

Preparations for War and the Australian Light Horse Campaign from Egypt to Syria 1914-1919

History - *"I cannot spare a single man"....*

With the return of the Australian troops to Egypt following the withdrawal from Gallipoli in December 1915, the War Office in London, having sent the Australian Infantry Division to France, asked for the Australian Light Horse Brigade as well. General Sir Archibald Murray, the new commander of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force stated *"I cannot spare a single man; these ANZAC troops are the keystone of the defence of Egypt"*. They were to prove this between 1916 and 1918, when from the Suez Canal Zone to Damascus in Syria, they fought no less than thirty six decisive battles.

The first Light Horse Division to be formed was the Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division, known as the ANZAC Mounted Division, under the command of General Harry Chauvel in January 1916. A year later, in January 1917, the second Light Horse division, the Imperial Mounted Division was formed, later re-named the Australian Mounted Division, under the command of Major General Sir H. W. Hodgson.

Purpose and scope

This exhibit of the Australian Light Horse Campaign examines the nation's preparation and engagement from a postal and social history perspective. The postal history is represented by the postal markings with references to key texts published on the subject. Important extracts from the soldiers are highlighted in italics and convey the personal feelings of the troops, the hopes of the soldiers and those of a nation. In addition, there are photographs and maps which provide further insight to this iconic campaign. Those items which are highlighted in bold red boxes represent items of rarity or historical interest.

Treatment

An arrangement of the Light Horse datestamps in chronological order would provide a disjointed representation of the material which would be difficult to interpret. A more realistic approach is defined by featuring twelve main categories comprising:

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| 1. Preparations for war | 6. The role of the Australian Flying Corps |
| 2. Light Horse soldiers fighting in the Gallipoli Campaign | 7. The Western Frontier Force |
| 3. Processing the mail | 8. The ANZAC Mounted Division |
| 4. Datestamps and censor cachets | 9. The Australian Mounted Division |
| 5. Australian mail processed through the British postal service | 10. Hospitals and convalescent homes |
| | 11. Soldiers killed in action and prisoners of war |
| | 12. Legacy of the Australian Light Horse Campaign |

Scarcity of the material

Australian mail from the Light Horse Campaign is relatively scarce when compared to letters from the Western Front, with correspondence from many areas not seen by modern day collectors. By way of comparison, 416,000 Australian soldiers enlisted in WW1, however, less than 10,000 Light Horsemen were involved in the campaign. The survival rate of letters, postcards and photographs reflect this statistic.

A photograph at a well
endorsed on the reverse
"Sorting mail in camp".



Principle references:

"Australian Imperial Forces Postal History 1914-18" by Bob Emery (1983) and the supplement (1988)

"British Empire Campaigns and Occupations in the Near East, 1914-1924" by John Firebrace (1991)

"The Australian Light Horse" by Roland Perry (2009)

The Australian War Memorial Archives

1. Preparations for War - Recruitment for the Australian Light Horse 1914 - 1918

The Call to War

Great Britain declared war on Germany on the 4th of August 1914. The Commonwealth of Australia announced a separate declaration of war the following day, and a commitment was made to provide the First Division ready to embark by the 21st of September. With the declaration of war, patriotic fervor gripped many young Australian males, with thousands enlisting in the Australian Imperial Forces in the following days. Included with the infantry troops was the 1st Light Horse Brigade comprising three Regiments of approximately 300 men each.



A picture postcard of the "First Expeditionary Force Marching to Camp", with a scene of the new recruits marching up Elizabeth Street, near the corner of the Bourke Street GPO on the 6th August. Note the two Light Horse officers leading the recruitment march.



A rare real photo postcard of the Koondrook Railway Station and the departure of the 17th Light Horse Regiment off to camp in 1914.

Recruitment Campaigns

The first wave of volunteers 1914

The Australian government's promise of 20,000 troops on the 5th of August 1914 created a swell of volunteers across the country. The task of raising and mobilising the enlisted recruits was given to William Bridges, Inspector General of the Australian Military Forces, who was to become its commanding officer. Bridges structured the force according to national demographics.

The 1st Light Horse Brigade comprised the 1st Regiment from New South Wales; the 2nd Regiment from Queensland; and the 3rd Regiment from South Australia and Tasmania.

Recruitment of reinforcements for the Gallipoli campaign 1915

A steady stream of volunteers maintained the flow of new recruits for the Gallipoli campaign. The 2nd Light Horse Brigade arrived in Egypt in January 1915, with the 3rd Brigade in March and the 4th in July. Australian infantry landed at Gallipoli on the 25th of April 1915. By early May, urgent reinforcements were needed. To meet the demand, the mounted men of the Light Horse Brigades volunteered to serve as infantry, leaving their horses behind at the Remount Camp at Mex.

Recruitment for the Light Horse Campaign 1916 - 1918

After Gallipoli, the Australian mounted soldiers remained in Egypt for the future Light Horse Campaign to Syria. The wholesale blood bath at the Dardanelles reduced the enlistment of troops to a trickle. Prime Minister Billy Hughes was determined to offer the full support of Australia by calling two referendums for conscription which were both defeated. The Australian military were forced to sponsor recruitment campaigns, and promote marches to encourage young men to volunteer for their country.

Recruitment marches during the Gallipoli campaign

October - November 1915

One method of stimulating recruiting was for a small body of volunteers to start from a country town, with the party growing in size as it marched on to the larger training camps. Light Horse volunteers were directed to the closest satellite camp for recruitment and training. These bands of volunteers were given patriotic names such as "The Kangaroos", "The Waratahs", "The Coo-ees", etc.



