 3rd LH Bde along with the NZMRB (New Zealand Mounted Rifle Brigade) which brought about the collapse of the entire garrison. Organised resistance ended at about 4.40 p.m.. which resulted in the capture of some 1,280 men.38 The day's desultory battle was quickly turned into a victory for the Allied forces. Cox's covert disobedience of Chauvel's orders brought success through an action that was soon to become part of the Light Horse legend.

It was at this point that Chauvel was on the cusp of the idea outlined by Kress. Even if Chauvel did not appreciate the scale of the victory at Magdhaba, there were still two further objectives as part of the orders, the drive further southwards to Abu Aweigila and Ruafa.39 There is no record

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35 1st Light Horse Brigade War Diary, December 1916, AWM4-10-1-29, p. 20.

36 General Charles Frederick Cox, [2 May 1863 - 20 November 1944], General Officer Commanding the 1st Australian Light Horse Brigade.

37 Gullett, HS, The Australian Imperial Force in Sinai and Palestine: 1914 - 1918, 10th edition, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1941, p. 221.

38 1,280 Ottoman prisoners were taken at Magdhaba which included: Unwounded – 1,210 men; Wounded – 40 men; and, a mixed party of 30 men brought in later. 45 Officers were captured and 97 Ottoman dead were buried by the Allies.

39 This tactical outcome was articulated in a letter from Central Staff, Eastern Force, Marked O.Y.2/16 to CO Desert Column Headquarters, dated 18 December 1916 and signed by Brig Gen GP Dawnay,

of Chauvel seeking to amend his orders to cancel this action and yet he did so with the approval of Chetwode.

Contact with senior levels of command was not a problem had Chauvel sought to capture Abu Aweigila and Ruafa. The signallers had utilised the functional Turkish telegraph line to establish a telephone link between Chetwode in El Arish and Chauvel at Magdhaba which was used to give almost real time status reports of the battle. No contact difficulties existed between Chauvel and Cairo due to the excellent communication lines established indicating that orders could be changed and approved at the highest level. Extraordinarily, nothing of the sort transpired on the day.

Had the orders been amended, the rapid despatch of a Light Horse Brigade with an artillery battery to Abu Aweigila, an hour's ride away, would have sufficient force to encircle and sever its communications with El Auja. Because of night fall, securing surrender might have taken until the following morning to although judging by the timidity displayed by the officer in command during the day, [40] once the arrival of Allied troops occurred making his position unambiguous, there was every chance of a quick surrender that evening. This would have added to the magnitude of the Turkish defeat and given the mounted troops access to another excellent source of water. For the Turkish Command, the lack of action was a reprieve. The failure to follow up by the Allies meant that once the fall of Magdhaba became known, this combat force at Abu Aweigila remained available to the Turks and so was ordered to withdraw to El Auja to bolster its defences, an action undertaken the following day.[41]

By 6pm on 23 December 1916 for Chauvel and his force, the situation was positive in every sense. They had an abundance of water with relatively few casualties.[42] There was sufficient water and captured tibbin[43] to supply the animals. Flushed with a victory, morale was sky high. In every way, the Division was fresh and able to be deployed at a moment's notice. The men also had a further day's supply of iron rations in case of supply shortages.

Re-supply for the division after the action at Magdhaba was always going to be a logistical nightmare. The rapidity of the advance had almost over run the capacity of the Supply Corps to cope with the situation. The main supply base prior to the push to El Arish was established at Kilo 149 along the rail line. It was able to supply the men with the basic needs but little more.[44] The tenuous nature of the supply situation was illustrated when the Prisoners of War from Magdhaba began to arrive at El Arish. To ensure the provisioning of Turkish rations on 24 December the men from the 52nd Lowland Scottish Division were forced to go on half rations for the day. The Scots were upset but put up with the inconvenience with good cheer.

Supplying El Arish by sea was a difficult affair with stores being put ashore in boats and lighters. Until the rail head arrived in January 1917, this operation was overseen by Admiral Wemyss. By 23 December, a large consignment of stores had been delivered on that day. Following that day,

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AWM 45 11/15; and see also General Staff, General Headquarters, Egyptian Expeditionary Force, AWM4, 1/6/9 Part 3 - December 1916.

40 General Staff, Headquarters Anzac Mounted Division, AWM4, 1/60/10 - December 1916.

41 Cutlack, FM, The Australian Flying Corps In The Western And Eastern Theatres Of War 1914-1918, 11th Edition, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1941, p. 49.

42 Allied casualties were: 5 Officers killed and 7 wounded; 17 Other Ranks killed and 117 wounded; and, 27 horses killed.

43 Tibbin: For ease of transport, the Arabs and Turks chop straw into a manageable size and then strap it together with twine. The specific product is called "tibbin". It is a common method of presenting fodder for horses and camels throughout the Levant.

44 Ordnance Work in Connection with the AIF in Egypt, 1919, AWM 224 MSS 507

however, the necessity of rapid re-supply trailed off as the rail line neared El Arish and only 1,500 tons arrived by sea during the following fortnight. 45 Had there been an imperative to land supplies to support a drive to Beersheba, then the supplies would have been available in the quantities that arrived on 23 December rather than in the capricious manner they were delivered once high demand through combat activity diminished while the railway was being built. Lack of urgent demand gave Chetwode the luxury of sending men to the rail head for supply purposes until the railway reached El Arish.

On the evening of 23 December, supplies for any further offensive action were available in quantities sufficient to maintain the division in the field without anything lavish added. At 4.30 p.m., Chauvel had already arranged for a convoy to re-supply the troops remaining for the post battle clean up46 indicating that there was excess supply capacity available at El Arish to allocate to an expedition. If despatched from El Arish at about 6 p.m., the camel convoy would have arrived at Magdhaba at about 3 a.m., in time to deliver supplies essential for a 6 a.m. start. Even if such a convoy did not make it in time, there was sufficient ammunition available for one more battle.47 In addition there was the captured war material in the way of four fully supplied mountain guns, 1,000 rifles and 100,000 rounds of small arms ammunition which went some way to replenishing the supplies.

Initial re-supply as a stop gap measure, could have been accomplished by a camel supply convoy. The despatch of GSW wagons from Kilo 149 would have meant that it would take about three days to travel to El Auja. The despatch of motorised transport, which was obviously much faster, would have assisted the situation. The lack of lorries made it difficult as supply officers were loath to make these precious vehicles available. The movement of lorries to any offensive activity would have required the direct intervention from Murray to ensure they were available.

At El Arish, things moved at a rapid pace. The 52nd Lowland Scottish Division was already in occupation with two other infantry divisions to follow when the occupation was certain. If the attack on Beersheba was to go ahead, it would have been the time to despatch a brigade of infantry. The march to Magdhaba was the standard infantry route march distance for one day.

Travelling conditions from El Arish to Beersheba via Magdhaba and El Auja were excellent. The main road was metalled - being some 4.5m wide with a 3m usable driving surface residing on a 30cm camber with spoon drains dug on each side. 48 The roads were suitable for the standard GS (General Service) wagon used by the ASC (Army Supply Corps). In addition, to cope with camel and horse traffic, the Turks had constructed a separate and parallel earthen road which was softer on the hooves, again with a slight camber and spoon drains on each side. Plentiful water was available over the whole length of the road to Beersheba. In assistance with re-supply was the decauville line from Abu Aweigila to El Auja and the rail link to Beersheba, thus cutting down a five day trek by the ASC on a GSW wagon to about two or three days. The journey meant travelling on 42 km of macadamised road with the balance undertaken by rail. The use of motorised transport, if it were made available, would cut the re-supply situation to one day. On 24 December, there were no motorised trucks at El Arish but if necessity required, they were able to be transferred the following day from Kilo 149.

The first leg, from Magdhaba to El Auja was about 42 km over reasonably flat countryside and excellent roads. In terms of timing, this translated into an eight-hour march by horse and for

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45 Falls, Captain Cyril, Military Operations: Egypt and Palestine, Volume I, London, 1928, p. 263.
46 General Staff, Headquarters Anzac Mounted Division, AWM4, 1/60/10 - December 1916.
47 The Allied force carried over a million rounds of small arms ammunition and expended about 400,000 rounds at Magdhaba.
48 Military Handbook on Palestine, Third Provisional Edition, June 30, 1917, Cairo, 1917, p. 76.

infantry, one and a half days march. A full mounted division employing the standard four man section line of column on the march is almost serpentine, creating a thin trail some 5.5 km in length. At any one point, it took the Division nearly 2.5 hours to pass. The lead regiment was able to take an hour's break for a meal and water the horses and be on the move before the tail of the division caught up. Although carrying a weight of 115kg including rider, food and equipment,[49] horses were treasured and so well looked after by the men. The standard march for the Light Horse was 40 minutes with the horse walking, 10 minutes with the rider walking next to the horse for the cool down and 10 minutes rest. At this rate, a march moved at the rate of about 5.7 km per hour. Watering a horse every six hours kept it fit although at times they could be without water for a couple days before being completely knocked up.

After a short march from Magdhaba to Abu Aweigila to join up with the detached brigade, the division would be able to march onto the next well at Um Shihan where there was only a small Ottoman outpost of about a platoon whose express purpose of keeping the supply lines open. Again, after the surrender of Abu Aweigila, a squadron could have been despatched to take over this outpost for a quick capture. At Um Shihan, the horses could be watered and the troops have a meal. Assisting the forward movement from Um Shihan to El Auja was the remainder of the decauville line. Quite a few trolleys still remained at Um Shihan in anticipation of withdrawing the Magdhaba garrison.

El Auja was a larger settlement full of many substantial masonry buildings, with the dominant structure being the railway station. The railway line north to Palestine and Syria began at El Auja. Since steam trains used huge amounts of water, engineers had constructed a water tower and a well to supply the water requirements of the trains. The intelligence report stated:

> Abundant supply for fully 12,000 men from two wells, water which was run into tanks by two motor engines through 4cm pipes. Water was down some 30m in the ground.[50]

The number of troops at El Auja consisted of at least one company from the 1/80th Battalion and various service units who were in the main, non combat soldiers.[51] One major group of non-combat soldiers were attached to the field hospital which at the beginning of December included about 100 tents. There appears to have been no machine guns or field guns at El Auja as these were being despatched by train from about 20 December onwards during the withdrawal. It appears that the last withdrawing combat troops along with eight field guns were entrained on 23 December at the same time when Magdhaba was besieged.[52]

The number of troops in transit at El Auja was unknown although various intelligence estimations gave numbers between 1,350 to 3,000 men.[53] Calculating the exact numbers troops at El Auja on 24 December is made difficult due to the lack of adequate and existing Turkish records. Those who remained were mainly with the non combat formations and usually non essential units such as the baggage trains, field hospitals, engineers and the transport staff, all of whom were awaiting transport to Palestine. The role of the protective troops was to arrange an orderly departure for the remaining units and secure the area from any local population who might seize the opportunity to pilfer. This explains the nub of Kress's panic regarding El Auja as there were few combat troops available for defensive work.

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49 Field Service Pocket Book, 1914, pp. 188-90.
50 Military Handbook on Palestine, p. 28.
51 Turkish General Staff, op. cite, p. 429.
52 General Staff, General Headquarters, Egyptian Expeditionary Force, AWM4, 1/6/9 Part 4 - December 1916.
53 General Staff, General Headquarters, Egyptian Expeditionary Force, AWM4, 1/6/9 Part 3 - December 1916: and, Intelligence Summaries, General Headquarters, Egyptian Expeditionary Force, AWM4, 1/9/10 - December 1916.

As with the garrison at Abu Aweigila, it is doubtful if this defensive force was prepared for or even capable of withstanding a sustained battle. The buildings were all situated upon flat and open grounds while the area surrounding El Auja was gently undulating which gave an attacking force the advantage of approaching the settlement without being easily seen or presenting simple targets. The lack of entrenchments meant that any hastily built sandbag redoubt could be speedily put out of action by the accurate fire from Royal Horse Artillery. This deficiency was made up after 24 December with hasty entrenchments being dug. But this is for the future when no attack occurred. The Allied force arriving in the afternoon of 24 December at El Auja would have caught the garrison without any protective redoubts or entrenchments to resist an attack.

Apart from being the obvious jumping off point to capture Beersheba, another benefit arising from capturing El Auja would be the folding up of the small Ottoman garrisons dotted in the Sinai but dependent upon El Auja for supplies. The largest was at El Kossaima, a garrison of 300 Turks, 80 Syrians, 2 field guns, and 1 machine gun. 54 Once isolated, these small outposts would surrender upon their own volition through exhaustion of supplies as there was no escape from the fierce desert which they would have to cross in order to reach the Hejaz Railway some 112 km to the east.

At El Auja, after a meal and a few hours sleep, a night march would be necessary to ensure the element of surprise at Beersheba. It would be prudent at this stage to follow the railway line from El Auja to Beersheba as it would ensure a close supply of water all along the way. Stations with water tanks began with Wadi el Abiad and then Thamilat el Rashi where there was a siding, four large stone buildings and three rail lines to allow shunting. Next was Bir el Asluj at Wadi Rakhama where the key feature included a 1.5m diameter stone-lined well some 15m deep coupled by two similar wells nearby although the wells' water quality was suspect. For a good place to rest and water the horses, Bir el Asluj was the most ideal place. The horses needed to be refreshed to take on the final part of the journey. Success at Beersheba meant water for the horses while failure meant a walk back to Bir el Asluj. There were another two small stations and then Beersheba.

The total distance from El Auja to Beersheba was 64 km; a twelve-hour march by horse along the road near the permanent way supplied with plentiful water all the way. The march from Magdhaba to Beersheba, 107 km, would have been extremely taxing on both man and beast reaching nearly the limits of physical endurance by the time Beersheba was reached. While difficult, it was well within the Allied Light Horse ability. The men of the division undertook similar rides during the September 1918 actions without any negative consequences to the efficiency of the divisions.

An alternative high risk and more direct route also existed from Auja via Khalasa to Beersheba, a distance of about 50 km or a nine hour-march, which shaved 14 km and three hours off the trek. The major risk was the lack of certain water along the route with Khalasa as the only place holding a well of any significance. The supply was sufficient for about 1,000 camels per day55 but insufficient for a cavalry division at that time,56 although it was very suitable for a fast moving striking force or a flanking guard of two regiments. These could be used to quickly reach Beersheba and feel out the defence while taking decisive action if the circumstances allow.

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54 Intelligence Summaries, General Headquarters, Egyptian Expeditionary Force, AWM4, 1/9/10 - December 1916.

55 Military Handbook on Palestine, p. 41.

56 The Royal Engineers developed the wells at Khalasa during October 1917 which allowed them to partially service the Desert Mounted Corps on its way to attack Beersheba.

The highest risk alternative was to entrain a squadron with four machine gun sections on the captured rolling stock and send it to Beersheba station. This would allow the capture of the most strategically important position in one quick thrust. The station capture would split Beersheba's defences down the middle severing the right flank from the left. It would also lay into their hands more rolling stock which could be quickly employed in bringing up more squadrons. The railway line lent itself to simple defence able to bring enfilading fire should an attack threaten. The advantage of this move would be to sow complete confusion in the Turkish defensive system which would allow the Division to approach almost unmolested, especially from the air. This audacious alternative promised the most return but also the move with the highest risk. If anything went wrong, and there was high potential for many things to go wrong, then the squadron was lost or neutralised requiring rescue.

For the Ottomans, Beersheba itself was not highly prized as a garrison, although it was useful for air reconnaissance due to its air strip and also served as a supply depot. At the opening of the Third Battle of Gaza, 31 October 1917, it was a pawn which they were happy to sacrifice while holding up the Allied advance. By about 3 p.m. on the day of the Allied attack, the Turkish forces were in the process of withdrawing from Beersheba and abandoning the town, some two hours before the famous charge occurred. The defensive systems were in the hills behind Beersheba and not the town itself. This defensive line was buttressed on the towns of Tel esh Sheria and Huj, both provided excellent bases upon which to occupy the natural ramparts of the Southern Palestinian hills. It was no different in December 1916. Most its active combat forces were stripped by the Turks and transferred to Khan Yunis and Gaza.57 The remaining infantry companies at Beersheba were sufficient only to perform local guard functions but with great difficulty could engage in defensive work. After a token resistance at the southern entrance of the town, they would withdraw to the hills overlooking Beersheba. The tough combat would be involved in winkling out the various outposts dotted over the hills which would threaten any occupying force.

