

“A splendid type of manhood.....”

Two boys from Wuk Wuk.



PTE ALBERT L EVANS
Killed in action at Gallipoli, aged 20

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PTE ALEX EVANS
Killed in action at Gallipoli, aged 27.

Brothers Alex and Albert Evans enlisted together on Sept. 14th 1914 and died together at Gallipoli on Aug 7th 1915.

Their father, John (a.k.a. Jack) Evans, the third son of Joseph Evans, was born at Wuk Wuk in 1855. His parents lived just a couple of hundred yards east of the Wuk Wuk Bridge. In 1884, Jack married Louisa Jennings.

John and Louisa had eight daughters and four sons. They lived at Wuk Wuk and the children attended the State School there which opened in 1886. Despite having a rapidly growing family, John and Louisa cared for Frances, daughter of John's older brother, Joseph, while her parents were licensees of the Golden Age Hotel in Omeo between 1887 and 1890.

When World War 1 broke out in August 1914, the Australian government immediately promised to raise a force to assist the mother country. At that time, Britain was, by far, the most dominant power on earth and Australia was a very large and isolated continent with a very small population. Although it was self governing, there were few Australians who believed that

Australia could withstand an enemy attack on its own.

Australian authorities were swamped with volunteers to join the army before it was ready to accept them. There were camps to be established, uniforms, rifles and a multitude of other supplies to be organised before large scale enlistments could be handled. Nevertheless, only six weeks later on September 14th, Alex and Bert Evans enlisted. It was almost inevitable that they would join the cavalry.

It is possible that they, like a number of others, took their own horses with them. Their uncle, Joseph Evans and his son, Joseph (a.k.a. Old Joe and Young Joe) had been engaged in buying horses (Indian Remounts) for the British Army in India for many years and were regarded as first class judges, particularly of the type of horse needed for military service. “Old” Joe judged horses at Sydney Show.

In his book, “Goodbye Cobber, God Bless You” which gives a gripping account of the establishment, the personalities and the history of the 8th Light Horse from its formation up to the dramatic events of Aug 7th 1915, John Hamilton states, “The 8th Light Horse could afford to take the very best for its three squadrons. ‘From these,

the Regiment picked its personnel and, as by this time the staff had got a fair idea of the best men, a splendid type of manhood was selected,' wrote Tom Austin, the 8th's unofficial historian".

Alex's regimental number was 368 and Albert's was 369. As their training proceeded, they were issued with a distinctive uniform which distinguished Light Horsemen up until World War 2. It was topped off with a jaunty emu-feather plume in the upturned slouch hat. This was the trademark of the light horseman worn every bit as proudly as the 'wings' of an airman 2 ½ decades later.

On Feb 24th 1915, the 8th Light Horse embarked on troopships anticipating that they were bound for England before going into action in France but during the journey it was learned that Turkish troops were threatening the Suez Canal and it became likely they would be called upon to defend this vital link.

They arrived in Egypt just as the first casualties were coming from Gallipoli. As their training continued in the desert outside Cairo, it became evident that more troops would be needed for the campaign on Gallipoli. However, the terrain on the peninsula was not suitable for cavalry and they became 'dismounted' light horsemen. Even their uniforms had to be changed as that of a light horseman was not suitable for the role of the infantryman.

A considerable portion of a light horseman's time was taken up in feeding, grooming and general care of his horse. When the time came for them to move to Gallipoli, there were many heavy hearts as they left their horses behind.

On May 19, the transport carrying the 8th Light Horse arrived off Cape Hellas just as the Turks launched a major attack to throw the Allied Forces off the peninsula. It did not succeed but it gave the onlooking troops a taste of what awaited them as they watched and listened to the bombardment ashore. Later the ship moved on to Anzac Cove where they disembarked. They were soon digging in to get some shelter from the bullets and shrapnel that frequently rained down upon the beach.

Up on the hills above Anzac Cove, the trenches of the Anzacs and the Turks were as little as 15 metres apart. It was impossible to retrieve bodies or wounded from no man's land and the stench was overpowering. Grappling hooks were used to try to drag living or dead back into the trenches where appropriate steps could be taken for their disposal. A few days after the 8th arrived, the Turks called for an informal truce to bury the dead.

The 8th settled into the routine of two weeks in the trenches and two weeks 'rest'. There was really no rest as all the beach area was vulnerable to enemy fire but the two weeks in the firing line was becoming as near to hell on earth as it could get. Both sides were extending and strengthening their positions with complex entrenchments but the Anzacs had the additional work of manhandling all ammunition, food and water up the steep cliffs from the beach.

Water was too precious to be wasted on such niceties as washing or shaving. Clothes became a haven for lice and fleas. The food was largely bully beef and biscuits lacking nutrition - but worst of all were the flies that swarmed over everything including the meagre rations. It was impossible to ignore the fact that they had recently crawled over the corpses in no man's land.

Bad as it was, there was worse to come.

It became increasingly apparent that neither side could bring the campaign to a conclusion. Disease was becoming a major problem for the Anzacs. A plan was developed by Headquarters to break the deadlock with a coordinated attack along the whole front. At the appropriate time, the 8th Light Horse were to lead an attack at The Nek, a narrow "bridge", about the size of a suburban house block between two plateaux, with steep cliffs down into valleys on either side. At this point the opposing trenches were about 30 yards apart but the Turks had the strategic advantage because they were on higher ground and were backed up by machine guns and artillery on even higher ground. Turkish Headquarters were only about 300 yards further back.