A rare real photo postcard of Hitchin's Coo-ees arriving at Springwood on the way to Sydney in November 1915.

With recruitment numbers dwindling, Gilgandra plumber Bill Hitchens devised the idea with his brother Robert to organise a route march to Sydney. The idea caught the imagination of the public. Twenty six men left Gilgandra on the 26th of October 1915 where they were feted at each town on the route. Recruitment meetings were held in each centre and their number increased to 263 by the time they reached Martin Place in Sydney, where they were greeted by over 100,000 people. The Light Horse recruits were directed to the closest satellite training camps.

1.2 Preparations for War - The Light Horse Military Training Camps

Overview

The Australian military camps had a very fragmented structure. Each capital city had a principle training camp allocated to the infantry soldiers. The recruitment for mounted troops focused on the regional areas with the Light Horse training camps established in the country centres. Most of these served a dual purpose with infantry and light horse operations. Much smaller camps were raised purely for mounted troops, but these declined as the war progressed. Some of the regional camps were provided with postal facilities, but the smaller encampments used the nearest town post office.

Mail and real photo postcards of the Light Horse military camps is very scarce.

New South Wales - Botany Bay

Real photo postcard



This card was sent under cover from a soldier to his mother writing about the camp:

"This is a photo of the camp horse lines and will give you an idea of how the horses are tied to the line and also have a feed bag too. You can see Botany Bay in the distance (indicated by the X on the card), also Cook's River and Railway Bridge and Arncliffe".

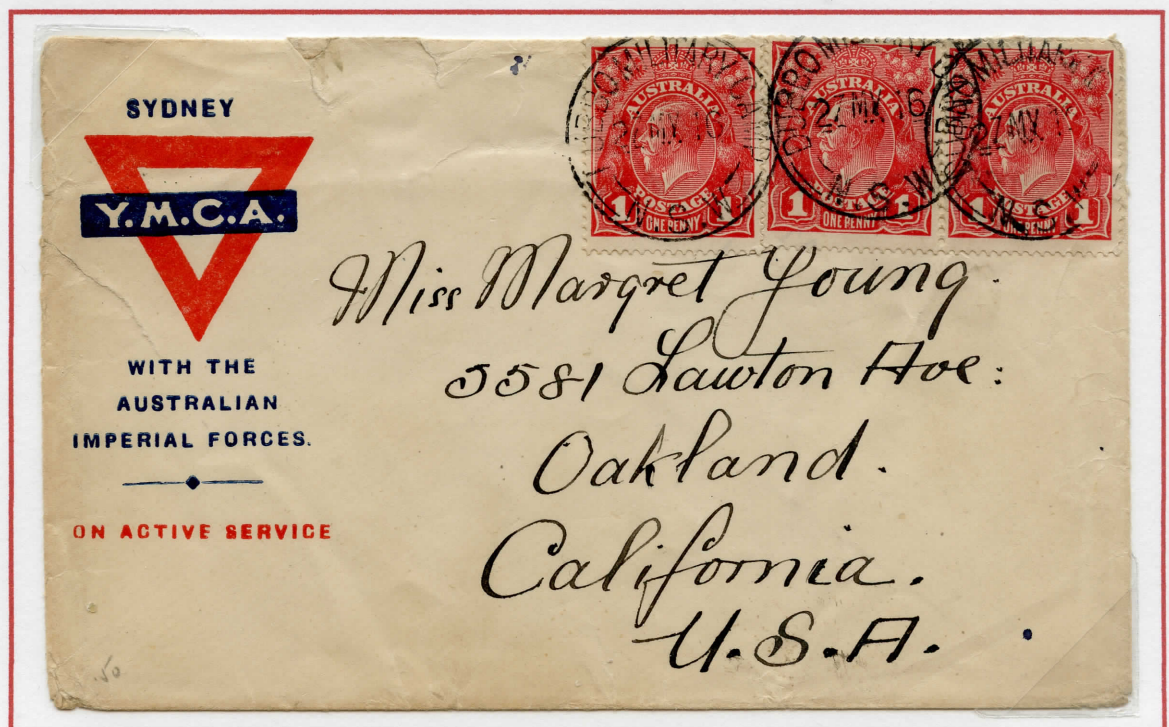
This is the only example of mail recorded from the Botany Bay Camp

New South Wales - Dubbo

The Dubbo Military Camp post office was opened on the 26th of May 1916 and closed six months later on the 25th of November. This served as a dual purpose military camp with infantry and light horse training facilities.

An envelope addressed to the United States and cancelled by the "DUBBO MILITARY CAMP" cds dated the 27th of May 1916.

Two covers are recorded from the Dubbo Military Camp



Queensland - Toowoomba

Newtown Park was a large open area in Toowoomba used as primarily a mounted infantry camp in WW1. The camp was very small and was not allocated any postal facilities. Postal mail from this camp is not recorded, and the two real photo postcards from a series of five are the only images of the camp I have been able to source.

Real photo postcard



A rare image of the Toowoomba Military Camp at Newtown Park looking south in 1918.



A rare image of the Toowoomba Military Camp at Newtown Park looking west in 1918.

South Australia - Gawler

The military camp at Gawler was located at the race course and was used as a light horse training camp drawing recruits from the Port Pirie and Wallaroo districts. It opened in April 1915 and closed in December 1916 and it was not allocated any post office facilities.

Real photo postcard



A real life postcard depicting six soldiers at the Gawler Military Camp. Driver George Bull was training with the 9th Light Horse Regiment and is sitting in the front row at the right around April 1916.

South Australia - Murray Bridge

There were no military postal facilities at the camp at Murray Bridge. It must have been quite small since I am unable to establish when it was opened, however, I suspect it was quite early in the war.

