

The Soldier Shepherd

Prior to World War I young Charlie Smart was a musterer on Mt Cook Station. He was knowledgeable of the mountain flora and fauna, enjoyed the highcountry clime and shared a strong affinity with animals.

On the out break of hostilities Charlie along with his horse, enlisted in The Mounted Rifles.

He collected up his goods but left his favoured mustering stick, in care, at the homestead.

Five decades on his stick was still there, awaiting his return.



The Soldier Shepherd

In the land of ancient Palestine
Where histories armies marched,
Thro' stoney desert country
Unburned, dry and parched,
Lie the scattered bones of warriors
On lonely indifferent sands,
Bones of once proud gladiators
From great armies, imposingly grand.

Tho' fable immortalised the heros
From antiquity that school boys have read,
Those epics are but human kind's heartbreaks
For a grief, that tears shared.

Away in this far flung region
Committed to an Imperial pledge,
On a namless battlefield at dusk.
Inflamed in a fading red,
Lay the body of an Anzac trooper,
Stilled, - and silently dead.

In war's cauldron of insanity
Though men their reasons lost,
Life its preservation
Was had at any cost.
Devious political policies
Believed important to Empire and Nation,
Vere lives sacrificed to war
Seemed folly by sequential generations.

They were the dashing men of the mounted
Bold daring and young,
Who never in battled wavered
Since first this war begun,
Together with their horses
They forged a bonded band of brothers,
Dependable in a crises
One unto the other.
Each knew what was his duty
By command to perform,
In service, courage and purpose
In the task each was drawn.

They left their island country
For remote Mediterranean shores,
Lured by youthful adventure
Unthinking of the horrors of war.

They paraded drilled and exercised
War's practise of manoeuvres,
In this hot desolate land
Along the frontier, confronting the vexing Druses.

Discordant voices bellowed
Urgent orders and commands,
For the Turks were seen approaching
And headquarters were in alarm.

Troopers scrambled and cursed
At the bugler's call to arms,
As they leapt to the saddle with their rifles
Eager in spirit, of the corps d'e'lam

The line formed up with rifle men
Then dressed off to the right,
Both men and horses fidgeted
As they braced for the fight.

The enemy were steadily approaching
In columns along the rise,
Their dark forms merging
With the dun colours of the sky.

The colonel shouted, "steady boys"
And the order came down the line,
Deploy 3rd. company to their left rear.
Then attacked them from behind.

The gap was closing, - the shooting started
But our troopers sat firm and still,
Our cannon roared and blasted their corps
Yet on they came with a will.

Turk bullets whizzed close to heads
And the inclination was to duck,
But the mounted sat steady in the saddle.
And murmured to each other, - "Good luck".

The very next moment their was firing
On the flank of the enemy rear,
The 3rd. company was on attack
And the Turks broke rank in fear.

The 3rds. battled with a fury
 The Turk flank taken by surprise,
 The enemy began to waver
 Fighting desperately; fighting fiercely for their lives.
 Then the bugler sounded the advance
 The horses reared to go,
 With sabre and carbine at the ready.
 The emotions raced wildly, surging from head to toe.

Riding at the gallop
 Free firing as they went,
 With hideous yelling screams
 On death they were bent.
 The madness of this moment
 Echoed games; of childhood's long ago
 Where in the goodies didn't die.
 And neither did the foe!
 Onwards the troopers thundered.
 Thro' shell, shot and fire,
 Trampling the fallen enemy
 Oblivious to mercie's cries.

A trooper slumped in the saddle
 Another tumbled to the right,
 Then midst the screaming and shrieking
 Came a blinding flash of light.

Young Charlie thrown by the blast
 Awoke wounded about the head,
 All about the scene, was strangely silent -
 His commrades, were those of the dead.

Thro' the mists of mind his mother
 Stood calling by the garden gate,
 And his father gestured he come
 Anxious, - in the void of the wait.

He visioned his home in the hills
 The cheery trees, summer kissed,
 Remembered the fragrant lilac blooms
 Then all became black; in an unconscious darkening drift.

Moving slowly amongst the fallen
 Came orderlies wearing the red cross,
 Bandaging the many who were wounded
 And for the record, - numbering victorie's cost.

They bound up Charlie's injuries
And lifted him onto his mount,
Pointing the way thro' the arid hills
To a dressing station, due by South.

The way was long and broken
Tightly he clung to his horse,
About him the pitching landscape lurched
Consciousness, his last resource.
Tho' courage claims the victory
And daring is that of the bold,
As this trooper gently slipped from his saddle
His life became the sum of the toll.

Twice over the sun did set
Upon the solitary scene,
He lay crumpled amongst the wild flowers
Where peace now reigned as queen,
His horse stood quietly biding
Awaiting his remount,
Waited and waited patiently
The hours of no account.
A trooper from the Green Stone Isles
A southern oceans land;
Lay dead amongst the wild flowers
Bestrewn by desert sands.
A warrior from a far far country
Of green pasture lake and snow,
A warrior once a shepherd
Last called his way leggo!
A man who cherished nature
Four legged were his friends,
And bound within that band of brothers.
His horse; a noble commrade
Ever faithful, unto the end.

Tomhas Mack.
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