The charge was timed to commence at 4.30 am. Four waves of 150 men each were to charge the Turkish trenches over a narrow area of sloping ground – the 8th providing the first two lines.

Their orders were to attack using bayonets and hand made bombs only – their rifles were not to have bullets in their magazines. The theory was that, as the charge was uphill, HQ did not want the impetus of the charge to be lost by men pausing to aim and fire a rifle. However, as the fuses of the bombs had to be lit from a smouldering length of rope carried by each bomb carrier, they were obviously going to be easy targets during that time. Not all carried bombs but the others could do nothing to protect those that did.

However, HQ assured the officers that the Turks would be under attack from other troops also who would have captured other Turkish posts by this time.

The attack was preceded by an artillery barrage that inexplicably ended seven minutes early. It was thought to be caused by a failure to co-ordinate watches. The 8th's Commanding Officer, Colonel Alexander White insisted on leading his men into battle. After climbing over the parapet of the trench into no man's land, he only took about ten paces before he was mown down by withering fire along with almost the entire first line. Some did not even get out of the trench before they were hit and fell screaming in

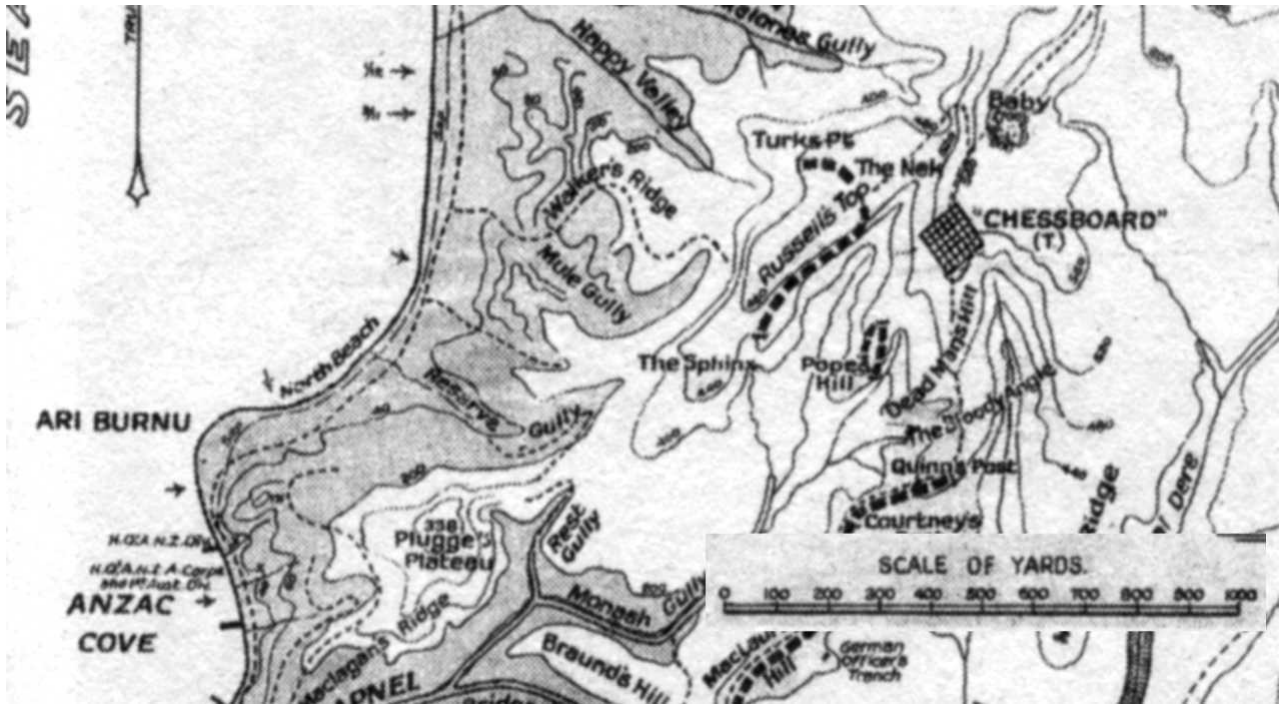
their agony on their colleagues in the trench waiting to form the second line.

They in turn had to walk over their own dead and wounded to reach the footholds they needed in order to clamber out of the trench to follow the first line but not one held back. In just five minutes, the 8th Light Horse Regiment was almost annihilated but no one took the decision to abandon the attack. Faced with the fact that sheer courage was not enough to win the day, senior officers failed to act and the third and fourth lines followed their mates to certain death.

The battle at Lone Pine was part of this same action. Seven Victoria Crosses were awarded at Lone Pine but the heroes of the battle at The Nek went largely unrecognised. The fact was that other actions that were supposed to have been completed before the charge took place had already failed and Australian officers who should have aborted the charge failed to do so.

Such was the confusion before, during and after this disastrous battle, no accurate list of casualties was made. It has been estimated that of 300 men, the 8th Light Horse suffered 234 casualties, including 154 killed.

The following map shows the location of The Nek in relation to Anzac Cove and Turkish Headquarters. Those HQs were protected by the Chessboard, a complex of trenches shown in detail in the following sketch of the layout at The Nek made by Colonel White.



Many of the 8th Light Horsemen who fought in the battle at The Nek have no known grave.

Their names are recorded on a monument at Lone Pine.

