



# HELM



## Heritage of East Lake Macquarie

APRIL 2019

email: helm2281@gmail.com

### LIGHT HORSEMEN



Horses have always been important in our history. At first, they were the only means of transport. During the 1899 Boer War in South Africa, the slouch-hatted Aussie "bushmen" and their horses proved to be a match for the mounted Boer commandoes. They were hardened to go for long periods with little food and water, good shots, and able to find their way in strange territory and use its features for cover.

At the beginning of WWI, Australia promised 4 Light Horse regiments; 2,000 men to join the British fight against Germany. By the end of the war, 16 regiments were in action. The Light Horse attracted young men, mostly from the country. Many brought their own horses, ready for adventure. If they passed riding and medical tests, they were accepted and issued with their uniforms. *Source: lighthorse.org.au*



Boer War; WWI 1  
Light Horsemen 2  
Sam Dhnaram 3-4

We are now on FACEBOOK! Check us out at:  
**HELM (Heritage of East Lake Macquarie).**  
Tell your stories - help keep our heritage alive!



first  
national  
REAL ESTATE

| Andrew McGrath

Kindly supporting the community –  
including Caves Beach Surf Life Saving Club; this edition of HELM newsletter.

**4972 1066 - NOW AT SWANSEA!  
SWANSEA PLAZA ARCADE**

Near Coles and Blondies.

## LIFE AS LIGHT HORSEMEN

Many army horses were bought from graziers and breeders. They were called "walers" because they were New South Wales stock horses - strong and big-hearted. A mixture of thoroughbred and semi-draught horse, they had great speed, strength and stamina. In camp the horses were tethered by head and heel ropes, between long ropes called picket lines. This meant they could never lie down. Saddle and equipment were placed in front of each horse. Each morning they were watered, fed, groomed; and lines cleaned up, before breakfast. The men slept in bell tents – eight to a tent, feet to the centre like the spokes of a wheel. They were already skilled horsemen and good shots. Most of their training was drill and fighting techniques.



They worked in groups of 4; 3 men would dismount to fight; the fourth would lead the horses to safety. All supplies were carried by man and horse. Extra clothing, food and personal items were in a canvas haversack over one shoulder; a 1 litre water bottle over the other. His bandolier with 90 rounds of ammunition supplemented the .303 rifle slung over the shoulder with another 10 rounds; then another 50 in his belt; which also supported the bayonet. Specially designed saddles with pouches carried a large array of equipment, with least discomfort. Across the front was strapped a rolled greatcoat and waterproof ground sheet. Mess tin, canvas water bucket and nosebag with a day's grain ration, were slung to the back of the saddle. The soldier's blanket was sometimes carried in a roll or spread under the saddle. Most added a billy, and a tin or enamel plate. Extra ammunition was slung around the horse's neck, a large grain sack – "sandbag" across saddle wallets, extra nosebag behind. Fully loaded the "walers" often carried up to 150 kgs; often over long distances; in extreme heat; sometimes without water for anything up to three days.

Source: [lighthorse.org.au](http://lighthorse.org.au)

## THE EMU PLUME

The tradition began in Qld during the great shearers strike in 1891. The Qld infantry were called in. When they had spare time, they had a sporting activity where they would ride their horses beside the emus and pluck the breast feathers; then place them on their hat. The fashion soon took on; the Qld Govt recognised it as part of their uniform; later all units of Australian Light Horse had permission to wear the plume. The feathers are very fine and many have to be collected to make up a plume.



## LIGHT HORSE INTERCHANGE SCULPTURE, WALLGROVE

The sculpture is dedicated to the troops who served, and the horses which did not return. Beside the M4 and M7 intersection, was a major training camp – at Wallgrove, west of Sydney. During WWII, the Light Horse patrolled the nearby main water supply pipeline. The sculpture has a central mast and four sets of markers representing the Light Horse on parade. The mast and beacon symbolise a torch in the dark. The red colour of the markers represents the Flanders poppies and the blood sacrificed. The diagonally cut pole is to show the slouch hat; the steel wires at the top are the emu plumes. The white band is a reference to the departing soldiers' innocence of war. The horses are represented by their absence, as the soldiers were unable to bring them home due to quarantine regulations. The old and sick horses were shot, the remainder were handed over to British units.

Source: RTA



## SAM DHNARAM

Sam is well known in the area, leading Swansea's Anzac Day marches with his light horse for many years.

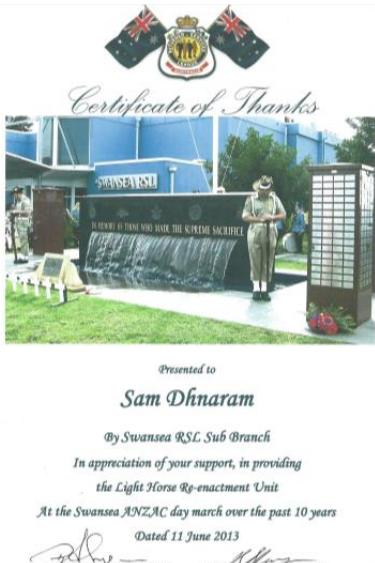


Photo far right shows the perfect sync of Sam and horse – same foot forward. The riderless horse with the empty saddle represents the soldier who did not come home; the boots facing backwards.

