CHAPTER V

ANZAC MOUNTED DIVISION

DIVIDED into three squadrons, each of six troops, a light horse regiment at war establishment is made up of 25 officers and 497 men. Of these, the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Brigades served complete upon Gallipoli, but the 4th Brigade was broken up upon arrival in Egypt. The 4th and 13th Regiments fought upon the Peninsula, but the 11th and 12th were disbanded, and were employed as reinforcements to other light horse units there.

On their return to Egypt most of the regiments went direct from the transports to their horse-lines. There the men handed in their infantry packs, were given back their riding gear, and jingled very happily again in their spurs. During their absence in Gallipoli their horses had been to a large extent in the care of a body of public-spirited Australians, most of them well advanced in middle age, who, being refused as too old for active service, had enlisted and gone to Egypt as grooms in the light horsemen's absence. Many of these men afterwards found employment in the remount dépôts, and continued their useful service till the end of the war.

All the regiments were much reduced in numbers, but the camps in Egypt then held abundant reinforcements, and a few weeks later eleven of the twelve regiments which afterwards served in Sinai and Palestine were at full strength. The 4th Regiment was reduced to two squadrons, one of which, together with the whole of the 13th Regiment, was sent as corps mounted troops to France, while the remaining squadron was for a time attached to an Imperial Service brigade doing special patrol duty against Turkish spies and agents upon the Egyptian side of the Canal. The 11th (Queensland and South Australia) and 12th (New South Wales) Regiments served until early in 1917 as detached units.

Scattered over a number of camps, most of them on the desert fringe of the Delta cultivation, the light horsemen presented a marked contrast to the raw regiments which had been assembled there twelve months before. More than half of them were now war veterans, trained in an exacting

and deadly school. In the Peninsula they had engaged in every form of modern infantry fighting. They had lived for months in trenches only a few yards from their enemy; they had learned patience in a prolonged defensive; they had engaged in some of the most hopeless offensives ever imposed upon storm-troops; their discipline had been tested in the sensitive and brilliant work of the Evacuation, and as marksmen they had become one of the most expert forces in the world. They were now all masters of their craft as fighters on foot, and had very little to learn in the mounted side of their work. Naturally these qualities had a remarkable effect upon the reinforcements which now filled the gaps in their lines. The new men introduced fresh life and enthusiasm into the regiments, and spirits were further stimulated by renewed association with the horses; on the other hand the knowledge of the veterans was quickly assimilated by the recruits, who now had a regimental tradition to sustain, and if possible to enhance. Moreover, almost all the officers were Gallipoli men, and with rare exceptions they enjoyed the complete confidence of their troops. Already on the Peninsula the Australian Imperial Force had practised that fine policy of promotion by sheer merit which, as the war continued, gave the men leaders whose average quality ranked remarkably high. Officers who failed were relieved of their front-line commands with a firmness scarcely to be expected in a young citizen army. From Gallipoli onward, neither social or political influence, nor considerations of personal friendship, played a sinister part in the selection or advancement of leaders. The result was a degree of efficiency not excelled in any force engaged in the war.

After their heavy work upon the Peninsula all troops perhaps expected a brief rest in Egypt. But mounted men were urgently needed for the defence of the Delta against the Senussi, the marauding tribesmen of the desert west of Lower Egypt, who were then threatening an attack. The 1st Australian Light Horse Brigade, under Brigadier-General C. F. Cox,[1] arrived at Heliopolis on December 28th, and was at

[1] Maj.-Gen. C. F. Cox, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., V.D. Commanded 1st L.H. Bde. 1915/18. Member of Australian Senate; of Parramatta, N.S.W.; b. Dundas, near Parramatta, 2 May, 1863.

once ordered to draw horses and mounted equipment, and be ready to march out, if possible, in forty-eight hours. The response of the three regiments, worn and exhausted as they were, was characteristic of the spirit which distinguished light horsemen throughout all their campaigning. They had come back from Gallipoli ignorant as to their future, and, while they would cheerfully have continued in the war as infantrymen, they prayed for service with their horses. They therefore received orders for mounted work with expressions of delight, and eagerly sought their old friends on the horse-lines. The horses were quickly shod, new clothing was issued, and "the Gallipoli stoop of the men changed into the old swing of the cavalryman." On December 31st, three days after their return, the 3rd Regiment (South Australia and Tasmania) under Lieutenant-Colonel D. Fulton[2] marched out for Wady Natrun, an oasis area on the desert forty miles north-west of Cairo; the 1st Regiment (New South Wales) under Lieutenant-Colonel J. B. Meredith[3] and the 2nd (Queensland) under Lieutenant-Colonel T. W. Glasgow[4] followed a fortnight later.