The march from Magdhaba to Beersheba would take two days. The men had sufficient rations for this time period while there was more than enough water for man and beast. Beersheba was a busy camel-trading post housing many camel dealers and fodder yards. Horses were also traded in some quantity so tibbin stocks were always at a high level. Surrounding the town were fields of wheat. Supplies presented little problem. Should their rations give out, meals of grilled goat, hommos and tabouli might present a pleasant alternative to biscuit, bully beef and onions, their staple.

Air cover from 34 aircraft was also readily available.58 The Royal Flying Corps 5th Wing stationed at Mustabig was specifically ordered to provide close air support, long range scouting and long range strategic bombing to support the attack on Magdhaba. This Wing was a composite formation with the No. 14 (British) Squadron and the No. 67 (Australian) Squadron. It had an array of different aircraft to perform specialist tasks. The scouting role was to keep a close watch upon Beersheba, El Auja and Abu Aweigila and provide updated estimates of Turkish strength and troop movements in response to the attack at Magdhaba. The rough air strip by Chauvel's Headquarters was busy with aircraft landing and taking off. At any one time, there were up to four aircraft on the ground.59 One other task was to bomb the airfield at Beersheba to render it unusable for aircraft. During the attack at Magdhaba, the 14th Squadron demonstrated

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57 Intelligence Summaries, General Headquarters, Egyptian Expeditionary Force, December 1916, AWM4-1-9-10.

58 General Staff, General Headquarters, Egyptian Expeditionary Force, AWM4, 1/6/9 Part 3 - December 1916

59 Letter from Chauvel to Birdwood dated 7 January 1917, AWM 252 A95.

both its scouting skills by giving reliable Ottoman troop information in almost real time while also dropping six 100lb bombs and over a hundred 16lb and 20lb bombs. The effective range of air cover was sufficient to provide a defensive covering air arc over the projected line of advance.

But Christmas Day at Beersheba was one that brought with it all the advantages that a lucky field general could ever wish for when things are going well. In the evening winter came to Palestine. The heavens opened up and it rained heavily with some hail storms. It was so heavy around Beersheba that the roads were impassable for all wheeled transport which meant that there was no likelihood of any reinforcements to support a depleted garrison. If Beersheba fell on Christmas Day then the division was safely under shelter protected by both rain and rifles while at El Auja would have been a brigade of infantry and additional artillery being entrained for Beersheba with the prospect of more artillery support and brigades in transit. While the vehicles could not move across country the train could still run. The rain may have been very uncomfortable for the reinforcing troops, unlike the Turks, there was no impediment to them arriving at Beersheba.

Upon the capture of Beersheba, one military prize would be a functioning air field complete with full aviation fuel tanks, captured Rumplers from the German 300 *Flieger Abteilung*[60] which sat grounded on the soft soil as well as a group of very experience pilots. Once the soil dried out a couple days later, the airfield would be available for Allied aircraft to occupy and fly sorties.[61] While the similar weather was experienced at El Arish, this weather did not spread throughout the operational theatre of the Sinai which allowed Allied aircraft to operate at will. The rain also meant that there would be ample surface water supplies for the horses in Wadi el Saba. With the onset of rain, the men who finished the march had every incentive to get the capture of Beersheba finished as quickly as possible so they could get under shelter with a warm fire.

So in terms of the Allies, an advance on Beersheba appears to have been possible. But the above only deals with one side. The Ottoman forces would not be idle. If Chauvel chose to undertake such an action the Turkish ability to respond requires examination.

For Kress, 24 December was a day of crisis. Until he was sure that the attack on Magdhaba was local, he knew the Turkish Beersheba defence perimeter was in trouble. The capture of El Auja would signal a possible movement to Beersheba and air reconnaissance would pick up the movement of the column, unless the Allied forces marched all night after taking El Auja. At that time, all the available Turkish formations were in the process of withdrawing to their allocated positions and so turning the regiments around for re-orientation would produce utter chaos without adding many men for defence. The earliest that any formation withdrawing from El Arish would be ready to undertake combat duties as a unit would have been 27 December leaving the immediately available forces for the defence of Beersheba were at Hebron and Tel esh Sheria whom were almost immediately trucked in when the news of Magdhaba was received by Kress.[62] Apart from lack of numbers, the rain would prevent any movement of a force. A valuable day would be lost until the rains subsided and the roads were usable again. The composite force he was able to assemble immediately not amount to more than a couple of poorly trained companies of garrison troops ill prepared for mobile combat. In addition, there was a battery of Austrian howitzers available after 27 December. The effect of this artillery would be more harassing than being a threat since the counter battery ability of the Royal Horse

60 Flieger Abteilung is the German air combat equivalent of the Allied squadron.
61 Gröschel, Dieter & Ladek, Jürgen, "Wings Over the Sinai and Palestine", Over the Front, Vol 13 No 1, Spring 1998 Edition, p. 29.
62 Kress, op. cite, p.208.

Artillery was of high order. The howitzers would only be able to fire a few rounds and then move location or endure a counter barrage.

While the immediate forces faced may not have been great, nearby were the three regiments from the 3rd ID commanded by Refet Bey, arguably one of the best performing Turkish Generals in the Suez Canal Expeditionary Force during the campaigns of 1916. After being mauled by the Allies at Katia during the Romani offensive in August, the result was the loss of over fifty percent of its effective strength. Consequently, the Division was in the process of being transferred to Palestine for rest, reinforcement and refitting.63 Apart from the 32nd IR, the balance of the division appeared to be suffering from the chaos that accompanied reformation. Weather prevented any concentration of this force until 28 December. The Regiment would not be ready for such a commitment towards attacking the static defences at Beersheba was remote and in the circumstances, too late to be of any use. It was in no condition to seriously contest a fresh force of Allied cavalry and infantry in well defended positions.64

Due to the inclement weather commencing towards the evening of 25 December, the only method of transporting elements of battalion sized formations which required an extensive logistics train would be by rail. The men and baggage would detrain at Tel Esh Sheria, the only Ottoman military base and logical where a concentration troops could occur nearest to Beersheba. While there were excellent shunting facilities at Tel Esh Sheria, the single track leading into the assembly area would, by necessity, restrict the number of troop trains able to arrive at the station at any one time. Of course, this all assumes the ready availability of rolling stock, something that was very uncertain. Re-routing trains and rolling stock already in motion is a difficult task, indeed, almost impossible. Unless there were trains at various depots as a specific reserve, it would take a great deal of time to alter the schedules to requisition sufficient rolling stock to undertake the task.

Any movement towards Beersheba from Tel esh Sheria for infantry entailed a gruelling one day march over hilly terrain in the pouring rain. Until sufficient troops arrived, any frontline force would be relegated to scouting and outpost duty. Turkish attacks would have been futile and exposed the troops to unnecessary casualties. It is an optimistic assessment to estimate that sufficient forces for offensive purposes could be assembled within a week.

Once assembled in sufficient numbers to engage the troops at Beersheba, many valuable days would have elapsed granting the Allied troops time to consolidate their hold. However, it is doubtful if any Infantry Regiment could mount an adequate offensive. For pragmatic reasons and those discussed below, there is a very real possibility that only one Infantry Regiment might be deployed to contain the Allied force at Beersheba rather a whole division. This would be in line with the Turkish defensive doctrine of containing the superior forces of the Allied advance through small blocking engagements and so conceding territory in exchange of avoiding any major combat.

Most of Syrian based Turkish forces were committed to protecting the coastal lines of communication. This was particularly the case covering of the area adjacent to Gaza and Jaffa where divisions were tied to coastal defence. The constant raiding by the British Royal Navy seaplane carriers kept the fear of Allied invasion uppermost in the minds of the Ottoman General Staff, since it had been only a year since the Allied invasion of Gallipoli. This scarring experience of Gallipoli meant that the Turkish Army committed many divisions to the static defence of the coast. The Turkish forces would not be able to take the chance of releasing troops

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63 Intelligence Summaries, General Headquarters, Egyptian Expeditionary Force, December 1916, AWM4-1-9-10.

64 Turkish General Staff, op. cite, p. 435.

committed to coastal defence with a suspected outflanking seaborne invasion appearing on the coast. So while there were Ottoman forces at hand, they were very light in number for deployment in the defence of Beersheba.

Any move towards Beersheba would have caused consternation in the Ottoman forces. They would have to decide very quickly if the move by the mounted troops through El Auja was a feint or a real invasion. Their uncertainty would be increased by if this move to Beersheba was accompanied by coastal bombardments and air raids from British ships. The Ottomans did not have sufficient forces to cover both contingencies. Additionally, holding Beersheba would not remove the threat of sea invasion but instead reinforce the belief that such a move was part of an encircling strategy.65 Basically, the Ottoman forces would be paralysed until it was clear that there was no further offensive action from the Allied forces, by which time it would be too late to dislodge the Allied occupation of Beersheba.

Should such a daring thrust have been undertaken by Chauvel, Beersheba presented itself as a defensible citadel had it been captured on Christmas Day. With an additional battery of artillery coupled with ample supplies at Beersheba, a force of 7,000 men could have repulsed any attack mounted by the Turkish forces within the following month. As noted above, there was little likelihood of the Ottomans gathering a force of sufficient size to deal conclusively with the Allied force. During the period of initial occupation, it would have taken only 4 days for the first sizable infantry reinforcements to arrive from El Arish along with a protected and regular supply chain. The logistics train would be sheltered for exactly the same reasons it was shielded from the Allies the following year – the desert is a cruel place for anyone without water. The Allied forces did mount a successful raid to El Auja. This was conducted after rigorous scouting and engaging one Australian mounted division as a covering force. It was meticulously planned and carefully executed. In contrast, at the conclusion of 1916, due to the lack of developed water supplies en route, the logistical problem of moving a large formation of troops from El Shellal to El Auja in a flanking movement was beyond the ability of the Turkish forces. Within a week of occupation, the position of the Allied forces at the Beersheba garrison would have been unassailable.

For the Turkish forces, the threat of a flanking move to Rafa, as did happen on 9 January 1917, or a seaborne invasion would be even more probable rendering the fortifications at El Shellal untenable. The net result would have been the withdrawal of the Turkish forces to a fragile defensive line from Tel esh Sheria to Gaza, a position that similarly existed on 1 November 1917, 11 months later. Such a move would also greatly assist logistical operations since any rail construction need only cover an additional 80 kms from El Arish to El Auja, thereby adding to the combat capacity of any force based at Beersheba. Since the section from Um Shihan already possessed a permanent way, upgrading the decauville line to a heavy iron track suitable for trains could proceed as fast as the iron way was supplied taking less time than under normal circumstances. At the same time, preparations for an infantry push through Tel esh Sheria after the capture of Beersheba would threaten Gaza with encirclement and leave the city in an untenable situation. With the clarity of vision that hindsight produces, an assault on Beersheba appears possible with the result of bypassing Gaza which would avoid three costly and frustrating battles in 1917 and might well have shortened the war on this front by about a year.

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65 The fear of invasion was taken very seriously. At the beginning of January 1917 the General Officer Commanding the 3rd ID, Refet Bey sent a report to Inci Kuvvei Seferiye (The 1st Expeditionary Force Command) pointing out the difficulties in mounting an adequate defence of the line from Tel el Fara to Khan Yunis as it left the flank open to British naval bombing from the sea. The report was acted upon by the Inci Kuvvei Seferiye. The 4th Army Headquarters agreed and work commenced upon fortifying the el Shellal defensive line. Turkish General Staff, op. cite, p. 447.

General Murray[66] had already clearly expressed a desire to see the capture of Beersheba some weeks prior to the capture of El Arish and Magdhaba. On 10 December, in an effort to outline his overall strategic goals Murray sent a cable to General Robertson[67] where he said:

> Occupation of this place would, moreover, have advantage of placing me on a railway. At Beersheba I should be only 70 miles from the Hejaz Line, against which my aircraft could co-operate daily. Further, I cannot but think our appearance at Beersheba would result in a rising of Arab population in southern Syria, who are known to be very disaffected towards Turks.[68]

This view had the backing of the new British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, who was desperately casting around for a major propaganda victory to divert public attention away from the brutality and slaughter experience by the Allied troops on the Somme. General Maurice[69] wrote General Lynden-Bell[70] on 13 December:

> The Prime Minister is very anxious, naturally, for some success to enliven the winter gloom which has settled upon England, and he looks to you to get it for him. He talks somewhat vaguely of a campaign in Palestine, and I think has at the back of his mind the hope of a triumphant entry into Jerusalem.[71]

The coming of Lloyd George seemed to herald a weakening of the original war policy articulated by General Robertson to Murray in a letter dated 4 October 1916 where he said:

> Broadly speaking, and in connection with the war as a whole, the French front remains the main theatre of war, and the policy in Egypt therefore necessarily remains a defensive one.[72]

By December, Murray understood the political change and formulated a strategy in line with the new exigencies. Robertson did not contradict Murray's goals. Instead, as time proved, Robertson materially added to Murray's ability to prosecute his war strategy in Egypt.

So undertaking a well calculated gamble in taking Beersheba would have been plainly within the wishes of the Egyptian General Staff and the Prime Minister regardless of the policy expressed by the War Office. Although Lloyd George was keen to see Jerusalem captured and Kress indicated that this was highly possible, that would have entailed a tremendous risk since Jerusalem is highly susceptible to isolation through severing supply lines which unless are well protected, would be easy prey. Unless these lines could be properly secured, Jerusalem would have just turned into another siege similar to that of Kut[73] earlier in the year with no prospects or hope of relief. The time frame required capturing Jerusalem during the small window of opportunity contrasted with ability of Allied forces to do so militated against each other making an early capture more a mirage than a practical reality. The lure of Jerusalem could well have been a reality a couple months later with reinforcements and a new offensive.

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66 General Sir Archibald James Murray [23 April 1860 - 21 January 1945], Commander in Chief of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force.
67 General Sir William Robert Robertson, [29 January 1860 – 12 February 1933], Chief of the Imperial General Staff, War Office 1915-1918.
68 Woodward, David R., Hell in the Holy Land: World War I in the Middle East, University of Kentucky Press, 2006, p. 53.
69 General Sir Frederick Barton Maurice [19 January 1871-19 May 1951], Director of Military Operations of the Imperial British General Staff, 1915-1918.
70 General Sir Arthur Lynden Lynden-Bell [1867- 14 February 1943] Chief of Staff of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force.
71 Woodward, op. cite, p. 55.
72 Extract from letter dated 4 October 1916 from Sir William Robertson to G.O.C. Egypt, AWM 252-A90
73 Kut-al-Amara, a town south of Baghdad, was where the 6th (Poona) Division of the Indian Army was surrounded by a Turkish force on 7 December 1915. After a siege of 147 days, on 29 April 1916, the commander, General Townshend surrendered his force of 13,000 men to the Turks.

With Kress's assessment coupled with the available Allied intelligence at the time of the Magdhaba battle, it clearly suggests that a viable opportunity existed. Was it ever considered by the Allies? Examination of all the available records indicates this idea did not even receive a fleeting consideration. Chauvel's orders clearly stated that after the capture of Magdhaba, he was to return immediately to El Arish[74] although this order was given prior to the successful conclusion of the battle. Perhaps it was feasible for Chauvel to undertake a daring push to Beersheba as the conditions appeared ripe for such an action but this choice was never exercised and so remains one of those great unknowns of the Sinai campaign.

A look at the two key generals involved might suggest an answer as to the idea failing to be canvassed. For Chetwode, he had just taken up his appointment as commander of the Desert Column in December so his familiarity of the terrain and fighting qualities of the Turkish formations in front of his forces would have been limited. Chetwode was an innovative soldier with a flair for the audacious as was demonstrated in the planning for the Third Battle of Gaza. In contrast, Chauvel appears to have been content to receive instructions to undertake forthright actions. This was demonstrated during the September 1918 campaign after the Desert Mounted Corps had achieved all its objectives. It was General Allenby who pressed Chauvel to consider moving his forces to Damascus rather than the other way round.[75] This proved to be a self-assured move that destroyed the Ottoman's will to resist any further. After the capture of Magdhaba, it would have been Chauvel's role as the most experienced field General to make a suggestion to take Beersheba. The available evidence seems to suggest that this request would have been treated with keen interest.

With an array of powerful senior military and political backing, it is peculiar that not one reference regarding the Beersheba option occurs in any message passed between Chauvel and Chetwode.[76] Even the lesser option of capturing Abu Aweigila was never canvassed by the two field generals despite it being part of the original orders. Subsequent to Magdhaba, the only papers in existence deal specifically with the minutiae of Allied consolidation of the positions around El Arish in preparation for further operations. Historically, Abu Aweigila seems to have been a handy pivot for invasions too and from the Sinai so its importance should have been realised. The Turks used Abu Aweigila when attacking the Suez Canal in 1915 and 1916, actions not lost upon various Israeli generals who used the same route for the invasions of 1948, 1956 and 1967. The reason why no discussion occurred between Chetwode and Chauvel about capturing Abu Aweigila and Beersheba will remain another of the Sinai Campaign's enduring mysteries. Perhaps it just never occurred to them at the time or perhaps they thought it was too difficult or maybe they had other pressing issues occupying their energy, but since nothing was recorded, it will remain unknown.

