

**Battle of Beersheba: The Australian charge into World War I history**  
**Andrew Faulkner, The Advertiser**  
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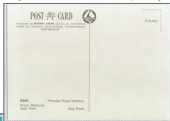
Before the Great War, Beersheba was a "squalid" little town that existed as a "distributing centre for camels", Australia's official war historian wrote. Before that, it was where Abraham sank a well. And the Battle of Beersheba on October 31, 1917, was as much about water as it was about outflanking the Turks in Palestine.

After riding for 30 hours across the desert from near Gaza to this little town 120km south-west of Jerusalem — stopping to fight the enemy on the way — the British, Australian and New Zealand soldiers and their horses were very thirsty indeed.

Matters were looking grim when, after multiple attacks by infantry and mounted troops, the Turkish garrison refused to yield. By about 3pm, with the "day on the wane", Lieutenant-General Harry Chauvel decided "it was neck or nothing". He would order a cavalry charge in the fading light.

But to whom would he entrust the deadly mission? And after hard fighting in the hot and waterless country, the bulk of his large force was spent.

Chauvel, a proud Australian who at times felt his countrymen were sidelined by their British commanders, had to choose



between his last "fresh" units: Brigadier William Grant's 4th Australian Light Horse Brigade or a British outfit.

"Put Grant straight at it," Chauvel said.

He chose his kin despite the British force being a cavalry unit equipped with swords, while Grant's brigade was "mounted

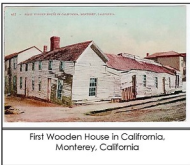


infantry"; that is, soldiers who rode to a battle then fought on foot. This is what perplexed the German and Turkish commanders when Grant's men trotted over the ridge. Usually, the Australians would dismount and fight

Part of the \$40,000—only a small part—which Mrs. Bushton had in her chamois bag was paid out for land on which to build the new home. For it is evident that a house must have a place to rest upon.

Very little money bought a great deal of land in those days and Mrs. Bushton found herself a "landed lady." Then the house was put up. Fourteen rooms to match and mortise together. The frame was of course of solid oak. Two doors and ten windows opened from the front. Many of these windows are; today exactly as they were when they were put in place 58 years ago. Some panes have been broken or have fallen out, but the greater number of the tiny sheets of glass are those that Mrs. Bushton imported on the Independence.

When that energetic woman became better acquainted with California she learned that in bringing timber to California she had been carrying coals to Newcastle. Good pine and redwood were all about her, and of California pine she laid all the floors in her new house. The inside walls were of New Zealand



First Wooden House in California,  
 Monterey, California

pine. And then to make it stronger and more durable the much despised "mud" was called into service, and between the outer and the inner walls was placed an interlining of adobe. Shades of Jane Bushton! Could you but know that the adobe you so scorned was to save your home from utter collapse on a certain morning in April some two years ago! The front door opened immediately into a big living room or hall. The floor is warped and uneven now, but in the first days—the

days when Jane Bushton raised and reared her family of boys and girls— this room was the ballroom of the house, and many are the stories that could be told of brilliant balls and receptions that were held here. So that after all that floor must have had a day of glory as well, as of decay.

On some of the lumber faint outlines of the letters "B. & H." may still be traced. B. & H. were Bushnell & Hanson, the contractors who had built the house in Australia.

Heavy weights must think a second time and then again a third before trying to go upstairs in the Allen house, as it is now known. They are apt to get stuck. The staircases are exactly two feet wide. We need go no further than to glance at these stairs to know that Jane Bushton must have been a slight girl. And then, too, though this is almost too much to credit, her friends must have

all been built on the same plan. For nothing else could ever make the turn in those narrow stairs. The heavy furniture in the rooms above must have been taken in piecemeal through the windows. In 1850, two years after Mrs. Bushton had come to Monterey, she was asked to allow a woman to stay with her for a few weeks. Hospitality was the order of those days, and two rooms were placed at the disposal of her stranger guest. Upon this woman three men called constantly. They, too, were strangers in the land—no one knew whence they came or whether they were bound.

