

IN THE HOLY LAND

An account kept of a stunt, lasting from 30/10/17 to 4/12/17, by 13/2580
Sig.-Sergt. A.G.Hooper, 3rd Anzac Battalion, First Imperial Camel Brigade:

October 30th . - We left Muran and treked to Beersheba. Did outpost duty three miles from Beersheba.

October 31st . - Our batteries bombarded Turkish positions from 0500 to 1500 continuously. Light Horse and N.Z.M.R. worked round behind Beersheba, and took Beersheba at 2000.

November 1.-We marched through Beersheba, and on to the Abu Jerval camp till November 2, when we had orders to saddle up, and moved out to take up a position in reserve to the 7th Mounted Brigade.

November 3.-About 800 went into the firing line near Qualfa. A Taube flew over our column and dropped one bomb, wounding a camel. The Taube gave our office away to the Turks by dropping the bomb, and we were immediately heavily shelled, but escaped any casualties. Some of the Mounteds were wounded, and a little damage done to one of our batteries. We withdrew from the line and treked back to Beersheba to get supplies, having gone six days without drawing water or rations.

November 4.-Had rest and clean up at Beersheba till about 1600 when we set off back to the front line, arriving 2030. At approx. midnight we were ordered to saddle up in quick time and move to another position, as the Turks commenced to shell us and were getting close to the mark, due, in my opinion, to Bedouins having given our positions away. We remained in new positions on 6th till 1500 when we went to relieve Mounted Rifles at Ras-el-Naght, about 1½ miles east of Qualfa. Took over from N.Z's about 2000 same night. On morning of 6th I saw some of my old mates (Auckland boys). On 5th Canterbury Rifles over 50 casualties, and on 6th 3rd Battalion Imperial Camel Corps had about 60 casualties before being relieved.

November 7.-We were roused out of bed about 0100. Turks made a raid on our left flank in immediate front of our headquarters. Two of our boys were killed by bombs thrown at close quarters. The alarm did not last long, as our machine-guns got into play and chased Jacko back to his trenches. Later in the day the Turks were noticed leading mules, donkeys, camels, etc., with packs to and from their stronghold at Qualfa, near the wells, and by afternoon it was a great sight to see the Turks withdrawing. They came out of their redoubt in great bunches, and our machine and heavy guns wrought great havoc amongst them, scattering them in all directions. A great sight truly, and well worth all the hardships we have gone through to get a glimpse of. We were in a position to observe every detail, and be sure we made the most of it. At 1700 everything was quiet.

November 8.-About 0600 rifle and machine gun fire on our right front was fierce on either side, and we had most of our casualties at this period, some of our Signallers among the wounded. Later in the day reports from the Companys on right flank were not promising. An O.C. reported one section cut off-that section lost 11 men before being able to withdraw. The wounded were left in the sun for 12 hours before stretchers were able to get them away. The last man removed to the dressing about 2000.

November 9.-Early morning, rifle and mounted gun fire heavy on both sides. A new battery of our heavy guns moved into position in our rear, and commenced bombarding a Turkish battery which had been playing on us for three days, and this drew more shells over our way. We were to be relieved to-night, but did not complete this till 0600 on 10th, when we moved into Sheria to get rations. We saw many wounded Turks here calling out "Allah". We stopped here overnight.

November 11.-Set off for Julias, travelling till mid-night.

November 12.-We stopped at Julias where the railway passes through to Jerusalem, and there saw trucks, engines, and all sorts of valuable property abandoned by the Turks.

November 13.-We left Julias for a place called Yelma, where the Turks made a stand, covering their main body's retreat. At 1500 in afternoon three shells fell on 16th Coy, killed one man and wounded three; at 2000 Yeomanry 7th Brigade rushed one position and captured 1000 Turks and battery of heavy guns.

November 14.-We were in reserve handy to an orange plantation and had a great time with the oranges. Being short of tobacco I was compelled to purchase some from a Gipo looking fellow with wolves eyes and had the smell of dead fish, but the tobacco went up in smoke the same as usual.

November 15.-Early morning our Mounted Brigade soon encountered one division of Turks, and won the day, losing heavily. The A.M.R. lost 160 killed and wounded, but left 400 Turks dead and many wounded. In afternoon we moved north (passing nice villages) acting body guard to Anzac Division. Reached Ramleh, about eight miles from Jerusalem and between Jerusalem and Jaffa.

November 18.-We moved north from Ramleh about two miles, and stayed until 21st.

November 22.-We moved to position two miles south of Jaffa.

November 24.-Went to Jaffa beach for a swim, and had a good time with oranges.

November 25.- We took over from 2nd Brigade at 0800 in front line; at 1200 15th Coy reported enemy movements on our front. N.Z. Mounted Rifles were shelled heavily, and had to retire at one point.

November 26.-Our big guns into position, and swept Jacko pretty low.

November 27.- Jacko commenced bombarding and kept it up all day. We retired at two points, and these were immediately occupied by the Turks.

November 28.-Jacko still shelled, but little damage done.

November 29.- We were relieved from front line, and went into support just in the rear. At 2200 we bombarded Jacko for one hour, and 15th Coy made a raid giving Jacko a hurry off with hand grenade bombs, and collected some gear between our front line and Jacko's. The bombardment was warm on both sides while it lasted, and I had to go out and mend a line in the middle of it, being in a very warm corner for a few minutes.

November 30.-Very quiet.

December 3.- We made a raid on 265, the battle lasting exactly an hour. Out of the raiding party 37 were killed and wounded.

December 4.-N.Z. Mounted Rifles relieved us in the trenches and we moved off for a well-earned spell, almost as far back as from where we started on the stunt, and well out of hearing of the guns. I was sorry we were so close to Jerusalem and did not get an opportunity to go through, but we should be able to visit it before long, as it now belongs to us.

Notes.- Our camels were carrying packs of about 2cwt most of the time. The guns, ammunition, etc etc captured from the Turks in this great victory is valued at over four million pounds. One of my old mates, Owen Grant, has won the D.S.M. and promoted sergeant for general good work. I am very pleased indeed over this.