

Copy of a letter written by Lt Guy Haydon from hospital in Cairo to his parents at Bloomfield, Blandford, NSW after the Charge of Beersheba on 31 October, 1917.

**NO. 14. A. G. H.
CAIRO. (No date).**

You will know from my Cable that I am in Hospital here with a rather nice wound, a bullet about 2 inches to the left of the crupper bone. I will try and give you an account of exactly what happened from the start of operations until I was knocked out.

We left our Camp at Tel-al-fara on the night of the 29th. at 5 p.m. and marched to a place called Essani reaching there about 11 p.m. and camped there the night and all next day. About 3 p.m. an enemy Plane came along but was driven off by our planes. At 5 p.m. we moved off again and marched to Khalassa reaching there at 10.30 p.m. and camped. At 2 p.m. the following day the enemy plane again endeavoured to fly over our lines but was attacked by two of our Bristol Fighters and much to our satisfaction they succeeded in shooting her down with their machine guns.

At 5 p.m. we were off again and marched all night and on until 9 a.m. next day when we halted in some broken country 4 ½ miles east of Beersheba. The previous instructions were that the mounted troops were to attack Beer-sheeba at 10 a.m. and we all quite expected to do so as the infantry were due to attack on the other portions of their line at that time, but 10 a.m. came and went and nothing doing, everyone wondered what could have gone wrong. Had the Infantry failed or had the attack only been postponed for a few hours.

Our Brigade was in reserve and we knew that if any hot job happened along, we would get it. At 4 p.m. orders came to mount and we marched along to within 3 miles of the town until we could go no further without being in full view, then we got the shock of our lives, the order came back "All pack horses, excepting Hotchkiss rifle packs, fall out and remain behind".

Then followed a few moments later the order "The 12th. & 4th. L.H. Regiments will charge Beersheeba on Horseback, the town is to be taken at all costs" and five minutes later we were on the way.

We trotted for the first 2 miles then the Turks opened fire on us from a line of redoubts about half a mile out from the town and we could hardly hear anything for the noise of their rifles and machine guns. As soon as their fire started we galloped, and you never heard such awful war yells as our boys let out, they never hesitated or faulted for a moment, it was grand.

Every now and again a rider would roll off or a horse fall shot but the line swept on. As we neared their trenches, our men were falling thicker and thicker and the pace became faster. 30 yards from their trenches were some old rifle pits and as soon as my eye lit on them I wheeled my horse round and yelled to the nearest men to jump off, let their horses go and get into the pits and open fire. Just previously I had seen Major Fetherstonhaugh's Horse go down killed, the Major get up and run for cover only to fall again shot through both legs. A few seconds afterwards a bullet hit me high up in the left buttock, just under the belt, lifting me clear off my horse and dropping me sprawling on a heap of dirt that had been thrown out of a rifle pit, and I rolled down into the pit and into safety.

But all this time, really only a few seconds, the charge went on, men raced their horses through and over the trenches and while some of us were still engaged in hand-to-hand fighting in the trenches, the remainder had charged through the town and went on to the high ground a mile beyond. The town was ours.

It is impossible to describe the charge, I was talking to a British Cavalry Officer in Hospital who had arrived 3 days previously from France, he went to France with the first batch of English Cavalry and had been there ever since, and he said "I have seen every action in which the British Cavalry have taken part, but the charge of the L.H. at Beersheeba yesterday, is the finest thing that I have ever seen mounted troops do." Our Brigadier received a wire from the G.O.C. congratulating him on the brilliant work his Brigade had done.

It is impossible to describe ones feelings, but for myself although it is the heaviest fire I have been under, I never felt less afraid, and I was terribly disappointed in being shot before reaching the town.

We took 2,000 Prisoners and their trenches were full of dead. Two Regiments of the first Brigade also had a charge, but they were further round on our right and we didn't see them, anyway we had the town before they got there. I will give you my experiences from the time I was hit until my arrival here.

I lay in the hole for about 2 hours listening to poor devils groaning all round me, and then an M.O arrived with a lantern and some sandcarts, he planked the lamp down near me and the stretcher bearers brought in the wounded from all points of the compass to be dressed, after being dressed the worst cases were loaded into carts and sent off to the Ambulance, 4 of the poor chaps died there within a yard or two of me, but it did not worry me, I had got past worrying.

At last there was only myself and 1 man left and we had to lie there all night. One of the boys got me a blanket off a dead horse but it was terribly cold, and I shivered all night long and in the morning my wound was so stiff that I couldn't move. About 7 a.m. a sandcart arrived and I was taken to the Field Ambulance where my wound was carefully dressed, then, we went per car to Beersheba then on to the rail head to a big casualty clearing station, where we spent the night. At 9 a.m. we were loaded onto the Hospital Train and reached El-Arish about 2.30 p.m. that afternoon. We spent the night there and left the next day at 12 a.m. for Kantara which we reached about dusk. The next day at about 11 a.m. we boarded the train for Cairo and finally reached the 14th A.G.H. (the best spot on this side of the water). At 4 p.m. today I was X rayed and the bullet was located about half way up my back and about an inch to the left of my spine, it must have hit a bone and turned at right angles, otherwise it must have gone right through my belly a wonderful streak of luck, am not suffering much pain and don't know when they will operate on me, but hope it will be soon as I don't want to be stuck in here any longer that I can help.

I can't get any correct estimate of the killed and wounded in the 12th yet but may hear in time to put it in this letter yet.

LATER. Was operated on the day before yesterday and bullet removed, am sending you the bullet for a Christmas Present by the same Officer as takes this letter. Am having very little trouble with my wound except at night when it aches a lot, but it is nothing to what some of the poor devils have to suffer. Poor old Nearguard was killed, I was awfully sorry about him, he was such a good Soldier, absolutely fearless. Roy Whiteman and Maclean both have commissions. Roy did splendidly, so well in fact that he was paraded to the

Divisional General Hodson and actually promoted on the field of battle. Major Fetherstonehaugh got a D.S.O. He is the bed opposite me. His wife nearly went mad when she heard about it. As far as can gather, there, there must have been about 27 12th L.H. killed in the charge and about 15 wounded. A very high percentage of Killed.

From Guy Haydon
I'll be back & those
guys you'll see for
ages.



Lt Guy Haydon on Midnight
Bred at Bloomfield, Blandford by Tester