

**THE OFFICIAL HISTORY OF
AUSTRALIA IN THE WAR
OF 1914-1918**

**VOLUME VII
SINAI AND PALESTINE**



THE
AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE
IN SINAI AND PALESTINE

1914-1918

BY
H. S. GULLETT

With 77 maps and 83 illustrations

Tenth Edition

AUSTRALIA
ANGUS AND ROBERTSON LTD.

89 CASTLEREAGH STREET, SYDNEY

1941

Printed and Bound in Australia by
Halstead Press Pty Limited,
9-19 Nickson Street, Sydney

Registered at the General Post Office, Melbourne, for transmission
through the post as a book.

Obtainable in Great Britain at Australia House and from all
booksellers (sole agent for wholesale distribution—The Official
Secretary for the Commonwealth of Australia, Australia House,
Strand, London, W.C.2); in Canada from the Australian Trade
Commissioner, 15 King Street West, Toronto; in the United
States from the Australian Government Trade Commissioner,
International Building, 630 Fifth Avenue, New York; and in
New Zealand from the Australian Trade Commissioner, D.I.C.
Building, Wellington.

First Edition - - - - - 1923
Second Edition - - - - - 1935
Third Edition - - - - - 1936
Fourth Edition - - - - - 1937
Fifth Edition - - - - - 1938
Sixth Edition - - - - - 1938
Seventh Edition - - - - - 1939
Eighth Edition - - - - - 1939
Ninth Edition - - - - - 1940
Tenth Edition - - - - - 1941

PREFACE

THE sole purpose of this narrative is to record the work of the Australian Light Horse in the British campaigns in Sinai, Palestine and Syria during the years 1916, 1917, and 1918. It is in no sense a complete narrative of those campaigns.

Obviously, however, it was impracticable to set out the part played by the Australians, who were only a portion of the mounted troops employed, without dealing (in broad outline at least) with the operations of the British Army as a whole. To make the activities of the Light Horse intelligible, it has been necessary to describe the strategy and tactics employed for the whole force, and at times even to give accounts of engagements in which the Australians were not directly involved.

The story, therefore, in its bolder features covers the whole British force. But, as will be apparent, it covers in detail only the fighting and the campaign life of the Australians. To readers beyond the Commonwealth this may suggest a biased sense of relative values. There is no such bias. The author is fully aware that the Light Horse achievements, although high in quality and sometimes decisive in effect, were but a contributing factor. The detailed history of the force of infantry and cavalry from the United Kingdom, from India, and from other countries within and without the Empire, has yet to be written.

Grateful acknowledgment is due of the author's debt to many hundreds of officers, non-commissioned officers, and men of the Australian Imperial Force who served in the campaign, for the assistance they rendered in the collection of information for this volume. Unfortunately most of the diaries of the units engaged were, until 1918, at best very scantily written. In the collection of material the author has had access to the original official papers used in the field, so far as they have been preserved. From the beginning of December 1917 he accompanied the Light Horse in nearly all their operations. But in dealing with the earlier stages

of the campaign he has been dependent for detail upon a systematic interviewing of responsible officers, and a minute examination—under the guidance of officers who took part in the fighting—of the ground of each engagement; personal narratives were obtained from a great majority of Light Horse leaders of all ranks; and by the careful comparing of all these statements, and the checking of them with the official papers, the story has been built up. Acknowledgment is due also to many Imperial officers who gave valuable assistance, and to Mr. Winston Churchill, who, as Secretary of State for War, permitted the author to study not only all the original records of Army Headquarters during the commands of General Murray and General Allenby, but also the papers of all British units engaged. But for this courtesy the volume could not have been written.

In particular the author expresses his indebtedness to Mr. Alan S. Murray,¹ who has been responsible for the making of all the maps and the small inset sketches, with Mr. W. S. Perry² working keenly and capably as his assistant. Mr. Murray, although a member of the A.I.F., served in the campaign with the survey corps working under British G.H.Q. During the campaign his work in surveying No-Mans' Land, often under fire, was recognised by high award. He afterwards made a detailed survey of all the Australian battle-grounds; and, in addition to the assistance afforded by his maps, his intimate knowledge of the country was of great aid to the author.