At last the custom house was robbed—of \$30,000! The whole town was under vigilance. Everybody was watched with suspicious eye, especially strangers. Mrs. Bushton had never liked the woman then living under her roof, and one night when the three men were calling in the other room she secreted herself in a small closet, having previously bored a hole through the adobe so that she would miss nothing if there was anything to see or hear. There was. The men produced the bags of bullion and, on condition of sharing it with the woman, were allowed to take up the second step of the staircase and hide their stolen booty.

Mrs. Bushton reported the matter at once to the authorities. The woman put up a bold fight. She was sitting on the second step when they arrived and boldly protested her ignorance of the affair. "Will you please move, madam?" she was asked.

"No; not a step," she answered. "I am an honest woman and what kind of men be you to come prowling through an honest woman's rooms? Get out with ye!"

But those officials must have been a set of boars, for, not yielding to their request, the lady was lifted bodily off her post of defense and the hidden treasure recovered. The three men had escaped and the woman was allowed to go her way.

The house itself is now in a most dilapidated condition. The west wall looks as though a gentle breeze from the south would blow it apart. Nevertheless, here live the son, the granddaughter and the great grandchildren of Jane Allen—or Jane Bushton as she is better known in this story.

Tom Allen, her son, is now and has been for many years constable of Monterey. His mother must have been an exceedingly attractive young



The Light Horse moved off at the trot, and almost at once quickened to a gallop. As they came over the top of the ridge and looked down the long, gentle open slope to Beersheba, they were seen by the Turkish gunners, who opened fire with shrapnel.

But the pace was too fast for the gunners. After three kilometres Turkish machine-guns opened fire from the flank, but they were detected and silenced by British artillery. The rifle fire from the Turkish trenches was wild and high as the Light Horse approached.

The front trench and the main trench were jumped and some men dismounted and then attacked the Turks with rifle and bayonet from the rear. Some galloped ahead to seize the rear trenches, while other squadrons galloped straight into Beersheba.

Nearly all the wells of Beersheba were intact and further water was available from a storm that had filled the pools. The 4th and 12th Light Horse casualties were thirty-one killed and thirty-six wounded; they captured over 700 men. The capture of Beersheba meant that the Gaza-Beersheba line was turned. Gaza fell a week later and on 9 December 1917, the British troops entered Jerusalem.

With reference from <http://www.awmlondon.gov.au/battles/beersheba>



A Christmas Card sent to the Imperial Light Horse on Active Service from Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers and Men. Xmas 1914

## Beersheba The Charge of the 4th Light Horse, 1917

### The Battle in Brief

The charge of the 4th Australian Light Horse at Beersheba late in the afternoon of 31 October 1917, is remembered as the last great cavalry charge.

The assault on Beersheba began at dawn with the infantry divisions of the British XX Corps attacking from the south and south-west. Despite artillery and air support, neither the infantry attacks from the south, or the Anzac Mounted Division's attack from the east had succeeded in capturing Beersheba by mid-afternoon.

With time running out for the Australians to capture Beersheba and its wells before dark, Lieutenant General Harry Chauvel, the Australian commander of the Desert Mounted Corps, ordered Brigadier General William Grant, commanding the 4th Light Horse



Brigade, to make a mounted attack directly towards the town. Chauvel knew, from aerial photographs, that the Turkish trenches in front of the town were not protected by barbed wire.

However, German bombing had forced the 4th Brigade into a scattered formation and it was not until 4.50 pm that they were in position. The Brigade assembled behind rising ground 6 kilometres south-east of Beersheba with the 4th Light Horse Regiment on the right, the 12th Light Horse Regiment on the left and the 11th Light Horse Regiment in reserve.

The Australian Light Horse was to be used purely as cavalry for the first time. Although they were not equipped with cavalry sabres, the Turks who faced the long bayonets held by the Australians did not consider there was much difference between a charge by cavalry and a charge by mounted infantry.

woman in her day, if a large oil painting in one of the bedrooms speaks the truth. It is the face of a serious, dignified young woman, her hair parted severely in the center, large earnest eyes which follow the visitor as he moves through her rooms and haunt him after he leaves them. She was a widow twice. Of her second husband, Krampnet by name, history tells but little.

