

Donkeys & Mules on Gallipoli 1915

Simpson and the Zion and Indian muleteers by Tony James



ANZAC Beach, 1915 (Australian War Memorial)

NO MATTER where I go in the world, (and I have been fortunate enough to travel a reasonable amount), one of my most memorable experiences remains the Dawn Service I attended in 1999 at ANZAC Cove, Gallipoli. Previously documented in an earlier *CAB* article, (One campaign, birth of two nations. April 2000). I have always returned to this experience as a reference for my studies of the ANZACs and WWI as well as my continuing love affair with Turkey. As new facts surface and further research information comes to hand, I find myself drawn back to this strange conflict that has so many connotations for history and commemoration.

Money

For the numismatist, the Gallipoli campaign brings to mind the notes and coinage that returning diggers brought back in their pockets and packs. Often these included Turkish small change notes and Egyptian coins plus the usual trench art produced by soldiers occupying their idle hours. The most notable (pun intended) additions to a serious bank-note collection formed around a military or Gallipoli theme hopefully include at least the English 10/- note and if possible the £1 note both with what is known as the Gallipoli overprint.



Gallipoli 2009: Australian visitors inspect the graves of the fallen



Great Britain 10/- with the Dardanelles Campaign Overprint. P348b/ T 15 Ten shillings red overprint reads 'Piastres silver 60' and 'Piastres silver sixty'

The British and ANZAC forces landed on the Gallipoli peninsula with either everything or nothing supplied, so there was initially no reason to pay the troops. When pay did start, it was credited to the pay book and amounts were allocated to the designated family members as the digger requested. John Simpson of the 3rd Australian Field Ambulance for example, yes that Simpson, - allocated 4/- from his 6/- a day army pay to his mother in England.

Later in the campaign when the British Imperial Forces thought that they may actually advance inland, British 10/- and £1 notes were overprinted in Arabic and distributed to troops in preparation for their use in Constantinople. However, as the expeditionary forces never got off the peninsula, it is thought that most of the overprinted currency was withdrawn and few examples have survived. Some commentators think that the issue was also used in Palestine. The pound is overprinted in red on the original black print and the ten shillings is overprinted in black on the original red print.

The £1 overprint reads 'Piastres silver

120' and below that 'Piastres silver one hundred and twenty.' These notes were a portion of the second issue of notes known as Bradbury's since they bore the signature of Sir John Bradbury, the Secretary to the Treasury. They were designed by George Eve, His Majesty's designer of stamps.

These Bradbury notes were used by the British Military Expeditionary Forces in the Mediterranean and the Naval Expeditionary Forces from May to June 1915. Supplies of the notes were apparently sent to Malta and Alexandria but whether these were the Gallipoli overprints or when and for how long they were issued remains a mystery. Other numismatic connections will be revealed later.

Mules

For the uninitiated a brief background to some of the livestock on the Gallipoli peninsula at this time, because the use of livestock played a vital role in the campaign. The horses belonging to the Australian Light Horse regiments, the much loved Whalers as they were affectionately

called, had been left behind in Egypt. They were not required on the beachhead and subsequent campaign. However there were two other units that took four-legged assistants with them, in the form of donkeys and mules.

The donkey is a separate breed from the horse. A mule is the progeny of either of a stallion and female donkey, or, as is more common, a mare and male donkey. A mule is always infertile.

The donkeys seem to have been used by stretcher bearers from the start of the campaign, as made famous by Simpson and Henderson. The mules on the other hand were in constant demand to carry supplies to the front line. They were particularly suited for this role because of their resistance to drought and temperature extremes. However, as the Australians found them stubborn, difficult to handle and irritable, they were left to the ministrations of their Indian and Jewish Mule Corp handlers.

Indian Mule Cart Transport Unit

The Indian Mule Cart Transport at Gallipoli was a unit of the British Army. It was brought to Gallipoli to carry supplies and was able to use its carts along the beach and a little way inland. For the transport further inland, the carts were abandoned and supplies were transferred to the backs of mules for carriage up the hills to the depots just behind the front line. Major H. M. Alexander, the commander of the Indian Unit, noted that the ANZACs got on well with the Indians (who were Sikhs) and treated them well.

The unit's camp was just below the position of Hore's unit the 8th Light Horse on Walker's Ridge.

The *Official History of Australia in the war 1914-1918 vol 1 The Story of ANZAC*, notes that the Indian Mule Cart Transport unit landed 2 officers and 227 other ranks at ANZAC between 25 April and 1 May 1915. Mules were also used by the 21st Kohat and 26th Jacobs Indian Mountain batteries that were with the Expeditionary Force.

