

AWM4
Australian Imperial Force unit
war diaries, 1914-18 War

Light Horse

Item number: 10/17/1

Title: 12th Australian Light Horse
Regiment

March - December 1915

H I S T O R Y
OF
12th AUSTRALIAN LIGHT HORSE REGIMENT.

P A R T I
Period March 1915 to - December, 1915.

FORMATION

On the 1st March 1915 authority was received to form the 12th Australian Light Horse Regiment for Active Service Abroad. The material available was approximately 1000 prospective Light Horse Men in the Light Horse Training Depot at LIVERPOOL. These men in all stages of elementary Training, hailed for the most part from the back Stations and runs of New South Wales, good shots and good horsemen, they were the very material required for the nucleus of a mounted Regiment.

On the 3rd March, 48 hours after the authority for formation, the 12th Light Horse Regiment complete in personnel, under the temporary command of Major A.B. BAKER D.S.O. marched out of LIVERPOOL Camp to HOLDSWORTHY, a camping area adjacent to the German prisoners of War, Concentration Camp.

FIRST APPOINTMENTS

O.C.	Lieut- Colonel	P.P. ABBOTT.
2nd i/c	Major	J. WESTGARTH.
O.C. "A"	Sqdn Major	P.A. CHAMBERS.
O.C. "B"	Sqdn Major	H. McINTOSH.
O.C. "C"	Sqdn Major	D. CAMERON.
Q.M.	Lieut	R.F. TOOMEY.
M.G. Officer	Lieut	E. HYMAN.

TRAINING

The work of Training and equipping the Regiment for over-seas now commenced. The Training consisted of a thorough grounding in Musketry, Field and Range Firing, Mounted and Dismounted Action and Manouvres, Regimental and Ceremonial Drill.

PARADE OF OVER-SEAS TROOPS.

On the 24th April the Regiment horsed and equipped on a war footing trekked to SYDNEY and the following day formed part of a Procession of Over-seas Troops which paraded through the principle Streets of SYDNEY.

On returning to HOLDSWORTHY a few days later, advanced training continued a pace until the 9th of June, when Embarkation Orders were received.

EMBARKATION.

The Regiment magnificently equipped, well horsed, highly disciplined and thoroughly Trained, an efficient fighting Unit, moved by road to SYDNEY, there to remain two days awaiting embarkation.

The Regiment (less portion of "A" Squadron and the Transport Section) embarked on S.S. Suevic, troopship No "A" 29 on the 11th. Having completed the work of loading the horses, the Transport moved out into the stream eventually sailing on the 13th.

The Detachment from "A" Squadron and the Transport Section together with Transport vehicles, under the command of Major P.A. CHAMBERS, embarked on S.S. Vestalia sailing on the 22nd of June.

ORIGINAL OFFICERS.

C.O.	Lieut- Colonel	P.P. ABBOTT.
2nd in command	Major	J. WESTGARTH.
Adjutant	Lieut	C.M. FETHERSTONHAUGH.
Q.M.	Lieut	R.F. TOOMEY.
M.G. Section	Lieut	E. HYMAN.
M.O.	Captn	L. COWLESHAW.
Chaplain	Captn	T. MULLINS.
V.O.	Captn	R.A. DOWLING.

ORIGINAL OFFICERS (contd)

"A" SQUADRON.

Major	P.A.	CHAMBERS.
Captn	H.	KERR-McKELL.
Lieut	M.A.	BROWN.
Lieut	E.A.	RALSTON.
Lieut	R.K.	ROBEY.

"B" SQUADRON.

Major	H.	McINTOSH.
Captn	A.E.	D'ARCY.
Lieut	L.	WILSALLEN.
Lieut	J.W.	HAMPTON.
Lieut	J.H.	HUXLEY.
Lieut	H.C.	HOLDEN.

"C" SQUADRON.

Major	D.	CAMERON.
Captn	A.D.	STEWART-MORAY.
Lieut	J.R.C.	DAVIES.
Lieut	B.B.	CAPPER.
Lieut	E.A.	TOURLE.
Lieut	R.M.	GAVIN.

S.S. SUEVIC

On the 15th June when at sea two days, a Wireless message was received to disembark all horses at ADELAIDE.

This was necessitated by the high rate of mortality amongst horses sent on boats to EGYPT shortly before the Regiment sailed.

The horses were disembarked at ADELAIDE on the 18th and taken to the Remount Depot at DRY CREEK.

The loss of the horses although at first a wrench, later proved a blessing in disguise. Deck space vacated by the horses was available of by the men and greatly relieved the congestion in the sleeping quarters on the Mess decks.