Her third and last husband was James Allen and by him she had a large family, now all married and scattered throughout Monterey county. The old house contains much of the furniture which Jane Bushton placed there. The piano is as handsome an old mahogany square as one would find in a month's wanderings. The bureau, a great massive chest of drawers, shares the honors of the big bedroom with two immense davenports—the low deep kind where one would stay the while and where it were easy to weave tales of other days and other times. In one of these Jane Bushton may have passed the shorter and later days of her varied life. Here she may have dreamed of the honors that had been hers, of the triumphs she had known. And in this room, too, she fell asleep.



Jane Bushton (Allen) portrait by Leonardo Barbier



Mrs Jane Bushton (Allen) the year before her death aged 92 years

## THE STAMPEX 2017 COMMEMORATIVE MEDALLION

By **Barrie Newman at the Adelaide Mint**

The 2017 medallion reflects the theme of Stampex 2017, to highlight the Australian Light Horse exploits during World War I.

The obverse of the medallion shows the Stampex logo and the reverse features the iconic Waler Horse, the backbone of the Australian Light Horse units.



The Waler – the horse from the “Colony of New South Wales” dates its origins from the foundation of Australia, as the first horses ever to arrive in Australia came with the First Fleet in 1788 from Cape Town. They were the Barb – a sturdy versatile horse.

Subsequently, many more breeds arrived as they were needed, including Arab, Draft, Thoroughbred, harness horses and riding ponies. The infusion of these breeds made for a tough, durable and versatile horse, swift of foot and perfectly suited to the harsh Australian environment of the time.

The horse was not only needed as the general riding horse but had to pull the plough, be the stock horse, take the family to town in the buggy and in turn become mounts for troopers, explorers, bushrangers and the army. With strong hooves and bone, powerful hindquarters, agility and stamina this Australian horse showed endurance, versatility and a loyal personality coupled with a quiet and friendly temperament.

These horses, bred in Australia, subsequently came to the notice of the British Army in India who purchased large numbers as artillery horses and troopers' horses or remounts. By 1867 they considered the horse, which they called the “Waler” (because it came from the Colony of New South Wales), to be the finest cavalry horse in the world. Compared to their English counterpart, more used to green pastures and soft ground, the Waler could cope with the harshest of conditions.

Between 1861 and 1931 almost half a million horses were exported to markets in India, South-East Asia and East Asia.

## BOER WAR & WORLD WAR I

The Waler is honoured and famed as the war horse of the Australian soldier in the Boer War and even more famously in World War I. In what was to become known as the last great cavalry charge in history, 800 men and horses of the Australian Light Horse, under Lt Gen Harry Chauvel, though vastly outnumbered, mounted a most successful cavalry charge on the water wells of Beersheba, to help open the way to Jerusalem. Sadly, only one of the many thousands of Australian horses sent off to World War I was allowed to return to Australia.

## WORLD WAR II

At the outbreak of the War, Militia Light Horse units were mobilised to protect key areas in Australia. By 1941 their horses were replaced by armoured vehicles. In 1942, with Australia under threat from Japanese invasion, horses were the main mode of transport of the North Australia Observer Unit (NAOU). Over 1100 horses, mules and donkeys gave the troopers, nicknamed the “Nackeroos,” the necessary mobility and stealth to provide early warning and patrol huge tracts of northern Australia, particularly in the harsh conditions of the outback, in the “wet” and in often inaccessible territory. They and their “Walers” too, formed a close and reliable bond.



A postcard was also published for Stampex '17 Remembering the Service of the Australian Light Horse During War

Which shows our three Memorials to the Australian Light Horse, here in Adelaide South Australia.

These were produced to co-incide with the 100 years since the Battle of Beersheba on 31st October 1917.

Please contact Claire if you wish to purchase either the Medallion in Cupro-Nickel \$15 or Bronze \$20 or the Postcard \$5.