

## The Capture of Damascus.

After Beersheba the Turks were retreating and the next target for the British Army under General Allenby was Damascus.

On the 22 December 1917 the 10<sup>th</sup> Light Horse under Lt. Colonel Arthur Olden defeated the Turks at Samaria and took 9,000 prisoners and 15 FIELD Guns.

Arthur Olden had landed at Gallipoli on the 25 April 1915 and was twice wounded. He was one of the few survivors of the attack on the Nek and believed that he should have died with his mates on that terrible day. He would always suffer from *Survivors Guilt*.

To Arthur, every battle that he survived was a bonus and his men thought that just being near him would keep them safe.

As the 10<sup>th</sup> arrived at Damascus they thought that it would be well defended but the Turks had gone. Arthur decided to carefully enter the city and his Light Horsemen rode slowly through the deserted streets with all its markets closed, until they reached the Town Square where they were greeted by the Governor, Emir Said, who was waving a Union Jack. He also had a Document which said that the British Troops were most welcome.

Arthur asked that the document be changed to say that he was an Australian Officer and that the Troops were Australian Light Horse. When this was done, Arthur accepted the surrender of Damascus.

In the past there had been some famous Soldiers who had captured Damascus;

*Pharaoh Ramses, Alexander the Great and Napoleon.*

I think that we must add the name *Arthur Olden* to that list.

Arthur suggested that the Emir should open up the Markets as his Troops would like to have food and drink and perhaps buy a few souvenirs.

The local traders were quick to open their shops and soon they were doing a roaring trade with the Australians. Every house and shop was now flying a Union Jack.

Having accepted the surrender of Damascus Arthur Olden moved his Troops out and joined the British Army in its pursuit of the Turks to take Jerusalem.

This was done and on the 31 October 1918 the War was over and a truce was declared at Mudros.

However the British Army kept going and would capture the vast oil wells at Mosul that the British Government had always wanted.

This act would be the first of many that would cause the Middle East to become the powder keg that it is today.

### ***THE RETURN TO GALLIPOLI.***

The Light Horse experience came full circle in December 1918 when they were asked to volunteer to return to Gallipoli. Despite their War Weariness and their desire to return to their homes they accepted the honour.

Men of the 7<sup>th</sup>. Light Horse and the NZ Mounted Rifles readily volunteered.

They arrived at Chanak on the 5<sup>th</sup>. December 1918 and the weather was terrible. Their billets were a disgrace and they would all suffer from the extreme cold.

Their mission was to find the remains of their mates who still lay where they were fallen on the bloody battlefields. They would find name tags and any other means of naming the young men who had died there. They would also see that they received a proper burial.

They were also asked to collect artifacts for the proposed War Memorial in Australia.

It was a sad and very emotional time for these ANZACS as they wandered up and down the hills, the gullies and the beach.

At The Nek, the bodies of the New Zealanders and the Light Horse were laying where they had fallen and the men had to collect bits of the uniforms and bones and place them into bags for identification.

It was a terrible task but not one man shirked it even when they found one of their mates. They buried each one and all wept as they placed wooden crosses at the graves.

They wept as they spoke to their mates and said that they would return and that they would never forget them.

They would have these memories remain with them for the rest of their lives.

***LEST WE FORGET.***

(John Imrie, November 2020)