Scattered forces of the Senussi were reported to be moving towards Wady Natrun with designs on the Kataba Canal, further east, which supplies Alexandria with water. As this canal was ten feet above the level of the Nile, it might easily have been breached with damaging effect by raiders. With orders to maintain a barrier between the tribes of the desert and the native population along the Nile, Cox's brigade remained at the oasis for upwards of a month. The enemy did not appear, and the regiments, when not engaged upon patrol, were given a "refresher" course of mounted training. The winter days on the desert were ideal; but the nights were bitterly cold, and, as usual in Egypt, fuel was scarce. The concern of the light horse officers for their men was conspicuous throughout the war, and was a strong factor in

[2] Lieut.-Col. D. Fulton, C.M.G., C.B.E. Commanded 3rd L.H. Regt. 1915/17; commandant A.I.F. Headquarters, Egypt, 1917/18, 1919/20. Estate agent; b. North Adelaide, S. Aust., 1 Aug., 1882.

[3] Brig.-Gen. J. B. Meredith, D.S.O. Commanded 4th L.H. Bde. 1917. Of Raymond Terrace, N.S.W.; b. Derrylough, Rosenallis, Queen's Co., Ireland, 11 Nov., 1864.

[4] Maj.-Gen. Hon. Sir William Glasgow, K.C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., V.D. Commanded 1st Aust. Divn., 1918; member of Aust. Senate, 1919/32; Minister for Home and Territories, 1926/27, for Defence, 1927/29. Grazier; of Gympie, Q'land; b. Upton Bank, Mary River, near Tiaro, Q'land, 6 June, 1876.

GENERAL SIR ARCHIBALD MURRAY, COMMANDER OF THE E.E.F., 1916-17

Photo by The Autotype Fine Art Company, London

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL SIR CHARLES M. DOBELL, COMMANDER OF THE EASTERN FORCE, E.E.F., 1916-17

Photo by J. Russell & Sons, London

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LIEUTENANT-GENERAL SIR HARRY CHAUVEL, COMMANDER OF THE AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE IN EGYPT AND PALESTINE AND OF THE DESERT MOUNTED CORPS

Aust War Museum Official Photo No B1485.

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the efficiency of the force. At this time they gave their issue of firewood to the troopers, and bought kerosene-cookers for use in their messes.

On February 11th the brigade, less the 3rd Regiment, was removed by rail to the south-western "front," some 140 miles up the Nile from Cairo, with headquarters at Minia. At this time the desert tribes were menacing the peaceful irrigated settlement of the Upper Delta from the west, and British troops were scattered over many hundreds of miles along the river. Cox's brigade patrolled a line south of Fashn, some 250 miles in length, and remained there until May The work was purely defensive; no effort was made to seek the enemy in the desert, and as the Senussi did not come in, the squadrons had a quiet if an arduous time. The posts were many miles apart, and to maintain contact the men had to be kept for long hours in the saddle. As the summer approached, the heat became severe upon the horses and their riders, and the khamsin season, with its strong dust-laden winds, was one of excessive discomfort. But after the confined hardship of Gallipoli, the light horsemen regarded their spell upon the Upper Nile in the light of a holiday. Their camps and routes of patrol lay along the margin of the irrigated valley, and the men enjoyed full rations of fresh produce. The unwarlike natives, and especially the Christian Copts, looked upon them as defenders against the fierce raiders of the desert, and treated them with kindness and hospitality. When the time came for their withdrawal the villagers expressed sharp regret. "Our children," said an influential Arab, "will remember the Australians in their prayers." Early in May the brigade was moved by rail to Kantara, on the Suez Canal, and took its place in Anzac Mounted Division. Cox, whose health was indifferent, was given leave to England. Lieutenant-Colonel Meredith took over the command of the brigade, and Major C. H. Granville[5] succeeded to the leadership of the 1st Regiment.

The Anzac Mounted Division was formed early in March and on March 16th Major-General H. G. Chauvel was

[5] Lieut. Col. C. H. Granville, D.S.O. Commanded 1st L.H. Regt., 1916/19, and 1st L.H. Bde. for short periods in 1916 and 1918. Of West Maitland, N.S.W.; b. Wales, 26 Jan., 1877.

appointed to its command. The new formation, which was to achieve results unequalled by any other division of horse, Allied or enemy, engaged on any front in the war, was at the outset composed of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Australian Light Horse Brigades and the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade. At a later date the 3rd Australian Light Horse Brigade was withdrawn from the division, which during the rest of the campaign, except on a few occasions, was composed of the remaining three brigades. With the birth of the division there commenced the long association of the mounted men of Australia and New Zealand, an association which, strengthened by increasing reciprocal admiration and affection in the course of two and a half years of harsh and often bloody campaigning, must ever stand as an intimate bond between the two young Dominions.