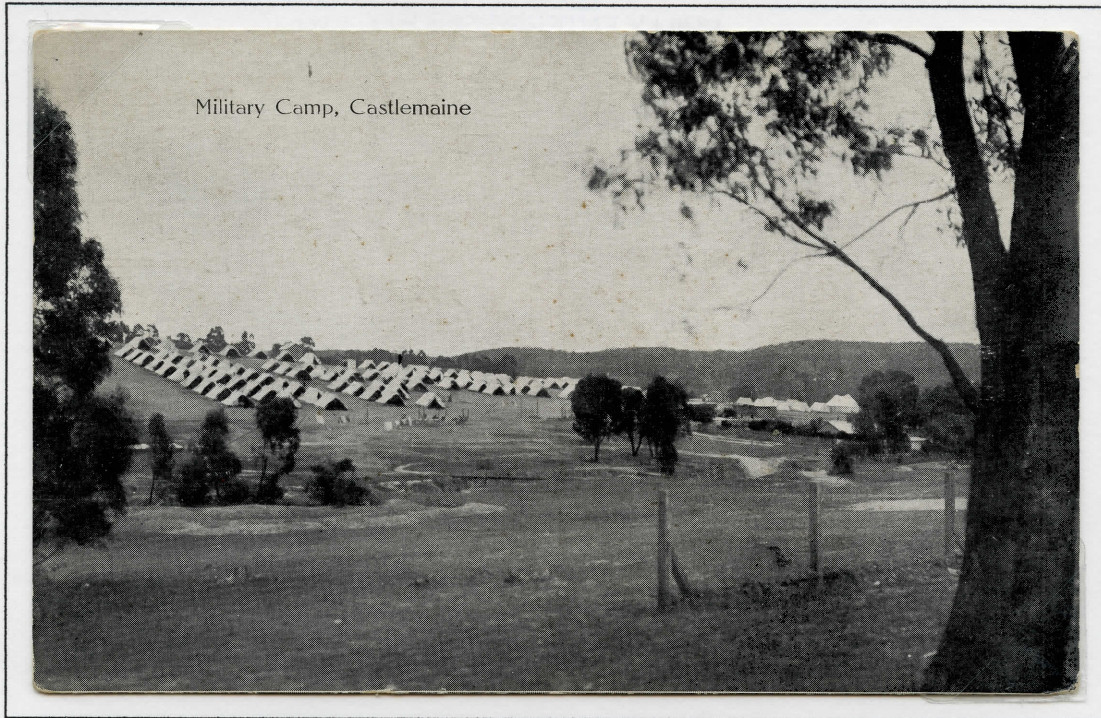


A real photo postcard endorsed at the left "Horse Lines, Camp Murray Bridge".

Victoria - Castlemaine

The military camp at Castlemaine was one of the smaller training camps and only opened for fifteen months between the 1st of September 1915 and the 1st of December 1916. It served as a dual purpose camp training infantry and light horse troops.

Real photo postcard



A real photo postcard of the Military Camp at Castlemaine.



A lettercard cancelled by the "MILITARY CAMP/ CASTLEMAINE" cds dated the 16th of August 1916 and addressed to Carlton, Victoria.

The only recorded cover from the Castlemaine Military Camp

Western Australia - Bunbury

The military camp at Bunbury was too small to be allocated post office amenities. The real photo postcards below are dated March and April 1916. Although there is little information in the official records, I believe this facility primarily served as a light horse training camp.

Real photo postcard



Note the slouch hats allocated to the light horse troops on the soldiers in this photograph.

A rare real photo postcard of "Changing Guard - Forrest Park Camp - Bunbury, WA 5/3/16".



A rare real photo postcard of "Camp Forrest Park, Bunbury, WA 2/4/16".

1.3 Preparations for War - The Convoys and Troopships of the Australian Light Horse

Convoys for the Gallipoli and Australian Light Horse Campaigns

There were thirteen convoys from November 1914 to December 1915 supplying not only Light Horse troops for the Gallipoli conflict, but equipment, medical and administrative staff and horses. Thereafter, there were only sporadic troopships on specific convoys reinforcing and supplying for the Light Horse Campaign from Egypt to Syria.

It is surprising how little mail from the troopships can be directly allocated to soldiers of the light horse. Many items, although signed, cannot be directly identified. Troopships were refitted to carry both soldiers and horses, with mail from these ships being especially difficult to acquire. This section is a small representation of the troopship and convoy mail.

Postal rates

From the outbreak of the war on the 4th August 1914, prepayment of postage had to be paid on mail originating from Australian light horse troops. Since postage stamps were not available on the troopships, most of the soldier's mail was endorsed "On Active Service" or "No Stamps Available", and postage was to be collected by the recipient on delivery. In many cases, given the patriotic fervor for the embarking troops, the postage deficiency was not collected. After the 15th of February 1915, soldiers on active service were able to send letters and postcards without the pre-payment of postage, so long as the postal item was endorsed "On Active Service".

