

A VERY SCARCE 5TH AUSTRALIAN LIGHT HORSE, PALESTINE 1917, THIRD BATTLE OF GAZA M.M. AWARDED TO AN N.C.O. WHO WAS LATER WOUNDED IN ACTION ON 19 APRIL 1918 WHEN HIS REGIMENT WAS OPERATING AROUND JERICHO NEAR THE RIVER JORDAN. HIS WOUNDS WERE SO SEVERE HE WOULD BE RETURNED TO AUSTRALIA TO BE DISCHARGED



MILITARY MEDAL, G.V.R. '876 L.CPL H. A. JOHNSON: 5/AUSTR:L.H.R.'

M.M. *London Gazette* 2 April 1918

Harold Ambrose Johnson was born at Sandford, Essex in 1891 and moved to Australia before the Great War. He enlisted into the Australian Imperial Forces on 15 March 1915, joining the 5th Australian Light Horse as part of the 4th Reinforcements at Gallipoli at 25 May 1915. The Regiment was raised in Brisbane in September 1914, entirely from men who enlisted in Queensland and became part of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade. The Brigade had itself had landed in mid May 1915 and was attached to the 1st Australian Division. The 5th Light Horse played a defensive role for most of the campaign but saw particular hard service around 'Wilson's Lookout' during October and November, during which time it was severely depleted by illness. Johnson was one of the latter and was invalided to Hospital on 24 November with Cellulitis and transported to Tigne Hospital on Malta.

Johnson transferred to All Saints Camp, Malta on 14 December and was discharged by 20 December, the day the 2nd Light Horse Brigade left the Gallipoli Peninsular. Travelling to Egypt he disembarked at Alexandria on 26 December 1915 and marched with his regiment to Maadi in February 1916, when the 2nd Light Horse Brigade became part of the ANZAC Mounted Division. Here they joined the forces defending the Suez Canal from a Turkish advance across the Sinai Desert. The 5th Light Horse's main activity in the Sinai over the next few months would be long-range patrolling. Falling ill again, Johnson was admitted to Hospital, this time with Appendicitis and taken to 31 General Hospital at Port Said on 10 June 1916. Re-joining his unit at Dueidar on 12 October 1916, he was promoted Lance Corporal, 14 May 1917.



During 1917, the 5th's work predominantly continued to be patrols and raids until the advance stalled before the Turkish bastion of Gaza. The regiment participated in all three battles aimed at capturing the town, most notably the first abortive attempt on 27 March 1917. On this occasion the 5th attacked Gaza from the rear and was fighting its way through streets and gardens when ordered to withdraw. At the battle of Beersheba in late October, it helped to secure the Jerusalem road, and captured Tel el Sakaty. In November, the Regiment took part in the pursuit of the retreating Ottoman forces after the Third Battle of Gaza and it was for his actions during the latter period that Johnson would be awarded the M.M. His service papers noting he was awarded the Military Medal for 'Gallantry and devotion to duty in the Field' on 30 November 1917. Though this is likely the confirmation date of award as opposed the date of the deed.

With the fall of Gaza on 7 November 1917, the Turkish position in southern Palestine collapsed. The 5th was involved in the pursuit that followed, and then spent much of the first half of 1918 holding the west bank of the Jordan River. During this time it was involved in the Amman; 24-27 February. Johnson was wounded on 19 April 1918, suffering a gunshot wound to the foot and a shrapnel wound to the buttock. At this time the 5th Light Horse were operating patrols in the vicinity of Jericho, having just crossed the River Jordan that day. Johnson was admitted to 14th Army General Hospital on 25 May 1918. His wounds were of a severe enough nature that in on 12 July 1918 he was returned to Australia for discharge from the Army.

5TH LIGHT HORSE MILITARY MEDALS

The 5th Light Horse War Diary for list the award of nine M.M.'s and one M.C. (Lieutenant Ogg) for honours gained during the month of November 1917 – Johnson noted here incorrectly as 976 Richards (who was not an M.M. recipient). Like Johnson, seven of the other men from the 5th Light Horse on official recommendation pages have no citations. They are simply marked as "Deed Not Available". Just one of the nine; Corporal Mouritz, has a citation but this recommendation is for September 1917. Another of the nine; Sergeant Cox, is mentioned in the Regimental history as having performed a lone deed of gallantry in November 1917 but has no citation. This leaves seven men (including Johnson) with no specific reason for their award. As such presumably the citations for the 5th Light Horse have been filed somewhere else and yet to be located. Lieutenant Ogg awarded MC for taking two guns with his troop and it is probable some of these will be for this action also.