To Lieutenant-Colonel J. G. Browne, and to Lieutenant-Colonel W. J. Foster, the author tenders his thanks for permission to use a number of sketches made by them during operations in the field.

H. S. G.

MELBOURNE,

1st November, 1922.

¹ Lieut. A. S. Murray, D.C.M., Aust. Survey Corps. Member of Aust. Permanent Forces; of Kew, Vic; b. Preston, Vic., 24 Feb., 1887.

² Sgt. W. S. Perry (No. 10202; 13th Bty., A.F.A.). Public servant; of Haberfield, N.S.W.; b. Tighe's Hill, N.S.W., 25 Oct., 1887.

CONTENTS

I. THE TURKS INVADE EGYPT	1
II. AFTER GALLIPOLI	18
III. THE LIGHT HORSEMAN AND HIS HORSE	29
IV. SINAI	40
V. ANZAC MOUNTED DIVISION	54
VI. THE ARABS	74
VII. THE ADVANCE TO ROMANI	81
VIII. THE DESERT ORDEAL	94
IX. AWAITING THE ENEMY	113
X. THE TURKISH ADVANCE	126
XI. THE BATTLE OF ROMANI	142
XII. KATIA AND BIR EL ABD	164
XIII. THE ADVANCE TO EL ARISH	194
XIV. MAGDHABA	214
XV. RAFA	229
XVI. TOWARDS GAZA	244
XVII. FIRST GAZA ENGAGEMENT	262
XVIII. SECOND GAZA ENGAGEMENT	297
XIX. SECOND GAZA ENGAGEMENT (CONTINUED)	318
XX. CHETWODE'S PLAN	340
XXI. ALLENBY AND HIS TASK	354
XXII. THE EVE OF BEERSHEBA	368
XXIII. BATTLE OF BEERSHEBA	384
XXIV. TEL EL KHUWEILFE	408
XXV. BREAKING THROUGH	427

XXVI.	THE GREAT DRIVE	445
XXVII.	CLEARING THE MARITIME PLAIN	466
XXVIII.	TOWARDS JERUSALEM	486
XXIX.	NAHR AUJA AND EL BURJ	497
XXX.	THE CAPTURE OF JERUSALEM	511
XXXI.	THE SEASONED LIGHT HORSEMEN	526
XXXII.	THE ADVANCE TO JERICHO	536
XXXIII.	THE RAID TO AMMAN	546
XXXIV.	GHORANIYE AND MUSALLABEH	586
XXXV.	THE ES SALT RAID	599
XXXVI.	THE ES SALT RAID (CONTINUED)	623
XXXVII.	SUMMER IN THE JORDAN VALLEY	638
XXXVIII.	RE-ORGANISATION AND PREPARATION	651
XXXIX.	ABU TELLUL	660
XL.	ALLENBY'S GREAT SCHEME	677
XLI.	SHARON AND SAMARIA	692
XLII.	EAST OF JORDAN	713
XLIII.	THE ADVANCE TO DAMASCUS	728
XLIV.	THE CAPTURE OF DAMASCUS	751
XLV.	ALEPPO AND THE ARMISTICE	776
	APPENDIX	793
	INDEX	795

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Light horse sergeant, with an Australian horse which served throughout the campaign in Sinai and Palestine	40
Four Australian horses which served throughout the campaign in Sinai and Palestine	40
Light Horsemen	41
General Sir Archibald Murray	56
Lieutenant-General Sir Charles M. Dobell	56
Lieutenant-General Sir Harry Chauvel	57
Major-General Sir E. W. C. Chaytor with Brigadier-General C. F. Cox	72
Brigadier-General G. de L. Ryrie	73
Hejaz horsemen at Damascus, October, 1918	80
The Wady um Muksheib, Sinai, in flood	81
The hod (desert palm-grove) at Oghratina	81
Lieutenant-Colonel J. G. Browne	104
Putting down a "spearpoint" pump in the desert	104
Camel cacolets for the transport of wounded	105
Sand sleighs with wounded	105
The line of posts held by the 1st A.L.H. Brigade on the night of 3rd August, 1916	138
View from southern end of infantry position at Romani, looking south over Wellington Ridge	146
Camels bearing water on the desert	160
Machine-gunners of the Australian Light Horse	160
Brigadier-General J. R. Royston and Lieutenant-Colonel L. C. Maygar, V.C., with an enemy gun captured at El Arish	161
An Australian "camelier"	184
Major-General Hon. H. A. Lawrence	185
Brigadier-General C. L. Smith, V.C.	185
Magdhaba: The advance of the 9th Australian Light Horse Regiment on 23rd December, 1916	224
Australians mounting their camels	225
The battlefield of Rafa	232
Ambulances of the Anzac Mounted Division moving along the beach near El Arish	232
Royal horse artillery in action at Rafa, 9th January, 1917	232
View of Gaza from the summit of Ali el Muntar	233

