

3: The Army in Roseville: the Engineer Officers' Training School

By Chris Edye

It must have been quite a day.

On 1 December 1917, well into the fourth year of the War, the Australian Engineers' Military Display was held at the Engineer Officers' Training School (EOTS) at Roseville.

During the afternoon there were displays of horse work and exhibitions of infantry and bayonet fighting, wireless station work and telephone wire running, and field engineering involving the erection of a composite mast, loading wagons, swinging derrick, pontooning, and much more. In the evening there was a display of 'the wounded despatch rider'¹ introducing the famous horse 'Gilpin', a spectacular trench raid, and a concert and cinematograph.

The idea behind the display was

to give the New South Wales public some idea of what the soldiers do and what sort of noise high explosives make... one may read all that is obtainable about the trenches, artillery, tanks, aeroplanes, etc., and get a fair idea of what they are like; but no written description will give the reader an adequate notion of what the bursting of a high-explosive shell is like, what sort of illumination is given by star shells and Very lights... these things are to be seen and heard in order to be understood.²

Abandoning any pretence of modesty, the programme announced that the display 'should easily be the best thing of its kind ever done in Australia'.³

It was a brilliant success. 'Thousands of people attended', *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported

an exceedingly fine military display ... as a military exhibition it was probably the largest and most successful that has been held in Sydney since the commencement of the war ... One of the most exciting events of the display, however, was during the night programme, when the great crowd of spectators watched with keen interest a night trench raid and the destruction of barbed wire barricade with high explosives.⁴

The *Sunday Times* estimated an attendance of 8,000,⁵ *The Australasian* in Melbourne reported that

all the world and his relatives seemed to gravitate to Roseville Park on Saturday afternoon and evening ... thousands of people had their evening meal in the big tents ... The intensely dark night made the proceedings very weird. Every time a star shell burst overhead, showing dim figures rushing forward, and guns crackled, women shrieked with unaffected terror.⁶

Not only were those attending treated to a 'spectacular display' but each was also charged one shilling entrance fee to help the war effort.⁷

All of this, on the sleepy North Shore!

6: A Campaign with Horses and Camels

from the Sinai Desert to Palestine and Syria 1916-18

By David S Wilkins

The security of the Suez Canal was vital to the Allied war effort. This strategic importance of the canal derived from it providing the shortest access to the major sea routes for British Empire battleships, its troopships and the supply ships. Well aware of this, the Germans and Turks set out to disrupt its use, and as early as February 1915 an aggressive Ottoman force approached from several directions across the Sinai Desert to launch an attack. The Turks came very close but were repulsed and the security of the canal remained intact.



Troops of the Imperial Camel Corps Brigade.
Photograph AWM B01627.

Following the allied evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula in December 1915 the Ottoman government, reelling in its defeat of the Anglo-French naval and land forces, was encouraged to expand its own empire by invading Egypt, and indeed was manipulated by the Germans to proceed with the plan.

The new British commander of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF), General Sir Archibald Murray, decided in January 1916 to revise the allied force's strategy by extending its defensive line into the desert to the east of the

canal. He established a patrol base at Katia, an oasis 25 miles to the east, and commenced the construction of a railway and a water pipeline for its logistical support. The depot and starting point for this EEF supply line, as it advanced across the Sinai Desert, was Kantara, an Egyptian town and railway junction connecting the Suez railway to Cairo (see Map 6.1). Kantara also became the base for No 1 Squadron of the Australian Flying Corps that conducted flights in support of the allied progress across the Sinai and later on through Palestine, reporting the enemy troop movements and dropping bombs.



Ronald Chesterley Gregory, on extreme right, training at Rutherford Camp, Maitland March 1916 with the 9th Machine Gun Company. Photograph Vera Stutchbury.

Nutter Greenwell 'of Strathfield' died at Royal North Shore Hospital on 16 June 1956.

THE TWO GREGORY BROTHERS OF TURRAMURRA

Ronald (b.1896) and Eric (b.1899), both born at Turramurra, were sons of cricketer and public servant David William Gregory (d.1919) and his second wife Lillies Leslie McMillan (d.1911). David Gregory was the pre-eminent member of the famous 19th century Australian cricketing family. He captained the colonial team that defeated the English tourists in the first Australia-England test match in 1877. The next year he captained the Australian team that defeated the Marylebone Cricket Club at Lords.

When Ronald and Eric enlisted they nominated their father as next of kin. They were both living at home, at *The Hermitage*, Kissing Point Road, Turramurra, neighbours of Walter R Fry whose two sons Harry and Bruce served in the War (see Volume I, pp.385-388).

GREGORY, Eric David

• Turramurra Memorial Park
• Warrawee Public School Roll of Honour

On 30 July 1917, Eric Gregory enlisted in the Citizens' Military Force aged just 17 years and nine months. His service number was 599 and he was drafted to No 2 District Guard as a Bugler. It appears that Eric was keen to serve overseas as he overstated his age by four months when he presented himself in December 1917. However, his father gave the correct birth date as 14 October 1899, supported by verification from the Registrar-General.

39427 Gunner Gregory left Sydney on SS *Port Darwin* on 30 April 1918 with the 34th Reinforcements, Field Artillery Brigade (FAB)

bound for England via Suez, Egypt. After spending three months training in England Gregory joined the 103rd Howitzer Battery, 3rd FAB in France on 28 October. It appears that the last action of the brigade was on 4 October south east of Cambrai. When Gregory joined them they had been withdrawn from the line. He returned to Australia aboard the *Aeneas*, arriving on 12 January 1920 and declared himself 'fit and well' before his discharge on 4 February. During his absence overseas his father died, on 4 August 1919.

In 1923 he married Kathleen Doris Waterson, younger sister of his brother Ronald's wife, Elizabeth Mary Waterson. By 1930 they were working Farm 1904, Griffith, NSW next to his brother Ronald's Farm 1177. They had moved to Pennant Hills where Eric worked as a postmaster by the mid 1940s. Eric died in 1950 survived by his wife, three daughters and one son.

GREGORY, Ronald Chesterley, MM

• Turramurra Memorial Park

In the tradition of returned men, Ronald Gregory never spoke of the act of bravery that earned him the Military Medal. It was only after his death in 1958 that his widow requested a copy of his citation from the Army Records Office. She was 'advised that the citation for the award of the Military Medal to your late husband is not now available.'

In the early 1910s Ronald went to work on the Waterson farm near Bega, NSW.

He soon fell in love with the eldest daughter Elizabeth. War broke out; Ron enlisted in the Light Horse, and then transferred to the 9th Machine Gun Company. After training in NSW he embarked on the HMAT Benalla, and as he had not been given final leave to go to

Lieutenant Richard
Lewis Hay Blake Jenkins
(right standing) and
Lieutenant S Ryrie
(left seated).
Photograph Tim and
Clare Jenkins.



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RLAB Jenkins and RA

S. Ryrie Lieut RN
Green's Godfather