



## The Nek

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<b>Location</b>	The Nek, Gallipoli
<b>Date/s of event</b>	7 <sup>th</sup> August 1915
<b>Regiments/Units involved</b>	3 <sup>rd</sup> Light Horse Brigade

### SUMMARY

Extract from *The Broken Years*, by Bill Gammage

The most tragic feat of arms, at once the most gallant and the most hopeless was made by the 8th and 10th Light Horse Regiments against the Turkish trenches at The Nek. The Nek was a ridge 45 metres wide at the Anzac line, narrowing to about 27 metres at the Turkish front. . . Four lines of the light horse, each of about 150 men, were to seize the enemy frontline and the maze of trenches and saps behind it. They would be preceded by a naval and artillery bombardment, and were to attack at two-minute intervals. The light horsemen were eager and confident, for this was their first great battle and they expected to break from the interminable trenches into the open. Sick men hid or escaped from their doctors to be in the charge

At four on the afternoon of 6<sup>th</sup> August, the artillery began a gentle bombardment. It intensified early on the 7<sup>th</sup> August but at 4.23 am, seven minutes before time, it ceased. The light horsemen stood still in the silence. In the enemy trenches soldiers cautiously emerged from shelter, lined their front two deep, fired short bursts to clear their machine guns; levelled their rifles, and waited. At 4.30am precisely the first line of the 8th Light Horse leapt from their trenches. As their helmets appeared above the parapet, an awful fire broke upon them. Many were shot, but a line started forward. It crumbled and vanished within five metres. One or two men on the flanks dashed to the enemy's parapet before being killed, the rest lay still in the open.

The second line saw the fate of their friends- Over their heads the Turk fire thundered undiminished, drowning out any verbal order. Beside them lay dead and wounded of the frontline, hit before they cleared the trench- but they waited two minutes as ordered, then sprung forward. They were shot down. The 10th Light Horse filed into the vacant places in the trench. They could not have doubted their fate. They knew they would die, and they determined to die bravely by running swiftly at the enemy. 'Boys you have ten minutes to live', their commanding officer told them and I am going to lead you.'

Men shook hands with their mates, took position, and when the order came, charged into the open. The bullets of their expectant foe caught them as before, and tumbled them into the dust beside their comrades. Moves were to halt the fourth line, but too late, and these men, too, climbed out to be killed.

It was now a little after 5.15am. Two hundred and thirty-four dead light horsemen lay in an area little larger than a tennis court. Most were there still there in 1919, their bones whitening the ridge to observers half a

mile away. One hundred and thirty-eight others were wounded, and about the same number otherwise survived, almost all of them from the later attacking waves.

They never had no hope of success. All the tragic waste of the Great War was contracted into their passing, for as they died, the English troops at Suvla, plainly visible from the Nek, were making tea.

The word "Nek" is Afrikaans for "narrow pass".

The slaughter became known as "Godley's abattoir", after Major General Sir Alexander Godley, the commander of the New Zealand and Australian Division of which the 3rd Light Horse was a part.

The official Australian war historian, C E W Bean, in his Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918, has recorded that one soldier, Private Wilfred Harper, was seen without rifle or other weapon sprinting at the Turkish trenches "like a schoolboy in a foot-race". Both Wilfred and his brother Gresley died at the Nek.

The attack was called off before the fourth wave went over the top but, due to an officer not receiving the order in time, eighty men on the flank went over the top. They too were slaughtered.

234 Australians were killed, 138 were wounded.

The Ottomans sustained eight dead, a surprising number in that the Australians had attacked with unloaded rifles with fixed bayonets.

The Australian dead stayed on the ground for the entirety of the campaign.

In 1919, after the war had finished, Commonwealth burial parties found the bones of the dead still lying thickly on the ground. Today The Nek Cemetery covers the area in which they fell with most of the fallen from that battle interred there. The remains of only five were able to be identified, one of those being Trooper Harold Rush of the 10th Light Horse. His epitaph reads "His last words, Goodbye Cobber, God bless you." The words had been spoken to his friend alongside him in the trench before commencing the attack. Minutes later he was dead.

<http://bytesdaily.blogspot.com.au/2012/04/battle-of-nek.html>



George Lambert: The Charge of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Light Horse Brigade at the Nek, 7<sup>th</sup> August 1915

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Picture taken from Russell Top trenches overlooking the Nek soon after the charge

Extracted from the book produced by Chris Coulthard-Clark, *Where Australians Fought - The Encyclopaedia of Australia's Battles*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1998, pp. 108-109



Father and son having a rest in a communication trench at Russell's Top after the attack on the Nek. The older man with the pipe is Pte Andrew Yeates, 9th LHR while the younger man in the front is his son, Pte James Yeates, 3rd AGH. Sadly the father was killed at Hill 60 on 27 August 1915.