Overview of the First Convoy

October - December 1914

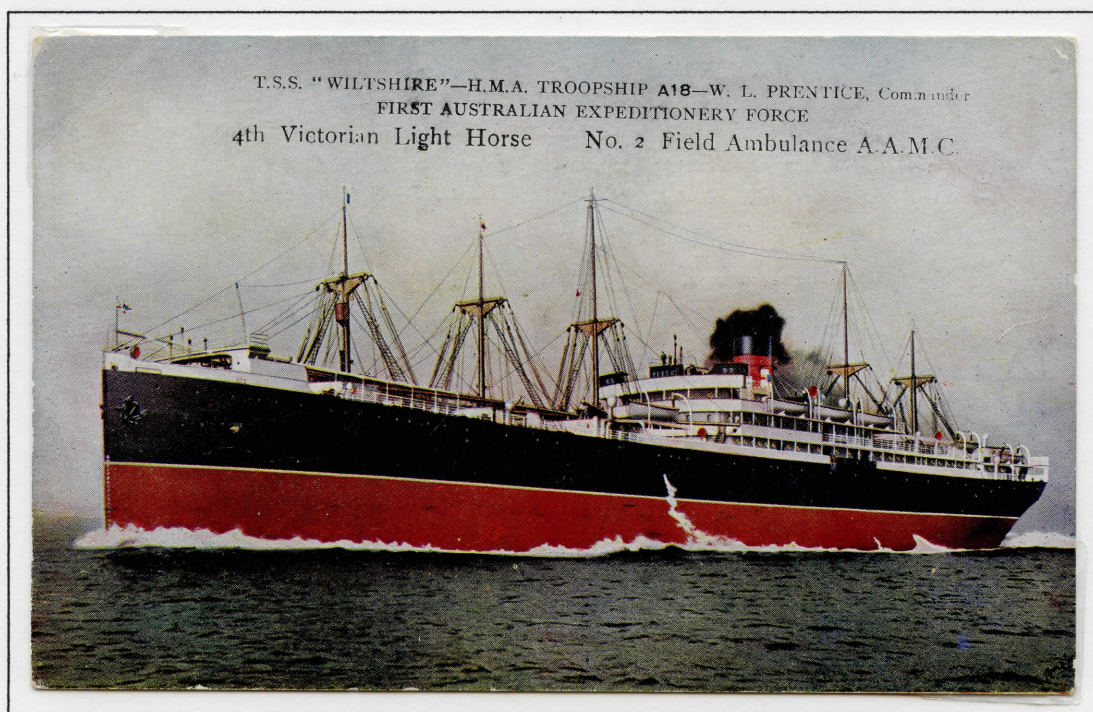
The first convoy consisted of twenty-eight ships and were allocated the numbers A1 to A28 which they retained throughout the war. Approximately 21,500 men and 7,900 horses, including the 1st Light Horse Brigade, plus supplies and equipment, embarked from various ports within the Australian States in October 1914. The troopships assembled at Albany, Western Australia by the 28th of October, where they were joined by the troopships from New Zealand. The combined convoy and their escorts sailed for Egypt on the 1st of November.

Although only a description of the First Convoy, it illustrates the amount of men, horses and equipment needed to supply the Australian Campaigns during WW1. The logistics for the Light Horse are only a fraction of these numbers.

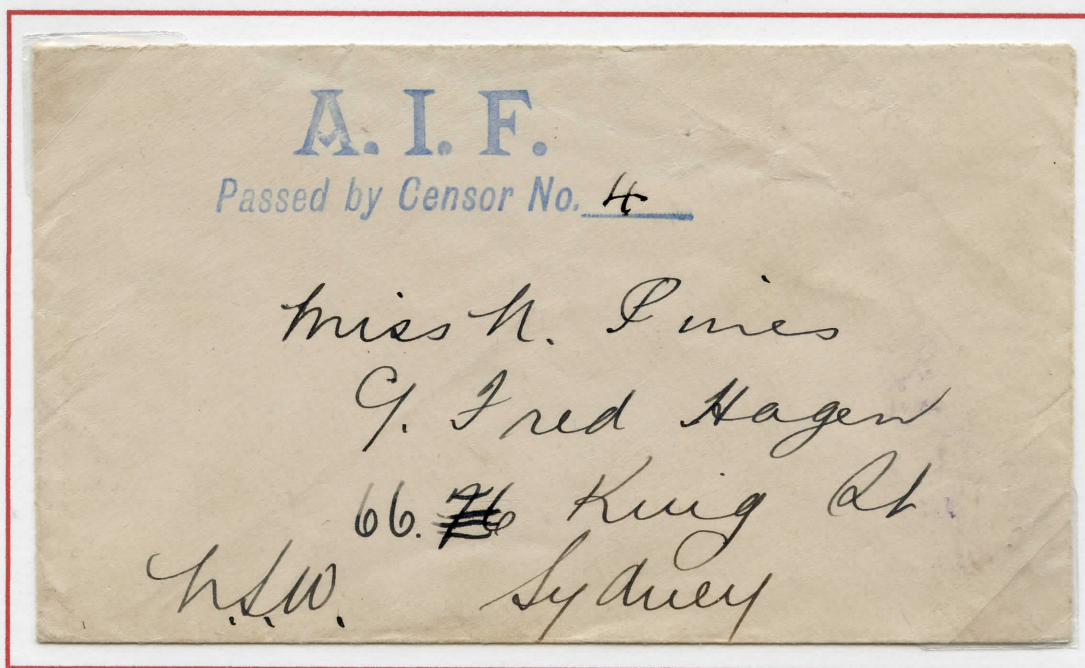
The First Convoy

24th October - 3rd December 1914

A First Convoy Postcard Showing the Victorian Light Horse Overprint



A scarce postcard using an overprint for the A18 H.M.A.T. "Wiltshire" by the Victorian Light Horse produced in Melbourne before the troops embarked. The card is postmarked at Albany on the 24th of October 1914 where the small "T" tax marking was applied on the reverse and addressed to Victoria where the oval "T 1d" was handstamped.