While an interesting piece of speculation, this idea of Kress avoids some facts about the Allied force confronting him. In making his assessment, it can only be assumed that Kress believed the mounted troops facing him had similar training as given to the Uhlans of Germany. In contrast, the men of Australian and New Zealand were citizen soldiers with little military tradition, let alone training. Rather than being in the colours for years as occurred with European conscripts,

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74 General Staff, Headquarters Anzac Mounted Division, AWM4, 1/60/10 - December 1916.

75 "When Chauvel told him that scarcely a Turk had crossed the Esdraelon plain or the river near Beisan, he [Allenby] for the first time mentioned the northern ride which was to conquer Syria, seize the Baghdad railway at Aleppo, and so bring to a sudden end the campaign in Mesopotamia. "What about Damascus?" he abruptly asked Chauvel: and the Australian, who never wasted his words, replied: "Rather."" Gullett, op. cite, p. 728.

76 The author has conducted a search of all Regimental, Brigade, Division and Egyptian Expeditionary War Diaries, Routine Orders, Special Orders, Operational Reports and signals traffic. To date, no document exists of an enquiry about taking Beersheba from Chetwode or Chauvel.

these men had to be available for combat after a few months' basic training. Unless Kress had faulty intelligence reports, he would have known this at the time Magdhaba fell. Kress observed an army in the making while in contrast his assessment was pertinent to a well-trained and confidently led field army. This apparent conflict in Kress's assumptions and conclusion seem to say more about him as a General who, from pique, appears to be grasping at straws to salve pride from an obvious and emphatic defeat.

Magdhaba was the first occasion in which the mounted Australian and New Zealand forces acted successfully as an independent Division. It was here that they learned the elements of autonomous cavalry warfare. They succeeded in carrying out a plan of limited scope with clearly defined objectives. Magdhaba gave the Anzac Mounted Division a taste of victory coupled with the men gaining a sense of confidence in their abilities.

For the Australian and New Zealand mounted forces, 1916 was a learning period with Magdhaba serving as their graduation day. By the end of the war, the two mounted divisions proved to be devastatingly effective military machines as they systematically dismantled the Ottoman forces in Palestine and drove Turkey to the peace table. As the years have worn on, their exploits became the subject of legends. Magdhaba began the legend.

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THE MAN WITH THE DONKEY: HERO OR FRAUD?

Tim Curran[1]

One of the most compelling, and enduring stories to emerge from the Gallipoli campaign of 1915, was the legend of Simpson, the man with the donkey. This was the supreme tale of selfless heroism, which for 80 years or so occupied a special place in the hearts of most Australians. Then, in 1992 a change occurred with the authenticity of the legend being questioned by Peter Cochrane, in *Simpson and the Donkey*. Other revisionists followed, in disputing the heroism of Simpson, which they claimed, was a retrospective exaggeration, casting the entire legend into doubt. Graham Wilson joined this list of critics in 2006 with a paper published in *Sabretache* which refutes many of the accepted facets of the legend – in particular the nature and value of Simpson's work, the environment he worked in and the degree of danger he faced; also, whether or not he deserved the VC his supporters claimed he should have been awarded, and whether in fact he had been recommended for one. The claims of Wilson, and his fellow revisionists, deserve to be tested.

Simpson's heroism: actual conditions in Monash Valley

Graham Wilson describes Monash Valley and Shrapnel Gully, (along which Simpson led his donkey) in April/May 1915, as the "major thoroughfares [at Anzac], as busy as Pitt Street at peak hour, and hundreds, even thousands of men, walked up and down them, under enemy fire, every day of the campaign. In this, Simpson was no braver than anyone else at Gallipoli."[2]

This picture, of a busy and bustling thoroughfare, painted by Wilson, is totally misleading and inaccurate. Turkish sniper fire exacted a heavy toll in casualties here until mid-June when General Birdwood's anti-sniper teams overcame this particular menace. Shrapnel, however, remained a constant hazard throughout. Only those men who absolutely had to went up or down Monash Valley during daylight hours (stretcher bearers and reinforcement troops for example). As the official historian, Charles Bean made quite explicit, the vast majority of movement up Monash and Shrapnel Gullies took place *at night*. This was when "numbers of men [were] sent down [from the firing line on the ridges] to draw rations, ammunition and water... and mule trains [were] sent up the gullies."[3]

Corporal E. H. Kitson, a stretcher bearer with the 4th Field Ambulance, who was making the same daily trips as Simpson, provided a more accurate, detailed and first-hand account of conditions in Death Valley, as Monash Valley was also commonly referred to, thus:

> For the first fortnight or so the carry from Quinn's Post to the beach was beset with all sorts of inconceivable difficulties. The carry was [three-quarters of a mile long] [4] and had to be done without reliefs... at various places it was necessary to sprint past warm points, from one safe place to another, as the snipers were very diligent and accurate, and shrapnel was also uncomfortably plentiful."[5]

By 5 May sandbag barricades were being erected at staggered intervals up Monash Valley, between which the men would run for cover. Nevertheless, as Bean informs us: "Early on May 15th... the

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1 Dr Tom Curran is the author of Simpson's biographies *Across the Bar* and *Not Only a Hero*. He is a former professional army officer and a Vietnam veteran.
2 *Sabretache*, December 2006, p. 37.
3 C.E.W. Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918, Volume I, The Story of Anzac*, Queensland University Press, St. Lucia 1981 (First published by The Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1921), p. 546.
4 Bean, vol. I, p. 577.
5 Australian War Memorial (hereafter AWM) file 41 (3/9/14).

sniping down Monash Valley in spite of the traverses, became severe. Several men running between those barriers were hit."[6] Bean adds, at this time "sniping was most severe in the early hours, when the sun was behind the Turks [on Dead Man's Ridge and the neighbouring Chessboard], and it was a common occurrence for twenty or thirty men to be hit during the morning."[7]

Simpson faced an additional hazard in making his donkey trips up and down Monash Valley, at this time, which was described by his Bearer Officer, Capt. Lyle Buchanan: "[Simpson] had really only one spot on the way which sheltered him and his donkey - an angle in the deep dry watercourse about halfway up on the southern side. Other people using the valley had a dozen waist high shelter spots."[8] But realistically, encumbered by the donkey and its passenger, Simpson would have had little opportunity of sprinting for any kind of cover.

Reliable eye-witnesses, such as Major C.H. Brand DSO, later Chief of the General Staff, described Simpson's situation thus: "Almost every digger knew about him. The question was often asked: 'Has the bloke with the donc stopped one yet?' It seemed incredible that anyone could make that trip up and down Monash Valley without being hit. Simpson escaped death so many times that he was completely fatalistic. He seemed to have had a charmed life."[9]

Capt. H.V. P. Conrick DSO, Bearer Officer of A Section, 3rd Field Ambulance, was another eye-witness to Simpson's activities which he described in an official account of the unit's experience at Anzac, written on 1 March 1916. "Simpson was a very game man." Conrick wrote, "At all times he was cheerful and a very great favourite with his mates of 3 Fld. Amb ... Simpson carried out a very dangerous mission. He had several donkeys killed [right next to him] while on his job." One day Conrick passed Simpson in Monash Valley and called out to him – "'Look out for yourself Simmy.' His laughing reply came: 'That bullet hasn't been made for me yet sir.'"[10]

The Bearer Officer of B Section, and adjutant of 3rd Field Ambulance, Capt. Kenneth Fry DSO, wrote to Simpson's sister Annie, shortly after he'd been killed, telling her of the "excellent work" her brother had been doing, going "up and down a dangerous valley carrying wounded men to the beach on a donkey... Everyone from the general downwards seems to have known him and his donkey... The valley at that time was very dangerous as it was exposed to snipers and was also continuously shelled. He scorned the danger, and always kept going whistling and singing, a universal favourite."[11]

Even without the well-meaning soldiers warning him constantly of the extreme danger he faced, Simpson had been warned, officially, by his Bearer Officer, Capt. Buchanan, of the suicidal nature of the task he had undertaken, before he had been allowed to continue. Buchanan later wrote: "I just happened to be in command of [Simpson's] bearer section and had the rather serious responsibility of authorizing his continued use of donkeys, after warning him of the inevitable result of wounding, or worse."[12]

The commanding officer of the Indian Mountain battery, where Simpson camped at night and obtained fodder for his donkey, Lt-Col. A.C. Fergusson DSO, similarly admired Simpson, and wrote of him: "He [Simpson] always had a donkey with him which he used to work Shrapnel Valley, bringing down men wounded in the legs or any cases which could ride but not walk. He had many donkeys and men killed beside him but led a charmed life himself until 19 May. We treasured his last donkey and

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6 Bean, vol. 2, p. 128.
7 *Ibid.*, p. 127.
8 AWM, PR 83/69, 6 of 17.
9 Sir Irving Benson, *The Man with the Donkey*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1965, p. 41.
10 AWM, 3 DRL/ 3329.
11 AWM, 3 DRL/ 3424.
12 AWM, PR 83/69, 6 of 17

evacuated it safely at the end with a view of presenting it to Australia, but it was stolen from our mule lines in Mudros."13

Simpson's closest friend in 3rd Field Ambulance, L/Cpl. Andy Davidson, himself a highly decorated hero, being awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal and the Military Medal, afterwards wrote of him: "He [Simpson] was the most respected, and admired of all the heroes at Anzac"14

The nature of Simpson's work.

Graham Wilson dismisses Simpson's work at Anzac as a lazy dodge, to avoid the hard grind of real stretcher carrying. He maintains that Simpson's heroism was massively exaggerated and that: "His actions appear... to have been entirely self-motivated and possibly even self-interested. Let's face it, strolling up and down a gully beside a donkey, with the donkey carrying a lightly injured man on the return trip, would have been far easier than struggling down that gully at one end of a laden stretcher." Wilson claims that Simpson "created for himself a job that was far easier and, despite all that has been said about the perils of his job, far safer than carrying wounded men down Monash and Shrapnel Gullies as part of a bearer team... The fact is that... All of the men he 'saved' were in fact lightly wounded men, walking wounded who could have quite easily made it down Shrapnel Gully on their own"15

Wilson dismisses the idea of Simpson's donkey carrying a severely wounded, semi-conscious man as an absurdity. Yet one of the most famous, and well-documented of all Simpson's donkey trips involved just such a case, when Simpson brought a young Englishman down the valley after the fighting at the Bloody Angle on 2-3 May. The man had a severe thigh wound and was semi-conscious throughout the journey, with Simpson holding on to him tightly to prevent him falling off the donkey's back. Simpson never discovered the identity of his passenger, whose life he had very likely saved. The man's name was Billy Lowes, born and bred in South Shields and he had been a childhood friend of Simpson. Lowes was medically invalided out of the army a few months later and returned to South Shields. He subsequently wrote a letter to Simpson's mother Sarah describing how he had been brought down Monash Valley on Jack's donkey, though passing in and out of consciousness all the way. He concluded: "I tell people about your son saving me and losing his own life after doing such good work, and if ever anybody was worthy of a VC it was Jack"16

But regardless of how many seriously wounded men Simpson did in fact carry on the donkey his essential role was to bring as many "lightly wounded" men as possible down from the firing line to the Casualty Clearing Station (CCS) on the beach, these being – not *walking wounded* (as Wilson persistently misinforms his readers) – but, as Colonel Monash pointed out: "all cases *unable to walk*" (italics added)17 There is a significant difference. The walking wounded had to make it down Monash Valley on their own. The statue of Simpson outside the Australian War Memorial represents the situation perfectly. The man depicted on the donkey has a serious lower leg wound and clearly would have been incapable of walking at all. He nevertheless required medical treatment and the sooner the better if he was not to lose his leg, or possibly even his life, to gangrene. These were the kind of casualties Simpson could carry on his donkey, freeing up the scant resources of the two-man stretcher teams to carry the totally incapacitated cases such as abdominal or chest wounds, and this was Simpson's self-appointed role.

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13 Peter Liddle, *Men of Gallipoli*, David & Charles, Newton Abbot, 1988, p. 156.
14 AWM, PR 83/69, 10 of 17.
15 *Sabretache*, pp. 36-7
16 Benson, p. 56 & W. Lowes letter to Sarah Simpson Kirkpatrick, AWM, PR 83/69, 6 of 17.
17 AWM, PR 83/69, 10 of 17.

Graham Wilson has built upon Lt-Col. Sutton's unfortunate slip of the pen, in his diary entry, when he described the donkey's passengers as being "slightly wounded." It is important to understand exactly what was meant by "lightly wounded," in medical-military terms, and Simpson's statue at the War Memorial offers a good illustration. Clearly the leg wound sustained by the soldier depicted here was not immediately life-threatening, yet expert medical treatment would be required, and within a reasonable time if serious repercussions were to be avoided. And this was where Simpson's one-man "casualty carrying service"[18] came into its own. Both Simpson and his casualty would have been acutely aware of the need for rapid medical attention. Why else would they have risked their lives on that perilous trip down Monash Valley.

Simpson's Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Sutton, admired what he was doing to the extent that, sometime in early May, he took off his Red-Cross armband and tied it around the donkey's head, telling the assembled men of his unit that, as the donkey was now a member of the unit, he would make it official. The donkey's headband, bearing Alfred Sutton's signature, is now on permanent display at the Australian War Memorial.[19]

Wilson describes a couple of instances where walking-wounded soldiers in Shrapnel Gully related how Simpson had offered them a ride to the CCS on his donkey. From this Wilson concludes that Simpson's heroics were a sham, that most of the men carried on the donkey could have walked down to the clearing station on their own anyway, that "Simpson did not in fact 'save' anybody!" and that the donkey was a convenient way of creating "an easy and far safer" existence for himself than stretcher bearing down Monash Valley.[20] This is an intriguing misrepresentation of the true situation – how for example, does Wilson reconcile the obvious disparity between walking up and down Monash Valley all day, and an "easy life" he claims Simpson sought for himself? Buchanan, Conrick, Fergusson, Davidson, Fry, Brand and many others wrote that Simpson's donkey trips assumed almost the nature of suicidal missions, in which a number of donkeys and passengers were killed, right next to him, Simpson himself being miraculously spared until he too succumbed to a deadly burst of fire on 19 May. Wilson overcomes this dilemma by simply omitting any mention of the Buchanan, Conrick, Fergusson, Fry, Davidson and Brand *et al.*, descriptions of the actual nature of Simpson's donkey trips in April/May at Anzac.

How many donkey trips did Simpson make?

Graham Wilson takes issue with the number of donkey trips allegedly made by Simpson, which may well have been somewhere in the region of 300. This number can be calculated quite readily by referencing three primary sources of evidence available.

Corporal Kitson states, in his account, that: "During the first 8 weeks the stretcher bearing was exceptionally heavy, some times the [two-man] squads had to do 5, 6 or 7 [stretcher] carries a day from the Dressing Station [at Quinn's Post] to the beach."[21] James Jackson (a New Zealand stretcher bearer, also clearing Monash Valley), recalled that when Simpson had been ordered to return to his unit by Sgt Hookway, he had said: "To hell with them. The old donc and I can do the work of four men" - that is, of two stretcher teams.[22] In other words, Simpson claimed to be capable of 10, 12 or even 14 stretcher carries (or donkey trips) a day. Considering that he was

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18 In the words of Andy Davidson: *West Australian*, 16 November 1933.

19 Diary of Surgeon-Major H.N. Butler DSO, Officer Commanding C Section, 3rd Field Ambulance: held by his grandson, John Teniswood of Kingston Beach, Tasmania.

20 *Sabretache*, pp. 28-30 & 36.

