

## **Historical Officers Report**

Events of the Great War as reported in the Camden News  
December 1918

How the light Horse fought in the Capture of Beersheba.

"The 'cold-footed' Light Horse who have been marking time in Palestine according to stay at home critics, have at last come into their kingdom," write Trooper Thomas James Cornelius Hoskisson of the 12<sup>th</sup> Light Horse, to his brother Norman Hoskisson, of Orangeville.

"After many dreary, sweating months in the desert, choked by sand and tantalised to the verge of madness by flies, exposed to the burning rays of the sun by day and drenched by night dews on patrol, keeping in touch with the enemy and occasionally handing him out a surprise packet of no mean order, we passed under the shadow of Tel-el-Farah on the evening of October 29.

This historic and formidable redoubt had been modernised in defence by the best German and Austrian engineers, but our troops pressed the enemy so hard in earlier engagements that he retired to his positions before Gaza and Beersheba.

At the base of its frowning summit we crossed the Wady Ghuzee, where in ancient times the Chaldeans had trodden, and where the French under Napoleon had marched to battle. Since the early April fiasco the new Q.O.C. (General Sir Edmund Allenby) had drawn the wand of a magician over the desert. His stupendous task was now complete and the time ripe for a general advance. The infantry were long since snug in their trenches before Gaza, and for months shadows were moving up through the darkest nights to our front lines. But in my humble capacity as a mere cipher I can only deal with the doings of portion of the Fourth Brigade, and as matters eventuated with such lightning like rapidity my process must necessarily be a skimming one.

For obvious reasons a circuitous route was taken by our various brigades, and our horses appeared to have been seized with the spirit of adventure as well as ourselves.

The hours of darkness were too precious to waste, and after two stops, morning light disclosed contingents of mounted Australians but five miles to the north west of Beersheba, screened by the surrounding hills. It may be as well to mention that our air service appeared to have obtained complete mastery over that of the enemy, for we had him beaten at every point of observation. Feelings throughout that day were tense. For there is nothing worse than in action when alongside the foe. This was due to the fact that portion of the infantry was held up by a strong force in another quarter, and

about 4.30 p.m. on October 31, an urgent order came along that Beersheba had to be taken at all costs. General H. W. Hodgson, C.B., had Divisional Command, while Brigadier General W. Grant, D.S.O., had charge of the 4th Light Horse Brigade.

A decision was soon arrived at, and the 12th (N.S.W.) and the 4th (Victorian) Regiments were assigned the advance with the 11th (Queensland) in reserve.

The first three miles were covered cautiously, and then hell was let loose. The order 'Charge' was given, and the good Australian nag was fired with the determination of his rider.

Colonel D. Cameron, D.S.O., led the 12th, while Colonel J. M. W. Bouchier, D.S.O. led the 4th, and it goes without saying that the pace was hot. Shells shrieked, and devilish machine gun fire bit our boys from three points of the compass. Redoubts, bristling with guns, were passed, and deep Turkish trenches in crescent-shape were jumped or avoided. It was a mad two miles gallop, and while some dismounted to the attack, a couple of squadrons of the 4th and 12th Light Horse kept their spurs busy, Australian coo-ees rending the air, and I have to say that the atmosphere was electrically charged with good round Australian slang and anathemas against the enemy.

Those mad Australians. Within 45 minutes of the word 'Charge' some of our men were rounding up gunners in the main street and alleys of Beersheba. Here a sergeant captured an enemy machine-gun and turned it on to its owners, an officer and a trooper galloped after and dismantled a howitzer, at every corner batches of 20 or more Turks were surrendering to a couple of our men, and by dusk this ancient city was in our hands.

Of a truth Jacko had got the wind up with a vengeance, and the rot that set in quickly spread. The remark of a British officer who viewed the sensational charge is apropos. 'There goes those mad Australians again, they will all be shot.' It may be said truly that the attack on and fall of Beersheba was not according to the army text book, but it is certain that had the usual dismounted tactic been adopted before the Turkish crescent of trenches, and their strongly fortified redoubts, the assault of them would have cost many lives as well as hazarding the great coup which eventually followed.

