

The Four Dummy Horse Sculptures of the Apocalypse

The Light Horse in the Air War



Prophecy and Present: The Valley of Megiddo

“Armageddon...stands for the conflict of nations, says St. John the Divine, writing in his cell on the island of Patmos: And they had breastplates, as it were breastplate of Iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horse running into battle”¹

The Four Horsemen of Revelation—white, red, black, and pale green—symbolise conquest, war, famine, and death. In 1918, on the same ground where ancient armies clashed, the Australian Light Horse played a part not in ending the world but in ending one of its bloodiest conflicts.

The name *Armageddon* evokes an end-of-days battlefield where “the conflict of nations,” as St John the Divine wrote from Patmos, would unfold amidst the sound of “chariots of many horses running into battle.” Yet Armageddon is not

¹Armageddon , 1918 The Final Palestinian Campaign of World War 1, Cyril Falls, p.1

merely a prophetic symbol. It is also a real place: *Har Megiddo* in the Jezreel Valley, the site of one of the earliest recorded battles in human history.



The mountain of Megiddo, also known as Armageddon from the Book of Revelation. Credit: MAGIORESTOCK/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

For more than four millennia, the mound of Megiddo has been a stage on which empires clashed and mythologies took root. Known in Hebrew as *Har Megiddo*, the origin of the word “Armageddon”, this small hill on the edge of the Jezreel Valley has attracted armies from Thutmose III to Napoleon, Saladin to Allenby. The Book of Revelation evokes it as the place of the final confrontation between good and evil, “the battle of that great day of God Almighty,” where “the spirits of devils... gather the kings of the earth” (Rev. 16:14–16). Its name has become a symbol of total war, eschatological reckoning, and humanity’s recurring capacity for destruction

From Gallipoli’s tragedy to Armageddon’s triumph, the journey of the Anzacs reveals a deeper truth: history, myth, and human ingenuity often converge in the places we least expect. On a battlefield long associated with apocalypse, they helped deliver not destruction but closure—an end to a war, and the beginning of a long and fragile peace.

**‘Just where cavalry had been encamped one saw dummy horse lines and camps looking, doubtless, from the air precisely as they had appeared for months. Four sticks with an army blanket slung between them must have resembled a horse when an observer looked down from an aeroplane skimming above the valley at a height of ten thousand feet... The dummy horse lines answered so well that an enemy air reconnaissance report dated September 17, found among the Liman von Sanders’ papers at Nazareth, said: ‘far from there being any diminution in the cavalry in the Jordan Valley there were evidences of twenty-three more squadrons.’
Squadrons of clothes Horses!’²**

² W.T. Massey; *Allenby’s Final Triumph*, Pp. 97, Constable and Company Ltd., London, 1920 Chapter VII Camouflaging an Arm



Dummy Horse
Bronze
Jordan Valley

Photo of Jordan Valley: James Brew
Photoshop: Jonny Bugler

The four “dummy” horses—emblems of an entire phantom force—reflect the ingenuity that helped conceal Allied movements, protect lives, and enable a decisive breakthrough.

Long before the Anzacs rode across this ancient landscape in 1918, the Egyptian Pharaoh Thutmose III had rallied his troops at Megiddo with the exhortation: “The capturing of Megiddo is the capturing of a thousand towns—capture ye firmly, firmly!” That battle of 1479 BCE is often considered the earliest recorded military engagement in history. More than thirty major conflicts—Egyptians, Israelites, Crusaders, Ottomans, British and Germans—have surged across these plains. It is little wonder the author of Revelation envisioned the final confrontation between good and evil occurring here.