21 AWM, 41 (3/9/14).

22 James Jackson, in a letter to the Director of the Australian War Memorial, Major J.L. Treloar, AWM, 93, 417/20/35, of 22 September 1937.

working all day and well into the night;[23] and that the distance between Quinn's Post and the CCS on the beach was three-quarters of a mile, [24] that is, a one and a half mile round trip, which should have taken no more than an hour – this accords with Kitson's figures and Simpson's, via Jackson, that he could have been making 12 donkey trips per day, in a 12-hour working day. In the 24 days he survived, therefore, (remembering that he began his donkey trips on the second day at Anzac), Simpson could have made between 230 and 322 trips (in a 14-hour working day). However, this figure would need to be lowered to allow Simpson time off for rest and food, for a smoke and mug of tea after offloading his casualty at the CCS, and to feed his donkey. I believe a reasonable assessment of how many donkey trips Simpson made, therefore might be somewhere between 200 and 300. Although, as Andy Davidson pointed out, there is no way of knowing how many men he helped, "but the number was large."[25]

Graham Wilson insists that the number of donkey trips Simpson made was around 100 or less. He dismisses the figure of 300 as "mythical." Wilson arrives at his figure, not through any reference to the evidence sources, nor through a calculation of the distance traveled. Wilson declines to offer a distance from Quinn's Post to the beach. Nevertheless, he contends that it would take a healthy, fit man 3 hours today to make that round trip, from the beach to Quinn's Post and back. Consequently, Simpson would have been limited to around four trips per day, in a 12-hour working day.[26]

With regard to the actual number of donkey trips Simpson made this is a moot point. It was never a critical issue. For Simpson to have made 100 trips under those conditions would have been magnificent. Between 200 and 300 would be superb.

Simpson's recommendation for the Victoria Cross.

Graham Wilson vehemently rejects the notion that Simpson was denied a VC. There is "no record anywhere of an official, written recommendation for a VC for Simpson," he insists.[27] This mistaken belief by Simpson supporters, he adds, is based on spurious "evidence" provided by Colonel Monash, Lt-Col. Sutton and Capt Fry. Let us, therefore, examine that evidence.

On 20 May 1915, the day after Simpson was killed, Colonel Monash, commander of the 4th Infantry Brigade, which was operating at the head of Monash Valley (the area Simpson was clearing his casualties from), sent in a lengthy, detailed report to Divisional HQ. which reads, in part:

> I desire to bring under special notice, for favour of transmission to the proper authority, the case of Private Simpson, stated to belong to C Section of the 3rd Field Ambulance. This man has been working in this valley since 26th April, in collecting wounded and carrying them to the dressing stations. He had a small donkey which he used, to carry all cases unable to walk.
>
> Private Simpson and his little beast earned the admiration of everyone at the upper end of the valley. They worked all day and night throughout the whole period since the landing, and the help rendered to the wounded was invaluable. Simpson knew no fear and moved unconcernedly amid shrapnel and rifle fire, steadily carrying out his self-imposed task day by day, and he frequently earned the applause of the personnel for his many fearless rescues of wounded men from areas subject to rifle and shrapnel fire."[28] Colonel, later General Sir John Monash, is generally acknowledged as Australia's pre-eminent military commander of World War One. His report on Simpson was a recommendation only for suitable military honours - not for a Victoria Cross.

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23 Lt-Col. Sutton diary entry, AWM, 2 DRL/ 1227.
24 Bean, vol. 1, p. 577.
25 AWM, PR 83/69, 10 of 17.
26 *Sabretache*, pp. 28-9.
27 *Ibid.*, p. 31.
28 AWM, PR 83/69, 10 of 17.

Monash makes no mention of a VC. It was not his place to do so. The appropriate honour would be decided by the determining authority. Wilson muddies the waters here by claiming that:

"Simpson's champions always hold this [Monash's report] up as the official recommendation for a VC and state that the only reason that Simpson did not get a VC was that Monash's recommendation was entered under the 'wrong category.' This is, to put it politely, total poppycock." And so it is. But Wilson's confusion of the issue presents his readers with a parody of the actual events.29

Monash never recommended Simpson for a VC. However, both Simpson's Bearer Officer and his Commanding Officer were convinced that he had earned, and merited the VC, and their wishes in this respect should have been respected and implemented. Capt. Lyle Buchanan wrote that: "He [Simpson] had earned it [the Victoria Cross] fifty times."30 Alfred Sutton recorded in his diary on 24 May 1915: "I sent in a report about No. 202 Pte Simpson, J. of C Section, shot on duty on May 19th 1915. He was a splendid fellow and went up the gullies day and night bringing [in] the wounded on donkeys. I hope he will be awarded the DCM [Distinguished Conduct Medal]," Then on June 1st Sutton wrote: "I think we will get a VC for poor Simpson."31

There is no doubt that Simpson was recommended through his unit for the Victoria Cross – a point which Graham Wilson refutes vigorously. But the evidence is incontrovertible and appears in a personal narrative by Capt. Fry, and in Lt-Col. Sutton's diary. The reason Simpson was denied the VC, however, may well have been due to the inexplicable interference into the awards process by Colonel Neville Howse VC, the senior medical officer at Anzac. This information did not appear in *Across the Bar*. I was advised not to publish it in 1994 as it was to comprise the new evidence with which the Royal Australian Army Medical Corps hoped to justify the awarding of a retrospective VC to Simpson, in 1995.

On 4 May 1915, Colonel Howse issued what Lt-Col. Sutton described as an "extraordinary order." Howse ordered that all recommendations for military awards from the Field Ambulances were to be made direct to him by the Senior Bearer Officers, thus bypassing the Commanding Officers and excluding them from the process. Alfred Sutton was dumbfounded, confiding to his diary: "The COs are not to have anything to do with it - they are not to have a word to say about it. I think this is an extraordinary order, surely my officer should report to me and I should pass it on. However this extraordinary order is an order and it shall be done."32

The normal procedure concerning the awarding of bravery medals in the Australian and British Armies in 1915 (which would be resumed in the Medical Corps when the AIF went to France), was that an heroic deed had to be witnessed - usually by a junior officer, in the field of action - and this officer would write a brief description of that deed which he would submit to his commanding officer (a Lieutenant-Colonel in command of a battalion or, in Simpson's case, in command of a Field Ambulance). It was up to the experienced commanding officer to determine whether a bravery award was indicated, and if so, which one. The CO would then prepare the official recommendation which he would submit to the senior officer in that theatre of war (a major-general in command of a division, or in Simpson's case, the senior medical officer at Anzac, Colonel Howse, Assistant Director of Medical Services). If successful, the recommendation would become the citation.

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29 *Sabretache*, pp. 27, 31 & 37.
30 AWM, PR 83/69, 6 of 17.
31 AWM, 2 DRL/ 1227.
32 AWM, 2 DRL/ 1227

Professor Bill Gammage, author of *The Broken Years*, maintains that during the first months of World War One at Anzac many Australian recommendations for military awards were unsuccessful due to the inexperience of junior officers in the correct procedure and requirements for the preparation of citations. This was a new army and the first priority was preparation for war.33

Colonel Howse's "extraordinary order" placed both Capt. Fry and Lt-Col. Sutton in an invidious position. Fry was a young doctor with very limited military experience and he was being asked to decide which bravery award was justified for Simpson, and to prepare the appropriate recommendation, to be on-forwarded to Howse for his approval or rejection. There is no question that Fry recommended Simpson for the VC. This is recorded unmistakably in Fry's narrative for 3 June 1915 where he writes: "Saw ADMS re Simpson and Goldsmith (Simpson for VC). Adams, Sharples and Jeffries and Conrick to give evidence." A second narrative entry by Fry for 14 June reads: "Adams and Sharples evidence (re Simpson) in the morning."34

Clause 5 of the Warrant for the award of the Victoria Cross, in 1856, specified that to be eligible for the award a recipient must have performed either a "signal [or outstanding] act of valour", or have demonstrated great "devotion to their country... in the presence of the enemy." It seems apparent from Lt-Col. Sutton's and Lyle Buchanan's comments in their accounts that Fry had recommended Simpson for the VC under the first category, that is for one outstanding act of bravery, and that he was unaware that Simpson could have been recommended for having performed brave, devoted service over a prolonged period, as was the case with Group Captain Leonard Cheshire, a VC winner in WW2. Alfred Sutton wrote in his diary on June 4th: I have been writing up poor Simpson's case with a view to getting some honour for him. It is difficult to get evidence of any one act to justify the VC, the fact is he did so many."35 Lyle Buchanan similarly recorded in a later statement: "You know all about the repeated, fruitless efforts to get him the VC. He had earned it fifty times, but the VC is only for those who have earned it on one occasion."36

A single outstanding act of bravery by Simpson could not be substantiated by Fry and Simpson's VC recommendation was rejected by Howse. Whether or not Howse's "extraordinary order" was decisive in denying Simpson a VC, the forcing of a junior officer to correctly prepare a VC recommendation, with no recourse to his commanding officer for assistance, must have been an important contributing factor. No record was kept of this botched VC recommendation by Fry, for Simpson (in keeping with Bill Gammage's appraisal of the early, confused conditions at Anzac). Instead, Simpson was awarded a Mention in Despatches on 26 August 1915.37

As stated, Howse's "extraordinary order" of 4 May 1915, was the basis of the 1995 attempt to have Simpson granted the VC. This was made by a past Director-General (James) and a Surgeon-General (Rodgers) of the Medical Corps, supported by then Land Commander of the Australian Army, Major-General Peter Arnison (subsequently Governor of Queensland), and by the Minister for Veterans Affairs, Con Sciacca. This VC attempt failed. There have been subsequent attempts in 2000 and 2005, notably by Parliamentarian Jill Hall and Senator Chris Schacht, within a Private Members Bill. All have failed.

In July 1967 leading Australian citizens, which included Prime Minister Holt, Governor-General Lord Casey, the Chief of the General Staff, and others, sent a petition to the British War Office, on behalf of the people of Australia, requesting that Simpson be awarded the VC he had been unjustly denied in 1915. This request was also rejected. With regard to this petition, in an

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33 Conversation with then Dr Bill Gammage at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, in 1990.
34 AWM, 41 (2/7/15).
35 AWM, 2 DRL/ 1227.
36 AWM, PR 83/69, 6 of 17.
37 Simpson's Army Records, Form B. 103.

Endnote to *Across the Bar,* I mistakenly named the Chief of the General Staff in 1967 as having been Major-General Brand, when this should, of course, have been Lieutenant-General Sir Thomas Daly. Graham Wilson took me severely to task for this error, magnifying it out of all proportion to its significance. It seems almost churlish on my part to point out that Graham Wilson has committed an almost identical error in his *Sabretache* article, not once but on two separate occasions, where he identifies the Prime Minister in this July 1967 petition as having been Sir Robert Menzies, when this should, of course, have been Harold Holt.38 This only goes to show that anyone is capable of the occasional error, and few historical works would ever claim to be error-free.

Conclusion

Graham Wilson's final determination, in his *Sabretache* paper, is that the Simpson legend, which has been accepted fondly by the people of Australia for more than eight decades, was a fraudulent deception all along, and that the man with the donkey, rather than being the selfless hero of tradition, turns

out to have been a "self-serving" shirker, to whom the award of a posthumous Victoria Cross would be both "inappropriate" and "wholly undeserved." Wilson arrives at these conclusions without the benefit of any supporting evidence. His arguments are based rather upon supposition and deduction. The *fact* that Simpson was never awarded the VC, for example, leads him to deduce that "Simpson was no braver than anyone else at Gallipoli." Hence his alleged heroism was a sham. And the *fact* that Simpson offered a lift on his donkey to a couple of walking wounded soldiers in Shrapnel Valley allows Wilson to deduce that: "*All* of the men he [Simpson] 'saved' were in fact lightly wounded men, walking wounded who could have quite easily have made it down Shrapnel Gully on their own (italics added)." This leads Wilson to the realisation that the donkey rides were a ploy, a lazy dodge by Simpson to avoid the hard grind – and danger - of stretcher carrying, and to establish "for himself a job that was far easier and... safer."39

As for Simpson being recommended for a Victoria Cross, Wilson dismisses this as "poppycock." The testimony of Capt. Fry in this matter can be discounted, he insists, because it was "drawn from a personal narrative... and made from memory... four years after the event." And Lt-Col. Sutton's evidence "are diary entries ... just that, no more, no less."40 Wilson makes no mention of Sutton's exclusion from the military awards process by Colonel Howse, and the profound impact this had on Simpson's recommendation by Capt. Fry. One suspects that Wilson was unaware of this crucial factor.

But if Simpson was the spineless shirker Wilson describes why then did Colonels Sutton and Monash write about him in such praiseworthy terms - and recommend him for high military honours?

And why should their sentiments have been echoed, independently, by the three Bearer Officers of 3rd Field Ambulance, Captains Fry, Conrick and Buchanan, the men who most closely would have observed Simpson in action every day, and who would have known exactly how he had conducted himself.

Wilson's basic premise - that the role Simpson chose for himself, "doing his own thing, strolling up and down Shrapnel and Monash Gullies with a donkey"41 was far easier, and safer than conventional stretcher work - is revealed to be a nonsense, unless one is prepared to dismiss all

38 *Sabretache*, pp. 27 & 32.
39 *Ibid.*, pp. 36-7.
40 *Ibid.*, pp. 30-1.
41 *Ibid.*, p.36.

the most reliable evidence of Simpson's Bearer Officers, together with that of Monash, Sutton, Fergusson, Davidson and Brand, all of whom testified that Simpson's work was fraught with extreme danger, and that he risked his life repeatedly, and selflessly, in order to get as many wounded men down to the CCS, for treatment, as possible.

Wilson insists that Simpson was never recommended for the Victoria Cross through his own unit, when he clearly was, as Capt. Fry's personal narrative establishes. Graham Wilson's alternative version of the Simpson story (as he refers to it in his paper) 42 is not supported by one scintilla of evidence. It is an invention, pure and simple, and a cynical exercise in dialectics which is unworthy of serious historical attention.

With regard to Wilson's claim that Simpson should no longer be considered for a VC, there is a certain merit to this argument - though most certainly not for the reasons Wilson gives. Simpson was a great military hero, one of Australia's very finest, as the evidence available should leave no reasonable person in any doubt. But it could be argued that Simpson has been honoured enough already, and that his place at the heart of the Anzac legend, as the personification of the Anzac spirit, is once again secure.

In 1999 the Commonwealth Government created a wonderful initiative, with the inauguration of the Simpson Prize. This is an annual, Australia-wide essay competition for all year 9 students, who are asked to write an essay on the meaning of Anzac (and how the Simpson/Anzac spirit is relevant in today's society). One winner from each state and territory is taken to Gallipoli as an Australian ambassador, at the Anzac Day commemoration each April. All of our schoolkids are thus given the best possible understanding of that tradition - through the ongoing influence of the Simpson Prize. Ask our younger generation, and they will tell you what the Anzac spirit is all about. And you can see a snowballing effect on the Anzac tradition as it gets bigger and stronger every year.

Perhaps Simpson no longer needs a Victoria Cross. Perhaps he has been given something worth more than any medal. With his official recognition as Australia's best-known and best-loved military hero he has become a national icon and a role model for our youth. One suspects that, given the choice, he may well have opted for that.

On the other hand, should it be decided, at some future time, that a Victoria Cross for Australia (our supreme award for valour) be granted to the man with the donkey, what message would this send out? It would tell the world who we are, the ideals we cherish, and what it means to be Australian.

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42 *Ibid.*

GREAT-GRANDAD WAS CATHOLIC AND DIDN'T GET A VC: AN ODD MYTH OF THE AIF

Graham Wilson

The AIF has a number of myths connected with it, some well known (think Simpson and his donkey), some lesser known, even obscure (think Gaby's 'posthumous' photograph). One of the lesser known myths of the AIF is one that I, for professional reasons, am personally well acquainted with. In the course of my work I have had occasion to respond to letters, emails and telephone calls from people seeking advice on the veracity of the myth that Catholics were denied the Victoria Cross during the First World War. The approaches are generally couched along the lines of: 'I have been told that my grandfather (great-grandfather, grand-uncle, great grand-uncle, etc) was recommended for a Victoria Cross during World War One but didn't get it because he was a Catholic.' The theme is then usually embroidered to the extent that the caller or writer is convinced that no Catholics were awarded the VC, being denied the decoration due to their religion. One odd aspect of this somewhat whimsical little myth is that it seems only to be connected with the First World War, i.e. the (First) AIF.

I am personally at a loss to know how and when this particular myth started. One possibility is simple ignorance and the one eyed religious bigotry of the more fervent Catholic man or woman, a bigotry that looks at a list of names, makes no effort to find out the religious affiliation noted against each individual name and presumes immediately that every person on the list in non-Catholic and just as immediately presumes some form of black hearted, anti-Popish, Proddie plot. Before any reader takes me to task for anti-Catholic bigotry myself, I state quite clearly that I am a baptised, practicing and devout Catholic and the description of the sort of blinkered Catholic zealot I have drawn comes from intimate personal experience.

