



'Dummy Horse'
Bronze Sculpture
Jordan Valley

From Gallipoli to Armageddon

From Gallipoli to Armageddon The ANZACs, the Dummy Horses, and the Forgotten Victory That helped End a War

John Kelly

'His doubt will be growing, even as we speak. His eye is now straining towards us, blind almost to all else that is moving. So we must keep it. Therein lies all our hope. This then is my counsel...we must at all costs keep his Eye from his true peril.'

The Lord of the Rings
J.R.R. Tolkein

For more than a century, the story of the ANZACs has been tethered to the tragedy of Gallipoli: the doomed landing, the impossible cliffs, the appalling losses, and the birth of a national myth. But this familiar narrative obscures a deeper, more surprising truth. **The ANZACs most decisive contribution to the First World War did not occur in 1915—but three years later, in a blistering desert valley and on a battlefield the Book of Revelation called Armageddon.**

There, in September 1918, **Australians** played a central role in one of history's most successful military deceptions. Their ingenuity helped shatter the Ottoman armies, collapse a centuries-old empire, and hasten the end of the war. This is the story largely absent from our

commemorative speeches: a story not of defeat, but of brilliance, audacity, and victory. **The Campaign Australia Forgot**

By mid-1918, the British General Edmund Allenby, was preparing the final offensive of the Sinai–Palestine campaign. The plan depended on one critical condition: **the Turks had to believe the real danger lay elsewhere**. Allenby needed the enemy fixated on the Jordan Valley—one of the most inhospitable places on earth—while the real striking force slipped away undetected.

To pull off this deception, he turned to **Major General Sir Harry Chauvel**, commander of the Desert Mounted Corps and the first Australian to lead a corps in battle.

Chauvel later wrote:

“ Having decided to attack, when the time came, on the Mediterranean coast, General Allenby determined to keep the enemy’s attention concentrated on the Jordan Valley flank. As a first measure it was necessary to keep the Cavalry on that flank until the last minute, as the enemy, in any of their “ appreciations ”, had always said that “ wherever the Cavalry are in the British lines, that is where we may expect trouble from ’. As a second measure, he gave me ‘ carte blanche ’ to do anything I could think of, regardless of cost, to keep the enemy thinking that we would attack from the Jordan Bridgeheads. This gave great scope for ingenuity on the part of my staff. We gradually built huge dummy ammunition dumps in the rear of each Bridgehead. We laid Decauville railway lines from the foot of the Jerusalem Road to these dummies. We erected a beautiful white bridge, which nobody would ever use, across one of the wadis; and most important of all, we built thousands of dummy horses, out of old blankets or overcoats stuffed with straw, with sticks for legs, to be left standing in the lines when the Cavalry moved out for their concentration on the other flank. ”¹

It was an invitation to creativity on a scale rarely seen in modern warfare.

¹ This text was sent to the artist by Chauvel’s Grand-daughter Honor Auchinlek in May 2025 who described it thus: ...’the text about the dummy horses etc came from a volume of letters from my grandfather to my grandmother and transcribed by my grandmother. The original is in the archive in the AWM.’

Creating an Army of Ghosts

What followed was extraordinary. In the shimmering heat of the Jordan Valley—where Australian troopers such as Walter Campbell, a Jackaroo from Red Hill near Tumut serving with the 6th Light Horse, and Corporal Smith battled 40–50°C days, swarms of mosquitoes, and the constant threat of malaria—the ANZACs built an army that did not exist. It was a phantom force, conjured from canvas, timber, and ingenuity, designed to mislead the enemy and shape the course of the campaign.

They built:

- **15,000 dummy horses**, made from blankets, canvas, old coats, and stuffed with straw;
- **dummy camps and tent lines** filled with mannequins, empty boots, and staged fires;
- **dummy bridges** over wadis—beautiful but useless;
- **fake Decauville railway lines** feeding imaginary supply dumps;
- **dummy artillery positions** with captured Ottoman guns facing east;
- **dust clouds**, created by dragging tree branches behind mule teams to mimic troop manoeuvres;
- **false wireless transmissions** sent from abandoned command posts.

British West Indian, Indian, and Jewish battalions were marched in visible loops during daylight to simulate reinforcements. Horse races were organised in Jericho, their posters deliberately spread through local markets. **Arab irregulars under T. E. Lawrence** staged raids east of the Jordan and bought up barley “to feed the great cavalry force” that supposedly remained there.

And above all, the Royal Air Force—supported by the Australian Flying Corps—swept enemy aircraft from the sky. None of this deception would have worked if German and Ottoman pilots had been able to observe the valley clearly.

As evidence of success, British forces later found an Ottoman reconnaissance report dated **17 September 1918**:

“Far from there being any diminution of the cavalry in the Jordan Valley, there is evidence of twenty-one more squadrons.”

In reality, only one division remained.