The New Zealand Brigade, like the light horsemen, had served and shone upon Gallipoli. Its men, made up of the Auckland, Canterbury, and Wellington Regiments, possessed many of the qualities of the light horsemen, and some distinctively their own. Like the Australians, they were all pioneers, or the children of pioneers, born to and practised in country life, natural horsemen and expert riflemen. Closer in physical type than the Australians to the big men of England's northern counties and to the Lowland Scotch, they perhaps lacked something of the almost aggressive independence of thought and individuality of action which marked the Australians. They represented in fact a younger dominion than the Australians; they were more closely, although not more purely, bred to the parent British stock, more "colonial" and less "national" in their outlook than their Australian comrades in the division. But, if the two bodies of young men presented interesting differences, mental and physical, they were almost indistinguishable as fighters. All the qualities which their countrymen rejoiced to find in the Australians were to be found in the New Zealanders, with the exception of little incidental excellences which sidelights disclosed on either side. The New Zealand Brigade not only won much glory for its people; it reflected everlasting credit upon the great business qualities of the New Zealand Government during the war. Not only in its fighting capacity, but

in its administration and economy, it was a model of what a mounted brigade should be; and Australian light horse officers of distinction were frequently heard to declare that the finest mounted brigade engaged in Sinai and Palestine was this splendid little body of New Zealanders. Between the Australians and the New Zealanders there was never in the long campaign a thought of jealousy or a moment of misunderstanding. Each trusted and swore by the other.

The Anzac Mounted Division was from the day of its origin on the desert very fortunate in its leadership. General Chauvel, as temporary commander of the 1st Australian Infantry Division on the Peninsula, had already displayed qualities which marked him as a sound administrator and a wise and far-seeing commander. Lieutenant-Colonel J. G. Browne,[6] his chief staff officer, an Australian native but a professional soldier of the British Army, had served in South Africa, and in 1914 was on the staff with Allenby's cavalry during the retreat from Mons. Without exception the rest of the staff officers were men who had displayed marked ability in Gallipoli. Chauvel's care and success in selecting his staff were proved, as the campaign progressed, by the fact that practically every officer on it rose rapidly and won distinction. The brigade staffs were almost wholly officers tried in the Peninsula; so, too, were the leaders of the regiments and squadrons; many of them, perhaps a majority, wore South African ribbons.

When, therefore, on 16th March, 1916, Chauvel hoisted his pennant at Anzac Mounted Division Headquarters at Serapeum, he must have regarded the future with much satisfaction. Almost every officer and non-commissioned officer, and more than half his men, had been through the trial of Anzac as infantry. The whole division was bursting with enthusiasm for a mounted campaign unconfined by trenches and barbed wire. Most important of all, perhaps, his men knew their prospective enemy. They had probed and discovered the Turk's weakness and strength. They knew his straight shooting, his efficiency with the bomb rather than with the bayonet, his grim tenacity in defence, his fortitude

[6] Brig.-Gen J G Browne, C M G., C B.E , D S O., p s c Officer of British Regular Army, of Adelaide, S Aust ; b. Mitcham, near Adelaide, 26 July, 1878.

under punishment, his capacity to make sound warfare under the harshest conditions and to endure on rations which would starve and destroy Western troops. They knew also his lack of personal initiative and his feebleness as an individual fighter in the open. Every Australian and New Zealander respected the Turk as a soldier; but every trooper felt his man-to-man superiority over the enemy; and that consciousness, natural to men of a superior race, endured throughout the campaign. "The light horseman," said an experienced Australian officer during the campaign, "looks upon the Turk as a superior nigger."

Chauvel, then, was well pleased with his division. But none of his staff officers would have guessed it. This remarkable Australian professional soldier, who was destined to become the greatest leader of horse in modern times, was one of the most imperturbable cavalrymen who ever crossed a saddle. No temporary failure depressed him; no victory, however sweeping and decisive, excited him. He appeared on service as an almost anomalous product of a young country, where reserve is not nearly so marked in the individual man as it is in the older lands of the north. Harry George Chauvel was born in 1865 on a cattle station owned by his grandfather, a retired Indian army officer, at Tabulam, on the Clarence River in New South Wales; he was therefore forty-nine years old at the outbreak of war. Like all Australian country boys, the future cavalry leader was from his infancy associated with horses, and in the rough timbered ranges acquired that easy mastery of country which was always conspicuous in his control of operations. The fact that at Toowoomba and at the Sydney Grammar School he was not conspicuous as a scholar, was due perhaps to his thoughts running on sports rather than on studies. Small and light for his years and, even as a boy, a finished horseman, he was sought as a jockey at picnic or amateur race meetings in Queensland and New South Wales, where he rode with much success. From sport to soldiering is but a narrow step, and young Chauvel very early decided for himself upon a military career. Always an eager reader, he rejoiced in stories of battle; and one day at Damascus, almost at the end of the great cavalry drive which had given Pales-

tine and Syria to British arms, he confessed that the two historical heroes of his boyhood were Saladin and Stuart, the great cavalryman of the American Civil War. "I never thought in those days," he remarked, "that I should take part in a cavalry operation greater than anything undertaken by them."