Extracted from the book produced by Chris Coulthard-Clark, *Where Australians Fought - The Encyclopaedia of Australia's Battles*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1998



Sketched by a soldier, Leslie Hore, the morning after the battle of the Nek

Extracted from the book produced by Chris Coulthard-Clark, *Where Australians Fought - The Encyclopaedia of Australia's Battles*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1998



A view looking across the Nek in February 1919 taken by Charles Bean's Gallipoli mission photographer, Captain Hubert Wilkins. Wilkins has positioned himself in the old Australian front line of 1915 and in the middle distance, standing where the Turkish front line was, is the memorial known as Sergeant Memhet's Tomb. Notice the human thigh bone in the foreground. Bean described the area in 1919 as 'strewn' with the human remains of the men of the Light Horse who had charged the Turkish lines on 7 August 1915 and of Turkish soldiers.

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The Battle of the Nek was a small World War I battle fought as part of the Gallipoli campaign. "The Nek" was a narrow stretch of ridge in the Anzac battlefield on the Gallipoli peninsula. The name derives from the Afrikaans word for a "mountain pass" but the terrain itself was a perfect bottleneck and easy to defend, as had been proven during an Ottoman attack in May. It connected the Anzac trenches on the ridge known as "Russell's Top" to the knoll called "Baby 700" on which the Ottoman defenders were entrenched.

On 7 August 1915 two regiments of the Australian 3rd Light Horse Brigade mounted a tragic and futile attack on the Ottoman trenches on Baby 700. The battle became known as "Godley's abattoir".

### **Prelude**

For the three months since the 25 April landings, the Anzac beachhead had been a stalemate. In August an offensive (which later became known as the Battle of Sari Bair) was intended to break the deadlock by capturing the high ground of the Sari Bair range, and linking the Anzac front with a new landing to the north at Suvla. In addition to the main advance north out of the Anzac perimeter, a number of supporting attacks were planned from the existing trench positions.

The attack at the Nek was meant to coincide with an attack by New Zealand troops from Chunuk Bair, which was to be captured during the night. The light horsemen were to attack across the Nek to Baby 700 while the New Zealanders descended from the rear onto Battleship Hill, the next knoll above Baby 700.

The 3rd Light Horse Brigade, which was fast commanded by Colonel F.G. Hughes, comprised the 8th, 9th and 10th Light Horse Regiments. Like the other Australian Light Horse and the New Zealand Mounted Rifles regiments, they had been dispatched to Gallipoli in May as infantry reinforcements, leaving their horses in Egypt.

### **Battle**

The attack was scheduled to commence at 4:30 a.m.[3] [4] on 7 August. It was to be preceded by a naval bombardment. The 8th and 10th Light Horse regiments were to advance on a front 80 metres (87.5 yards) wide in a total of four waves of 150 men each, two waves per regiment. Each wave would advance two minutes apart. The distance they would have to travel to reach the Ottoman line was a mere 27 metres (29.5 yards). Coloured marker flags were carried, to be shown from the captured trenches to indicate success.

On the morning of 7 August, it was clear that the prerequisites for the attack had not been met. The plan drafted by Colonel Andrew Skeen required a simultaneous attack from the rear of Baby 700, thereby creating a hammer and anvil effect on the Ottoman trenches caught in between this pincer movement. Because the New Zealand advance was held up, and failed to reach Chunuk Bair until the morning of 8 August, a day late, the reason for charging at the Nek evaporated. A further part of the Skeen plan required an attack from Steele's Post against German Officers' Trench by the 6th Battalion, 2nd Infantry Brigade of the Australian 1st Division, which failed.

The Ottoman machine guns sited there enfiladed the ground in front of Quinn's Post and the Nek. The Ottoman machine gunners did not suffer any casualties as a result. Nonetheless, Major General Sir Alexander Godley, commander of the New Zealand and Australian Division of which the 3rd Light Horse Brigade was then a part, declared that the attack was to proceed.

Owing to a failure of timing instructions, the artillery preparation ceased at 4.30 am while the attack was not launched until 4:37 am.[5] After the artillery firing ceased, no one knew if the bombardment was to continue. It was later discovered that the synchronisation of watches between the artillery officer and the assault officer was overlooked. As a result, the attack was not launched at the scheduled time,[3] giving the Ottoman

defenders ample time to return to their trenches and prepare for the assault that they now knew was coming. The first wave of 150 men from the 8th Light Horse Regiment, led by their commander, Lieutenant Colonel A.H. White, "hopped the bags" and went over the top. They were met with a hail of machine gun and rifle fire and within 30 seconds, Colonel White and all of his men were gunned down. A few men reached the Ottoman trenches, and marker flags were reportedly seen flying, but they were quickly overwhelmed and shot or bayoneted by the Ottoman defenders.