The Break-Out

Preparations for the Battle of Megiddo – also known as the Battle of Armageddon, the final Allied Offensive of the Sinai and Palestine campaign – were underway, General Allenby's Air Commander 'Biffy Borton' had flown a massive Handley Page 0/400 biplane bomber, with a thirty-metre wing span, from England to Alexandria to play a key role in the battle. At the time, the flight was the longest in history. Borton handed the machine over to the Australian Ross Smith.²

... On 16th of September 1918, Australian, British, Arab and Gurkha troops under the command of T. E. Lawrence began destroying railway lines that supplied the Turkish forces. Three days later, at 1.15 a.m., Ross Smith, piloting the giant Handley Page 0/400, launched the battle of Armageddon when he dropped the massive machines full load of bombs on the telephone exchange and railway station in Al-Afuleh.

On the night of 19 September 1918, the Jordan Valley appeared unchanged: dummy horses stood silent in their lines, fake camps glowed faintly in the dusk, and real guards patrolled among phantoms.

But dozens of kilometres away, under the orange and olive groves near Jaffa, the truth unfolded. **The bulk of Allenby's infantry and all of Chauvel's cavalry had already slipped out**, moving under cover of darkness to the coast. At first light, the British artillery opened fire. The Mediterranean offensive smashed through the Ottoman Eighth Army, and the mounted troops charged through the breach, galloping across the plain toward ancient **Megiddo**—the site long associated with Revelation's final battle.

Chauvel wrote to his wife Sybil:

"I am overlooking the plain of Armageddon... We have done a regular Jeb Stuart ride."



Light horseman advancing across the Megiddo plain 22 September 1918

Lejjun, Palestine, Ottoman Empire (modern Israel) photographer James

Campbell (1865–1935) Australian War Memorial (B00256)

The breakthrough was catastrophic for the Ottomans. Their retreating armies were cut off. Within weeks, the Empire sought terms of surrender. The war in the Middle East was effectively over.

A Moment of Humanity Amid the Ruins

One final, remarkable scene deserves to be remembered. On 28 September 1918, Australian Light Horsemen advanced on a large Turkish encampment south of Amman. Outnumbered ten to one, they prepared for desperate resistance. Instead, they were greeted with relief. After years of bitter fighting—from Gallipoli to Gaza, Beersheba, and Megiddo—the long-time adversaries exchanged cigarettes, laughed, shared food, and attempted conversation through gestures and broken words. The Turks praised the horsemanship and courage of the Australians; the Australians expressed their respect in return. It was a brief, brilliant moment when humanity outshone the machinery of war.

A Legacy Hidden in Plain Sight

Why has this victory—the victory that helped end the war—nearly vanished from our national memory? Partly because it lacks the tragic resonance of Gallipoli. Partly because it took place far from home, in a campaign overshadowed by the Western Front. And partly because the sheer scale of deception is difficult to condense into simple myth. Yet this story matters. It reveals the ANZACs not only as courageous soldiers, but as creative, adaptable, and strategically vital contributors to a global conflict. It shows that their legacy is richer than sacrifice alone.

Allenby fully understood the stakes. In June 1918 he warned:

“If the Jordan Valley falls, you lose Egypt; and you lose the Empire which hinges thereon.”

The Anzacs held it—and transformed it into the setting for one of history’s greatest military illusions.

In an age grappling with the ethics of war, misinformation, and the power of narrative, their ingenuity speaks across time. The dummy horses, the fictional railways, the phantom brigades, and the dust raised by branches dragged across the desert—they remind us that wars are not won only by numbers or firepower, but by imagination. More than a century later, perhaps it is time to place **Armageddon** beside **ANZAC Cove** in our national memory: not as a replacement, but as a long-overdue **restoration of the full story**.

