

A ride on the wild side with Mudgeeraba Troop

STORY AND PICS NIGEL ALLSOPP

As the official historian of the Australian Defence Force Trackers and War Dog Association, I have been trying over many years to establish war-animal memorial plaques at RSLs throughout Queensland to formally recognise their deeds in all wars. As a direct consequence of this effort, this year I found myself joining the ranks of the Australian Light Horse.

I was fortunate enough in May of this year to unveil the first war-animal plaque on the Gold Coast, sponsored by the Mudgeeraba RSL. To get some media attention for this event I began in February to ask the units that still operate animals in Queensland to come along on the day. In the end, we had a great turnout with Stan the Ram – 8/9RAR's mascot – mules and donkeys from a re-enactor group, military working dogs from the RAAF and 2nd Combat Engineer Regiment and a troop of light horsemen from the local Mudgeeraba unit.

I have been a horse owner and rider myself in years gone by, but when Peter the president of the 14th Mudgeeraba Light Horse said, "Sure, we will come to your event, but how about helping out with ours?" I suddenly felt the need for some revision horse-riding lessons, so as not to embarrass myself.

Peter wasn't talking about a simple ride. This was the televised ANZAC Day Ceremony on Channel 7's Morning Show, with only half the population of Australia watching. So, no pressure then!

After several lessons, to my surprise, riding to school as a kid (I couldn't afford a bicycle) had paid off.

I met the president of the troop a few days before the dawn service and was given a uniform, most of which needed repair and a

lick of polish. So, I spent two days bringing it up to parade standard.

I had not even met the horse I would be riding on the day at this stage and was rather hoping it would not sense my nervousness on the day.

ANZAC Day at 0330 hours was dark and cold as the troop began to unload its horses and get into uniform. The rest of the troop members were great, helping with my uniform leggings, which I had no idea how to put on, and saddling my mount Frasier.

Of course, Frasier had to be the biggest horse in the troop – jet black and what seemed to be smoke coming out of its nostrils in the cold air.

Fortunately, however, Frasier turned out to be steady as a rock and an ideal mount for a novice light horseman.

I say light horseman with a great deal of pride, because that is what I felt like. Yes I have been in the regular military and did my tour of duty in Mogadishu, Somalia – but, as someone who was born in the UK and thus a first-generation Australian – I would find it hard to believe anyone was more proud or honoured to be an Aussie that day than me.

We began the parade around 0430 hours along the beachfront at Currumbin and rode about a kilometre along the road to a crowd reported to be more than 10,000 people – a massive turn out. All seven of us formed an honour guard, with me safely wedged between two experienced troopers.

To my great relief, Frasier was like a rock as the bugle sounded and three volleys from rifles were fired.



After too short a time, we rode back to the horse floats where we dismounted only to get ready for the next service at a local RSL at 1030 hours, where we again proudly led the parade down the main road.

Half the troop had shot up to Tweed Heads to conduct a parade for the RSL there. Even more of the troop had conducted parades that morning out west, and frequently does so as far out as Roma. It's great to see the troop supports the little RSLs as much as the big ones.

It was one of the most emotional days I have had in many years and I have now actually joined the troop and hope to be in many more parades.

In the past, and like so many people, I have observed these troops pass by on military parades and, while they looked great, I didn't put much thought into who they were or what they did.

What I found was a bunch of dedicated Australians trying to keep our legacy alive, using their own funds and resources and without government funding or help.

These historical enactors do what they do out of their own pocket, all equipment and horse care – which frankly costs thousands a year – is given freely by these men and women because they are proud Australians and believe the Light Horse spirit should never be forgotten.

HISTORY

The Light Horse tradition is kept alive in many centres across the country by volunteers, many directly descended from those brave men who fought in the Boer War and in the 'Great War'.

Captain Charles Chauvel from Tabulam, west of Ballina and Casino in the north of New South Wales, established the Light Horse in 1885. He gathered together those men who began the great tradition of the Light Horse that was carried on by later generations.

Today, the tradition is kept alive in the hearts and souls of the Australian Light Horse troops. One such troop is the 14th Light Horse Mudgeeraba Troop, which came into being in the early 1980s.

Mudgeeraba Troop actually embodies two regiments – the 14th Light Horse Queensland Mounted Infantry (QMI) and the 14th Australian Light Horse Regiment, Australian Imperial Forces (AIF).

The 14th LH (QMI) was a militia regiment of the Imperial Bushman Detachment 1899-1902 Boer War, becoming part of the 3rd LH in 1912 and the 2nd ALH AIF in 1914.

The 14th Australian Light Horse Regiment's story began on the banks of the Suez Canal on 1 July 1918 when the Australians from the disbanded Imperial Camel Corps were given horses and formed the 14th & 15th Regiments.

The first commanding officer of the 14th was Lieutenant Colonel George Furner Langley DSO, Mentioned in Despatches (three times), a man who had served with distinction in the Camel

Corps. He was also awarded the Serbian Order of the White Eagle for his service while at Gallipoli.

Seventy men of the 14th ALH were awarded decorations for gallantry during the war and 30 were mentioned in dispatches.

The 14th Light Horse were the first men to be issued with swords (unlike regiments 1 to 13, who were actually mounted infantry). They used their swords with great skill while still mounted in the saddle.

On 31 October 1918, one year to the day after the Charge of Beersheba, the war ended for many. However, it wasn't until 24 July 1919 before the 14th began their journey home, having been heavily involved in 'keeping-the-peace operations' in Egypt.

General Sir Edmund Allenby said, as the last light horsemen left Egypt:

"The Australian light horseman combines, with a splendid physique, a restless activity of mind. This mental quality renders him somewhat impatient of rigid and formal discipline, but it confers upon him the gift of adaptability, and this is the secret of much of his success, mounted or on foot. The Australian light horseman has proved himself equal to the best."

The original 14th ALH Regiment was disbanded in Seymour, Victoria, in late 1919 after being forced to leave their horses in the Middle East because of Australian quarantine regulations.

Today's troop has adopted the badge of the 14th Australian Light Horse, circa 1918, which depicts a combination of the camel and the horse with a rifle crossed by a sword, which proudly upholds the traditions that those original men of the Australian Imperial Forces had set down.

The 14th ALH Museum in Mudgeeraba also preserves the memory of this great aspect of our military history. Like the mounted troopers, it too is run by volunteers dedicated to preserving the history of the Light Horse.

Put simply, without such people, your grandchildren will not know who the Light Horse were! So, please contact your local Light Horse troop and see if you can help retain the ANZAC tradition, either by joining a troop or helping with a simple donation.