Turkish and German soldiers (guarded by Australians after capture)	274
Turkish soldiers (after capture)	274
A cactus hedge at Gaza, with Arab cultivator	275
Infantry advancing on Ali Muntar at First Battle of Gaza, 26th March, 1917	276
Cars of No. 1 Australian Light Car Patrol beside the Dead Sea, 1918	308
A disabled tank at Gaza	308
Enemy machine-gunners in action at the Second Battle of Gaza	309
The destruction of the viaduct on the Asluj railway	348
Turkish cavalry in dismounted action	349
General Sir Edmund Allenby	364
Lieutenant-General Sir Philip Chetwode	365
Lieutenant-Colonel T. E. Lawrence	365
Beersheba	388
Brigadier-General L. C. Wilson and his staff	389
Brigadier-General W. Grant	428
Captain J. R. Cain	429
An Arab village on the Philistine Plain	446
The Jewish settlement of Wady Hanein	447
The road from Jaffa to Jerusalem running through the country of Judæa	488
Headquarters of a light horse regiment encamped close to the Mediterranean	489
Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives	489
The advance upon Jericho by the 1st Australian Light Horse Brigade	536
Jericho	537
Advance on Amman, 27th March, 1918	565
Crossing the Jordan	566
Amman	567
Amman during Turkish counter-attack on Hill 3039, 30th March, 1918	576
Ain es Sir, scene of attack on Wellington Mounted Rifles, 1st April, 1918	579
Ghoraniye bridgehead, showing "The Pimple"	589
Clay hills in the Ghoraniye bridgehead	594
Musallabeh	595
View of Shunet Nimrin and El Haud	609
Light horse and British yeomanry at Es Salt	612
Dust in the Jordan Valley	613

ILLUSTRATIONS

xi

Es Salt-Shunet Nimrin road (showing where it was blown up by the retreating Turks in September, 1918)	628
Brigadier-General G. M. Macarthur Onslow and his staff ..	644
Nurses of No. 14 Australian General Hospital, Port Said, 1918	645
"The Bluff"	686
Dummy horses in the Jordan Valley, prepared in order to deceive the enemy concerning General Allenby's imminent offensive	686
Transport camels	687
Scene on the Nazareth road after the advance of the 13th British Cavalry Brigade	702
Turkish prisoners captured at Jenin	703
General Chaytor with Ali Bey Wahaby	728
Turkish prisoners captured at Amman	729
The scene of the charge at Semakh	736
Light horse graves at Semakh	736
3rd Australian Light Horse Brigade marching by the Sea of Galilee	737
The broken bridge at Benat Yakub	737
The surrender of Kuneitra to Major-General H. W. Hodgson, Commander of the Australian Mounted Division	740
A halt on the ride to Damascus	740
Squadrons of the 4th and 12th Australian Light Horse Regiments in readiness for the charge at Kaukab	741
Barada Gorge	748
Damascus	749
Key to conventional signs used in maps	794

LIST OF MAPS

1 Turkey in Asia, showing Allied pressure early in 1917 ..	24
2 Sinai Peninsula, showing main routes across the desert ..	45
3 Communications about July, 1916	124
4 Romani—Position at dusk, 3rd August, 1916	140
5 Romani—Position at 4 p.m., 4th August, 1916	157
6 Romani—Position at 5 a.m., 5th August, 1916	168
7 Romani-Katia—Position at 5 p.m., 5th August, 1916 ..	177
8 British attack at Bir el Abd	180
9 Maghaba—Position at dusk, 23rd December, 1916 ..	224
10 Battle of Rafa	233
11 Rafa—Attack by N.Z.M.R. Brigade and I.C.C. Brigade ..	240
12 First Battle of Gaza—Position at Dusk, 26th March, 1917 ..	290