Another possibility is a belief, strongly held in the years between the two world wars, amongst Catholics, not only in the UK and Ireland but here in Australia as well, connected with the famous Irish Jesuit priest, Father William ('Willie') Doyle, SJ, chaplain to the British Army's 16th (Irish) Division. It is stated, with little proof, that the highly regarded Father Doyle had been recommended for the VC in 1917 but the recommendation had been quietly sidelined as it was thought that awarding the VC to an Irish Catholic priest at the time of the Easter Uprising in Dublin would be politically unacceptable. This charming little story ignores the fact that the Easter Uprising took place in 1916, not 1917. It also ignores the reality of the fact that the Uprising originally had almost no popular support. Support for the Irish Nationalist cause only gained impetus after the wholly understandable but politically inept execution of 15 of the captured leaders of the Uprising. Given the explosion of support for Irish Nationalism in the wake of the executions of the leaders of the Easter Uprising, it is quite probable that the British government would have actually looked quite favourably on the notion of an award of the VC to an Irish Catholic priest as something of a propaganda coup, a way of showing the Catholic Irish that they were still valued. While it can be argued that it is just as likely that award of a VC to an Irish Catholic priest could have been seen as antagonistic to the pro-British Unionist faction in Ireland – remember that the Easter Uprising occurred less than two years after the pro-Unionist so-called 'Curragh Mutiny' of 1914 – and therefore just as much to be avoided as embraced, Westminster and Dublin Castle didn't need to woo the support of the Unionist as badly as they needed to court the support of the Nationalists.[1] I still feel that if a recommendation for the VC had in fact been made for

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1 The 'Curragh Mutiny' or 'Curragh Incident' in Ireland in 1914 involved British Army officers serving in Ireland. At the time of the impending, although ultimately abortive, passage of the Home Rule Act through Parliament, the predominant Protestant 'Unionists' in Ulster threatened to resist the imposition of the Act by armed force if necessary. Readying itself for the possibility of having to

Willie Doyle then it would have been acted on. We only have to note, for instance, that being a Southern Irish Catholic did not stop another Doyle, CSM Martin Doyle, MM, Royal Munster Fusiliers, from being awarded the VC in 1918. Unlike Father Willie Doyle, who was killed in action on 17 August 1917 and has no known grave, Martin Doyle, VC, survived the war to return to Ireland and become an officer in first the Irish Republican Army (in its original form as a revolutionary army fighting for the freedom of Ireland) and then the Irish Free State Army. Martin Doyle's VC was awarded for bravery and devotion to duty on 2 September 1918 when he took command of his company after all of the officers had become casualties, extricated a party of his men who had become surrounded by the enemy, carried a wounded officer to safety while under heavy enemy fire, organised the defence of a stranded tank, single-handedly captured a German machine gun and finally organised a counter-attack that drove back a German attack on his company position. Martin Doyle was 26 years old at the time.2

All this aside, the belief that Willie Doyle had been recommended for the VC at some stage but was denied it due to, in the words of his biographer, 'the triple disqualification of being an Irishman, a Catholic and a Jesuit' remains strong, amounting almost to a myth in its own right.3 Given the extremely strong, not to say overwhelming, Irish element in the Australian Catholic community in the first half of the 20th century, it should come as no surprise to learn that the story of Willie Doyle, totally forgotten in Australia today, was widely known and widely repeated in the Catholic community in Australia during the war and in the years after it. There is a very good chance that the myth of Willie Doyle's 'VC' may in fact have been the genesis for the myth of the denial of the VC to Catholics in the AIF.

As a Catholic myself, this myth certainly has special meaning for me and I have acquired quite a bit of knowledge on the subject, which I use to disabuse those who bring the myth to my attention. The very first thing that can be used to dispel the myth is the statutes for the VC itself. The Sixth Statute of the original Royal Warrant establishing the VC in 1856 expressly states:

> Sixthly. – It is ordained, with a view to place all persons on a perfectly equal footing in relation to eligibility for the Decorations (VC), that neither rank, nor long service, nor wounds, nor any other circumstance or

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enforce the Act by force of arms if necessary, the British Army engaged in some confusing communications between London and Dublin, which resulted in the commander of the Curragh Camp (the main British base in Ireland), General Paget, offering the officers under his command the option of resigning their commissions if they felt they could not fight the Ulster Unionists. When news broke that 57 of the 70 officers at the Curragh had resigned their commissions, there was an uproar, following which additional troops were despatched to Ireland, the British government, which had at first been prepared to take a harsh line with the 'mutineers', backed down, calling the whole thing a 'misunderstanding', the officers involved were reinstated to their commissions and the War Office declared that the Army would not be used to enforce the Home Rule Act. The Act was not passed in the end, and the 'Curragh Mutiny' itself was quite minor, however, it was indicative of the volatile situation in Ireland at the time. For more detailed information on the incident, see Beckett, Ian F. W. The Army and the Curragh Incident 1914 and Fergusson, Sir James *The Curragh Incident*, London, 1964.

2 This England, 1997 The Register of the Victoria Cross (hereinafter referred to as Register), The Bath Press Limited, Bath, Somerset, p. 94.

3 O'Rahilly, Professor Alfred Father William Doyle, S.J., quoted in Johnstone, Tom and Hagerty, James, 1996 The Cross On the Sword Catholic Chaplains in the Forces, Geoffrey Chapman, London, p.163.

condition whatsoever, save the merit of conspicuous bravery shall be held to establish a sufficient claim to the honour.[4]

This Statute has never been repealed and was in force during the First World War. The Statute expressly forbids a recommending or approving authority to discriminate against a recommendation on the basis of the recommended person's religion, or any other basis for that matter. The Statute decrees that in considering recommendations for award of the VC, it placed 'all persons on a perfectly equal footing' – not 'all Anglican persons', or 'all Church of England persons', or 'all Conforming persons', not even 'all male persons' (although no female has ever been awarded the VC, there is nothing in the Statutes to preclude this), simply 'all persons'. Further to this, for the myth to be accepted, either for the British Army or the AIF in the First World War, we would have to accept that, prior to making a recommendation or forwarding a recommendation on, a recommending or approving authority would call for the recommended man's personal record and check his stated religion. Accepting the frailty of human nature and that there were almost certainly non-Catholics in positions of authority who would have liked to have seen no VCs go to Catholics (or Presbyterians, or Baptists, or Methodists, or Non-Conformists, or Jews, etc) I have never heard or read one single whisper of this ever having actually occurred, i.e. the deliberate cancellation or withholding of a VC (or any other form of decoration) recommendation due to the religion of the recommended man – neither in the AIF, nor in the British forces.

The proof of this lies, of course, in the second major item that can be used to refute the myth, i.e. the names of some members of the British Army who were both Catholic and were awarded the VC, before and during the First World War and the list of members of the AIF who were awarded the VC during the First World War, with the recipients' stated religion listed.

First of all, a number of Catholics serving with the British forces had been awarded the VC, before and during the First World War. For example, apart from CSM Doyle, already mentioned, Stonyhurst College, the famous Jesuit school in Lancashire, lists no less than seven VC recipients amongst its distinguished alumni, of which five were awarded before or during the First World War.[5] Stonyhurst was established by the Society of Jesus at St Omer, in Flanders, in 1563 to offer a Catholic education to the sons of English Recusant Catholic families.[6] The school relocated to Stonyhurst in Lancashire in 1794, at which time it took its current name. Besides its seven VCs, Stonyhurst counts many famous men amongst its alumni, including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, doctor, author and creator of the fictional detective Sherlock Holmes; Gerard Manley Hopkins, Roman Catholic convert, Jesuit priest and romantic poet; Charles Laughton, soldier, stage and screen actor, screen writer, producer and director, perhaps best remembered for his role as the deformed Quasimodo in the 1939 version of 'The Hunchback of Notre Dame'; Thomas Francis Meagher, Irish born soldier, politician and statesman who escaped to America from the penal settlement in Van Diemen's Land in 1852, American Civil War general, raised and commanded the Irish Brigade of the Army of the Potomac; Joseph Mary

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4 'Victoria Cross Warrant', quoted in Abbott, P.E. and Tamplin, J.M.A., 1981 British Gallantry Awards, Nimrod Dix & Co, London, p.311.

5 'Stonyhurst College' official website (hereinafter referred to as 'SCW'), http://www.stonyhurst.ac.uk.

6 'Recusant', from the Latin recusare, to reject or to oppose, is a word used to describe English Catholics who refused to attend or embrace the Church of England. The word dates back to an anti-Catholic Elizabethan law of 1593, An Act for Restraining Popish Recusants, While non-Roman Catholic groups of Reformed Christians or Protestants who dissented from the Church of England were also originally referred to as Recusants, the word has evolved over the years to refer specifically to Non-Conforming English (and Welsh and Scottish) Catholics. The most well known Recusant family in England is Fitzalan-Howard, whose head, the Duke of Norfolk, is Hereditary Earl Marshal of England, one of the Great Officers of State. Other well known Recusant families include Arden of Longcroft, de Lisle (and de Lisle-Phillips), Fitzherbert, Noel (Earl of Gainsborough), Radcliffe, and Chrichton-Stuart (Scotland). Historically, one of the best known Recusants was Guido (or Guy) Fawkes.

Plunkett, Irish patriot executed in 1916 for his part in the Easter Uprising in Dublin; and J.R.R. Tolkien, author, philologist, soldier, university professor and creator of *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings*.[7] The VC awards to Stonyhurst graduates are:

- Lieutenant Edmond William Costello, VC – graduated from Stonyhurst in 1891 and awarded the VC for gallantry serving with the 22nd Punjab Infantry, Indian Army, during the Malakand Campaign in 1897 (Costello would go on to serve in the First World War, earning the DSO and French Croix de Guerre, rose to the rank of Brigadier General and was a senior officer in the Home Guard in Sussex during World War Two).[8]
- Captain Paul Aloysius Kenna, VC – graduated from Stonyhurst in 1880 and awarded the VC for gallantry serving with the 21st Lancers at the Battle of Omdurman during the Sudan Campaign of 1898 (Kenna was killed at Gallipoli as a Brigadier in the British Army on 30 August 1915).[9]
- Lieutenant Maurice James Dease, VC (posthumous) – graduated from Stonyhurst in 1907, awarded the VC posthumously (first VC of the First World War) at Mons, Belgium as a member of the 4th Battalion, the Royal Fusiliers on 23 August 1914.[10]
- Captain John Aidan Liddell, VC – graduated from Stonyhurst in 1909, awarded the VC for gallantry in the air as a member of 3rd Battalion, Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and Royal Flying Corps in Belgium on 31 July 1915 (Liddell died on 31 August 1915 of wounds received in his VC action).[11]
- Second Lieutenant Gabriel George Coury, VC – graduated from Stonyhurst in 1913 and awarded the VC for gallantry in France on 8 August 1916 while serving with the South Lancashire Regiment (Coury, the son of an Armenian father and a French mother, earned a battlefield promotion for his gallantry, later transferred to the RFC and reached the rank of captain and in World War Two served in the Royal Army Service Corps as a major and took part in the Normandy landings in June 1944).[12]
- Captain Harold Marcus Ervine-Andrews, VC – graduated from Stonyhurst in 1929, awarded the VC for gallantry in action on 31 May-1 June 1940, near Dunkirk in France while serving with the 1st Battalion, East Lancashire Regiment (born in Ireland, Ervine-Andrews spent two years during World War Two attached to the Australian Army, rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the British Army before retiring in the 1950s, tried to settle in Ireland but was driven out by the IRA, eventually settling in Cornwall, and died in 1995, the last of the 'Irish VCs').[13]
- Captain James Joseph Bernard Jackman, VC, - graduated from Stonyhurst in 1934, awarded the VC (posthumously) for gallantry in action at Tobruk on 25-26 November 1941, while serving with the 1st (MG) Battalion, the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers (Jackman's VC is held and displayed by Stonyhurst College).[14]

Ervine-Andrews and Jackman are not actually relevant to the article as they are World War Two awards, but their names are included for the sake of completeness. The seven Stonyhurst VCs are today commemorated in Stonyhurst's Combined Cadet Force Unit, with seven of the Unit's eight platoons being named after the VC recipients.[15] As an additional example of the fact that Catholics

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7 SCW, ibid.
8 SCW, also Register p.72 and Arthur, Max 2005 Symbol of Courage The Men Behind the Medal, Pan Books, London (hereinafter referred to as Symbol), p.145.
9 SCW, also Register p.176 and Symbol, pp.151-152.
10 SCW, also Register, p.87 and Symbol, pp.188-190.
11 SCW, also Register, p.193 and Symbol, p.233.
12 SCW, also Register, p.73 and Symbol, p.252.
13 SCW, also Register, p.32 and Symbol, pp.388-389.
14 SCW, also Register, p.624 and Symbol, p.401.
15 SCW, also Register of the Victoria Cross. In addition to seven VCs, Stonyhurst graduates have been awarded 43 DSO, 8 DSC (and 1 Bar), 108 MC,13 DFC, 3 AFC, 1 Croix-de-Guerre, the latest awards known being a DSO and an MC in the Falklands War in 1982. Stonyhurst's military heritage does not just include award recipients, the College being able to make that claim that since 1857 not a

were not discriminated against in the matter of gallantry awards, as wells as seven VCs, Stonyhurst graduates have been awarded 43 Companion of the Distinguished Service Order (DSO), 8 Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) and 1 Bar to the DSC, 108 Military Cross (MC), 13 Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC), 3 Air Force Cross (AFC) and 4 Croix-de-Guerre, the latest awards known being a DSO and an MC in the Falklands War in 1982.16

The known Catholic recipients of the VC in the British forces up to the end of the First World War, in chronological order of date of award, include:

- Sergeant Luke O'Connor, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in action in the Crimean War on 20 September 1854 while serving with the 23rd Regiment of Foot (O'Connor was commissioned and late achieved the rank of Major General and a knighthood, being Major General Sir Luke O'Connor, VC, KCB at the time of his death in 1915).17
- Private Joseph Bradshaw, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in action in the Crimean War on 22 April 1855 while serving with the 2nd Battalion the Rifle Brigade (Bradshaw was later promoted to Corporal and also received the French Médaille Militaire).18
- Private John Byrne, VC – awarded the VC in the Crimea for gallantry on 5 November 1854 and 11 May 1855 while serving with the 68th Regiment of Foot.19
- Private William Coffey, VC, DCM – awarded the VC in the Crimea for gallantry on 25 March 1855 while serving with the 34th Regiment of Foot.20
- Boatswain's Mate John Sullivan, VC, CGM – awarded the VC for gallantry in the Crimean War on 10 April 1855 while serving with the Naval Brigade at Sevastopol (Sullivan later achieved the rank of Chief Boatswain's Mate and would be awarded, in addition to the VC, the Conspicuous Gallantry Medal, the Royal Humane Society's Silver Medal (for life saving), the French Legion d'Honneur and the Sardinian Al Valore Militari).21
- Private John Lyons, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in action at Sebastopol, in the Crimea (Russia) on 10 June 1855 while serving with the 19th Foot, later the Green Howards (Lyons went on to serve in the Indian Mutiny and reached the rank of Corporal; he was a Chelsea Pensioner for a period before returning to his native Ireland, where he died in 1867).22
- Private John Alexander, VC – awarded the VC in the Crimea on 18 June 1855 while serving with the 90th (Perthshire) Light Infantry.23
- Captain Thomas Esmonde, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in action in the Crimean War on 18 June 1855 while serving with the 18th Regiment of Foot (Thomas Esmonde, who later rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the Royal Irish Regiment, was the great-uncle of Lieutenant Commander Eugene Kingsmill Esmonde, VC, DSO, another Catholic VC recipient, who was awarded a posthumous VC for gallantry off the coast of England on 12 February 1942).24

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single year has passed when at least one Old Boy (or Old Girl these days) of the College has not passed out of one of the Service Colleges as a commissioned officer.

16 Stonyhurst's military heritage does not just include award recipients, the College being able to make that claim that since the mid-19th century not a single year has passed when at least one Old Boy (or Old Girl these days) of the College has not passed out of one of the Service Colleges as a commissioned officer of His or Her Majesty's Forces.