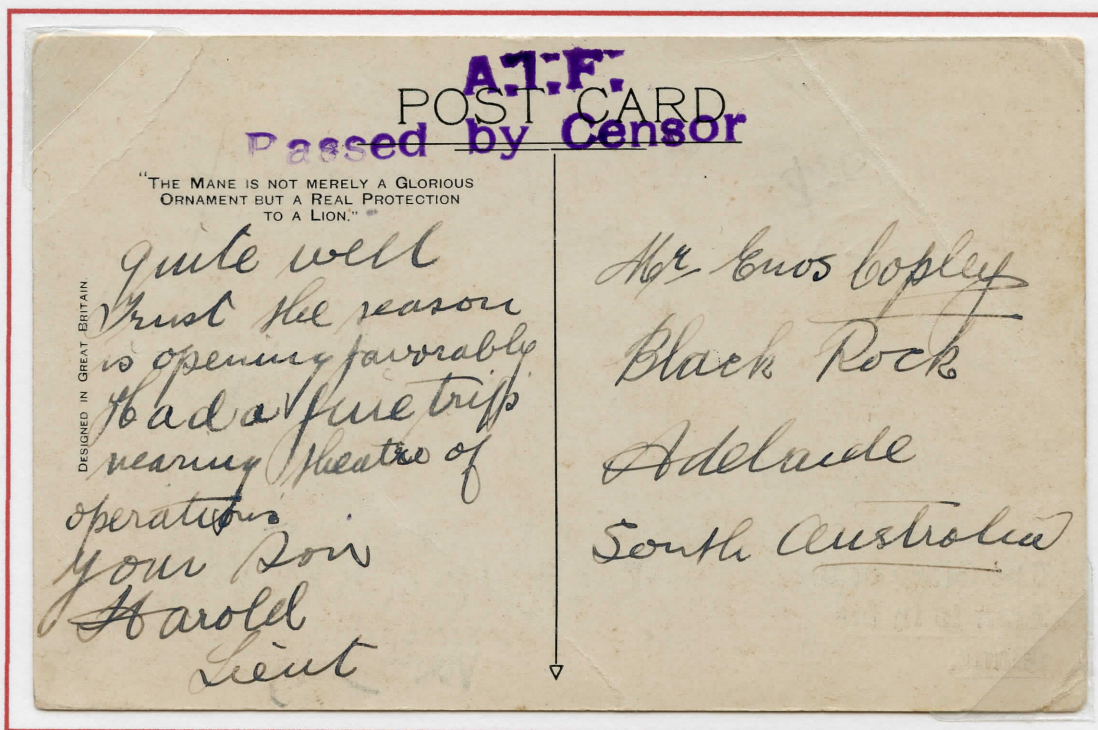


An unstamped envelope addressed to New South Wales with the "A.I.F./ Passed by Censor No....." cachet with number "4" inserted in manuscript allocated to the A4 "Pera".

Mail from this troopship is quite rare since it was generally transporting horses and later with some reinforcements for the Light Horse. Hence, there were very few soldiers to write home.

This is the only example of mail from the A4 "Pera" recorded

An unlisted troopship censor cachet



The card was written by Lieutenant Harold Copley of the 3rd Light Horse Brigade, who by the end of the war had been promoted to Major, and returned to Australia on the 19th of February 1919.

A postcard addressed to South Australia with an unframed "A.I.F./ Passed by Censor" cachet in violet (not recorded by Firebrace) and allocated to the A47 H.M.A.T "Mashobra".

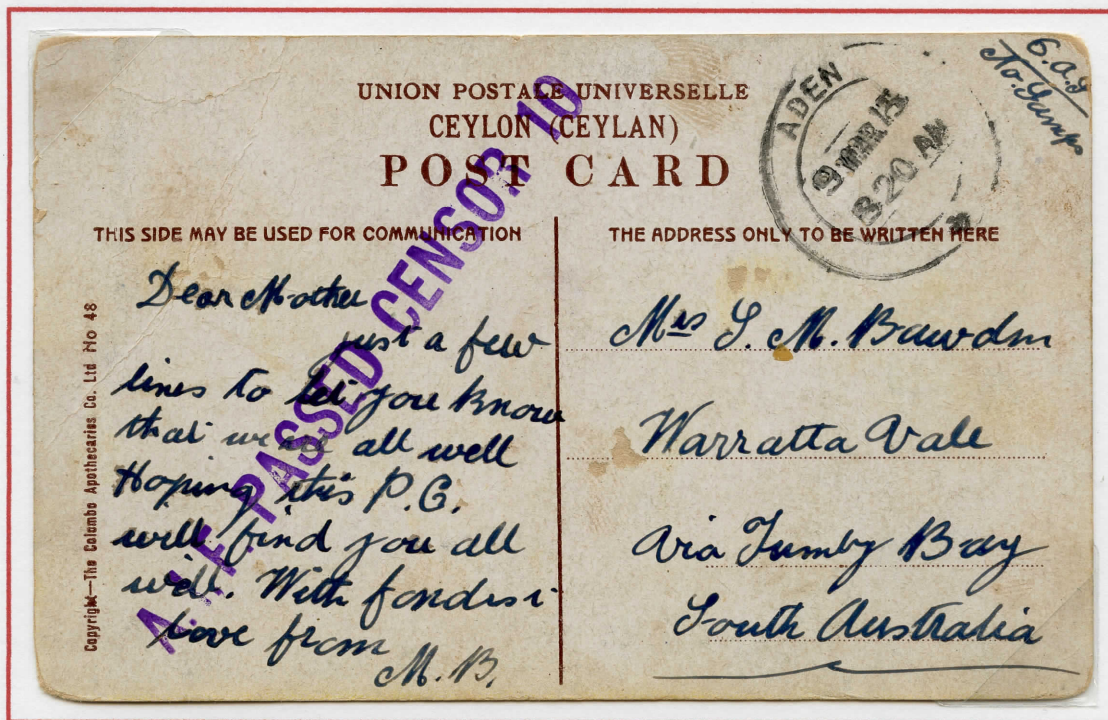
The Third Convoy

The first port of call - Aden

29th January - 29th March 1915

9th March 1915

An unlisted troopship censor cachet



This convoy is not recorded as stopping at Aden, however, the Aden datestamp of the 9th of March confirms this, with the next port being Suez on the 11th. There is a maritime straight lined "A.I.F. PASSED CENSOR 10" cachet in violet (not recorded by Firebrace) which was allocated to the A10 H.M.A.T "Karoo".