John Simpson, 3rd Australian Field Ambulance and Duffy

If there was one soldier to stand out among the stories of bravery in the campaign who is well known by name and deed, it is number 202 Private John Simpson MID (Kirkpatrick). Known to the troops also as Murphy or Scotty, Simpson and Duffy, his donkey, are an important part of our ANZAC tradition and history. Simpson, whose real name was John Kirkpatrick enlisted in the 1st AIF as John Simpson and was allocated to the 3rd Field Ambulance. He is often referred to as the official icon of the ANZACs, and while the famous painting by Horace M. Moore-Jones has been found

to be based on a photograph of Pte/ Lance Corporal (later Lieutenant) Richard Alexander Henderson of the New Zealand Medical Corps, who performed a similar service with a donkey, the depiction of Simpson in paintings, statues and his grave on the peninsula are often used to embody the values and qualities of the Australian soldier. Whilst a donkey was not standard issue to medics in the Australian army somehow Simpson, like a typical Aussie digger, acquired what he needed to carry out his role.

Zion Mule Corps

This unit was composed of Jewish members of the population who had settled in Egypt after being expelled from Palestine by the Turks or who had migrated from Russia. Two leaders of the community, Josef Vladimirovich Trumpeldor, a former officer of the Russian army, and Ze'ev Jabotinsky, a Zionist writer and educator, instigated the formation of the transport unit, which finally received the approval of General Sir John Maxwell, the commander of British forces in Egypt. While resisting the idea of a Jewish unit fighting on the Palestinian front, Maxwell agreed to allow them to serve at the invasion of Gallipoli.

The first suggested name for the unit was The Assyrian Jewish Refugee Mule Corps. Then the Zion Mule Corp was officially designated as a Colonial Corps of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force. The commanding officer of the Zion Mule Corps was Lt. Colonel John Henry Patterson, a veteran of the Boer War, knowledgeable about Jewish history and sympathetic to the Zionist cause. The unit had its own badge and flag and its members were armed with rifles as they were expected to be a fighting unit as well as a transport corps. On the 23rd March 1915 the Zion Mule Volunteers were sworn in and began work as part of the 29th British Division.

On the 2nd April 1915 the Corps numbering 750 men, went into training camp in Egypt with four troops, each had a

British and a Jewish Officer in joint command. Orders below the Troop level were given in Hebrew. On the 17th April, 562 members of the Corps departed for Lemnos aboard the HMT *Hymettus* and HMT Anglo-Egyptian. The ships carrying the Zion Mule Corp approached Cape Helles on the morning of 25 April and upon landing two days later, the force was split, some going to W beach with the British, and others going to V beach to work with the ANZACs. The Australian History of WWI notes that the Zion Mule Corp landed six officers and 240 other ranks at ANZAC between 25 April 1915 and 1 May 1915.

The *New York Times* records that when a mule was shot, the minder would drag the ammunition cases himself, always under fire. On one occasion upon arrival at the trenches after unloading the ammunition, the men jumped into the trenches with the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and fought back the Turks until the crisis passed, despite being forbidden to do so. Records show that members of the unit were decorated for bravery; Private M. Groushkowsky was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) for gallantry and others were mentioned in despatches. All members of the unit were eligible for the 1914/15 Star, British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

One historian states that the commanding officer - Patterson was told that his soldiers might well have averted a military and medical calamity, for during the first two days of the attack on Gallipoli there were no hospital supplies available for the troops, and they were the only Service Corp unit in the field.

Despite the force being designated as a "Line of Communication unit", Zion Mule Corp members managed to see their fair share of combat. Some joined with front line troops and others performed bravely taking much needed supplies to the front line.

Unfortunately, the part of the unit that had been detached to work with the ANZACs was joined by other men and

animals, and the unit was ordered to hand over its animals and return to Alexandria. It was observed that someone did not approve of the Zion Mule Corps being at Gallipoli.

On the 26th May 1916 the Zion Mule Corps was disbanded. During its short life as a military unit the Corps lost 15 soldiers. About 55 were wounded. Some 120 members of the unit re-enlisted when the Royal Fusiliers (38th-42nd) battalions were raised in August 1917 to form what became known as the Jewish Legion.

Donkeys & Mules and the men who used them

Matt Walsh, a researcher who discovered this unusual transport unit of the Gallipoli campaign noted: "When we speak about Gallipoli, we remember the ANZACS, the British and their colonial troops –the Indians etc), the Turks and to a lesser extent the Germans. But very rarely do we ever hear any one speak about the involvement and exploits of the Jews as an identifiable group of soldiers in their own right and not just as members of the armed forces who follow a particular religious belief like any of the other main stream religious groups – Christian, Hindu, Muslim, etc. The men of the Zion Mule Corps deserve just as much recognition and acknowledgement for their actions and involvement in defending freedom as all the other troops involved on the side of the allies during World War I." (*Gallipoli a Social Perspective*)

The role and work undertaken by the Indian Mountain Batteries and their mules on Gallipoli is recorded in descriptions of the campaign as was, to a lesser extent, the Indian Mule Cart Transport Unit. Simpson and Duffy are not only enshrined in history but also in bronze outside the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

Without these animals (the mules and donkeys) the movement of supplies, ammunition, water and of course the evacuation of the wounded would have been difficult and we may well have seen a different result in respect to the campaign.

References

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