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ENGINEERS' FINE WORK AUSTRALIAN CORPS PRAISED. TURKS ATTEMPT TO CROSS THE CANAL. WIY IT FAILED. Sapper Wm. Cameron, who joined the 4th section of the Third Engineers in Melbourne, writing to his mother, Mrs. H. Cameron, of French-street, Launceston, tells a graphic story of how the Turks were beaten back from the Suez Canal:

"We spent three weeks at Kantara, a town (demolished) on the Canal, 25 miles south of Port Said, doing defence works, etc. During this time I was picked as one of two to do reconnaissance work on the other side of the Canal, with an officer. We did a survey of the other side of the Canal, which was being flooded to bar the passage of the Turks. With our instruments, which I could work, having had an idea of them previously, we also took ranges for our batteries, and cruisers, who patrolled the Canal, and I might add it was owing to this work being so minute and accurate that the Turks were beaten so easily in the fight at this part of the Canal. After there we went to Ismailia, on Lake Timsah, a small lake through which the canal runs. It was here that the Colonel of the engineers wanted our company to return to Mena, and we relieved by one of the other two companies, but the General commanding would not let us go, as he said we were indispensable, which showed that he appreciated our work.

Later on our headquarters were made at -----and we were detached from Mena altogether. We started on a pontoon bridge here, and had it ready for use; it was a very elaborate bridge, and one for us to be proud of, as we were told later by the same General. We then towed the bridge to the Canal, and shoved it across in different places, and at each place we made a ramp for troops to come down to cross it. Then we received urgent orders to proceed low down the Canal to ----- to put it across, as the Turks were expected that night. Well, it was too rough to cross the lake, so we had to stand by for 48 hours. During this time the Turks bombarded the Canal for a length of about 20 miles.

By the way, three of our Tasmanian section were working the searchlight Jack Irvine was running, and put up the steam plant for it. The shells fell around us for fully 24 hours, and they were exploding within 100 yards of us. One went just over our heads, but luckily did not explode. We had a splendid view of the battle. Our battleships, French and British, were doing excellent work. We could see their shells bursting in the Turkish trenches about six or seven miles off, with deadly aim. We soon quietened them, and they retreated, not to return again, at least not for another couple of months. This was our share of the scrap at Kantara. They soon wiped the Turks out.

While this was on, little did we know how nearby the Turks were to crossing the Canal at where we were supposed to have been at that moment. Mind you, the Turkish artillery fire was excellent, but they had no observers, and therefore did not know when their range was good, else we might have been wiped out altogether. At Serapeum there were at least 12,000 Turks in the attack. They came forward under heavy fire in the day, and dug trenches along as they advanced. They drove the Ghurkas out of their trenches, which were only 100 yards off the Canal, and then they waited for night to cross the Canal. They brought pontoons for bridges, and everything wanted. It was certainly a marvellous attempt to cross the Canal. Well, when night came they started to advance through the trenches, and over the bank of the Canal to the water in enormous numbers. As soon as they started this the artillery opened fire into the trenches, of which it had an enfilading command, and, of course, blew them to atoms.

While this was on, a little lower down they attempted to shove the pontoons over. In fact, they had four in position loaded with men. There must have been fully 700 Turks at the water's edge ready to cross, as well as those on the pontoons. They were no sooner in the act of crossing when the patrol boat, which had been watching and waiting, came along with quick firing guns and 12 pounders, and simply mowed them down. They were too crowded to offer resistance of much use. This was the cause of their retreat. We killed about 500 and captured a similar number, and the others turned tail and ran. Even with their large reserve they gave up what was almost theirs and ran, dropping clothing, ammuniion, good boots, hats, and every encumbrance to their flight. The patrol boat saved the situation.

