



In Memory of

**Lance Corporal
CHARLES HENSLER**

8, 4th Battalion Australian Infantry, A.I.F.
who died age 25
between 6 – 9 August 1915

Sister of Mrs Edith Moss, 3 Fairfield Road, Bow, London, England. Had no other relatives listed upon enlistment

Remembered with honour
LONE PINE MEMORIAL, TURKEY



LANCE CORPORAL
CHARLES HENSLER

4TH BN, AUSTRALIAN INFANTRY
SERVICE NUMBER: 8

The story of **Charles Hensler** provides an interesting lesson in how information was received and dealt with 100 years ago and how modern data banks have allowed us to gain a clearer view of events that happened a century ago.

Charles Hensler was a young English migrant who arrived in Australia in 1911. He was a Londoner, aged 30, tall and fit at over 6 foot and 176 pounds. He wrote his next-of-kin as his sister Mrs Edith Moss of Fairfield Road, Bow, London. We know he was born at Kensall Green, London, and educated at Olga Street School, near Bow. He stated that in Australia he was single, a labourer and had “no other friends or relations”. He also stated that he had served eight years in the Royal Garrison Artillery, “time expired”.

He enlisted at Randwick in Sydney on 17 August 1917, less than a fortnight after the declaration of war. He gave his Sydney address as Fort Street. He was a member of the Church of England, fair complexioned with blue eyes and brown hair. He was posted to the new 4th Battalion, one of the 1st Brigade units mustering in Sydney, assigned to HQ with the very low service number of “8”. The battalion embarked as part of the First Contingent on 20 October 1914 aboard *A14 Euripides* at Sydney and sailed for the Middle East.

After further training in Egypt the 4th Battalion prepared for the attacks at the Dardanelles in April 1915. Charles was part of the Landing force on the morning of the 25 April, the first ANZAC Day. He survived that day and the intense fighting that followed, that saw more than fifty percent of his battalion become casualties. In July Charles was promoted to Lance Corporal.

In early August the men of the 1st Division, including Charles’ 4th Battalion, were prepared for the infamous August Offensive. On 6 August the 4th Battalion was part of the utterly desperate charge and hand-to-hand battle at Lone Pine. From that day he was officially “missing”. Although the struggle lasted several days several witnesses declared that Charles was not seen after the first day. In April 1916 his battalion concluded a court of inquiry into the missing men of August 1915 and amended hundreds of files as “killed in action”. Charles is commemorated on the Lone Pine Memorial at Gallipoli, inscribed with the names of thousands of men who have no known grave. He was 34 when he died.

NB. Charles Hensler has been remembered at Toowoomba Grammar School ever since his death in 1915. Although he may have had no direct connection to TGS, he was mistaken for an old boy of the school, namely Leslie Charles Hensler, who served in the Australian Flying Corps and survived to return home in 1919. Leslie Charles Hensler was a Goondiwindi boy, the son of a prominent local family, three of whose sons served in the AIF, all graduates of TGS. Leslie Charles Hensler also enlisted in Sydney, which may have added to the confusion.

It seems that the publication of the Casualty Lists for August 1915, occurring about a month later, included the name of “Charles Hensler” under the NSW heading; the assumption was made that the past-student had been killed in action. Given the limited communication possibilities available at the time and the uncommon frequency of the surname (only five in the Great War), it is easy to appreciate the circumstances in which Charles Hensler came to be commemorated at TGS.

Toowoomba Grammar School Archive Records state that he started school on 1st January 1912 and left on 31st December 1912.

On the Gallipoli and the Anzacs site courtesy of the Department of Veteran Affairs the following is stated, ‘*The country immediately to the north of the Anzac line at Walker’s Ridge stretched away in a series of long ridges and deeply eroded valleys. These ridges snaked down from the main range leading to the heights of Chunuk Bair and, during the months of May and June 1915, Major Percy Overton, Canterbury Mounted Rifles, scouted the area. He found it lightly held by the Turks. Just as nobody thought the Turks would attack Anzac from the north along the beach, exposed to the guns of the British warships, so the Turks thought themselves free from attack from this seemingly impassible terrain. Only Lieutenant-Colonel Mustafa Kemal thought an attack up these precipitous slopes possible, but his fears were discounted by higher command. Kemal was right. It was from this very direction that the proposed breakout from Anzac was attempted.*

The plan was a complex one. On 6 August there would be a diversionary Australian attack on key Turkish positions on the Lone Pine plateau, strong enough to make the enemy think that this was a major onslaught. As it was in progress, the New Zealand infantry would make its way north from Anzac, into the valleys and then up to a ridgeline just below Chunuk Bair, from where, at dawn on 7 August, that commanding position would be assaulted. An Australian force would also make its way well to the north behind the beach, then swing east into a valley, up to a ridge and on to capture the highest point of the Sari Bair range – Koja Temen Tepe (Hill 971), the ‘hill of the great pasture’. The plan also called for other diversionary attacks in the early hours of 7 August, including one by Australian light horsemen. While all this was going on there would be a new British landing at Suvla Bay during the night of 6-7 August, well north of Anzac at the far end of Ocean Beach, followed by the capture of Turkish positions further inland. Thus would the Turks be confronted by the Anzacs on the heights of Sari Bair and a major new British force inland from Suvla. Might not these strokes win the campaign? At least, so it was thought.