Training Board was limited to Physical Exercise, Rifle Drill and Lectures by Senior Officers.

ADEN

The first Port of call was ADEN which was reached on the 11th of July. Here an incident occurred which savoured of war. An ARAB Force of some 4000 Rifles Officered by Turkish Regulars, cut off the water supply from ADEN at LE HAGE about 13 miles inland. The BRECKNOCKS (Welsh Garrison Troops) formed a punitive Force but suffered severely from thirst, through the treachery of the natives in charge of the water convoy, but the situation was eventually restored by this Battalion.

For 8 days the 11th Regiment on board S.S. Medic and the 12th Regiment stood by in readiness to land, but this was not found necessary except a Route March through ADEN as a demonstration of strength to impress the natives who had grown very restless.

This was the first body of Australian Troops to land at ADEN AND they created a very good impression, not only by their fitness and physique but also by their march discipline.

Indian Troops now arrived and reinforced the ADEN field Force, thus enabling the Light Horse to proceed to EGYPT.

EGYPT

On the 18th July, in a terrific dust storm, the Suevic accompanied by the Medic departed from ADEN, and after passing through the oppressive heat of the Red Sea berthed at SUEZ on the 22nd. Having disembarked the Regiment entrained for CAIRO arriving the following day at the 2nd OASIS CAMP HELIOPOLIS.

TRAINING

In the absence of horses vigorous dismounted Training on the desert was the order of the day. Route Marches and Dismounted Attacks on the sandhills against an imaginary enemy, soon had all ranks in a perfect state of fitness.

TRAINING (Contd)

When in EGYPT a month the Light Horse Bandolier equipment was replaced by the Infantry Web Equipment and pack.

DEPARTURE FOR GALLIPOLI.

All speculation now as to the Regiment's destination was at an end, it appeared certain that the 4th L.H. Brigade was bound for Gallipoli, there to assist the other horseless Light Horse Regiments.

On the 25th August the Regiment entrained for Alexandria, the same day embarking on Troopship B13 S.S. "Marquette".

On arrival at LEMNOS on the 28th the Regiment transhipped to the "Prince Abbas" arriving at ANZAC COVE at midnight after a devious passage to avoid submarines.

ANZAC COVE

Before daybreak on the 29th the whole Regiment, had disembarked on Lighters and proceeded to REST GULLY, ANZAC, at the foot of WALKER'S RIDGE.

Here with deep regret it was learned that the Regiment for the time being at least, would no longer exist as a unit.

Other Light Horse Regiments were so wasted and weakened through casualties, sickness and disease, that without immediate reinforcements they could no longer hold their sectors in the line.

Each N.S.W. Regiment was now strengthened by the addition of a squadron from the 12th Regiment, "A" Squadron and the Machine Gun Section reinforcing the 1st L.H. Regiment on WALKER'S RIDGE, "B" Squadron the 7th L.H. Regiment at RYRIE'S POST and "C" Squadron the 6th L.H. Regiment at HOLLY'S PUR.

Lieut-Colonel P.P. ABBOTT and Headquarters Staff were attached to Headquarters 3rd L.H. Brigade, Lieut.Colonel ABBOTT assuming command of the 10th L.H. Regiment.

WALKER'S RIDGE

"A" Squadron (Major P.A. CHAMBERS) now absorbed in the 1st L.H. Regiment was in reserve at WALKER'S RIDGE.

This position was daily subjected to heavy shell fire from enemy Batteries, whilst at night snipers and bombing parties showed great activity.

This Squadron in support during the day found the usual fatigues and working parties and at night reinforced the front line trenches.

After a week "A" Squadron together with the 1st L.H. Regt. moved to OTAGO GULLY and occupied the front line trenches overlooking SNIPERS' NEST.

SHELL GREEN

From REST GULLY "B" Squadron (Major H.McINTOSH) moved to SHELL GREEN and was absorbed in the 7th L.H. Regt.

Whilst in support the same night Major H.McINTOSH was severely wounded in the thigh and evacuated to Hospital.

LONE PINE.

On the 30th August "B" Squadron and a detachment from the 7th L.H. Regiment took over a section of the line at LONE PINE, relieving portion of the 1st Infantry Brigade.

In places the trenches were but 5 yards apart and sapheads were separated from the enemy line only by a wall of sandbags. In these trenches observation was both difficult and dangerous, a periscope raised above the parapet being frequently shattered by the unerring skill of a Turkish marksman.

Bombing duels were of daily occurrence keeping all ranks ever on the alert.

HOLLY SPUR

After another turn in LONE PINE, the 7th L.H. Regiment took over a sector at HOLLY SPUR where "B" Squadron of the 12th remained until the evacuation.