Next day the General asked our Major to write a report on their attempt. The survey party was once more exiled out to pick up the trenches and lay of the ground up to seven miles out, and a gruesome job it was. For three or four days the bodies were lying about, and the sight was terrible, as most of them were in pieces. There was a large quantity of ammuniion left, and the trenches were full of things left by them. I did not bother to get anything much, but a clip of cartridges of theirs. We found a few shells with 'made in Germany' printed on them. The ground was covered for miles with bullets that were spent, both theirs and ours. They were facing just as they had stopped. Our artillery must have been terrible for them, as there were pieces of our shells in their trenches for miles out. We found bodies here and there up to six miles out. This shows that they could not have had time to bury them all. They were given 24 hours for burying alter the battle. We got four pontoons and a lot of rope and bridge material found up to five miles out in the trenches. At about 6 1/2 miles there was an enormous amount of ammuniion, and about 500 kerosene tins, evidently meant to build a raft with, but not a sign could be seen of the Turks.

The next week we spent on moving up and down the Canal, and then we go to Mena to be refitted with clothing. We are known as 'the 3rd Engineers.' We have been mentioned in home despatches four times, our survey work especially, and General Sir John Maxwell, the Officer commanding all troops in Egypt, said that we were absolutely indispensable. We knew nothing of our fame until someone came down from Mena and wanted to know where the 3rd Engineers camped, and told us all about the reports of us up there. You will think a lot of this brag, but it is just as I have heard it. We were the first of the Australians under fire, the first mentioned in despatches, and the first to be congratulated on our work."

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/50822493?searchTerm=%22will%20cameron%22&searchLimits=l-state=Tasmania#>

HEROIC ENGINEERS. STORY OF A DESPERATE LANDING. DEVOTION TO A COMRADE.

Writing to his mother (Mrs. H. Cameron, of 23 French Street, Launceston), Sapper Will Cameron, of the Tasmanian Engineers, tells graphically of stirring deeds and heroic conduct by a small volunteer party. He writes first of the landing at Gaba Tepe.

"The 3rd Brigade," he says, "effected a landing at a place that was supposed to be absolutely impregnable. Such a thing has never occurred in history to equal this. The hill they charged under terrific fire, was about five times as steep as French Street, by the hospital. It was simply marvellous, and they drove the Turks back for three and a half miles inland - 30,000 Turks and only 4,000 Australians; but they had to retire about a mile on account of not having reinforcements and artillery to back them up. Of course, they lost heavily. They landed at 4.30 on Sunday morning, and the 2nd and 1st Brigades followed straight after. We landed at night, having had to get our pontoons and stores aboard the lighters for going ashore. There were eight or nine battleships covering our attack. They were bombarding all the time. The Queen Elizabeth was there too. The sound of her guns was tremendous. All the landing had to be done under terribly hot shell fire. The Turks knew the range exactly, and the air was full of shrapnel and bullets. Really, it was marvellous anyone lived through it. Even to the time I left it was not safe to be out of cover. When everyone was used to it you would see them looking up the hill and marvelling however the charge was done with such success. The Turks ran from the bayonet. They cannot face the bayonet at all. The firing was very heavy, and the Turks continually charged our positions to push us back, but they were repulsed, and must have lost heavily each time. These charges and heavy shell fire used to occur every morning as it began to get light, and every evening.

I had 10 days altogether before I was hit. They called for 10 volunteers to go with 100 infantry to land and capture a fort lower down the coast, and to blow it up. I was one. We got on to a destroyer at 1.30 in the morning, and went to the place, and were towed ashore for a bit by pinnaces in boats. Then the boats' crews rowed to the beach. We Engineers were loaded up with guncotton and heavy explosives. The moment the boats touched the ground, and we jumped out up to our neck in the water, the Turks opened a terrific rifle and machine gun fire on us. Of course we had to run to the cover of the cliff, about 30 yards off. Men were falling all around me, and as I tried to run to cover I slipped, and the weight of the pack and explosives kept me from travelling fast. I got halfway when I felt an awful bang in the foot, and fell, but kept on crawling until two chaps ran out and pulled me into cover. By this time the others who were not hit were in cover and the guns were playing on me, so I was lucky to be alive. I am hit under the knee right through. The bullet missed the main artery by a fraction, but it shattered the main nerve. It is three weeks since then, and all the pain I get is in the foot. The wound is nearly healed up, but I cannot straighten the leg, and all the foot is number. When they sent a boat in for the wounded the Turks let it get in, and when they put us in and shoved off for the ship they opened on us again. There were a couple killed, and got extra wounds, but I was again fortunate. B. F. G. McKenzie risked his life by carrying me to the boat. He and a chap named Roy Bowden, of Hobart, carried me, and I shall never forget it. I hope to repay it someday. I think they got back safely. Later on they had to abandon the attempt for want of numbers, but it was captured later on by a battalion. I was put on hospital ship, and three days later arrived at Heliopolis Hotel.

