

# **The Battle of Beersheba**

## **Palestine, 31 October 1917**

### **4th LHFA, AIF, Unit History Account**

Lieutenant Colonel Clive Vallack Single produced a unit history of the 4th Light Horse Field Ambulance, AIF, in which included a section specifically related to the battle of Beersheba and extracted below.

Lieutenant Colonel Clive Vallack Single, *4th Australian Light Horse Field Ambulance, 19 February 1917 - March 1919*, pp. 6 - 8:

#### **Fall of Beersheba**

*The Mobile Section of the Ambulance left Fara at 1700 on October 28 and travelled with the Brigade to Esani. This constituted the first night's march. Here we halted and bivouacked till 1830 on the following day, when the journey was resumed to Khalasa, which was the second bivouac site. During the night's march strict discipline was maintained. Smoking or talking was not permitted. The weather was ideal for travelling. The white chalk and sandstone cliffs between Esani and Khalasa stood out conspicuously in the moonlight, and presented a picture of exquisite grandeur. As the columns moved onwards all hearts were gay, and in each face could be discerned an appearance of eagerness for contact with the enemy. The past six months of quiescence were monotonous for most men, and now that operations were to commence, all were keen and alert in anticipation of striking a severe blow on the enemy who had repulsed two assaults on Gaza earlier in the year.*

*The Brigade moved from Khalasa at 1700 on October 30. As the columns left the bivouac area, the moon rose from behind the Eastern Hills and the journey throughout the night was made with no difficulty than would have been experienced if travelling had been by day. On arriving at Asluj at 0200, it was found that the Australian Receiving Station was utilising a brick building there as a hospital. After halting an hour at Asluj the troops moved on, and journeyed till 1130 on October 31, arriving at Iswaiwin. Here we off saddled, and rested till 1630. It was then time to move again. It was not clearly apparent to all that the attack would be made on Beersheba that night. Two officers with all the sand carts and bearers travelled in the rear of the Brigade which immediately took up positions behind the hills to the East of Beersheba. The Tent division of the Ambulance did not go with the Brigade, but travelled northwards towards Khashim Zanna, where the Dressing Station was established pursuant to instructions from ADMS, Ausdiv.*

*The attack was launched at 1900 and it was only a matter of minutes before Beersheba was entirely in our hands.*

#### **Casualties Arrive**

*Casualties commenced to arrive at 2100. The bearers and sand carts travelled backward and forwards between the battlefield and Dressing Station till 0400 November 1. Forty-six Australian patients were treated and as most of the wounds were severe, the dressing staff was kept working continuously without any respite. When all patients had been dressed and fed, most of the staff went to bed. At 0600, however, hostile aircraft bombed the Station but no damage was done.*

*As soon as the Receiving Stations received the news of the fall of Beersheba, they left Asluj for the captured town in accordance with pre-arranged plans. Here they occupied the Turkish Hospital which was in a dirty condition and infested with vermin. This building was considered unsuitable for the reception of patients, so with as little delay as possible, the Station established itself in the Town Hall. At 1100 on November 1 the patients at Khashim Zanna were evacuated to the Australian Receiving Station at Beersheba and five men who had died of wounds in the Ambulance were conveyed by cacolet camels to Beersheba for interment in the Military Cemetery there.*

#### **Ambulance's First Casualties**

*Having cleared the Dressing Station of patients, the Ambulance moved on to Beersheba and occupied a camp-site in the Brigade area to the East of the town. The horses were watered and tents pitched. Just as the animals returned from water, the attention of the men of the unit was attracted by the MG Squadron opening up fire. On looking skywards an enemy plane, flying very low, was seen approaching the Ambulance. All dived to the ground for shelter but it was then too late. The enemy had dropped his bomb in the midst of the bearer lines. The thunderous explosion was followed by an appalling spectacle. The horse lines were strewn with the intestines of eviscerated animals, and in the midst of this scene were lying many of our own personnel. Some had their limbs shattered, whilst others had their chest and abdomen torn away. Here and there were horses limping away on three legs. The scene was simply indescribable. The casualties were four killed and eight wounded, whilst 14 animals were also killed or had to be destroyed. These were the first casualties that were suffered since the inception of the Ambulance. The deceased soldiers were all buried in a gum tree plantation which was set apart from the Military Cemetery.*