Lance Corporal Johnson's award is one of just eighteen M.M.'s awarded to the 5th Light Horse during the Great War

A transcription of the 5th Light Horse Regimental history can be found here:

https://www.anzacs.org/5lhr/pages/5lhr_history_full_a.html

Details on the 2nd Light Horse Brigade here:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2nd_Light_Horse_Brigade

5TH LIGHT HORSE REGIMENTAL HISTORY FOR NOVEMBER 1917

Having watered our horses during the night at Beersheba wells, the Regiment was detached next morning and ordered to reconnoiter in the Judean Hills towards Hebron, in the direction of Dhaheriyeh. On reaching a point near Makruneh, the enemy was found to be holding the ridges in some strength and they opened fire with two guns and machine guns. They had created a new flank based on the commanding position of Khuweilfe. In the afternoon the Regiment moved forward to reconnoiter Deir Suideh, but found the enemy holding a strong position, which checked our advance. A withdrawal was made to B.H.Q. at dusk, where we watered and bivouacked for the night.. The following days, from the 2nd November to the 5th November, further reconnaissance's with the full Brigade were made, and at night touch was maintained with the enemy who were still holding the hills in strength. It had been the intention on the 3rd to attack if possible and work round the enemy's left flank. The country, however, was extraordinarily rugged and difficult, and in many places the horses had to be led up and down the hills. Enemy reinforcements could be seen hurrying down the Hebron Road in motor lorries. We were shelled most accurately during these days although we had good cover, and it was apparent

that Bedouin spies were at work. On the 5th four guns concentrated their fire on us and caused casualties-nine men wounded, 14 horses killed and 17 horses wounded.

On the 6th we were withdrawn from the enemy's left flank (there was no water for our horses there) and we took up the pursuit more from the centre through El Sheria, which position had just fallen. Pressure and pursuit were our duties henceforth across the Philistine Plain. The enemy were holding fairly well to their left flank in the very rugged country, but now their centre had given way. The retreat, however, was not by any means a rout. Their artillery heavily shelled our advance and we were counter-attacked strongly on occasions.



On the 8th two guns were captured by Lieutenant Ogg. For his gallant services on this occasion he was awarded the Military Cross. On the 9th at Kuridaba a large convoy was reported moving N.E., protected by infantry. The 5th Regiment, with the 7th on the right, after a gallop of seven miles, came up with the enemy at Suafie. Pursuit was continued to El Kustine and by this time 300 prisoners were taken and a large amount of booty. The advance continued from day to day, with strong opposition generally, and we had the experience on one occasion at nightfall of facing point blank shrapnel fire from two field guns. The artillery at all times was splendidly served by Austrians and Germans. On another occasion Corporal C. E. Cox was responsible for a fine individual effort. He was in advance with his section when two howitzer guns were come across apparently just abandoned. He immediately galloped over the brow of a hill in search of the gun teams and he there saw three men mounted and getting away. Corporal Cox was well mounted and out-distancing his own section and another section which had been sent to his support, accounted for all the three. After a gallop of more than a mile, he would fling himself from his horse when within range and, with bridle over his arm, bring his rifle to bear on horse or man, and then would mount again and continue the pursuit of the remainder. The last man's horse had been brought down, and he took cover behind a boulder, and then with his artillery rifle (he was an

Austrian officer) fired at Corporal Cox at only about 20 yards range. Cox, however, was also ready with a second shot, and he won this duel even against these odds. Altogether, he had five shots in this pursuit and every one took effect. It was really as brilliant a piece of individual Light Horse work as one could imagine. He received the M.M.

The pursuit of the enemy continued until November 18th, when the objective was reached and an entrenched outpost line was taken up east of Jaffa and overlooking the river Auja. Hotchkiss rifles were invaluable in the pursuit. The following is an instance how they could be used to deceive the enemy as to our strength. The advance troop (about 20 men) approached a village in which were probably 100 of the enemy endeavoring to get stores away by train. Without any definite target the Hotchkiss opened fire. When the troop advanced covered by this fire, the enemy dispersed and much booty was captured, including 1,500 rifles, without a casualty in the troop. From 30th October to the 18th November 120 miles of enemy country had been covered, 629 prisoners were taken, and four guns, 1,500 rifles and much other booty fell to the Regiment. This defeat of the Turkish Army and the pursuit up the Philistine Plains, over rolling downs country, was a tremendous change for us all. Gaza, of evil fame, was no more - the two disastrous battles there, with the months following of continuous dust, heat, road making, patrols, reconnaissance's, etc., were in the limbo of the past. What a change had General Allenby wrought! Oranges obtained during the pursuit were a great treat.

The Turkish Army was now cut in two, and the Regiment's duty from 18th November was to assist in holding the left half of our line. The enemy were at all times active and made frequent attacks. Horses were sent to the rear, and it was trench warfare again. It was impossible to work on the trenches during daylight owing to enemy fire, and at night time every available man was kept digging and improving trenches. The Jewish village of Mulebbis was just in front of us, under enemy occupation.



Condition VF. Sold together with a file of research including service records, Gazettes, Pages from War Diary November 1917 and April 1918 and other research. A very scarce award to the 5th Light Horse