Chauvel served as a volunteer in the South Africa campaign, first with the Queensland Mounted Infantry, and later as the commander of a composite mounted force which included Queensland, British, Canadian, and South African horsemen. Unlike many professional soldiers of distinction, he was always a leader of broad Imperial sympathies and infinite tact; and he displayed in that South African command, early in his career, the very rare capacity he had for handling men recruited from many lands and divided by striking differences of temperament and outlook. To this quality he owed his elevation later in Palestine to the command of Desert Mounted Corps, where, as the leader of a force of Australians and New Zealanders, British yeomanry, and Indian cavalry, he directed with complete success, and always without any apparent effort, one of the most complex and difficult corps commands to be assembled in warfare.

When war was declared, Colonel Chauvel was at sea, on the way to London to act as Australia's representative on the Imperial General Staff at the War Office. On his arrival he asked at once for employment in France, but was informed of Australia's intention to recruit and send oversea a division of infantry and a light horse brigade, and told that he was required to command the mounted force. Chauvel joined the 1st Light Horse Brigade immediately after its arrival in Egypt, and, after directing its training, landed with his three regiments in Gallipoli in May, 1915. Anzac gave limited opportunities to generals, but it was nevertheless a severe test of leadership. The successful commanders were those who convinced the troops whom they led of their personal courage, their knowledge of their sector, their sense of the enemy, and their qualities as men. In that cramped area brigadiers and their troops lived close together. The men learned to know their officers very intimately, and an indifferent soldier or an unconvincing personality was quickly disclosed. Chauvel served

with honour as a brigadier, and on the 6th of November, 1915, was promoted to the temporary command of the 1st Australian Infantry Division. He left the Peninsula with a reputation as a shrewd, safe leader, who had made the most of restricted possibilities. Birdwood was quick to appreciate his wide and intimate knowledge of tactics and the sound sure touch with which he applied that knowledge to actual warfare, and it was proposed that he should proceed with the infantry to France. But Chauvel shared with his light horsemen their strong desire for mounted action; and, when it was decided to leave Australia's mounted regiments in Egypt, he elected, in a happy moment for his career and for British fortunes in the Near East, to remain and lead them.

Reserved and aloof in manner, gentle of speech and quiet of bearing, Chauvel won favour with the men of Anzac by his quality as a soldier rather than by his personal parts. He was not one of those leaders who went down among the men and gained their affection by active and sympathetic participation in their every-day lives. His aloofness did not mean that he was opposed to such conduct. He could not have done it if he had tried; he was far too shy. A keen but a very just disciplinarian, his manner was genial to officers and men with whom he came in contact; but he was incapable of seeking popularity either for self-gratification or for the legitimate purpose of stimulating in his troops a personal regard for their leader. Like many great military leaders who went before him, he was the sure far-seeing brain, rather than the spirit of his force. And so even in the great cavalry days ahead, when his huge corps of horsemen was rolling up the Turkish armies in Palestine, and victory was succeeding victory with the certainty of sunrises, he was never a hero to the light horsemen. Great leader as he became, he missed by his instinctive reserve the satisfaction of becoming a soldier's idol.

This was the more remarkable because Chauvel was a cavalryman. In the mounted service there is more hero-worship than in infantry. Most of the world's great captains of horse have won their fame by the exercise at the critical moment of what is known as the cavalry instinct. They have been masterful, dramatic figures, who have leaped into

fame by a brilliant stroke at the decisive time, seizing upon a fleeting opportunity to smash in with their horse and turn the fortunes of a hard-fought battle. Chauvel did so with his light horsemen at Beersheba. But that was after he had won his way to the greatest cavalry command of modern times. He was never an arresting, picturesque figure. There is no record in the whole of the Palestine war of him or any other general riding down a mass of Turks, sword in hand, at the head of his men. He earned his command by far-seeing and perfect preparation and exact execution rather than by inspired flashes of genius in times of crisis. Chauvel was no hard-riding gambler against odds. Like Alva, he could on occasion ignore the ardent enthusiasm of his officers and bide his time. Always cool, and looking far enough ahead to see the importance of any particular fight in its proper relation to the war as a whole, he was brave enough to break off an engagement if it promised victory only at what he considered an excessive cost to his men and horses. He fought to win, but not at any price. He sought victory on his own terms. He always retained, even in heated moments of battle, when leaders are often careless of life, a very rare concern for the lives of his men and his horses.

Chauvel's appreciation of the true purpose of mounted riflemen was illustrated again and again in his command of the light horse. In scouting, patrol, and reconnaissance, the functions of mounted riflemen are identical with those of cavalry, but in action their work is quite dissimilar. When engaged in actual operations, they are infantrymen made highly mobile by their horses. They are thrusters and raiders; they are intended for swift surprise work on the flanks rather than for frontal attack. Their mission is by bold reconnaissance to screen preparation and the advance in battle, daringly to probe and discover the enemy's strength and intentions, constantly to keep him uneasy as to his flanks—and all the while prepared to swoop down on an exposed enemy position, or by long night-rides to surround and destroy his isolated posts. Their superior merit as dismounted fighters lies in the speed of their approach to an enemy force or stronghold, and—as they have not been exhausted, like infantry, by long marches under burdensome