The card was written by Driver Milton Bawden of the 9th Light Horse Regiment who served throughout the war and returned to Australia on the 4th of March 1919.

Ex Stern



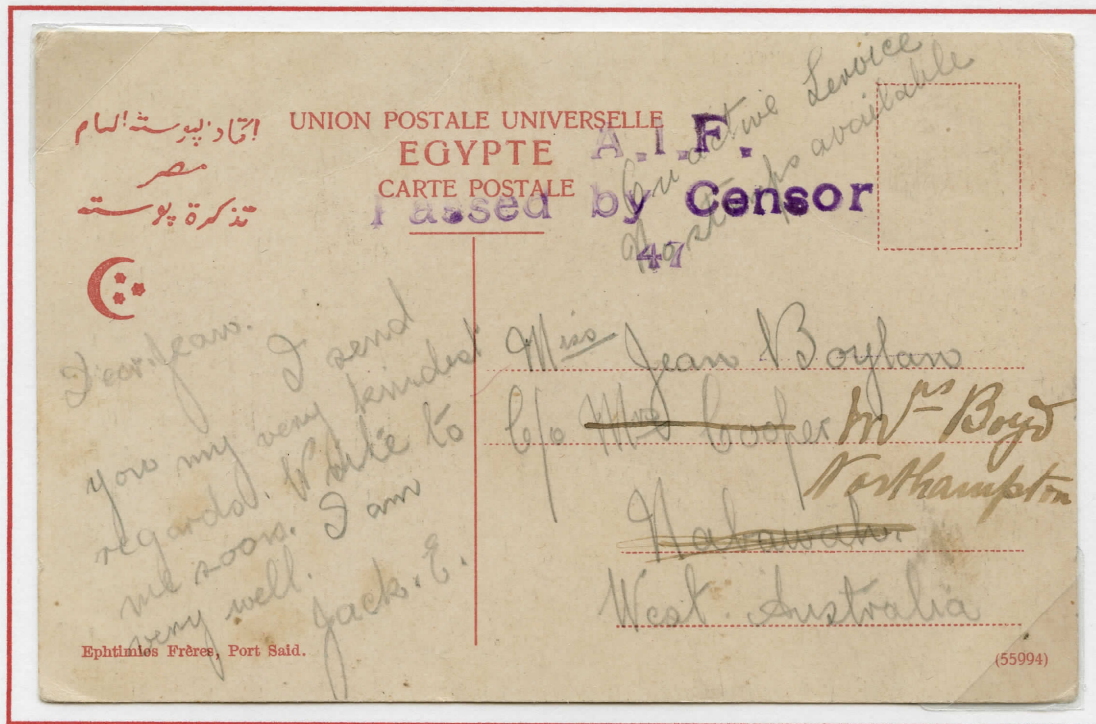
A real photo postcard of the A10 "Karoo" unusually details of the original shipping agents before being requisitioned as a light horse troopship. I suspect that the troopship text was added afterwards.