Centuries later, as imperial rivalries and religious visions overlapped, the site would again become the focal point of conflict, a place where past and present collide. From its hilltop one sees the West Bank, Hezbollah rockets to the north, and Israeli-Hamas conflict to the south. Many religious traditions—Jewish, Christian, and Islamic—see in these tensions echoes of apocalyptic struggle, though all also envision a final triumph of justice, peace, and pluralism. Armageddon, therefore, is less a prediction of mutual destruction than a reminder that humanity must choose compassion over fanaticism

This landscape of prophecy and war would become unexpectedly linked with Australians in the First World War. The men who landed at Gallipoli in 1915—immortalised in film, eulogised in song, and mourned across a century—would eventually fight their final campaign in the shadow of Megiddo. Their journey from the Dardanelles to the “battle of Armageddon” in 1918 is one of the most remarkable odysseys in the history of modern warfare



Gallipoli, Memory, and the “Expendable Men” of Empire

More than sixty years after the failed Dardanelles campaign, the Australian band Redgum released its 1983 song *I Was Only Nineteen*, a lament for the expendability of young soldiers in twentieth-century wars:

*“And the Anzac legends didn’t mention mud and blood and tears
And the stories that my father told me never seemed quite real...”*

The song emerged in an era still haunted by Vietnam and coincided with renewed scrutiny of the disastrous Gallipoli campaign with Peter Weir’s 1981 film, ‘Gallipoli’, upon which Rupert Murdoch’s father, Keith Murdoch, had famously condemned this WW1 operation in a blistering 8,000-word report to then Australian Prime Minister Andrew Fisher, calling it “a costly bloody fiasco” and “one of the most terrible chapters in history.”

By late August 1915—after months of attrition—the situation at Anzac Cove had barely shifted. Thousands of casualties had been sustained for negligible territorial gain. In the ensuing August Offensive, troops were thrown into desperate attacks at Lone Pine, The Nek, Chunuk Bair, and the Chessboard only

compounded the tragedy. As a result the Light Horse regiments, stripped of their horses, were ordered to fight as infantry. As one regimental diary recorded, “Bandoliers were handed in... and a final farewell parade held on 24 August.”. The 4th Light Horse Brigade was dissolved to provide reinforcements and a diversion for a British landing at Suvla Bay.

General Otto Liman von Sanders, commander of the Turkish Fifth Army, oversaw the Ottoman defence of Gallipoli and forced the Allies into evacuation. Yet astonishingly, Australian Light Horse veterans would face him again—three years later, on the plains of Armageddon.

From Horse to Aircraft: The Light Horse in the Air War

Among the survivors of *The Nek*, a charge immortalised in the ending of Peter Weir’s film, was Paul McGinness of the 8th Light Horse. Of 150 men in the first line, only a handful lived. McGinness was knocked unconscious by a bullet glancing off his kit; mistaken for dead, he survived by lying still until nightfall before crawling back to Australian lines.

After the evacuation of Gallipoli, McGinness, along with other Light Horseman in Ross Smith, and Hudson Fysh, three young Australians who would later shape Australian commercial aviation, were reunited with their mounts in Egypt to find there the Australian Remount Squadron led by non-other than A.B. ‘Banjo’ Paterson. Their war was not over. It would carry them eastward across the Sinai, into Palestine, and ultimately to Megiddo itself.

‘...Leading the team of horse-breakers that broke in the feral brumbies – those famous ‘wild bush horses’ – as well as farmer’s nags and the occasional decent pony, was a man renowned throughout the English-speaking world for his poetry: A.B. ‘Banjo’ Paterson, best-known for his works, *The Man From Snowy River* and *Waltzing Matilda*.’³ ‘It was the behind-the-scenes efforts of these world-class trainers that made possible the famous Light Horse charge at Beersheba on 31 October 1917.’⁴

‘Whilst in Egypt on ‘7th of August 1917 McGinness was selected for flight training, and he learnt to handle aircraft at Heliopolis and then Aboukir...he was a natural at working the rudder and ailerons. For a time he was even seconded to Lawrence of Arabia’s top-secret X flight wing at Aqaba.’⁵ In 1917 Smith and Fysh were also transferred to the Royal Flying Corps No. 67 squadron, and later

³ <https://www.96three.com.au/banjo-patersons-forgotten-anzac-role-one-of-the-least-known-parts-of-his-life/>