17 Register, p.242 and Symbol, p.8.

18 Register, p.37 and Symbol, pp.55-56.

19 Register, p.48 and Symbol, p.21.

20 Register, p.64 and Symbol, p.28.

21 Register, p.306 and Symbol, p.28.

22 Register, p.198 and Symbol, p.33.

23 Register, p.12 and Symbol, p.33.

24 Register, p.104 and Symbol, p.34.

- Corporal Philip Felix Smith, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in action in the Crimean War on 18 June 1855 while serving with the 17th Regiment of Foot (Smith was later promoted to the rank of Sergeant and in addition to the VC was awarded the French Médaille Militaire).25
- Private John Joseph Connors, VC – awarded the VC in the Crimea for gallantry on 8 September 1855 while serving with the 3rd Regiment of Foot (Connors was promoted to Corporal, however, his VC gazette was posthumous, Connors dying at Corfu on 29 January 1857, with his VC gazette being published on 24 February 1857).26
- Ensign Everard Aloysius Lisle-Phillipps, VC – awarded the VC (posthumously) for gallantry in action between 30 May – 18 September 1857 at the Siege of Delhi during the Indian Mutiny while serving with the 11th Bengal Native Infantry (Lisle-Phillipps was the scion of a famous English Recusant Catholic family; he was killed in action during the storming of Delhi on 18 September 1857 and his name was published in the *London Gazette* with the notation that had he lived his name would have been put forward to the Queen for award of the Victoria Cross; following the change to the rules for the VC in 1907 which allowed for posthumous award, Phillipps was posthumously awarded the VC, his award (along with five others) being gazetted on 15 January 1907, almost fifty years after his VC action, and due to the date of his VC action he is generally accepted as the first posthumous award).27
- Colour Sergeant Cornelius Coughlan (also spelled Coghlan), VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in the Indian Mutiny on 8 June 1857 while serving with the 75th Regiment of Foot.28
- Private John Purcell, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in action on 19 June 1857 during the Siege of Delhi in the Indian Mutiny while serving with the 9th (Queen's Royal) Lancers (Purcell never learned of the gazettal of the VC, being killed in action at on 19 September 1857 during the storming of Delhi).29
- Private John McGovern, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in the Indian Mutiny on 23 June 1857 while serving with the 1st Bengal European Fusiliers.30
- Private William Dowling, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in the Indian Mutiny between 4 July and 27 September 1857 while serving with the 32nd Regiment of Foot.31
- Lance Corporal Abraham Boulger, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in the Indian Mutiny between 12 July – 25 September 1857 while serving with the 84th Regiment of Foot (Boulger later rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the York and Lancaster Regiment).32
- Private Denis Dempsey, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in the Indian Mutiny on 12 August 1857 while serving with the 10th Regiment of Foot.33
- Private John Divane (also Devine and Duane), VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in the Indian Mutiny on 10 September 1857 while serving with the 60th Rifles (Divane was an 'elected' VC, his award being elected by ballot amongst the privates of the 60th, under Rule 13 of the Statutes).34
- Private Patrick Green, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in action on 11 September 1857, during the Siege of Delhi in the Indian Mutiny while serving with the 75th Regiment of Foot, the Gordon Highlanders (later promoted to Colour Sergeant, Green died in his native Ireland in 1889 and like quite a few early VC recipients his precise burial location has been lost).35

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25 Register, p.299 and Symbol, p.35.
26 Register, p.68 and Symbol, p.39.
27 Register, p.254 and Symbol, p.50.
28 Register, p.73 and Symbol, p.50.
29 Register, p.260 and Symbol, p.52.
30 Register, p.202 and Symbol, p.53.
31 Register, p.93 and Symbol, p.67.
32 Register, p.34 and Symbol, p.68.
33 Register, p.88 and Symbol, p.57.
34 Register, p.90 and Symbol, p.55.
35 Register, p.129 and Symbol, p.56.

- Private Thomas Duffy, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in action in the Defence of Lucknow on 26 September 1857 during the Indian Mutiny, while serving with the 1st Madras Fusiliers (later 1st Battalion the Royal Dublin Fusiliers).36
- Private Patrick Dononoe, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in the Indian Mutiny on 28 September 1857 while serving with the 9th Lancers.37
- Private Patrick McHale, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in the Indian Mutiny for two separate acts on 2 October and 22 December 1857 while serving with the 5th Regiment of Foot.38
- Mr Thomas Henry Kavanagh, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry on 9 November 1857 at Lucknow during the Indian Mutiny (Kavanagh was a member of the Bengal Civil Service and was one of the handful of civilian awards of the VC that have been made over the years).39
- Lance Corporal John Dunlay (also Sonley and Dulca), VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in the Indian Mutiny on 16 November 1857 while serving with the 93rd Regiment of Foot (Dunlay, whose VC was elected under Rule 13, was wounded in the knee by a musket ball during his VC action, the musket ball now being displayed alongside his VC in the Sheesh Mahal Museum in India).40
- Drummer Thomas Flinn, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in the Indian Mutiny on 28 November 1857 while serving with the 64th Regiment of Foot (Flinn was 15 years and 3 months old at the time of his action and is jointly regarded with Hospital Apprentice Andrew Fitzgibbon, who may also have been Catholic, as the youngest VC recipient in history – as Fitzgibbon's actual birth date is unknown it is impossible to say who was youngest).41
- Private Bernard McQuirt, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in the Indian Mutiny on 6 January 1858 while serving with the 95th Regiment of Foot.42
- Corporal Michael Sleavon, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry during the Indian Mutiny on 3 April 1858 while serving with the Corps of Royal Engineers.43
- Private James Byrne, VC – awarded the VC during the Indian Mutiny for gallantry on 3 April 1858 while serving with the 86th Regiment of Foot (Royal Irish Rifles).44
- Private Patrick Carlin, VC – awarded the VC during the Indian Mutiny for gallantry in action on 6 April 1858 with serving with the 13th Regiment of Foot (Carlin was born in the Belfast Workhouse, never married and died alone in the Belfast Union Infirmary in 1895).45
- Farrier Michael Murphy, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in action near Azimurgh during the Indian on 15 April 1858 while serving with the 2nd Battalion, Military Train (Murphy was unfortunate enough to be one of the only eight men to forfeit their VC under Rule Fifteen of the original Royal Warrant for the VC; Murphy's VC was forfeited following his conviction and imprisonment for theft of military stores in 1872; Murphy served nine months in civil prison, although his forfeited VC 'disappeared' on the last day of his trial and was not recovered until five years after his death in 1893 when the VC was offered for private sale and purchased by the Royal Army Service Corps (the successor to the Military Train); Murphy returned to his unit at the completion of his civil sentence and served a total of 20 years in the British Army and reached the rank of Farrier Major; Murphy's entitlement to the VC was restored in 1920 when the forfeiture clause was removed from the Royal Warrant and Murphy's name along with the other seven forfeitures, was relisted in the VC Register).46

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36 Register, p.96 and Symbol, p.72.
37 Register, p.336 and Symbol, pp.65-66.
38 Register, p.204 and Symbol, p.73.
39 Register, p.174 and Symbol, p.74.
40 Register, p.358 and Symbol, p.77.
41 Register, p.111 and Symbol, p.73.
42 Register, p.212 and Symbol, p.83.
43 Register, p.295 and Symbol, p.90.
44 Register, p.48 and Symbol, p.90.
45 Register, p.53 and Symbol, p.86.
46 Register, p.233 and Symbol, p.87.

- Colour Sergeant John Lucas, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in New Zealand on 18 March 1861 while serving with the 40th Regiment of Foot (the VC to Lucas, who was later promoted to the rank of Sergeant Major, was one of only two awarded for the Taranaki War).47
- Sergeant John Murray, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in action at Tauranga, New Zealand on 21 June 1864 during the Waikato War, while serving with the 68th Foot, The Durham Light Infantry.48
- Private David Bell, VC – awarded the VC on 7 May 1867 while serving with the 2nd/24th Foot during the Andaman Islands Expedition (Bell's VC was one of a handful awarded for gallantry not in action, in accordance with a new clause added to the VC Statutes in 1858 which allowed award of the decoration for 'acts of conspicuous courage and bravery under circumstances of extreme danger – six awards were made in 1867 and 1868, however, the clause was revoked in 1881).49
- Private William Griffiths, VC – awarded the VC on 7 May 1867 while serving with the 2nd/24th Foot during the Andaman Islands Expedition (Griffiths' VC was awarded for the same incident and on the same day as David Bell's VC – Griffiths was killed in action on 22 January 1879 during the Battle of Isandhlwana during the Zulu War, it being reported that when his body was recovered after the battle he was found to still be wearing his VC, which is now in the Regimental Museum of the South Wales Borderers).50
- Private Thomas Murphy, VC - awarded the VC on 7 May 1867 while serving with the 2nd/24th Foot during the Andaman Islands Expedition (see Bell and Griffiths).51
- Private James Bergin, VC – awarded the VC in Abyssinia (Ethiopia) on 13 April 1868 for bravery at the storming of Magdala, while serving with the 33rd (Duke of Wellington's) Regiment.52
- Acting Assistant Commissary James Langley Dalton, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in action at the Battle of Rorke's Drift during the Zulu War on 22-23 January 1879 while serving with the Commissariat and Transport Department (portrayed in the 1964 movie 'Zulu' as a fussy, prissy, almost effeminate bureaucrat, Dalton was actually an old soldier of much experience, who had served under Sir Garnet Wolseley in the Red River Expedition of 1870 and had retired from the Army in South Africa 1871 as a Master-Sergeant in the Commissariat Department – volunteering to serve in the Zulu War in 1879 as an Acting Assistant Commissary, Dalton's role in the defence of the Rorke's Drift mission station on 22 January 1879 has been shown by recent research to have been far more significant than has long been thought).53
- Surgeon Major James Henry Reynolds, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in action at the Battle of Rorke's Drift during the Zulu War on 22-23 January 1879 while serving with the Army Medical Department (Reynolds retired in 1896 with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and Brigade Surgeon and died in 1932).54
- Captain Garrett O'Moore Creagh, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in action at Kam Dakka near Kabul during the Afghan War between 12-22 April 1879 while serving with the Bombay Staff Corps (Creagh would be knighted in 1904, rise to the rank of General in 1907 and replace Kitchener as Commander-in-Chief in India in 1909).55
- Private Francis Fitzpatrick, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in South Africa during the Basuto War on 28 November 1879 while serving with the 94th Regiment of Foot (although Fitzpatrick died in Dublin in 1933, he is buried in St Kentigerns Catholic Cemetery in Glasgow, Scotland, possibly transported there by his family).56

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47 Register, p.196 and Symbol, p.99.
48 Register, p.234 and Symbol, p.104.
49 Register, p.26 and Symbol, p.109.
50 Register, p.131 and Symbol, p.110.
51 Register, p.233 and Symbol, p.110.
52 Register, p.29 and Symbol, p.111.
53 Register, p.29 and Symbol, p.122.
54 Register, p.81 and Symbol, p.127.
55 Register, p.75 and Symbol, p.117.
56 Register, p.110 and Symbol, p.130.

- Sergeant Patrick Mullane, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in action at Maiwand on 27 July 1880 during the Afghan War, while serving with the Royal Horse Artillery (Mullane was born in India, son of an Irish soldier, and later rose to the rank of Regimental Sergeant Major; Mullane died in 1919, however, in 1904, while he was absent overseas, it was reported that he had died and his family sold his medals, including his VC, however, they were restored to him on his return to England).57
- Trooper John Danaher (also Danagher), VC – awarded the VC for gallantry on 16 January 1881 during the First Anglo-Boer War while serving with the Transvaal Horse (Danaher, a volunteer soldier with the Transvaal Horse, was attached to the 2nd Connaught Rangers at the time of his VC award and was offered and accepted a chance to transfer to the Rangers as a regular soldier and thus secure a free trip home to Ireland – Danaher served 27 years in the Connaught Rangers and retired in 1908 and became a publican, dying in 1919; one of Danaher's sons, Private Patrick Steven Danaher, 5th Battalion the Connaught Rangers, was killed in action at Gallipoli on 29 August 1915).58
- Lance Corporal James Murray, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry on 14 March 1882 during the First Anglo-Boer War while serving with the 2nd Battalion, Connaught Rangers (James Murray was awarded his VC for the same action for which John Danaher was awarded the decoration – Murray died in Dublin in 1942 and was buried in an unmarked grave, which was marked with a plain headstone in 1990 which finally had the letters 'VC' added to it in 1999 when his family felt that the political situation in Ireland was such as to allow the addition without causing outcry or controversy).59
- Lieutenant Edmond William Costello, VC (Malakand Field Force 1897 -Stonyhurst VC, see above for details of award).
- Private Thomas Byrne, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry at the Battle of Omdurman in the Sudan on 2 September 1898 while serving with the 21st Lancers (Thomas Byrne's award of the VC was largely the result of the work of a young Winston Churchill, who discovered that it was Byrne who gone to the rescue of Churchill's friend, Lieutenant Molyneux of the Royal Horse Guards, and brought Byrne's actions to the attention of his superiors).60
- Captain Paul Aloysius Kenna, VC (Omdurman 1898 - Stonyhurst VC).
- Private John Barry, VC (posthumous) – awarded the VC for gallantry at Monument Hill, South Africa, during the Second Anglo-Boer War on 7-8 January 1901 while serving with the Royal Irish Regiment (Barry was one of the first posthumous recipients of the VC).61
- Surgeon Captain Thomas Joseph Crean, VC, DSO – awarded the VC for gallantry in South Africa on 18 December 1901 during the Second Anglo-Boer War while serving with the 1st Imperial Light Horse (Crean was awarded a Royal Humane Society Testimonial in 1891 for saving the life of a drowning man in the sea near Dublin; he was an Irish international Rugby player who was capped nine times for Ireland between 1894 and 1896; Crean transferred to the Royal Army Medical Corps after his award of the VC and served in the First World War, earning a DSO to add to his VC and was twice mentioned in dispatches, leaving the Army in 1919 with the rank of Major and died in 1923).62
- Lieutenant Maurice James Dease, VC (posthumous) (Mons, 23 August 1914, first VC of the First of World War - Stonyhurst VC).
- Sergeant John Hogan, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in action at Festubert, France on 29 October 1914 while serving with the 2nd Battalion, The Manchester Regiment (Hogan was the illegitimate son of an Irish cotton mill worker and never knew his father; a pre-war regular in The Manchesters with service in India, Hogan re-enlisted at the outbreak of the war in 1914 in his old rank of sergeant and served throughout the war, he fell on hard times after the war and pawned his medals,

57 Register, p.232 and Symbol, p.118.
58 Register, p.82 and Symbol, p.132.
59 Register, p.234 and Symbol, p.132.
60 Register, p.48 and Symbol, p.151.
61 Register, p.21 and Symbol, p.173.
62 Register, p.75 and Symbol, p.176.

which eventually came into the hands of a Manchester businessman who presented them to the Oldham Council, which now displays them).63

- Lance Corporal Michael O'Leary, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry at Cuinchy, France, on 1 February 1915 while serving with 1st Battalion, Irish Guards (O'Leary, who was awarded the Russian Cross of the Order of St George 3rd Class, and featured on a famous World War One recruiting poster, had served in 1913-14 in the Royal North West Mounted Police in Canada and after the war returned to Canada to take up a position with the Ontario Provincial Police – he returned to England in 1925 and re-enlisted in the British Army in World War Two, in which he received a commission and reached the rank of major, serving with the Middlesex Regiment from 1940-44 and the Pioneer Corps from 1944-45).64
- Private Robert Morrow, VC – awarded the VC (posthumously) for gallantry in action near Messines, Belgium on 12 April 1915 while serving with the 1st Battalion, The Royal Irish Fusiliers.65
- Corporal William Cosgrove, VC, MSM – awarded the VC for gallantry at Gallipoli on 26 April 1915 while serving with the 1st Battalion, Royal Munster Fusiliers (Cosgrove was badly wounded at Gallipoli by machine gun fire during his VC action and saw no further action in the war, although he stayed in the Army and finally achieved the rank of Staff-Sergeant Instructor and qualified for the MSM – Cosgrove transferred to the Northumberland Fusiliers when the Munsters were disbanded in 1922 at the time of the creation of the Irish Free State and he died in 1936, not long after his retirement from the Army and directly as a result of the wounds he had received at Gallipoli).66
- Captain John Aidan Liddell, VC (RFC flying award 31 July 1915 – Stonyhurst VC).
- Private Thomas Kenny, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in action at La Houssoie, France on 4 November 1915 while serving with the 13th Battalion, the Durham Light Infantry (Kenny was a Durham coal miner before the First World War and returned to his old trade after the war and did not return to a surface job until 1944, when he was 62 years old).67
- Private John Caffrey, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry at La Brique, France, on 16 November 1915 while serving with the 2nd Battalion, York and Lancaster Regiment (a pre-war regular soldier, Caffrey would later be awarded the Russian Cross of the Order of St George 4th Class – he left the Army in 1919 in the rank of Sergeant, worked as a fireman until the Depression when the company he was employed by collapsed and he was forced to go on the dole; his fortunes changed for the better in 1931 and during the Second World War he served in the Nottingham Home Guard as a Company Sergeant Major).68
- Temporary Lieutenant Colonel Adrian Carton de Wiart, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in action at La Boiselle, France on 2-3 July 1916 while in command of the 8th Battalion the Gloucestershire Regiment (Carton de Wiart was born to a Belgian father, a member of the Belgian nobility, and an Irish mother and had an incredibly adventurous life, serving with the 4th Dragoon Guards in the Boer, during which he survived being shot in the lungs, losing his left eye in 1914 in the campaign against the 'Mad Mullah' in Somaliland while serving with the Somaliland Camel Corps, losing his left hand in 1915 at Zonnebecke and collecting five more wounds during the war; he headed the British Military Mission to Poland in the 1920s (he spoke fluent Polish, as well as French and Arabic) then in the Second World War briefly commanded a division in the UK, then took command of the ill-fated Norway Campaign, then took a division command again, then was selected to head the British Military Mission to Yugoslavia, however, on the way to take up his post his aircraft ran out of fuel and ditched into the Mediterranean, which saw Carton de Wiart enter into almost two years of captivity as a POW of the Italians until released in 1943, following which he was sent to China as head of the British Military Mission to Chiang Kai Shek (during which he famously interrupted a