13	Second Battle of Gaza—Position at 2 p.m., 19th April, 1917	324
14	British and Turkish lines of communication, prior to Allenby's attack on Gaza, October, 1917	356
15	Beersheba—Charge by 4th A.L.H. Brigade—Position at dusk, 31st October, 1917	396
16	Gaza—Allenby's attack—Position about 6 p.m., 31st October, 1917	405
17	Khuweilfe, 2nd-3rd November, 1917	416
18	Khuweilfe—Position at dusk, 7th November, 1917	425
19	"Breaking through," 10 p.m., 7th November, 1917	438
20	Advance up the Maritime Plain—Position at 7 a.m., 14th November, 1917	480
21	Turkish attack on Nahr el Auja line, 25th November, 1917	496
22	Position prior to fall of Jerusalem, evening of 7th December, 1917	514
23	Jerusalem water supply after the British occupation ..	528
24	Advance on Jericho—Position at noon, 20th February, 1918	536
25	Capture of Jericho—Position on 21st February, 1918, after Turks had evacuated the town	537
26	The opposing front lines (between the two Aujas), February, 1918	548
27	Crossing of Jordan, 22nd-23rd March, 1918	555
28	Amman Raid—First attack by Anzacs and I.C.C. Brigade—Position at dusk, 27th March, 1918	566
29	Amman Raid—Night attack—Position at dawn, 30th March, 1918	576
30	Amman Raid—Position on 30th March, 1918, immediately prior to withdrawal	584
31	The fighting at Ghoraniye and Musallabeh, 11th-12th April, 1918	590
32	Es Salt Raid—Position at midnight, 30th April, 1918 ..	605
33	Turkish attack on 4th A.L.H. Brigade—Position about 8 a.m., 1st May, 1918	617
34	Turkish attack on 4th A.L.H. Brigade—Grant's position at dusk, 1st May, 1918	621
35	Es Salt Raid—Position just prior to withdrawal, 2nd May, 1918	629
36	The counter-attack at Abu Tellul, 14th July, 1918	670
37	British and Turkish lines of communication, Summer of 1918	682
38	Commencement of Battle of Sharon, 19th September, 1918	694
39	Battles of Sharon and Samaria. Advance of British cavalry—Position at 6 p.m., 20th September, 1918 ..	698
40	Operations of 5th A.L.H. Brigade, 19th-20th September, 1918	700

MAPS

xiii

41	Operations of 5th A.L.H. Brigade, 21st September, 1918 ..	703
42	Chaytor's advance on Es Salt and Amman, 22nd September, 1918	716
43	Capture of Amman by Chaytor's Force, 25th September, 1918	725
44	The action at Semakh, 25th September, 1918	731
45	The action at Tiberias, 25th September, 1918	737
46	Crossing of the Jordan at Jisr Benat Yakub, 28th September, 1918	742
47	Advance on Damascus, 28th September, 1918	745
48	Damascus and environs, showing route taken by 3rd Australian Light Horse Brigade through the city	760
49	British and Turkish lines of communication after the capture of Aleppo	776

LIST OF SKETCH MAPS

Action at Jifjafa	72
Position of 5th Yeomanry Brigade, and attack by Turks at about 5.30 a.m., 23rd April, 1916	83
Mazar	198
Tank Redoubt	316
Atawineh Redoubt	320
Baiket el Sana	331
Asluj-Auja demolition	352
Tel el Saba	390
11th and 12th A.L.H. Regiments at Buteihah	432
Advance by 1st and 2nd A.L.H. Brigades, 9th November, 1917 ..	450
Turkish counter-attack at Burkusie Ridge	463
Crossing of Nahr Sukereir	467
Yeomanry charge at Mughar	471
Latron and Amwas	490
Attack on Jerusalem	494
El Burj	507
53rd and 60th Divisions' attack on Mount of Olives	518
Raid by 5th A.L.H. Regiment at Amman	567
Attack by 6th and 7th A.L.H. Regiments at Amman	570
3rd Regiment's attack on Turkish M.G. post at Es Salt	581
McDonald's march to Maain	597
Capture of Amman by 5th A.L.H. Regiment, 25th September, 1918	722
Situation of 2nd A.L.H. Brigade and Turks at Ziza	726