The Third Convoy

29th January - 29th March 1915

The final destination of the A47 "Mashobra" - Port Said, Egypt

8th March 1915

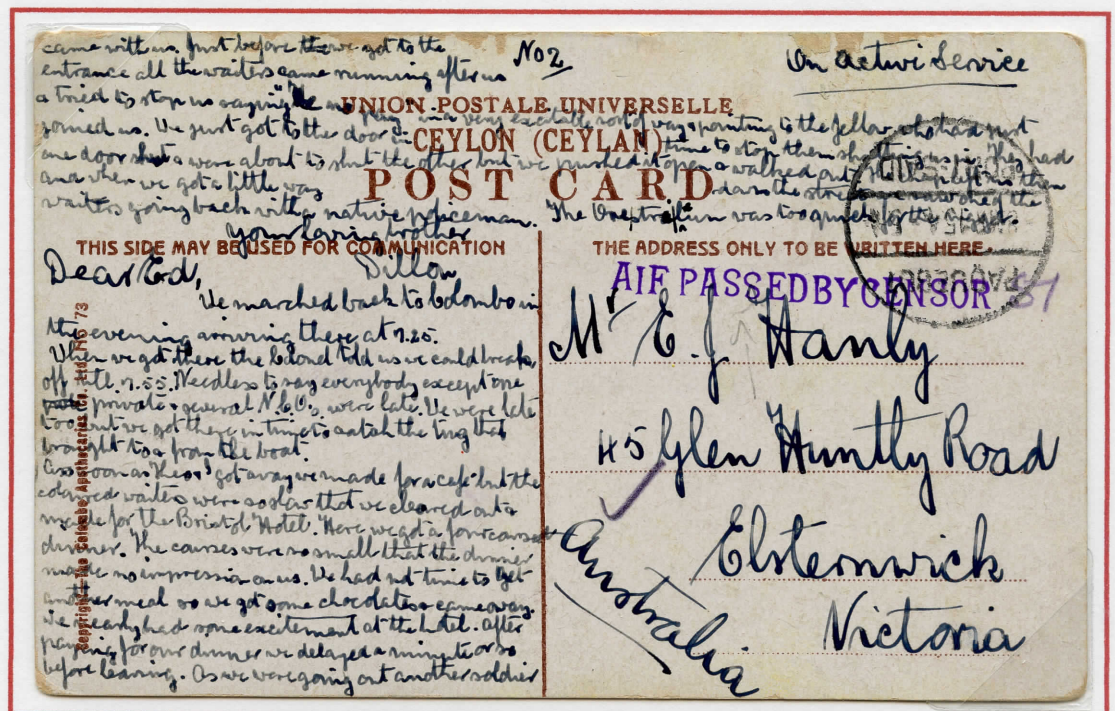


A picture postcard addressed to Western Australia with the unframed "A.I.F./ Passed By Censor/ 47" cachet in violet (not recorded by Firebrace) allocated to the A47 "Mashobra". Although not listed by Firebrace, about half a dozen examples are known, written by soldiers of the 10th Light Horse Regiment from the Third Convoy and addressed to Western Australia.

The final destination of the A51 "Chilka"- Port Said, Egypt

8th March 1915

An unlisted troopship censor cachet



The card was written by Private Joseph Hanley of the 3rd Light Horse Field Ambulance who served throughout the war and returned to Australia on the 6th of May 1919.

A picture postcard of Ceylon with a Port Said paquebot cds dated the 8th of March 1915 and addressed to Victoria with an unframed "AIF PASSED BY CENSOR" cachet in purple (not recorded by Firebrace) with "51" inserted in manuscript of the A51 H.M.A.T "Chilka".

The Sixth Convoy

8th May - 1st August 1915

The final destination of the A19 “Afric” - Alexandria, Egypt

26th June 1915



A rare photograph of the A19 “Afric” docked at Alexandria unloading horses on to the dock.

For the 6th Convoy, the “Afric” carried only horses and reinforcements for the 9th Light Horse Regiment.

The Twenty Second Convoy

1st May - 16th September 1916

The final embarkation port for the A13 “Katuna” - Fremantle

1st July 1916



A lettercard posted at Perth on the 3rd of July 1916, two days after the A13 H.M.A.T. “Katuna” had sailed for Colombo. Very little mail is recorded from this troopship since it carried mostly horses and some light horse troops.

Unusually, the lettercard has a “PASSED BY CENSOR” cachet in purple (not recorded by Firebrace) allocated to the “Katuna” before the ship had left Australia. The card is written by Private William Sawyer of the 9th Light horse Regiment who served throughout the war and returned to Australia on the 10th of July 1919.

The Twenty Fifth Convoy

19th August - 28th December 1916

The departure of the A25 "Anglo Egyptian" - Sydney, New South Wales

19th September 1916



A real photo postcard of the departure of the A25 "Anglo Egyptian". The card is endorsed on the reverse "HMAS Anglo Egyptian A25 leaving wharf Sydney with the 6th & 12th Light Horse, Sept 19, 1916".

The Thirty Fourth Convoy

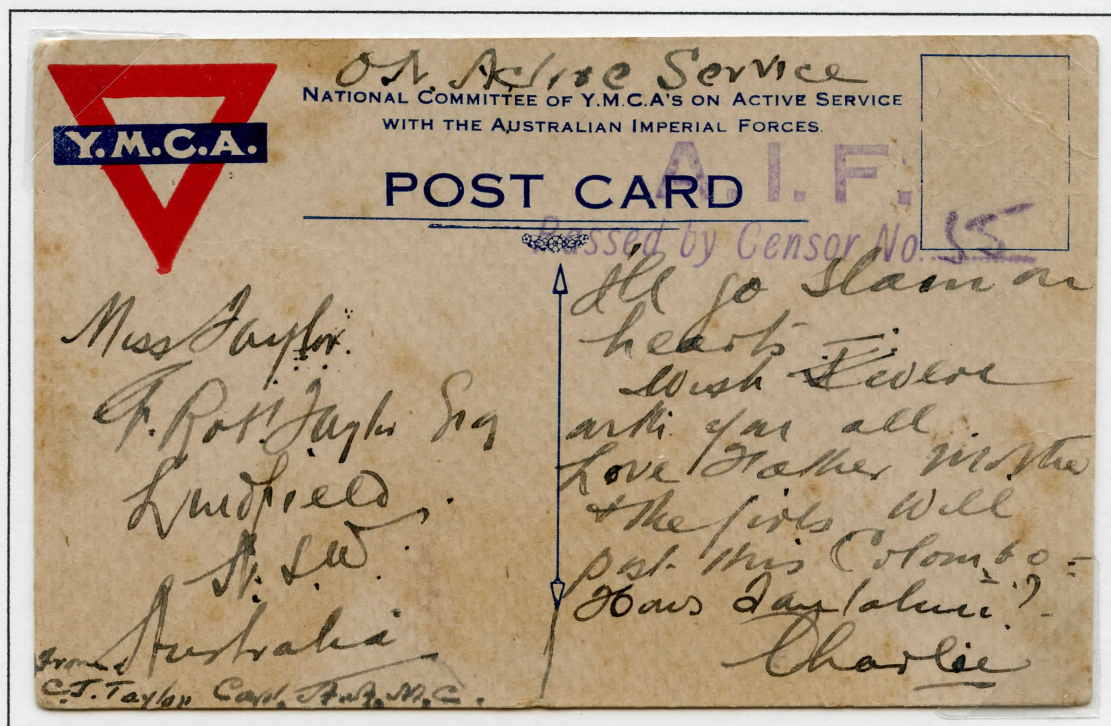
7th September 1917 - 14th January 1918

The first port of call of the A55 "Kyarra" - Colombo, Ceylon

November 1917

The card was written by Captain Charles Taylor of the 14th Australian General Hospital and writes "Will post this Colombo".