⁴ <https://www.96three.com.au/banjo-patersons-forgotten-anzac-role-one-of-the-least-known-parts-of-his-life/>

⁵ Hudson Fysh, Author Grantlee Kieza 2022 p.7

to the No.1 Squadron of the Australian Flying Corps. It was in Palestine that they would once again be up against their old foe in Liman Von Sanders when in...‘February 1918, Sanders undertook the command of a combined Turkish-German force on the Palestine front.’⁶

‘Fysh had been with the Squadron only a few weeks when he saw first-hand the aerial dash of his old Light Horse Commander Ross Smith’⁷. ‘On 1 September 1917, Smith and Ellis⁸ were flying single-seat Martinsydes over Beersheba when they gave chase to two German aircraft. Smith and one of the Germans flew head on at each other, with Smith firing his machine gun mounted on the top wing. He brought one of the enemy down but was hit in the process. Back at the airbase Fysh watched the wounded airman smash through the telephone wires bordering the camp. He still managed to land the plane safely. One bullet had creased the top of his head, and the another had cut a trough through his cheek.’⁹

On 16 March 1918 [McGuinness]... joined Fysh at the No 1. Squadron... ‘In their first dogfight together, they and their escort encountered four Albatross two-seaters over El Afule. Fysh fired a long burst at one aircraft as it flashed past but could see no effect, when McGuinness made a sharp, wheeling manoeuvre and was on its tail, diving fast, his front gun flat out. The Albatross returned fire, and hot lead rocked past Fysh’s head. The Albatross, seemingly out of control, surged up in a towering loop with McGuinness sticking to it and blasting away with his machine gun through the propeller. Instantly Fysh and McGuinness were upside down. Fysh’s head spun. The inverted machine seemed to hit three hundred kilometres per hour. They were still upside down when McGuinness shot the two-seater at the top of its loop, the Germans plummeting straight into the ground, their machine exploding.’¹⁰

The Small and wiry Paul ‘Ginty’ McGinniss became Fysh’s favourite pilot. Fysh Regarded McGinniss as an airman ‘full of dash and adventure’, and said that in his seven confirmed victories – scored when the enemy was shot down – McGinniss was hit only once, when a bullet went through the tail of his machine.¹¹

⁶ <https://turkeyswar.com/whoswho/otto-liman-von-sanders>

⁷ Hudson Fysh, Author Grantlee Kieza 2022 p.67

⁸ Alfred William Leslie Ellis, born 14th October 1894, Steiglitz, Victoria,; died 22nd January 1948, Sydney

⁹ Hudson Fysh, Author Grantlee Kieza 2022 p.68

¹⁰ Hudson Fysh, Author Grantlee Kieza 2022 p.75

¹¹ Hudson Fysh, Qantas rising, p. 72

‘Lawrence flew to Azraq and brought back the Emir Feisal and Nuri esh Shalan in a car, to find Ross Smith’s Handley-Page unloading amid a crowd of Arab spectators who called it the “*The aeroplane*” and the fighters its foals.’¹²



Official Australian War Photographer, Frank Hurley, aerial photograph of No. 1 Squadron Australian Flying Corp, Mejdal, Palestine, 1918.

‘Lawrence’s agents began buying up large quantities of horse feed, dropping hints that they were required for the British cavalry...The most famous of the hoodwinking ruses was the construction of dummy horses. 15,000 of them were erected in the Jordan Valley area. They had been used there in smaller numbers earlier in the summer, purely so as to attract enemy aircraft from the real horse lines. They were made of canvas stuffed with straw, bamboo and wooden poles, many of them

¹² Armageddon , 1918 The Final Palestinian Campaign of World War 1, Cyril Falls, p.106

with real horse rugs and real nose-bags upon their dummy heads... In fact our pilots reported that sacks stuffed with brushwood cast in the strong sunlight just as deep a shadow and were effective enough to cozen from the air...”¹³



Capt. Ross Smith (left) and observer with their Bristol F.2B Fighter, in Palestine, February 1918.