63 Register, p.152 and Symbol, p.198.
64 Register, p.243 and Symbol, p.202.
65 Register, p.230 and Symbol, p.206.
66 Register, p.72 and Symbol, p.222.
67 Register, p.178 and Symbol, p.203.
68 Register, p.53 and Symbol, pp.246-247. See also Happy Odyssey – The Memoirs of Lieutenant General Sir Adrian Carton de Wiart by Adrian Carton de Wiart.

political speech being given by Mao Zedong at a dinner and delivered a tongue lashing to the stunned Communist leader for holding back from fighting the Japanese for political reasons), wangled a posting to Burma and participated in the surrender of the Japanese at Singapore in n1945; promoted to Lieutenant General in 1944 and knighted in 1945, he retired from the Army in 1946 and spent his final years in Ireland with his second wife, dying at Killdarnish, Co Cork in 1963).[69]

- Second Lieutenant Gabriel George Coury, VC – (France 8 August 1916 - Stonyhurst VC).
- Temporary Second Lieutenant Henry Kelly, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in action at La Sars, France on 4 October 1916 while serving with the 10th Battalion, The Duke of Wellington's (West Riding) Regiment (Kelly was born into a prominent Manchester Irish Catholic family and was educated at private Catholic schools in Manchester; he eventually reached the rank of Major, was awarded an MC and Bar serving on the Italian Front in 1918 and, one of the few non-Spaniards to serve on the Nationalist side during the Spanish Civil War, was awarded the Laureate Cross of Saint Ferndinand in 1938).[70]
- Corporal John Cunningham, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in action near Barlin, France on 12 April 1917 while serving with the 2nd Battalion the Leinster Regiment (Cunningham died of his wounds four days after his VC award action without learning of his award).[71]
- Lance Sergeant John Moyney, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in Belgium on 12-13 September 1917 while serving with the 2nd Battalion, Irish Guards (a dependable NCO during his military service, Moyney worked as a railway porter after the war, employed for 40 years by the Irish railways, however, his wages were never enough to support a large family and he made numerous appeals to the War Office over the years for financial support and died, if not in poverty at least in straightened circumstances, in Ireland in 1980).[72]
- Acting Captain Allastair Malcolm Cluny McReady-Diarmid, VC – awarded the VC (posthumously) for gallantry in action at Moeuvres, France on 30 November – 1 December 1917, while serving with the 17th (Service) Battalion, The Middlesex Regiment (McReady-Diarmid, whose surname was originally McReady-Drew, was a Londoner of Scottish descent and a Catholic convert who changed the second part of his surname to reflect his new religious faith; McReady-Diarmid's body was not recovered from the battlefield and he is commemorated on the Cambrai Memorial to the Missing).[73]
- Private James Duffy (Séamus Ó Dubhthaigh), VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in Palestine on 27 December 1917 while serving with the 6th Battalion, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers.[74]
- Private Jack Thomas Counter, VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in France on 16 April 1918 while serving with 1st Battalion, The King's (Liverpool) Regiment.[75]
- Company Sergeant Major Martin Doyle, VC, MM – awarded the VC for gallantry at Reincourt in France on 2 September 1918 while serving with the 1st Battalion, Royal Munster Fusiliers (Doyle left the British Army in 1919 and joined the IRA, fighting his former comrades in the cause of Irish independence, following which he served in the Free State Army, being wounded in the Irish Civil War, and then served in the regular army of the new Irish republic, retiring from the Irish Army in 1937 – he was employed by Guiness, but tragically contracted polio and died in 1940 at the relatively young age of 46).[76]
- Private Martin Moffat (or Moffatt), VC – awarded the VC for gallantry in action in Belgium on 14 October 1918 while serving with the 2nd Battalion, The Prince of Wales's Leinster Regiment (Moffat, who also awarded the Belgian Croix de Guerre, was a native of Sligo and returned there after the war,

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69 Register, p.49 and Symbol, p.203.
70 Register, p.175 and Symbol, p.259.
71 Register, p.79 and Symbol, pp.266.
72 Register, p.89 and Symbol, p.296.
73 Register, p.231 and Symbol, p.285.
74 Register, p.96 and Symbol, p.308.
75 Register, p.73 and Symbol, p.326.
76 Register, p.94 and Symbol, pp.337-338.

dying in tragic circumstances in 1946, drowning in the sea off Rosses Point, Sligo, a few days after losing his job as harbour constable).77

These are just the men that I know for a fact, were Catholics. Their status as Catholics is either recorded in biographical information held on them, or is presumed from the fact that they were buried in a Catholic churchyard or cemetery section. This list only includes members of the British forces with no members of the Australian, Canadian, New Zealand or South African forces included. As for the British forces, the list is almost certainly incomplete, with quite a number of other men, especially Irishmen, who should be on the list, but who it has been impossible to confirm as Catholic. A list of other VC recipients between 1854 and 1918 who might be Catholic includes: Captain George Boyd-Rochfort (1915); Bombardier Joseph Brennan (1858); Second Lieutenant Bernard Cassidy (1918); Sergeant Bernard Diamond (1857); Private John Doogan (1881); Second Lieutenant James Emerson (1917); Gunner Richard Fitzgerald (1857); Hospital Apprentice Andrew Fitzgibbon (1860); Private Edmund Fowler (1879); Private James Fynn or Finn (1916); Colour Sergeant Stephen Garvin (1857); Private Thomas Grady (1854); Lieutenant Thomas Hackett (1857); Leading Seaman John Harrison (1857); Pensioned Sergeant Henry Hartigan (1857); Private Thomas Hughes (1916); Captain of the Mast George Ingouville (1855); Rough Rider Edward Jennings (1857); Boatswain Third Class Joseph Kellaway (1855); Private William Keneally (1915); Private Charles Kennedy (1900); Private James Kenny (1857); Lieutenant William Kenny (1920); Sergeant Major George Lambert (1857); Private Thomas Lane (1860); Gunner Thomas Laughnan (1857); Surgeon Ferdinand Le Quesne (1889); Corporal William Lendrim or Lendrum (1855); Private Charles McCorrie (1855); Private John McGovern (1857); Sergeant James McGuire (1857); Private Patrick McHale (1857); Corporal John McNamara (1918); Sergeant William McWheeney (1854); Sergeant Ambrose Madden (1854); Drummer Michael Magner (1868); Sergeant Patrick Mahoney (1857); Midshipman Arthur Mayo (1857); Sergeant Andrew Moynihan (1855); Private Patrick Mylott (1857); Sergeant David Nelson (1914); Private Timothy O'Hea (1866); Captain Gerald O'Sullivan (1915); Sergeant Edmund O'Toole (1879); Corporal James Owens (1854); Private James Pearson (1858); Private George Richardson (1859); Captain Richard Ridgeway (1879); Ensign Patrick Roddy (1858); Private John Ryan (1857); Lance Corporal John Ryan (1863); Drummer Miles Ryan (1857); Corporal Frederick Schiess (1879); Corporal Philip Smith (1855); Drummer Dudley Stagpoole (1863); Sergeant Joseph Ward (1858); and Private Alexander Wright (1855). While there is very little likelihood that every man in this list was Catholic, it is, on the other hand, very likely that a number of them were. Unfortunately, lack of records and lack of access to sources makes the final confirmation of the list next to impossible.

Turning now to Australia, how does the myth hold up in the case of the AIF? To answer this, listed below are the Australian recipients of the VC for the First World War, with each man's stated religion listed against his name.

NAME	Religious Denomination
AXFORD, T L	RC (1)
BEATHAM, R M	C of E
BIRKS, Frederick	C of E
BLACKBURN, A S	C of E
BORELLA, A C	Presbyterian
BROWN, W E	C of E
BUCKLEY, A H	Presbyterian
BUCKLEY, M V (Served as SEXTON, Gerald)	RC (2)
BUGDEN, P J	RC (3)
BURTON, A S	Presbyterian
CARROLL, John	RC (4)
CARTWRIGHT, George	C of E
CASTLETON, G C	Non Conformist
CHERRY, P H	C of E
COOKE, Thomas	C of E
CURREY, W M	Presbyterian
DALZIEL, Henry	C of E
DAVEY, Phillip	RC (5)
DUNSTAN, William	C of E
DWYER, J J	RC (6)

77 Register, p.227 and Symbol, p.314.

GABY, A E	C of E	McNAMARA, F H	RC (11)
GORDON, B S	RC (7)	MOON, R V	C of E
GRIEVE, R C	Wesleyan	MURRAY, H W	Presbyterian
HALL, A C	C of E	NEWLAND, J E	C of E
HAMILTON, J P	RC (8)	O'MEARA, Martin	RC (12)
HOWELL, G J	C of E	PEELER, Walter	Methodist
INGRAM, G M	Methodist	POPE, Charles	C of E
INWOOD, R R	C of E	RUTHVEN, William	C of E
JACKA, Albert	C of E	RYAN, John	RC (13)
JACKSON, William	Presbyterian	SADLIER, C W K	C of E
JEFFRIES, C S	C of E	SHOUT, A J	C of E
JENSEN, J C	C of E	STATTON, P C	Methodist
JOYNT, W D	C of E	STORKEY, P V	C of E
KENNY, J J B	RC (9)	SYMONS, W J	'Protestant'
KEYSOR, Leonard	Jewish	THROSSELL, H V H	C of E
LEAK, John	C of E	TOWNER, E T	C of E
LOWERSON, A D	Methodist	TUBB, F H	C of E
MACTIER, Robert	Presbyterian	WARK, B A	C of E
MAXWELL, Joseph	C of E	WEATHERS, L C	RC (14)
McCARTHY, L D	RC (10)	WHITTLE, J W	RC (15)
McDOUGALL, S R	Presbyterian	WOODS, J P	Methodist
McGEE, Lewis	Methodist		

As can be seen from the list, of the sixty-three members of the AIF who were awarded the VC, fifteen listed their religion as 'Roman Catholic', which of course immediately kills the myth. Not all of the men listed above as Catholic were necessarily what my Nanna would have called 'good Catholics', i.e. Catholics who attended Mass every week and took the sacraments regularly, however, all of them listed themselves as Catholic on enlistment and several of them, for example Bede Kenny, were noted in their later lives for their devoutness to their Faith.

But lest anyone think that I believe that being Catholic made a man a better soldier, I freely admit that the record confirms that not all of these men were Kipling's 'plaster saints' either:

- Thomas Axford received 7 days Field Punishment No. 2 in November 1916 for absenting himself without leave.[1]
- Maurice Buckley originally enlisted in the 13th Light Horse but was returned to Australia after contracting VD, then deserted from the VD camp at Langwarrin and re-enlisted under an assumed name.[2]
- John Carroll, while not a trouble maker, certainly had his share of run ins with authority, being convicted of failing to appear, losing by neglect and absence without leave (including two convictions **after** he was awarded the VC!)[3]
- Phillip Davey was convicted of overstaying leave.[4]
- Bernard Gordon was particularly ill-behaved, spending time in hospital for VD, being convicted of four counts of absence without leave, one of conduct to the prejudice of good order and discipline and one of drunkenness (however, in a fit of obviously VC induced generosity, in 1919 the Army remitted the 49 days loss of pay that Gordon had been sentenced to).[5]
- John Hamilton also suffered VD, was convicted of two counts of absence without leave and one count of insubordination (however, this did not stop him from being granted a commission).[6]
- Bede Kenny spent two periods in hospital for VD and was also convicted of absence without leave.[7]

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1 NAA B2455 3042124 Personal Record of Axford, Thomas Leslie VC
2 NAA B2455 7062096 Personal Record of Buckley, Maurice Vincent VC (AKA Sexton, Gerald)
3 NAA B2455 1935343 Personal Record of Carroll, John VC
4 NAA B2455 1935356 Personal Record of Davey, Phillip VC
5 NAA B2455 1935361 Personal Record of Gordon, Bernard Sidney VC
6 NAA B2455 1935364 Personal Record of Hamilton, John VC

- John Ryan suffered VD, was convicted twice for absence without leave, once for overstaying leave and once for absent from place of parade and was tried by District Court Martial in July 1919 on charges of failing to appear at place of parade (two charges), disobeying a lawful command and insubordination – Ryan was found guilty of all charges but awarded a minor sentence of forfeiture of 14 days pay (good to be a VC recipient!).8
- Lawrence Weathers suffered a bout of VD;
- finally, John Whittle was court-martialled in October on the charges of drunkenness and conduct to the prejudice of good order and military and, being found guilty, was awarded the very mild sentence of being reduced to the rank of corporal, which sentence was then immediately remitted (again, good to be a VC recipient!).9

So, not all 'plaster saints'. But while most of the Catholic VCs had some record of misconduct or misdemeanour during their service, there is no denying their heroism.

Lance Corporal Thomas Leslie Axford, 16th Infantry Battalion, was awarded the VC for gallantry in action during the fighting at Hamel and Vaire Woods on 4 July 1918. When his platoon was held up by German machine gun fire and the platoon commander wounded, Axford, then a lance corporal, charged the German position, cleared the trench and silenced the machine guns, killing ten Germans and capturing six and then returned to rejoin his platoon to fight through the remainder of the action. Axford would be awarded the MM in September 1918, in addition to his VC.10

Sergeant Maurice Vincent Buckley, then serving under the assumed name of Gerald Sexton, 13th Infantry Battalion, was awarded the VC for gallantry in action near St Quentin on 18 September 1918. Buckley, either single handed or at the head of his platoon, was credited with capturing a number of German positions that were holding up the advance of his battalion. Maurice Buckley had previously been awarded the DCM for gallantry.11

Private Patrick Joseph Bugden, 31st Infantry Battalion, was awarded the VC (posthumously) for gallantry in action in Belgium between 26 and 28 September 1917. Bugden twice led small parties in attacks in the face of heavy enemy fire and captured several German strongpoints at the point of the bayonet. On five separate occasions he rescued wounded men under heavy enemy fire, being killed during the last rescue.12

Private John Carroll, 33rd Infantry Battalion, performed a series of gallant actions between 7-12 June 1917 near St Yves, in Belgium. In his first act he single-handedly rushed a German trench and bayoneted four of the occupants. He followed this up with a single handed attack on a German machine gun position in which he killed three of the crew and captured the gun and then later rescued under shellfire two of his mates who had been buried by an exploding shell. Stories that Carroll failed to appear at Buckingham Palace to receive his VC and on the fourth occasion used his status as VC recipient to 'call out the Guard' are almost certainly apocryphal and probably sourced to Carroll himself (who is reputed to have a had wicked sense of humour).13

Corporal Phillip Davey, 10th Infantry Battalion, carried out a lone attack on a German machine gun position with grenades, in the face of what was described as 'point blank fire', at Merris in France on

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7 NAA B2455 8334254 Personal Record of Kenny, Thomas James Bede VC
8 NAA B2455 1935373 Personal Record of Ryan, John VC
9 NAA B2455 1935408 Personal Record of Weathers, Lawrence Carthage VC
10 Register, p.18 and Symbol, p.312.
11 Register, p.44 and Symbol, p.342.
12 Register, p.44 and Symbol, p.288.
13 Register, p.54 and Symbol, p.278.