John Kelly
January 2026

Armageddon, 1918

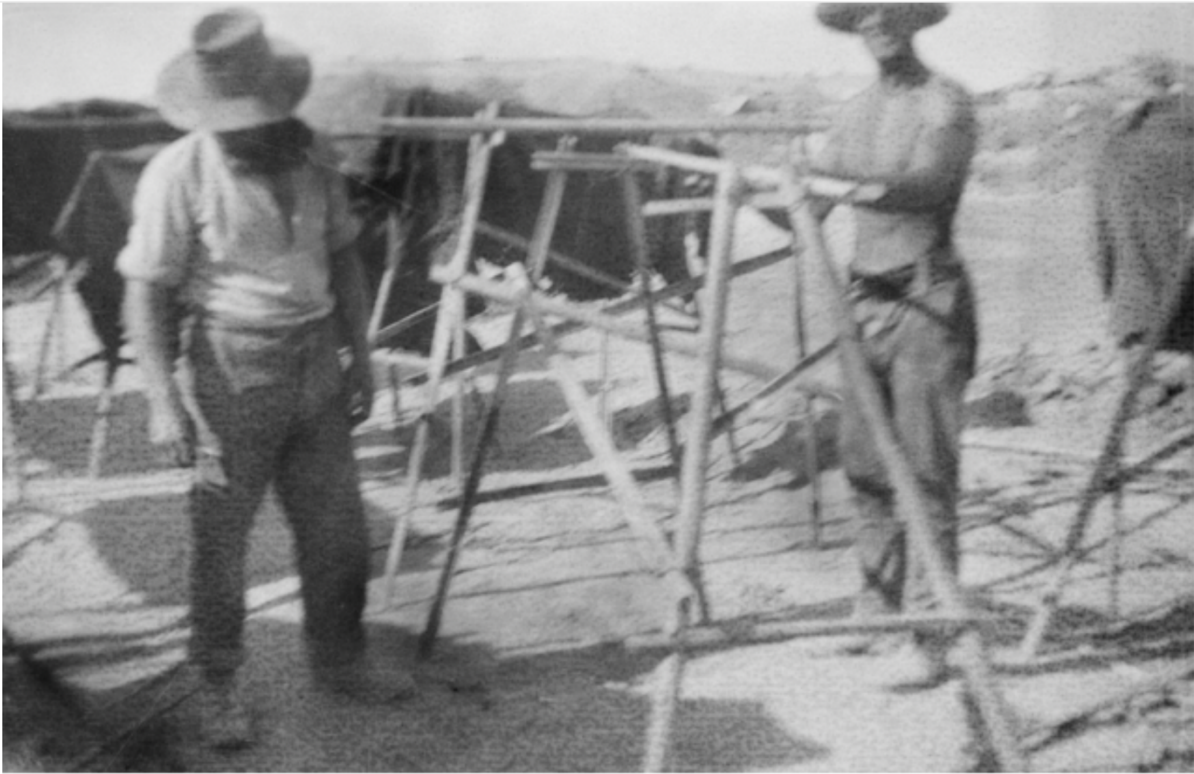
The Final Palestinian Campaign of World War I

Cyril Falls



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

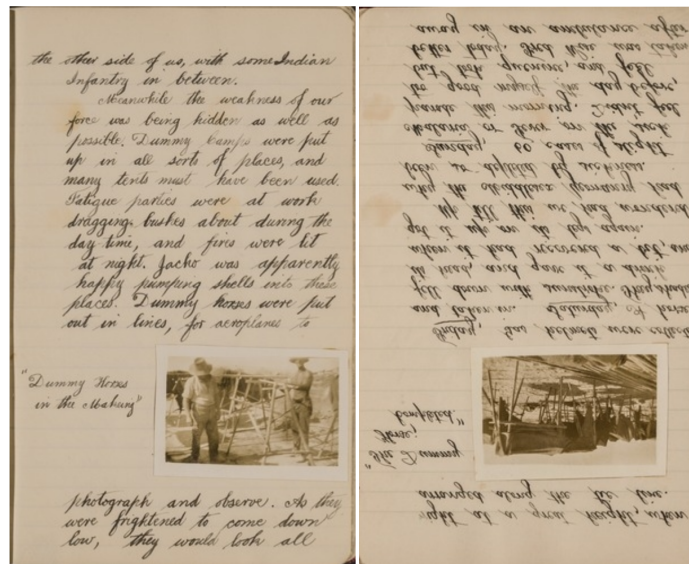
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AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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DUMMY HORSES BEING MADE BY CORPORAL SMITH AND ANOTHER MAN, 6TH LIGHT HORSE REGIMENT, IN THE JORDAN VALLEY, ABOUT 1918-09-04. (DONATED BY MR. W.M. CAMPBELL.



The Australian Trooper Walter Campbell, a Jackeroo from Red Hill near Tumut of the Australian 6th Light Horse records in his diary along with photographs from the first week of September 1918 the construction of the Dummy horses.

*'... the weakness of our force was being hidden as well as possible. Dummy camps were put up in all sorts of places and many tents must have been used... **Dummy horses were put out in lines**, for aeroplanes to photograph and observe. As they were frightened to come down low, they would look all right at a great height, when arranged along the tie line.'*

Further research on this history can be found via the link below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kpXFBahXXnM&t=131s>

**Australia and the 'Great Arab Revolt' 1918 Campaign
- A Partnership 'Forged under Fire' -**

Narrated by James P. Brew

أستراليا و"الثورة العربية الكبرى" حملة عام 1918
شراكة "تشكلت تحت النيران"
الراوي: جيمس برو

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4mH7c0vpQtA>

**Only Fools and (Dummy) Horses
The making of a sculpture**

We gratefully acknowledge the use of the photos and film used in this presentation from the following: James P. Brew (Historian), John Kelly (Artist), Australian War Memorial (AWM), Imperial War Museum, State Library of Queensland, Australia and Bronze Art Fine Art Foundry Dublin, Thanks to: John Minihan Photographer, Videozoom