The approach to Damascus	744
Turkish stand before Sasa	746
Kaukab—Attack by 4th and 12th A.L.H. Regiments	748
Barada Gorge	753
Pursuit by 3rd A.L.H. Brigade	765

CHRONOLOGY FROM END OF 1915 TO 1918

(*Italic type indicates events dealt with in this volume.*)

1915.
 Oct. 5—Salonica campaign begins.
 Dec. 20—Evacuation of Anzac and Suvla.
1916.
 Jan. 8—Evacuation of Helles.
 Feb. 21—Battle of Verdun opens.
 March 15—*Despatch of Australian infantry to France begins.*
 April 29—Surrender of General Townshend at Kut (Mesopotamia).
 May 31—Battle of Jutland.
 June 4-Aug. 11—Russian offensive (under Brusilov) in Galicia.
 June 8—Compulsory enlistment in Great Britain begins.
 July 1—Opening of First Battle of the Somme.
 " 19—5th Australian Division engaged in Flanders at Fromelles
 " 22—I Anzac Corps in Battle of Pozieres.
 Aug. 4—*Battle of Romani.*
 " 27—Roumania enters the war.
 Oct. 4-Dec. 23—Austro-German counter-offensive in Roumania.
 Dec. 7—Mr. Lloyd George succeeds Mr. Asquith as Prime Minister.
1917.
 Feb. 1—Germans commence "unrestricted submarine warfare."
 " 21—Germans in France begin withdrawal to "Hindenburg Line."
 March 9—Revolution in Russia.
 " 11—Baghdad captured by the British.
 " 26—*First Battle of Gaza.*
 April 6—United States enters the war.
 " 9—British offensive at Arras (I Anzac Corps engaged at Bullecourt, April 11, May 3, *et seq.*).
 " 19—*Second Battle of Gaza.*
 May 4—French offensive near Soissons.
 " 5—Russians falling back in Mesopotamia, Persia, and Armenia.
 " 12—Italian offensive on Isonzo-Carso front.
 June 7—British offensive at Messines (II Anzac Corps engaged).
 " 27—*Allenby arrives in Egypt.*
 July 1—Russian offensive in Galicia (under Brusilov).
 " 19—German counter-offensive in Galicia, leading to defeat of Russians.
 " 31—British and French offensive in Flanders (Third Battle of Ypres: I and II Anzac Corps engaged, September-November).
 Aug. 19—Italian offensive on Isonzo-Carso front.
 " 21—Germans attack the Russian front near Riga.
 Oct. 24—Austro-German offensive breaks Italian line at Caporetto.
 Nov. 7—*Third Battle of Gaza.*
 " 20—British offensive towards Cambrai.
 Dec. 2—Preliminary negotiations for armistice between Germany and Russia.
 " 6—Roumania suspends hostilities.
 " 9—*Capture of Jerusalem.*

- 1918.
- March 3—Treaty of Brest-Litovsk signed.
 „ 9—British advance along the Tigris.
 „ 21—Final German offensive opens near Somme (Australian Corps engaged from March 27).
- April 9—Battle of the Lys begins (1st Australian Division engaged from April 13).
- May 27—German offensive against the French on the Aisne.
 June 15—Austrian offensive against Italians on Piave repulsed.
 „ 16—Bulgarian support of Germany weakens.
 July 15—German thrust towards Paris across the Marne.
 „ 18—Franco-American counter-attack north of the Marne.
 Aug. 8—British and French attack from Amiens (Australian Corps engaged).
- Sept. 19—*General Allenby's offensive in Palestine.*
 „ 28—Bulgaria asks for an armistice.
 „ 29—Final breaking of the Hindenburg Line.
 „ 30—*Capture of Damascus.*
- Oct. 4—Germany seeks an armistice through U.S.A.
 „ 30—*Armistice signed by Turkey.*
- Nov. 4—British and French advance beyond Scheldt Americans reach Meuse
 „ 11—Armistice with Germany signed.