packs and arms and munitions—in the freshness, vigour, and rapidity of their subsequent advance on foot. This mobility gives them strong chances of frequently surprising and overwhelming enemy forces greatly superior to their own. The light horsemen were usually outnumbered in their fights in Sinai and Palestine. Such enterprises have their obvious risk. If the enemy in a selected position survives the first onslaught of his swift-striking assailants, he has a sound opportunity, if the attack is persisted in, of destroying most of the mounted infantry force. And mounted men in warfare are, with their horses, slower to train and more difficult to replace than ordinary infantry. Had the Anzac Mounted Division, for instance, been disabled in the early days of the Sinai campaign, it is extremely doubtful if Palestine would have fallen to British arms.

Chauvel never lost sight of these elementary principles in the employment of his mounted rifles; and it is to be remembered that, for more than a year after the crossing of the Canal, true cavalry, as distinct from mounted rifles, played little or no part in the campaign. His disposition was to make all possible use of his force, but never to risk its extinction except, of course, when fighting on the defensive, as at Romani. He was a leader of infinite patience. A deep student of military history, he was never in a hurry to win expensively to-day that which could be won cheaply to-morrow. In the bold aggressive ranks of cavalrymen such a policy was at times certain to be challenged by criticism; Chauvel's justification lies not only in the magnitude of the results achieved by his mounted forces in the campaign, but in the trifling battle casualties which his victorious horsemen suffered.

The Australian light horse leaders were rich in their contrasts. Charles Frederick Cox, who led the 1st Brigade in succession to Chauvel, was as impulsive and fiery as Chauvel was constructive and calm. Cox, like Chauvel, took to soldiering for the love of it; but, while Chauvel was a professional, he was an amateur. Born at Parramatta in 1863, he entered as a young man the clerical service of the Government railways, but was destined to spend only intermittent periods at his desk. When still a lad he enlisted as a trooper in the New

South Wales Lancers, was commissioned in 1894, and became a captain in 1897. In 1899 it was decided by the New South Wales Government to send a hundred chosen lancers to Aldershot for a special course of training, and young Cox was entrusted with the command. Soon after he reached England war broke out in South Africa; Cox and his troopers volunteered their services, and were immediately accepted. England was stirred at the fine response of the Australian visitors, and, when Cox and his men rode through the streets of London prior to embarkation for Africa, they received a great ovation from its populace. They were the first Australian mounted troops with a war mission to be seen in the old city, and the heart of the Londoner was keenly touched. Joining up with other New South Wales troops in South Africa, Cox soon won notice for his strong personal hold upon his men and for his native dash in action. Fighting in Cape Colony, the Orange Free State, and the Transvaal, he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant-colonel, and was given command of the 3rd New South Wales Mounted Rifles.

Standing well over six feet, handsome and well-proportioned, Cox looks what he is, a very spirited cavalryman. He is by intuition a master of cavalry rather than a leader of mounted riflemen. He is in action a man of instant intuitive resolve and swift tempestuous action. He won his "C.B." in South Africa—a rare decoration for a major, as he then was—by an inspired decision to lead his men at the gallop round the flank and across the rear of a greatly superior force of Boers who were seriously threatening a British infantry position. His dramatic move unnerved and broke the enemy, who fled in disorder. The action was characteristic of the man, and was repeated in more than one fight in Palestine.

"Fighting Charlie," as he was known after South Africa, had never been a deep student of war. He relied upon his native wit and his common sense rather than upon the text-books. He could not claim, like Granville Ryrie, to be an outstanding example of the Australian bushman. In the field, except in actual operations, he left the conduct of his brigade almost entirely in the hands of his staff, although there was never any doubt as to who was in fact, and in the

hearts and minds of his men, the leader of his force. But, if Cox left much to his brigade staff and to his regimental officers, he in more than one crisis in Palestine took hold of his force with the grasp of the real leader, and turned a critical fight into sudden complete victory. These flashes were apparently so unpremeditated and so daring that critics feared Cox would one day sustain a bad failure. But both in South Africa and in Palestine his instinct, moving in the thick of battle, was always sound, and gave him a sure, strong grip on the confidence and affection of his brigade.

Of all our Australian leaders disclosed by the war, perhaps none stands level with Granville de Laune Ryrie, of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade, as a true representative of the Australian countryside. He was a distinguished soldier, and was active in Australian public life at home. But above anything else, he was a great Australian bushman. Born in 1865 on his father's station at Michelago, in New South Wales, he was educated at King's School, Parramatta. But his thoughts as a boy probably never ran very seriously upon schooling. His heart was in the bush; before he was out of knickerbockers he had already shown exceptional skill in all youthful country pursuits. Like Cox, he was not a deep student of military affairs. The qualities which marked him as a fine soldier were acquired as a lad on the wild, fresh countryside. Despite his great weight, he was one of the most perfect horsemen in Palestine; and on the rifle ranges in the field where the men practised, he often showed himself one of the best shots in his brigade.