28 June 1918. When his supply of grenades was exhausted, Davey withdrew to collect a fresh supply and then continued the attack, killing all of the crew and capturing the gun. Davey had previously been awarded the MM for another act of gallantry.14

Sergeant John James Dwyer, 4th Machine Gun Company, was a sergeant in command of a Vickers MMG crew at Zonnebecke in Belgium on 26 September 1917 when he rushed his gun forward to within 30 meters of a German machine gun and, firing point blank, killed the entire crew. He followed this by successfully withdrawing his gun and crew under heavy fire. The next day when his gun was destroyed by enemy shell fire, Dwyer took his team back through the enemy barrage and collected a reserve gun which he then brought back into action. Dwyer would later be awarded the MM for gallantry in 1918 and would go on to a successful career as a State politician in Tasmania.15

Lance Corporal Bernard Sydney Gordon, 41st Infantry Battalion, carried out a single-handed attack on a German machine gun position near Bray in France on 26 August 1918, killing the gunner and capturing the gun and eleven Germans (including an officer). Over the next 24 hours he cleared a number of trenches and captured 51 additional prisoners and six machine guns. Gordon had previously been awarded the MM for gallantry in action.16

Private John Patrick Hamilton, 3rd Infantry Battalion, was awarded the VC for his actions at Lone Pine at Gallipoli on 9 August 1915. Ignoring enemy fire he took up a firing position on the parados of a trench in order to get a better firing position to engage enemy bombers who were carrying out a determined attack designed to dislodge the 3rd Battalion. Encouraged by Hamilton's example the defenders held firm and the attacking Turks were driven off.17

Private Thomas James Bede Kenny, 2nd Infantry Battalion, attacked a German machine gun position at Hermies in France on 9 April 1917, capturing the gun and its crew.18

Lieutenant Lawrence Dominic ('Fats') McCarthy, 16th Infantry Battalion, captured a German machine gun position near Vermandovillers in France on 23 August 1918. He then continued to fight his way down the enemy trench, bombing his way along until he linked up with another Australian party fighting its way along the trench from the other direction. This action, which saw McCarthy kill 22 of the enemy and capture 50 men and five machine guns, is often stated to be the single most effective piece of individual fighting in the history of the AIF, next to Albert Jacka's MC action at Pozières. McCarthy had previously been awarded the French Croix de Guerre for gallantry.19

Lieutenant Frank Hubert McNamara, 1 Squadron Australian Flying Corps, was a pilot serving with the AFC in the Middle East. On 20 March 1917 he landed his aircraft under heavy fire behind enemy lines to rescue a fellow pilot who had been forced down and was in danger of being captured by Turkish cavalry. Although the other pilot made it to McNamara's aircraft, the wounded McNamara was unable to keep his aircraft straight on take of and it crashed and turned over. McNamara and his comrade then set fire to McNamara's aircraft, ran to the other pilot's damaged machine and managed to get it started so that McNamara could take off and fly himself and his fellow pilot to safety. Frank McNamara would later go on to have a successful career in the Royal Australian Air Force, serving in World War Two as Air Officer Commanding British Forces in Aden and would be created a Companion of the Order of the Bath (CB) and a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE). McNamara died

14 Register, p.84 and Symbol, p.312.
15 Register, p.99 and Symbol, p.288.
16 Register, p.122 and Symbol, p.333.
17 Register, p.137 and Symbol, p.227.
18 Register, p.178 and Symbol, p.273.
19 Register, p.199 and Symbol, p.332.

in London in 1961 and is buried in the cemetery attached to the Carmelite Priory (St Joseph's) in Gerrard's Cross, Buckinghamshire.[20]

Private Martin O'Meara, 16th Infantry Battalion, was decorated for gallantry during the fighting at Mouquet Farm between 9 and 12 August 1916, rescuing a number of wounded men under fire, carrying out scouting tasks forward of the trenches under fire and bringing up ammunition and bombs under a heavy barrage. Sadly, O'Meara's experiences, including a number of wounds, would lead to mental illness and he was admitted to Claremont Mental Hospital in January 1919 almost immediately on arrival back in Australia, described as suffering hallucinations and both homicidal and suicidal tendencies. He never left the hospital and died in Claremont on 20 December 1935. Martin O'Meara left money in his personal estate for the restoration of the Dominican Abbey at Lorrha in his native Tipperary, however, as there were insufficient funds to cover the project, the money was used to rebuild the local parish church instead.[21]

Private John Ryan, 55th Infantry Battalion, led a party of men in an assault on German bombing party in the Hindenburg Defences in France on 30 September 1918. The Germans had established themselves in the rear of the 55th Battalion's recently won positions and Ryan organised the assault part on his own initiative, leading an attack with bombs and bayonets. All of the men in Ryan's party were killed and wounded, with Ryan the last man standing killing the last of the enemy himself before succumbing to wounds that would see him out of action for the rest of the war.[22]

Temporary Corporal Lawrence Carthage Weathers, 43rd Infantry Battalion, single-handedly carried out a bomb attack on a strongly held German trench that was holding up the attack of the 43rd Battalion near Peronne in France on 2 September 1918. When he used up his supply of bombs he went back to collect a fresh supply and went forward again with three comrades and continued his attack under heavy fire. Ignoring the enemy fire he mounted the parapet of the enemy trench and bombed his way forward, eventually capturing 180 prisoners and three machine guns. Sadly, Lawrie Weather, a New Zealander by birth and possibly part Maori to judge by his photograph, was killed in action less than a month later.[23]

Sergeant John Woods Whittle, 12th Infantry Battalion, was sergeant in command of a platoon of his battalion on 9 April 1917 when he led a counter-attack near Boursies to recapture a portion of trench that had just been taken by the Germans. Later that day when the Germans again borke through the lines under cover of a heavy artillery barrage, Whittle charged across the bullet swept ground to kill a German machine gun crew with grenades and capture their gun. Whittle had previously been awarded the DCM for an action in February 1917.[24]

Perhaps not entirely relevant, but worth discussing anyway, is the unique award of the Albert Medal in Gold to Sergeant David Emmett Coyne. Coyne was a bombing (hand grenade) instructor with the 31st Infantry Battalion. On the night of 15 May 1918 Coyne's battalion was in the line in Flanders and Coyne was testing a batch of Mills grenades that he suspected had been damaged by damp. A live test grenade thrown by Coyne meant to go over the parapet instead rebounded off the parapet and dropped back into the trench. Coyne ordered the men around him to clear the area and then threw his body on the grenade to protect his comrades from the blast. Although Coyne survived the initial explosion, he died some hours later. Of relevance here is that Coyne, a Catholic, was originally recommended for the posthumous award of the VC, however, as the incident was not actually in contact the enemy, the

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20 Register, p.210 and Symbol, p.298.
21 Register, p.244 and Symbol, p.252.
22 Register, p.281 and Symbol, p.348.
23 Register, p.329 and Symbol, p.340.
24 Register, p.334 and Symbol, p.274.

recommendation was changed to the Albert Medal in Gold, the highest not in action gallantry award equivalent to the VC then available, and in Coyne's case, a unique award to the AIF.25

Details of individual actions aside, as can be seen from the list, 15 of the 64 VCs awarded to members of the AIF were to men who professed 'Roman Catholic' as their religious denomination. This represents approximately 25% of the total and certainly well and truly explodes the myth that no Catholic member of the AIF was awarded a VC. If we examine the list statistically, with the percentages measured against the known percentages for the various religious denominations in the AIF, the list is in fact even more damning of the myth. In June 1919 the AIF published its casualty and other statistics as at that date. This report noted that there had been 331,781 embarkations from Australia by members of the AIF.26

The report then went on to note that the various denominations provided:

Church of England	162,774
Roman Catholic	63,705
Presbyterian	49,631
Methodist	33,706
Jewish	1,214
Other Denominations	20,751
Total	331,78127

As can be seen, Catholics made up the second largest contingent in the AIF. Expressed as a percentage of the Force, the 63,705 Catholics who embarked for overseas service represented 19.2% of the AIF. However, if we look at the list of VC winners and convert the raw figures listed to percentages, we see that Catholics represented 23% of the total of the total number of men who were awarded the VC. Does this mean that Catholics were braver than the rest? Hardly; in fact the discrepancy between the figure representing the number of Catholics as a percentage of the entire AIF (19.2%) and the figure representing the number of 'Catholic VCs' as a percentage of the total number awarded for the war (22.4%) is small enough to say that the number of VCs awarded to Catholics in the AIF more or less equalled, when expressed as a percentage, the number of Catholics in the Force. On the other hand, given the fact that the number of Catholics who received the VC, when expressed as a percentage, was greater than the percentage of Catholics in the AIF, we can see that the myth that Catholics were denied the VC because of their religion is well and truly disproved.

Another aspect of this somewhat bizarre little myth that needs to be considered is the fact that had an establishment plot existed to deny award of the VC to Catholics, then it is almost certain that this would be a plot of adherents of the Established Church, i.e. the Church of England, and it was not only Catholics who were anathema to some people in this church, but all Non-Conformist churches. I think we could safely say that if representatives of the Established Church within the British Army hierarchy had targeted Catholics for VC discrimination, then they would also have targeted Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Wesleyans, Quakers, Jews, in fact anyone whose expressed religious affiliation did not conform to the Established Church. It cannot be forgotten that it was not just Catholics who had been subject to penal sanctions of the religious laws of England between the 17th and 19th centuries. Having said this, if we refer back to the list of Australian VC recipients for World War One, we find eight Presbyterians, five Methodists, one Wesleyan, one Jew and one (Castelton) who quite unashamedly

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25 NAA B2455/1 3437880 Personal Record of No.3347 Coyne, David Emmett. See also Pedersen, P.A., 1981 'Coyne, David Emmett (1896 – 1918)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, Volume 8, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, p.132.

26 AIF Headquarters, 1919 Australian Imperial Force Statistics of Casualties, Etc. Compiled to 30th June, 1919, Records Section, AIF Headquarters, London, p.20.

27 Ibid.

declared himself to be 'Non-Conformist'. It think it is fairly safe to say that if, for instance, Maurice Buckley, Bede Kenny, Dominic McCarthy and Martin O'Meara had been denied the VC because they were Catholic, then it is just as probable that Alexander Burton, Lewis McGee, Robert Grieve and Leonard Keysor, again for instance, would have been denied the VC because they were Presbyterian, Methodist, Wesleyan and Jewish respectively. In both instances, Catholic and non-Catholic, this was simply not the case.

This last point leads into yet another matter that is impacted on by the myth, namely, the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia. Admittedly, I might be drawing an incredibly long bow by involving the Constitution in my debunking of this myth, however, it is a fact that the Australian Constitution quite explicitly deals with the matter of religion, stating at Section 116:

> The Commonwealth shall not make any law for establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion, and no religious test shall be required as a qualification for any office or public trust under the Commonwealth.

Since the very first days of the Commonwealth of Australia constitutional experts have agreed that this section of the Constitution rejects the setting up and recognition of a 'State Church' as well as rejecting the notion of the bestowal of special favours or advantages to one church at the expense of others, but at the same time does not prohibit the Federal government from recognizing religion or religious worship. This is in stark contrast to the United Kingdom where, both in World War One and at the present time, the Church of England occupies a beneficial position, recognized as the 'Established Church', recipient of government funding and enjoying special legal status. This special status of the Church of England went so far as the inclusion in the old form of the Coronation Oath for monarchs of Great Britain a section in which the monarch was required to publicly repudiate certain specific Catholic beliefs and to label Catholic worship, in particular the Mass, as 'superstitious and idolatrous'.28 Edward VII found this section of the Coronation Oath so personally detestable and so insulting to his millions of Catholic subjects that he attempted to have it removed from the oath prior to his coronation in 1901. Although Edward was unsuccessful at the time and was forced to use the old form of oath, after his coronation he brought pressure to bear on Parliament to change the form of the oath to delete the anti-Catholic sentiments and the new form of the oath (passed in 1908) was used at the coronation of George V in 1910.29 So any attempt to bar Catholics from award of the VC would have been unconstitutional and illegal. This is not to say that some Church of England clergy in Australia did not chafe against the 'restrictions' of the Australian Constitution and yearn for the beneficiary position enjoyed by their clerical brothers elsewhere in the Empire. Sad to say, some of these Church of England clergy who were appointed chaplains to the AIF saw service under British Army control as a means of repudiating the Constitution and claiming the benefits that they felt due them. For example, a Methodist chaplain to the AIF (Chaplain T.C. Rentoul) wrote home in early 1915:

> The C. of E. Chaplains are causing a vast amount of trouble. Our armies here are all under **British** control and regulations. This applies also to the Chaplains department. In the British army and navy the Church of England has undisputed control and sway over all religion. The Church there is national – being established and endowed by Government money. As you...know, in Australia all religious bodies are on the same footing. We non-Anglicans are **not** non-conformists because there is nothing to conform to. The C. of E. in Australia is only another religious denomination. But these same Australian Chaplains are taking full advantage of the British Army rules, which were never made to be applied to us. They absolutely refuse to use the Australian Service Book. They use the Anglican

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28 Act of Settlement, Article 12, S.13.

29 Johnstone, Tom, 2000 Cross of Anzac Australian Catholic Service Chaplains, Church Archivists' Press, Toowoomba, Queensland for the Military Ordinariate of Australia, p.11. See also Thurston, Herbert, 1908 'Coronation' The Catholic Encyclopedia Vol.4, Robert Appleton Company, New York.

> Prayer Book. This is contrary to all Australian orders. But they say they are now under British control and are taking full advantage of the situation.30

Chaplain Rentoul was not the only non-Anglican chaplain to complain and a number of the more 'Established Church' Anglican chaplains were quietly removed and sent home, although the situation was not fully resolved until the extraordinary 1916 joint pastoral visit to the AIF carried out by the Right Reverend C.O.L. Riley, Bishop of Perth and Anglican Chaplain-General and the Most Reverend Dr. P.J. Clune, Archbishop of Perth and representative of the Roman Catholic Chaplain-General.31 The two prelates knew each other well and, if not exactly friends were warm acquaintances and travelled together throughout the visit, sharing quarters and always dining together, a fact that was not lost on observers and that helped to convince any 'Established Church' holdouts to keep their thoughts to themselves. Despite this, Anglican primacy, real or perceived, in matters of military chaplaincy in the Australian forces was to cause continuing problems long after the war, especially in the matter of religious representation at ceremonial activities, a situation brought to a head by the 'Colours Controversy' of 1952 in which Catholic members of the RAAF were accused of treason and threatened with court-martial and dismissal for refusal to attend a parade for the presentation of the first Queen's Colour of the RAAF, as the ceremony included an Anglican religious service, which the Catholic airmen believed was contrary to both S.116 of the Constitution and S.123B of the *Defence Act 1903* and which would have placed the Catholics in breach of certain sections of the *Code of Canon Law* and therefore possibly guilty of the sin of heresy.32 It was in fact the 'Colours Controversy', which eventually involved the Prime Minister of the day, Sir Robert Menzies, not to mention the formidable Archbishop Daniel Mannix, Catholic Chaplain-General, that saw the rationalisation of the religious element of major ceremonial to allow for the participation of all religions, the situation which exists today.

The point to this rather long-winded digression is that while Anglican supremacy in matters militarily religious in the AIF was something of a minor problem, religion was definitely something of a touchy subject in some quarters of the AIF and had there even been a suspicion that Catholics and other non-Anglicans were being discriminated against in the matter of decorations, honours and awards, then this would have been brought vociferously to light. Even had the AIF authorities wanted to discriminate against Catholics in the matter of the award of the VC, as the British Army manifestly did not do so, as shown by the lists above, then the AIF could not have brought it off.

So, it is safe to say, in the words of a well known American television show, this myth is definitely busted. Despite this, the myth lives on. I vividly recall one indignant little old lady (with a distinct trace of an Irish accent) I dealt with at the beginning of 2007 who told me that at her 'church meeting' the night before she had been shocked and angered to learn that no Catholics had ever been awarded the VC because they were discriminated against on the basis of their religion. Despite my best efforts to advise here to the contrary, while the lady was eventually mollified, I don't think she was totally convinced, even when I quoted voluminous statistics to her and told her that I am Catholic myself. Virulent things, myths.

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30 From Noni Faragher (ed) Prelude Fugue and Variations (Letters to a Loved One From Chaplain T.C. Rentoul in World War One), quoted in Johnstone, Cross of Anzac, ibid, p.19.

31 Johnstone, ibid, p.19.

32 For more detail on the 'Colours Controversy' see Wilson, Graham, 2003 'Error of Judgement or Outright Bigotry? The Colours Controversy of the 1950s', Sabretache The Journal and Proceedings of the Military Historical Society of Australia, Vol.XLIV, No.3, September, pp.15-22.