WILSON'S LOOKOUT. A detachment from "B" Squadron assisted "C" Squadron in holding and consolidating WILSON'S LOOKOUT.

During the period under review the 7th L.H. Regiment was subjected to almost continuous shell fire and sustained a number of casualties, including Lieut. H.C. HOLDEN who was killed.

WILSON'S LOOKOUT (contd)

"B" Squadron assisted in repelling an attack on this portion of the line during a blizzard on the night of the 29th November, the enemy leaving many dead in front of the trenches.

RYRIE'S POST

"C" Squadron moved from REST GULLY to RYRIE'S POST and was absorbed in the 6th L.H. Regiment.

After being initiated into the methods of trench warfare, the squadron occupied a sector on the extreme right of HOLLY SPUR fronting the system known as the Turkish Despair Trenches.

This Squadron was continually under heavy machine gun fire and enemy snipers accounted for many casualties, but counter-sniping soon secured a supremacy of fire which was maintained until the evacuation.

The general routine of work was sapping, tunnelling and trench repairing, the latter work being done at night.

CAMEL'S HUMP

"A" Squadron working at night, constructed a communication trench across OTAGO GULLY which linked up with CAMEL'S HUMP.

The Squadron then manned CAMEL'S HUMP, a detachment remaining there until the evacuation.

PATROLS

Small night patrols reconnoitred the valley between the trenches at OTAGO GULLY and the enemy front line.

Enemy patrols were frequently encountered, Light Horse Patrols pushing forward as far as SNIPER'S NEST. These patrols proved so active that in a very short time the enemy feared to venture far from his trenches.

WILSON'S LOOKOUT

Early in November the 5th Light Horse Regiment succeeded in capturing the salient in what was afterwards known as WILSON'S LOOKOUT.

"C" Squadron relieved the 5th Regiment the same afternoon when this post was heavily shelled, sandbags and trenches being flattened and levelled to the ground. The enemy attack which followed the bombardment at night was beaten off by bombers, 1200 bombs alone were thrown from the salient during the night.

This action was the most important engagement on the Peninsula in which the Regiment participated, the enemy being in greatly superior numbers and well supported by artillery from advantageous positions.

GENERAL HEALTH

Troops were suffering a good many hardships, and their general health was a matter of grave concern to those in high command. The lack of reinforcements made the already strenuous work unduly heavy on the partially fit men in the line. Dysentery, Fever and Sickness reduced Regiments to Squadron strength.

Men out of the line in supposed rest, were called upon to supply working parties and do all manner of fatigues.

The nervous strain was never relaxed, not one acre of ANZAC being free from shell fire.

CLIMATIC CONDITIONS

The weather was hot and a plague of flies made eating almost impossible. The monotonous Bully and biscuits was occasionally supplanted by a fresh issue, but a rough sea on a treacherous coast often made it impossible for stores and supplies to be landed for a week at a stretch.

WATER

Water was scarce all ranks being limited to less than $\frac{1}{2}$ gallon per day, the sinking of several shallow wells however increased the supply, but even at its best the issue fell a long way short of the actual needs of the troops.

THE BLIZZARD

Late in November, heavy rain set in for two days and on the 29th snow and sleet fell leaving the hills and bracken covered in a mantle of snow. The blizzard lasted three days but was followed by fine sunny weather.

All ranks suffering extreme hardships during this bitterly cold period, Men in the line were drenched and half frozen at their post. Dugouts and shelters were not equal to this severe test of nature, in consequence few could boast of dry and comfortable quarters many were evacuated to Hospital with Frost-bite.

THE EVACUATION

Early in December, it was realised that without large reinforcements a further advance at ANZAC would be impossible.

Guns of large calibre had arrived and still more were expected from Germany, these alone would make the British line untenable.

About the 11th December the evacuation commenced, troops being withdrawn from the line at night, embarked on lighters and then transhipped to transports which were standing out to sea.

The line was weakened in this manner nightly, until, on the night of the 19th only a thin line of bombing posts remained.

The last party to leave the trenches at half past two on the morning of the 20th, reported the enemy still digging and wiring in front of his positions, quite obvious of the fact that the British had gone.

A large percentage of the personnel who formed the rear party of the 1st, 6th and 7th Regiments were selected from the Squadrons of the 12th Regiment.

After having accomplished what might be termed a military miracle, the troops after reaching MUDROS embarked for Alexandria and eventually arrived in CAIRO on or about Christmas Day; "A" Squadron proceeding to the Aerodrome Camp, HELIOPOLIS and "B" and "C" Squadrons to the old camp site at MAADI.

CASUALTIES

See appendix 1.