His knowledge of his men was unequalled by that of any other light horse leader; so also was his knowledge of horses, and in his sense of country and his appreciation of the strength of enemy positions, he rivalled Chauvel. And in all these qualities, invaluable in the leader of mounted men in the field, he was relying not upon the lessons of the military textbooks, but upon his training as a bushman. When Ryrie first stood for Parliament, he went round the electorate entertaining his audiences with a programme of rollicking ballads sung to his own accompaniment on a piano, a concertina, or any other musical instrument available. He was then, as he is now in 1922, capable of effective, bluff speech,

marked by refreshing humour, courage, and common sense. But Ryrie knew his country people and what they liked; and he was victorious at the polls. Extraordinarily versatile, he could throw and treat a sick horse in the field as cleanly and effectively as most veterinary officers; he could rival the most expert aborigine in the use of the boomerang; as a young man he fought twice in the final round for the amateur heavyweight boxing championship of Australia; and even at fifty-five, in the field, few men would have been pleased to enter the ring against him.

Squarely and massively built, Ryrie weighed above sixteen stone. But, although the heaviest man in the light horse, he perhaps for his weight rode lighter than any man in Palestine. His favourite charger, "Plain Bill," an Australian thoroughbred, which had known steeplechasing days before the war, was the most coveted horse among all the 30,000 animals that finally made up the Desert Mounted Corps command. Such a man, provided he was a good soldier, could scarcely fail to be a hero to his men. And Ryrie had many great qualities as a soldier. He had not the occasional brilliance of Cox, nor did he pretend to the profound knowledge of the art of mounted warfare possessed by Chauvel. But he was, nevertheless, a rare leader of a mounted brigade. Pre-eminent in common sense, he was above all a sound man. No leader in Palestine had a shrewder grasp of possibilities, both British and enemy; and because of this he went right through the campaign from the Canal—where, at the beginning, he led the light horse vanguard—to the armistice without once making a serious mistake—an uncommon record for a leader of a sensitive, daring force in a campaign of two and a half years' constant fighting. Steady, consistent success marked his leadership all the way. And, apart from his military gifts, Ryrie was a great moral force to the Australians in Palestine. His wide human sympathy, his excellence in all physical exercise despite his weight and age, his unaffected indifference to the hottest fire, his close personal acquaintance with many hundreds of individual men, his keen humour and great talent as a story-teller, and, above all, his deep sense of duty and devotion to the cause for which he was fighting, and his determination to live as his troopers lived, sharing

their rough rations and their hardships—all these things made him a personal force for good which extended far beyond his own brigade. Ryrie had been sometimes described as a careless disciplinarian—he was certainly more indulgent towards his troopers than other Australian brigadiers. But no leader on the front could count more assuredly upon the discipline of his force in action. He was, in the camp and in action, the trusted father of his men.

When Chauvel established his headquarters at Serapeum, the Anzac Mounted Division was attached to the I Anzac Corps, which was then holding No. 2 Section—or the central sector—of the Canal Defences. On March 15th the division relieved the 1st Australian Infantry Division in the front line, where the 3rd Light Horse Brigade had already been for some time. While the new formation was still far from complete in its equipment, it became urgently needed to reinforce the 5th Yeomanry Brigade at Romani, and the work of making it ready for the field was therefore vigorously pushed forward. The men from Anzac had been rested and refreshed; the reinforcements were learning readily from their experienced camp-fellows; spirits were high, and all ranks were eager for the order to follow the yeomanry eastwards.

Australia did not provide artillery for its mounted brigades, and Chauvel was now furnished with Territorial batteries of the British Royal Horse Artillery. The Leicester Battery was attached to the 1st Light Horse Brigade, the Ayrshire to the 2nd, the Inverness to the 3rd, and the Somerset to the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade. These Territorial gunners from the outset displayed a high standard of efficiency. Their work throughout the campaign was distinguished by bold driving and straight shooting, and very soon there were established between them and the mounted men from Australia and New Zealand strong and warm ties of friendship. In a hundred fights they proved gallant and dependable allies of the light horsemen.

A reconnaissance to Wady um Muksheib on March 21st provided the light horsemen with their first little mounted enterprise into Sinai. The enemy, as we have seen, had come by the Muksheib route in his attack on the Canal early in 1915, and during the year there had been reports of Turkish

working parties improving the water-supply in the wady, with a view to future operations. Except near the Katia oasis area, the British line east of the Canal was protected by a desert zone practically devoid of natural water, and it was obvious policy to guard against the enemy increasing the supply by well-sinking and other artificial means. If this could be done, the Turk would be restricted in his advance to the old Darb el Sultani route in the north, by way of Katia, and the British campaign thus confined to a definite frontage.