The rapid and devil-may-care nature of the operation though looked at in calmer moments as more akin to huge bluff I stakes materialised, and that was the predominant and urgently needed issue. The surprise was so well timed and complete that we found the enemy coppers full of food for the evening meal, with ladies ready to serve same; while in his cosy room a German officer looked round from the telephone only to find a revolver levelled at his head. One main well was blown up, but several others were intact, while though holes had been freshly bored in the solidly constructed railway viaduct of 20 spans, it was unharmed. The quantity of artillery and shells, small arms and ammunition, and stores left behind was colossal, and

in addition a couple of aeroplanes under repair were left in the aerodrome, which was situated underground, as was also most of their wireless plant. Colonel Cameron, D.S.O., was naturally a proud man when addressing his regiment a couple of nights afterwards. He had gone over the ground traversed on the eventful day in company with several high officials. And the opinion of one and all was that the Light Horse had achieved the seemingly impossible. The climax was reached when he read General Sir William Robertson's cable message expressing admiration at the undaunted valour and dash displayed by the Australian Light Horse.

Some instances of German barbarity can be quoted against the craven Turks. Many of the Turks who put their hands up shot their captors in the back while the disarming process was going on, but those deaths were speedily avenged.

A field ambulance was also deliberately bombed. Beersheba possess some fine buildings but the immediate surrounding country is rocky and of poor quality. It was pleasing to see young gum trees making headway through the stony soil.

Gaza was evacuated by the enemy a few days after the fall of Beersheba, but not before its years toil in the shape of fortification had been pounded to dust by our artillery from the sea and land. Here also we came into possession of arsenals of ammunition and stores. From this on our successes magnified, though in some places, notably at Tel-el-Sheria, the Turks put up a stubborn resistance. The nature of the country favoured them in fact they were driven from range of hills to similar lines of defence further back all along their front, but the indomitable pluck and perseverance of the infantry eventually gained the day.

The Wady was heaped with dead, but it eventually came into our hands, and the sorely tried horses without water for 72 hours slaked their thirst. Our rapid forward movement seems inconceivable under the circumstances, for though there were wells in abundance through the country, time was too precious to hand water thousands of animals. Where time permitted the engineers took a hand with the pumps.

At Huj an ammunition dump covering about 10 acres was captured, and in every instance through the campaign the enemy seemed to think more of flight than destroying his possessions. As our pursuit increased and became more threatening the Turks, Germans and Austrians confederates in the air abandoned them, after which the retreat became a rout. They shot their mules and oxen in the lumber and all along the line were shattered remnants of their convoy.

Their two main lines of railways fell into our hands, and we are now utilising them. After sixteen days continuous travelling and fighting Jaffa and Ramleh were evacuated, and our portion of the Light Horse is now resting among the corn and wine, the Olive and orange groves and vineyards of

Biblical fame, and we are well and truly anchored not far from Jerusalem. The movement was too vast, too awe inspiring to follow in detail, and it seems incredible even to a participant that such a sweeping forward move has in reality been made. It would indeed be difficult to praise too highly the perfect organisation of the attack, or the spirit and dash of our men, and no doubt the thrashing the Turks received was a thing undreamt of even in his lowest despondency. The aftermath of battle is hellish, and the sights I have witnessed made me pause and think that there is sound logic in the quotation—"Peace hath her victories no less renowned than war."

### **Historical Officers Notes**

Thomas was 36 when he enlisted on the 7<sup>th</sup> February 1916; he left Australia on the RMS Mongolia with the 10<sup>th</sup> reinforcements. Thomas was with "B" Squadron 12<sup>th</sup> Light Horse and participated in the charge. He returned to Australia on the 20<sup>th</sup> July 1919.

### **From The Home Front**

With this issue of the "Camden News" is published our calendar for 1919, and with it is compiled the Camden District Honour Roll.

The need of a complete list of our soldier, sons and brother showing the locality from which they enlisted. A record to be kept in all homes is essential, and it has fallen to the "Camden News" to secure that list.

The usual form of calendar adopted by this office for years past has been altered to make this possible, but it is thought the importance of the names listed for outweighs that of a picture or colours generally used.

Now that hostilities have ceased after four years of dreadful warfare, and victory secured for right against might, the Honour Roll is complete as far as we can ascertain. May the Peace promised the world make impossible such another Roll and the thought of that add happiness throughout this Christmas

The above are the only two articles found in the Camden News for December 1918.

Ray Herbert  
Historical Officer