*Photos courtesy of Sam Dhnaram*

Sam was born in February 1938, in a tiny rural community, Homeleigh; these days a 15 minute drive north-east of Kyogle; then continuing another 40 minutes to Murwillumbah. The small community of about 150, consists of farmlets, livestock, and mixed farming, with the Border Ranges in the background. Back in the day there was no time for gazing at the scenery.

Sam's parents came to the area in 1930 from India; his father having served in the British Army. He was able to set up a market garden on one of the properties; exchanging some of the vegetables they grew (carrots, peas, beans) in return for milk. His father died when Sam was 2 years old; leaving his wife, who spoke no English, with 5 boys ranging from 12 to a new born baby. They lived in two small sheds, with much work to do in the garden and getting water. They used a horse and cart to take their produce to the fruit shop. Even so, times were tough, and they often went hungry. School was 5 miles away. Sam mostly rode, but sometimes had to walk. No doubt that is where his love of horses started. Sam left school at 13 to work in the garden and sell produce, carried in bags on each side of a horse at three pence a pound. Then he worked with his uncle with horses and cattle. Sadly, as happens periodically, the area was ravaged by drought, which killed off the farm and everything had to be sold off. Ever resilient, Sam sought out and turned his hand to many jobs - helping a dairy farmer milk cows; cutting cane. His first steady job was as an apprentice painter with the railways, based at Kyogle.

The National Service Scheme was introduced after the beginning of the Korean War. In the 1950s, military training was compulsory for all 18-year-old men. Sam had put up his age to gain his driver's licence sooner, but that backfired, as he now had to enlist. Having completed the required 176 days at Ingleburn, near Liverpool, west of Sydney, he served another 3 years voluntary enlistment.



*Source: RAEME: 1RAR. The army huts were mostly long wooden buildings with small windows and iron roofs, which were freezing in winter and boiling in summer.*

Originally, Ingleburn Army Camp was the first purpose-built camp and major training centre in NSW for soldiers,

engineers, transport and signals for WWII, which had become more technical in terms of weapons and transport. The camp operated for 60 years; and has now mostly become Landcom's Edmondson Park housing estate. In 2013, now known as the Bardia Barracks, the camp was listed on the State Heritage Register. (Named after Bardia, the Mediterranean seaport in Libya where the first Australian troops saw active service in WWII after training at Ingleburn; breaking through the defence of Italian forces.) Tours and open days are conducted; and plans are being made to restore and reuse the former guard house and cell block as a café and museum.

After his Nasho days, Sam continued his painting apprenticeship, and for some 10 years travelled all over the state, painting Tooheys Hotels, which eventually led him to Newcastle. Having to establish himself in a new town; and provide for a family meant a lot of hard work – sometimes doing 3 jobs; including working at Mattara and Swansea Hotels; and having a milk run. The milk run involved working from midnight through to 9am, 7 days a week, from the Dairy Farmers depot on the highway opposite Belmont High School. If the depot was on strike, he would have to go to Newcastle to collect supplies. With increasing competition, milk deliveries were diversified, and soon orange juice, cream and cheese had to be delivered as well.

Developing out of necessity, Sam's interest in horses from an early age never left him. After his stint in the Nashos, he attended monthly meetings, eventually joining the Australian Light Horse – 12<sup>th</sup> Murrurundi troop, over 25 years ago, and participating in many marches, in many places. The Upper Hunter town this year will commemorate for the 25<sup>th</sup> time the courage of those in the Middle East in WWI. Not only honouring the troops, many of whom were stockmen, drovers, farmers and station hands; but also, the horses which carried everything needed for fighting and survival in the cold and the searing heat. In spite of the strong bonds that were forged between horse and rider in WWI; the joy of going home in 1919 turned to heartbreak as the quarantine decision was handed down to leave the horses behind.



A rider in full light horse uniform leads the Reserve Forces Day parade in Newcastle.

*Photo provided by Norm Worth*

The full Light Horse uniform is the same as that worn in WWI, sourced from Lawrence Ordinance in Sydney.      *Source: lighthorse.org.au*

Hat – khaki fur felt, Puggaree (band), chinstrap and hat badge  
Emu plumes are fixed behind puggaree – centre of left-hand side of hat  
Jacket khaki- wool serge, with Rising Sun and Australian badges; colours  
Bandolier- (9 pocket 90 round leather); water bottle, haversack  
Waist belt, ammunition pouches. Bayonet on left hand side rear  
Breeches – Bedford cord; laces below knee; held up with braces  
Boots, leggings; spurs with leather butterfly on spur strap.  
Any saddles taken from Aust had to go to Qld to be dipped.

The woollen uniforms were very hot; but when it rained they didn't get wet. A grey horse blanket was carried to sleep on, rolled up in green canvas, which was intended to keep scorpions out. Days for the diggers serving overseas with the Light Horse were very hot; nights freezing cold.



Rising Sun, Kings Crown badge on hat and jacket

#### Disclaimer

: Whilst every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of the information in this newsletter, however, the accuracy of statements or opinions expressed in articles cannot be guaranteed.

© Material contained in this publication is not available for use, duplication or modification in any other publication without the express permission of the editor; published under the auspices of Lake Macquarie and Districts Hist Soc Inc.

HELM IS PRODUCED INDEPENDENTLY FROM THE EAST LAKE MACQUARIE HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR YOUR IDEAS FOR MORE HERITAGE STORIES!!!