A party from the 8th Light Horse Regiment (Victoria) under Captain A. E. Wearne,[7] supported by other details, bringing the strength up to fifteen officers and ninety-four men, was detailed for the reconnaissance. Wearne was to seek information as to the water-supply at Moiya Harab and El Hassif, close to where the Wady um Muksheib, after coming down from the central highlands of Sinai, loses itself in the sands of the desert, report upon some slight enemy works in the neighbourhood, and spy out the land generally. The result proved to be of trifling importance. Water was found in a number of cisterns in the Muksheib, and the enemy works were reported to be old and deserted. But many useful lessons were learned. The column traversed eighty miles of sheer desert in thirty-seven hours, including halts. The men and horses finished fresh and strong; but the pace set was excessive for the camels, although they were a selected lot, and they were greatly exhausted on the return to railhead.

This was the first triumph of the Australian horse over the camel in desert warfare. The camels had been taken to carry water for the horses, a provision which later in the campaign, when the endurance of the horses became better known, would not have been deemed necessary. Without the camels the horses would have travelled much faster, and even thirty-seven hours without water would not have distressed them. The Australians observed for the first time the amazing stamina of the native camel-drivers, who walked the full eighty miles dragging their camels, which always hung back at the end of their ropes, after them. They realised, also, how destitute was Sinai of sustenance for man-

[7] Maj. A E Wearne, M C 8th L H. Regt. Reuter's correspondent, Peking; of Liverpool, N S W.; b Liverpool, 5 Aug., 1871.

kind. As they approached the foot-hills of the central range, they came upon country with a sparse supply of rough grazing for camels, and startled a few gazelle and hares of some small variety. There, too, they found a camel-herd in charge of a few camels, a wretched native "unusually dense and stupid," who was "terrified when taken into camp," but whose fears disappeared under kindly treatment. "He ate biscuits given to him by the troopers," said Wearne in his report, "to an extent far beyond the capacity of ordinary mankind." His abnormal hunger was explained by his declaration that for two months he had lived, like the old Sinai sheikh met by Kinglake, entirely on camel milk.

Upon this expedition commenced the long and profitable work of the air force with the light horsemen. Airmen preceded the column and advised Wearne that all was clear ahead, so saving the horsemen much exhausting work in scouting. This association between the two services, continued throughout the campaign, brought about a striking increase in the speed and effectiveness of mounted troops. Then, and on countless occasions afterwards, cavalry forces with airmen as advance-guards were able to travel swiftly and without fear over unknown enemy country towards their objective, instead of being compelled to probe their way slowly and laboriously mile by mile, as in the days before flying. The column also used wireless, carried on camels, to keep in touch with division. The latest achievements in science and mechanism were operating in the war in old Sinai as they were in France and Flanders.

Early in April Chauvel shifted his headquarters from Serapeum to Salhia, nineteen miles west of Kantara, taking with him the 2nd Light Horse Brigade and the New Zealand Mounted Brigade, in order to complete preparations for the advance into the Katia area, which was planned for May. It was at Salhia that Napoleon more than a century earlier had concentrated his army for his dash across Sinai. The 3rd Light Horse Brigade remained in the line east of the Canal, and the 1st Brigade was still patrolling in southern Egypt.

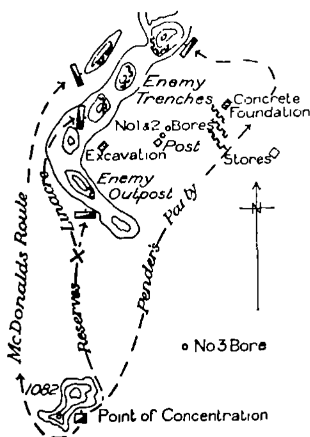
The Victorians of the 8th Regiment had had the honour of the pioneer enterprise to the Muksheib, and a few men of the same regiment were associated with a slightly more serious

mission to Jifjafa early in April. The British airmen, who were daily becoming more active and venturesome, reported the existence of a small Turkish force at Jifjafa, a post situated in the Sinai Range at an altitude of about 1,000 feet, some fifty-two miles east of the Canal. Major W. H. Scott[8] was ordered to proceed with a squadron of the 9th Light Horse Regiment (South Australia and Victoria), under Captain Wearne, to capture the position, destroy the well-sinking machinery on which the enemy was reported to be working, and observe the country generally. Scott had, after allowing for the horseholders, about ninety rifles available for action, in addition to thirty-two officers and men from the Australian and Royal Engineers and the Army Medical Corps; but, when his column was complete with transport camels and their native Bikaner escort, it included no less than 320 officers and men, 175 horses, and 261 camels. This fact, unimportant in itself, is an indication of the transport entailed by an advance into the desert. The actual fighting was simple; the difficult problem confronting the Commander-in-Chief was supplies.

