



Lieutenant Colonel William Ernest MARKWELL DSO

[1889 – 1917]



2nd Light Horse Regiment

William Ernest (Willie) Markwell was born in Beaudesert on 23 December 1889, the son of John Markwell and Agnes (nee McDonald).

He volunteered for the AIF on the outbreak of the Great War and was posted to 2nd Light Horse Regiment. The regiment sailed from Brisbane on HMAT A15 *Star of England* and trained in Egypt before being landed at Gallipoli (without their horses) on 12 May 1915.

Willie survived the dismounted operations during the Gallipoli campaign without wound or illness, and deployed with his unit to Palestine for mounted operations against the Turks.

We thank the History Interest Group and other volunteers who have researched and prepared these Notes. The series will be progressively expanded and developed. They are intended as casual reading for the benefit of Members, who are encouraged to advise of any inaccuracies in the material.

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Markwell was killed in action on 31 October 1917 during the Battle of Beersheba in the Palestine campaign. He was 27 years old and had been twice Mentioned in Dispatches and awarded a Distinguished Service Order for his actions in the war.

The Queenslander reported on Saturday 17 March 1917:

Major W. E. Markwell, who is mentioned in a recent cable as having had the D.S.O. conferred on him, is a comparatively young officer, who has seen a great deal of service in the present war. He left Queensland with the first contingent as a captain in the 2nd Light Horse Regiment, commanded by Colonel R. Stodart, who had with him such well-known and honoured officers as Major Glasgow (now Brigadier-General), Logan, Graham (killed in action), and Bourne (now Lieut.-Colonel and D.S.O.).

At the opening of the Gallipoli campaign the regiment volunteered for infantry work, and arrived at the Peninsula a few days after the famous landing. As in the case of all other units, the months of strenuous work in the trenches claimed its heavy toll of the regiment, but Major (then Captain) Markwell was one of the very few who escaped both injury and illness. He received his Crown on the battlefield at the early age of 24.

On returning to Egypt, the regiment was reorganised, and placed for arduous desert work under General Chauvel, work which culminated in such famous victories as Romani, El Arish, Maghaba, and Rafa. It was for conspicuous work on these fields that the honour now bestowed in Major Markwell was gained. The gallant young soldier has the rather unique record of having served 2½ years on active service without once having to leave the regiment through illness or injury.

In a letter recently received from a chaplain at the Front, the following reference to Major Markwell appeared: "He led the final attack the other day in fine style, and his example went a long way towards making the charge as irresistible as it proved to be."

Major Markwell is the only son of Mr and Mrs John Markwell, Kargora, Beaudesert.

Major William Ernest Markwell DSO now lies Beersheba War Cemetery, Be'er Sheva, (now Israel).

Sources included:

- Australian War Memorial
- National Archives of Australia
- Various web pages
- *United Service Club, Queensland: The First Century, 1892-1992* by Flight Lieutenant Murray Adams and Lieutenant Colonel Peter Charlton
- Club Meeting Minutes, Annual Reports and sundry documents