During the morning and early afternoon of 6 August, the New South Welshmen of the battalions of the First Australian Brigade filed into the trenches of Lone Pine. Charles Bean described the scene:

The men chaffed each other drily, after the manner of spectators waiting to see a football match. Some belated messenger hurried along the trench to find his platoon, and, in passing, recognised a friend. ‘Au revoir, Bill’, he nodded, ‘meet you over there’. ‘So long, Tom’. was the answer, ‘see you again in half an hour’.

It was 5.30 pm; Anzac artillery, which had been bombarding the Turkish lines, fell silent; officers’ whistles blew; and the Australians rose from their positions and raced across no-man’s-land. Within half an hour the Turkish trenches, after hard fighting, had been seized and new posts established well into the Turkish position. But the real battle of Lone Pine -- the Turkish efforts over the next three days to take back their lost trenches -- was just beginning. As anticipated, the Turkish commanders saw these positions as essential, and reinforcements were quickly diverted to assist in their recapture.

The Lone Pine fighting for both sides during these Turkish counter-attacks was all about throwing bombs across hastily erected barriers, dashing around corners in trenches and getting off a few rounds at the shapes of advancing men, slipping over the dead and avoiding the dying and wounded. The dead and wounded, according to Sergeant Cyril Lawrence of the 2nd Field Company, Royal Australian Engineers, were impossible to avoid:

Right beside me within a space of fifteen feet, I can count fourteen of our boys stone dead. Ah! It is a piteous sight. Men and boys who yesterday were full of joy and life, now lying there, cold – cold -- dead -- their eyes glassy, their faces sallow and covered with dust ... somebody’s son -- now merely a thing.

For the Anzacs, now the defenders, all efforts went into holding on to the sand bag barriers hastily erected during their attacking phase. Dozens of small-scale actions were fought on 7, 8 and 9 August to hold off the determined Turkish efforts to drive the Australians out of their new Lone Pine positions. Typical of these actions was the one fought by men of the 7th Battalion, from Victoria, on 9 August. Lieutenant Frederick Tubb was in command of a captured Turkish trench and some of his men had been assigned to catch the Turkish bombs (grenades) and hurl them back before they exploded. Gradually, these men were killed or mutilated. One of them, Corporal Frederick Wright, clutched at a bomb that burst in his face, killing him.

Another, Corporal Harry Webb, described by Charles Bean as an 'orphan from Essendon', continued to catch bombs until both his hands had been blown off. He walked out of the Pine and died. Tubb later described what it had been like:

Three different times I was blown yards away from bombs. Our trenches were filled with dead, mostly ours ... We were glad to get out ... I cannot write of details but many of our brave boys were blown to pieces. As fast as we put men in to fill the breaches they were out. I kept sending for reinforcements and bombs, all our bomb throwers were killed and so were those that volunteered to fill their places.

Conditions in Tubb's trench got worse. Tubb himself was wounded and soon only two soldiers were left fighting with him -- Corporals William Dunstan and Alexander Burton. A huge explosion virtually demolished their main barricade and, as Dunstan and Burton worked swiftly to rebuild it, Tubb covered them with his revolver. A bomb now killed Burton and temporarily blinded Dunstan. Reinforcements arrived from nearby and the barricade was held and not again seriously attacked. Tubb, Burton and Dunstan all received the Victoria Cross, the highest award in the British Empire and Commonwealth for bravery in action. Indeed, something of the sheer intensity of the fighting at Lone Pine is evident from the fact that seven Victoria Crosses were awarded to Australians for this action, in addition to a host of other lesser bravery awards.

It was all over by the morning of 10 August, when Turkish counter-attacks ceased. Anzac casualties amounted to more than 2000 killed, wounded and missing, while Turkish losses were estimated at more than 6900.

While the Australians held their gains at Lone Pine, one of the Turkish officers opposing them there, Major Zeki Bey, realised that this was not the main attack. He later told Charles Bean:

... all these days I had been looking over my left shoulder seeing your shells bursting on the rear slopes of Chunuk Bair ... I knew things must be happening at Chunuk Bair which were more critical by far, and, if you succeeded there what use would be our efforts at Kanli Sirt [Lone Pine]?

External Links

[Australian War Memorial Honour Roll](#)

[National Archives of Australia Military Records](#)

[AWM4 unit war diaries Item No 23/4/1 Part 2 May-Sept 1915 4th BN](#)

[ANZAC Portal DVA](#)