The light horse, fighting as mounted troops, first drew blood upon the Jifjafa raid. Scott moved out from the Canal defences on the afternoon of April 11th, and bivouacked that night in the Wady um Muksheib. The desert of central Sinai is sandy only in patches—much of the country provides firm ground for horses—and on this march the Australian waler began to show his superior pace as a walker, an invaluable campaigning quality in which he was always superior to horses from England and other countries. Preceded and advised by aircraft, Scott travelled by rapid marches up the firm, dry bed of the Muksheib for several miles, and then struck north-north-east along a branch wady towards Jifjafa to his final bivouac before action, a point about eight miles from the enemy post, which he reached at half-past two on the morning of the 13th. The airmen had reported that the little Turkish force usually retired to the hills during their reconnaissance in the mornings, and returned later to their camp. Scott therefore waited until the morning was well advanced before making his attack.

[8] Brigadier W. H. Scott, C.M.G., D.S.O., V.D. Commanded 9th L.H. Regt., 1916/19. Consulting Engineer, of Wangaratta, Vic.; b. Oamaru, N.Z., 11 Apr., 1881.

Very little fighting attended the capture of the post, but Jifjafa provides a pretty, if a slight, example of light horse work. Moving from cover, Major Scott ordered one troop, under Lieutenant J. M. McDonald,[9] to ride as rapidly as the broken ground would permit round the west and north of the hill 1082, and to occupy ground on a ridge about a mile north-west of the supposed position of the enemy camp. A second troop moved north-east past the enemy's works on the south, while a third troop, under Lieutenant F. J. Linacre,[10] made the frontal attack. Four men and the machine-gun section were held in reserve. As Linacre approached the first enemy outpost, it was seen that McDonald would be a little late in his envelopment on the left. Linacre was then swung with sixteen men over the ridge slightly to the north of the enemy, and the remaining men and the slender reserve marched direct on to the post. When the Australians came into view the Turks bolted, some to the hills and some towards the south-east. Those who made for the hills, finding themselves headed off by Lieutenant W. S. Pender,[11] took up a position and opened fire. The engagement was brief. The Australian riflemen speedily asserted fire superiority; six of the enemy were killed and five wounded, and the rest of the force, with the exception of two who escaped on camels, surrendered. The officer in charge was an Austrian engineer, whose party had been engaged in boring and well-making with a German military artesian plant. During the brief fighting the light horse suffered their first casualty in the campaign, Corporal Monaghan,[12] of the 8th Light Horse, being



[9] Capt. J. M. McDonald, M C., 9th L H. Regt. Civil servant; b Semaphore, S Aust., 24 March, 1890.

[10] Capt. F. J. Linacre, 9th L.H. Regt. Pearler; of Gisborne, Vic.; b. Carlton, Melb, Vic, 4 Feb., 1889. Died, 17 Jan., 1922.

[11] Col. W S. Pender, C.I E, M B E; 9th L H. Regt. (later Director of Farms, Indian Army). Farmer, of Minyip, Vic.; b. Rushworth, Vic, 18 Oct., 1889.

[12] Cpl. S. F. Monaghan (No. 976, 8th L.H. Regt.). Sawyer; of Prahran, Melbourne, Vic.; b. Derby, Tas., 1888. Killed in action, 13 Apr., 1916.

MAJOR-GENERAL SIR E. W. C. CHAYTOR (RIGHT), COMMANDER OF THE ANZAC MOUNTED DIVISION, 1917-19, WITH BRIGADIER-GENERAL C. F. COX (LEFT), COMMANDER OF THE 1ST AUSTRALIAN LIGHT HORSE BRIGADE, 1915-19

Aust. War Museum Official Photo. No. B002

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BRIGADIER-GENERAL G. DE L. RYRIE, COMMANDER OF THE 2ND AUSTRALIAN LIGHT HORSE BRIGADE 1914-18, ON HIS HORSE, "PLAIN BILL"

Aust War Museum Official Photo No B1681

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killed. Scott, having demolished the plant, returned with his prisoners to the Canal. As the column retraversed the Muksheib, the wady came down in flood, the dirty brown waters, fed by a downpour rare in Sinai, spreading wide and shallow over the bed of the wild ravine. The light horse spent nearly a year in Sinai, but that was the only time they saw a running stream.

This raid, insignificant in itself, was very encouraging to General Murray. The Commander-in-Chief was well aware that success in Sinai depended almost entirely upon his mounted troops; he probably knew, even before a yeomanry brigade met with disaster in the oasis area, that the Australians and New Zealanders were the only horse which showed promise of early usefulness. Jifjafa demonstrated that the light horsemen were at home on the desert. Scott had led his little force for several days and nights over a wild route, most of which was quite unknown to him and his men; he had surprised and demolished the enemy at a slight cost to himself, gleaned much information about the cisterns of the Muksheib, and returned to his base almost precisely to his time-table. The troop-leaders had shown dash and resource, the co-operation with the airmen had worked admirably, and the men had displayed keenness, excellent horsemanship, very straight shooting, and perfect discipline. Murray expressed warm appreciation of the exploit, and was already satisfied that in the Anzac Mounted Division he had the beginning of a force of exceptional fitness for the irregular work ahead.