Daily Telegraph (Launceston, Tas. : 1883 - 1928), Monday 13 September 1915, page 3

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SAPPER MCKENZIE'S HEROISM AT THE LANDING AT GABA TEPE. TOLD BY SAPPER CAMERON.

(Recent cables have informed us that Sapper G. F. McKenzie, of Launceston, was among those awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for bravery at the landing at Gaba Tepe, by carrying Sapper W. Cameron out of danger, after the latter had been wounded. Very little was heard as to that rescue until the return of Sapper Cameron to Launceston on Saturday.

On being seen at the base hospital by a 'Daily Telegraph' reporter, Sapper Cameron, who, by the way, belongs to Launceston, his people being residents of French-street, said he desired to say that he owed his life to his comrades, McKenzie and Roy Bowden, and they deserved all the praise he could give them. Unfortunately, since Cameron was wounded Bowden had laid down his life for his country, but his name would be recorded in the pages of history, commemorative of the many heroic deeds of the Australians.

Sapper Cameron, with gentlemanly modesty, had very little to say about himself. It was others he wanted to talk about. He said that a party of 100 Infantry and 10 Engineers, all Tasmanians, were ordered to Gaba Tepe in the endeavour to capture the fort there. That was early in May, some ten days after the Sunday on which the majority of the Australians landed at the Dardanelles. They left at 4 a.m. in a destroyer, and disembarked in boats, the men landing in the water. Immediately they got into the water a murderous fire from machine guns was opened on the Tasmanians, who had not anticipated that their landing there would be seriously opposed, but, as it subsequently transpired, there must have been a couple of thousand Turks entrenched behind the fort. So murderous was the attack that many never got off the beach, they being killed there.

Sapper Cameron was struck just as he reached the beach after wading up to his neck through water, two bullets striking him, one in the left leg below the knee, and one in the left ankle. Bowden, who saw Cameron fall, called out that he was hit, but was un-able to reach him at once. McKenzie heard Bowden's call, and rushing down the beach picked up Cameron. There was a heavy machine gun fire on all the time, and it was extraordinary that the two were not riddled with bullets, but McKenzie completed his task and got Cameron to the alcove of the cliff overlooking the beach, where there was a little shelter from the bombardment. About ten minutes later McKenzie fell wounded.

McKenzie's plucky action was witnessed by Lieut. Thirkell, who was in charge of the Engineers. McKenzie was removed to Alexandria for treatment, and has since gone back to the firing line. He has again been mentioned in despatches for bravery. Sapper Cameron was sent to the Palace Hospital, Heliopolis, and subsequently to the Luna Park Hospital, where he remained until being placed on board the hospital ship for Melbourne. He mentioned that Stan McKenzie, brother to G. F. McKenzie, also of Launceston, is also doing excellent work in the Clearing Hospital, and Sapper Cameron pays a graceful, tribute to the very fine work which the Australian A.M.C. has done in this war.

Shortly after joining the hospital ship Sapper Cameron was attacked with rheumatic fever, which has left him very weak. The wounds he received have severed the nerves and sinews of his left leg, and he has practically lost the use of it. Hopes are entertained, however, that under the special treatment which he is receiving he will regain the use of the leg.

Sapper Cameron regrets that he did not see his comrade McKenzie after he was wounded, and was never able to get into, communication with him by letter. He states, that if his leg recovers its use he will make an endeavour to get back to the front if the war is not over by then. Before going to the Dardanelles Sapper Cameron was with the Tasmanian Engineers while they were engaged on important work on the Suez Canal. In this, as already reported, they earned distinction.