The second wave of 150 followed the first without question two minutes later and met the same fate with almost all the men cut down by heavy rifle and machine gun fire before they got half way to the Ottoman trench. This was the ultimate tragedy of the Nek, that the attack was not halted after the first wave when it was clear that it was futile. A simultaneous attack by the 2nd Light Horse Regiment (1st Light Horse Brigade) at Quinn's Post against the Ottoman trench system known as "The Chessboard" was abandoned after 49 out of the 50 men in the first wave became casualties. In this case, the regiment's commander had not gone in the first wave and so was able to make the decision to cancel.

Lieutenant Colonel Noel Brazier, commander of the 10th Light Horse Regiment, attempted to have the third wave cancelled, claiming that "the whole thing was nothing but bloody murder". He was unable to find Colonel Hughes and unable to persuade the Brigade Major, Colonel J.M. Antill, who believed the reports that marker flags had been sighted. This report of marker flags was subsequently confirmed in a Turkish article published after the war where it was stated by the author who had been at the Nek that a couple of men with a marker flag made it to the Ottoman trench before being quickly killed. In that time they were able to raise the flag. Colonel J.M. Antill had not checked the scene to establish if it was of any purpose to send the next wave and issued the order for the third wave to proceed. The third wave "hopped the bags" and the assault came to a quick end as before. On this assault, many men launched themselves out of the trenches and tried to dive for cover, having performed their duty to attack, but having no ambition to commit mindless suicide by attacking clearly impenetrable defences. This explains the lower casualty rate for the 10th Light Horse Regiment. Finally, Hughes called off the attack, but confusion in the right area of the fire trench, due to an officer not being told of the cancellation, led to around 75 to 80 men of the fourth wave going over, and they too were cut down in less than a minute. By 4:45 a.m., the ridge was covered with fresh dead and wounded Australian soldiers, most of who remained where they fell for the duration of the campaign.

A further consequence of the failure to call off the attack at the Nek was that a supporting attack by two companies of the Royal Welch Fusiliers was launched from the head of Monash Valley, between Russell's Top and Pope's Hill, against the "Chessboard" trenches. Sixty-five casualties were incurred before the attack was aborted.

Of the 600 Australians from the 3rd Light Horse Brigade who took part in the attack, the casualties numbered 372; 234 out of 300 men from the 8th Light Horse Regiment, of which 154 were killed, and 138 out of the 300 men from the 10th, of which 80 were killed (including L.B). The Ottoman losses were negligible on this occasion for the Australians charged with unloaded rifles with fixed bayonets and were unable to return fire at all, although there are at least eight known Ottoman dead.

When Commonwealth burial parties returned to the peninsula in 1919 after the war's end, the bones of the dead light horsemen were still lying thickly on the small piece of ground. The Nek Cemetery now covers most of no-man's land of the tiny battlefield, and contains the remains of 316 Australian soldiers, most of whom fell during the 7 August attack, of whom only five could be identified.[6]

Trooper Harold Rush of the 10th Light Horse Regiment died in the third wave. His body was one of the few identified and he is buried in Walker's Ridge Cemetery. His epitaph famously reads "His last words, Goodbye Cobber, God bless you".

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_the\\_Nek](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_the_Nek)

## **Battle of the Nek**

### **The Chronology**

**4.23** - the "joke" of a bombardment ends.

**4.28** - Turks clearly seen manning the parapets of the trenches and machine gun ranged.

**4.29** – The men in the first line already know they are in for a tough time.

**4.30** – The whistle blows and 150 men of the 8th Light Horse Regiment, led by Colonel White, climb out of the trenches and charge across the Nek.

**4.35** – 150 men lay dead or wounded within 30 metres of the trench. Three men made it to the Turkish trench only to die there. An observer spots a location flag in Turkish trenches and reports this to Antill. The whistle blows and a further 150 men climb out of their trench.

**4.40** – 150 more men lay dead or wounded.

Colonel Brazier, commander of the 10th Light Horse Regiment argues with Antill about sending the next line out. Antill orders Brazier to send out the third line.

**4.45** - Trooper Harold Rush, 10th Light Horse Regiment, says to his friend as both men shake hands: "Goodbye Cobber. God bless you." He died a minute later.

The whistle blows and 150 men from the 10th Light Horse Regiment climb out of their trench.

**4.50** – 150 more men lay dead, wounded or pretending to be dead.

**5.15** - The 4th line of the attack is called off but some troops misunderstand this direction and charge.

**5.20** – 234 dead and wounded from the 8th LHR and 138 from the 10th LHR lay on the blood soaked ground of the Nek. Any movement of the wounded men brought Turkish machine gun fire to bear on the person. Some of the wounded were able to crawl back into the trenches. Others who had been lucky and not injured made their way as best as possible. For the rest, their lot was a miserable day in the sun without any hope of relief until the evening.

[http://alh-research.tripod.com/Light\\_Horse/index.blog/1832194/the-nek-7-august-1915-lest-we-forget/](http://alh-research.tripod.com/Light_Horse/index.blog/1832194/the-nek-7-august-1915-lest-we-forget/)