Smith once famously interrupted his breakfast with T.E. Lawrence, the desert commander to jump into his machine with his observer ‘Pard’ Mustard,¹⁴ ‘climb like a cat up the sky’ and shoot down an enemy aircraft before returning within a few minutes. Lawrence recalled that Smith jumped ‘gaily out of his machine’, swearing that ‘the Arab front was the place [to be]’.¹⁵ The plucky South Australian hardly had time to finish his still warm sausages and tea before he was air borne again, helping to destroy another enemy attack.

Later in the campaign, Fysh would hand deliver a number of messages to Lawrence as the Englishman marshalled his Arab forces...later, Fysh joined missions bombing the Hedjaz Railway and a large viaduct south-west of Amman in heavy rain and even heavier ground fire¹⁶.

¹³ Lord Anglesey; A History of British Cavalry: Vol. 5 1914-1919 Egypt, Palestine and Syria, Leo Cooper, London, 1995

¹⁴ Ernest Andrew (Pard) Mustard, Born 21 September 1893, Oakleigh Melbourne; died 10 October 1971, Coolangatta, Queensland.

¹⁵ T.E Lawrence, Seven Pillars of Wisdom, Jonathan Cape, 1935

¹⁶ Leslie Williams Sutherland’s Account of Operations of the 1st Squadron, A.F.C., 40th Wing, R.F.C.. 1917-1919, p. 35, State Library of NSW, World War 1 diaries, Item: 04, E



At noon on 27 March Fysh was operating the rear machine guns on Addison's Bristol Fighter when they found three groups of Turkish cavalry, of about 250 men each, in the hills, south west of Kuttrani. They Flew low over the ancient Crusader castle of Kerak; seeing Turkish cavalry in the courtyard, they dropped an eleven-kilogram bomb right in among them. The airmen then pursued the horsemen over the plains with machine-gun fire.¹⁷ Later, when Lawrence of Arabia visited Fysh's squadron at their new base in Ramla¹⁸, Lawrence told Fysh he had been at the castle in disguise when the bomb dropped, and it had created carnage.¹⁹

The Four Horses, the Four 'Dummy' Horses, and the End of a Long War

Towards the end of the Battle of Armageddon Liman Von Sanders would '.. avoid being captured by the Light Horsemen whilst in bed in Nazareth,'²⁰ as reported in the Australian press in 1927 given he had... 'been swamped by 'Edmund Allenby's much larger British force in the September 1918 Battle of Megiddo.'²¹

'The one man mainly responsible for the escape of the German General Liman von Sanders from the clutches of the Australian Light Horse after the defeat of the Turkish army in Palestine was a chauffeur named Tiecke. The fact was disclosed by a chance conversation at a London motor cycle show, between, the manager of an English firm (Mr. C. Wilson) and a German agent. Mr. Wilson

¹⁷ Cutlack, pp. 109-110

¹⁸ Also known as Ramleh

¹⁹ Hudson Fysh, Qantas rising, p. 53

²⁰ <https://www.firstworldwar.com/bio/liman.htm>

²¹ <https://www.firstworldwar.com/bio/liman.htm>

remarked- "I was in the air force in Palestine during the war, and once chased General von Sanders in a car." Tieceke laughed. "Ye we had to move fast. I was driving the General's car, and kept to narrow lanes. The Australians missed us by the merest fraction".²²

From Gallipoli's tragedy to Armageddon's triumph, the journey of the Anzacs reveals a deeper truth: that history, myth, and human ingenuity intertwine in the most unexpected places. On a battlefield long associated with apocalypse, they helped deliver, not destruction but conclusion to; 'the war to end all wars'.

The four "dummy" horses become an emblem of an entire phantom force that deceived the enemy, protected Allied lives, and enabled a decisive victory.

Lest We Forget

John Kelly

January 2026



²² <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/34421240>

Western Argus Western Australia General' Narrow Escape, Echo of Palestine Campaign