Note: The 14th Australian General Hospital was located in Cairo and served the Light Horse troops throughout the war.



A Y.M.C.A. postcard and addressed to New South Wales with the unframed "A.I.F./ Passed by Censor No....." cachet in violet with "55" inserted in manuscript allocated the A55 "Kyarra".

The card was written by Captain Charles Taylor of the 14th Australian General Hospital and writes "Will post this Colombo".

2. The Light Horse soldiers fighting as infantry in the Gallipoli Campaign 1915

Arrival of the Light Horse troops in Egypt

The First Light Horse Brigade comprising the first three regiments arrived in Egypt in December 1914 on the First Convoy. A steady stream of volunteers maintained the flow of new recruits for the Gallipoli campaign. The 2nd Light Horse Brigade arrived in Egypt in January 1915, with the 3rd Brigade in March and the 4th Brigade in July.

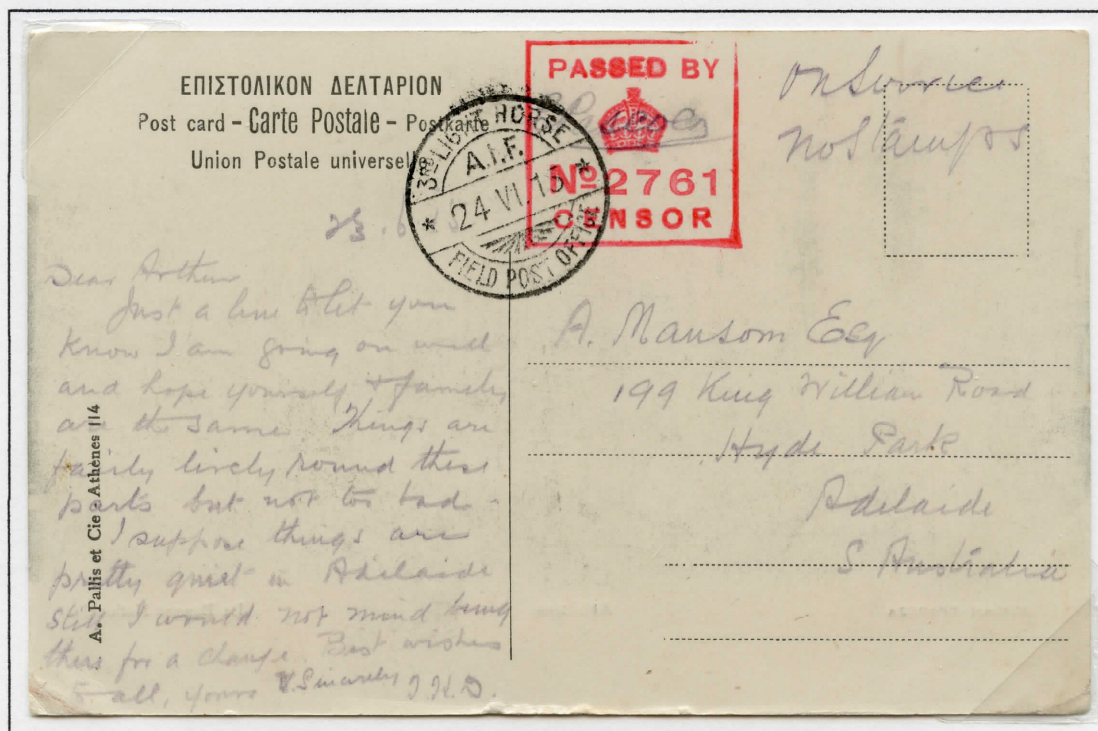
The Light Horse soldiers fighting as infantry at Gallipoli

The Australian infantry landed at Gallipoli on the 25th of April 1915 and the Turks fought ferociously to protect their homeland. After five days, the Australians had only penetrated one and a half miles inland with the loss of 4,900 men. By early May, urgent reinforcements were needed.

To meet the demand, the mounted men of the Light Horse Brigades volunteered to serve as infantry, leaving their horses behind at the Remount Camp at Mex.

The 1st Light Horse Brigade sailed for Gallipoli on the 9th of May, whilst the 2nd and 3rd Brigades embarked on the 16th of May. Aside from some recuperation at Lemnos Island in September, all the light horse soldiers fought throughout the campaign until evacuation in December 1915.

A postcard sent by a Light Horse trooper whilst fighting as an infantry soldier at Gallipoli



A Greek picture postcard cancelled with the "3rd LIGHT HORSE/ A.I.F./POST OFFICE" cds of the 24th June 1915 (Firebrace Type DS 24) when they were based at Walker's Ridge.

Evacuation from Gallipoli - December 1915

After the Turks pushed back the major Allied offensive in August, the resulting stalemate forced the British Generals to reassess the possibility of victory. In November, the bitterly cold weather contributed to the decision to evacuate and all the Australian soldiers including the Light Horse evacuated Gallipoli in December 1915.

The return to Egypt and preparation for the Light Horse Campaign

With the return of the Australian troops to Egypt following the withdrawal from Gallipoli in December 1915, the War Office in London, having sent the Australian Infantry Division to France, asked for the Australian Light Horse Brigade as well. General Sir Archibald Murray, the new commander of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force stated "I cannot spare a single man; these ANZAC troops are the keystone of the defence of Egypt". And thus began the preparations for the Australian Light Horse Campaign.