

The ANZAC Desert Champions – Haydon and Midnight – by Jill Curry

Australian Curriculum, Year 9 – ACDSEH095

One of the most famous duos amongst the ANZACs in World War 1 was Guy Haydon and his horse Midnight. Guy was 16 when she was born at midnight at their Bloomfield stud in the Hunter Valley, NSW, on October 31, 1905. She was jet black with a white star with three points like a tiara on her head. She became Guy's special horse. Her father was a champion race horse named Tester. Midnight inherited her father's speed and her mother's stamina. Guy was an excellent horseman and trained her well in his duties around the farm.



Guy enlisted in the army together with his younger brother, Barney, and their horses. They joined the 12th Light Horse regiment and sailed off to Cairo in June 1915. When the two brothers were sent into action at Gallipoli, they had to leave their horses behind. After returning to Cairo, Guy was initially assigned another horse but was eventually reunited with his beloved mare after someone recognised the Haydon spur trade mark. As the troops did more training in the desert sands a rivalry arose between the British and the ANZACs as to which were the best horsemen and horses. The "Desert Olympics" were held and Guy and Midnight were chosen to represent the ANZACs. There were three events – a sprint, an obstacle race, and dressage. Guy and Midnight won all three!!!

Midnight performed well in the harsh conditions in the desert battles on the Sinai peninsula. The Waler horses, which had been trained in the Australian bush, had stamina and strength needed to withstand the 50 degree desert summer temperatures and the long tiring treks, mostly at night. The 12th Light Horse regiment were part of the battle of Gaza. When this failed, the General Chauvel decided to trek inland and take the city of Beersheba. After riding for several nights and trying to sleep by day, on arrival at Beersheba the soldiers had to fight all day. As the sun was about to set, the 12th and 4th Light Horse regiments were ordered to line up and charge for the city and its precious ancient wells of Abraham.

800 Light Horsemen defeated 4,000 entrenched Turks in a reckless charge, at lightning pace, jumping the trenches and galloping into town to capture the wells. The horses smelled the water and the riders could not stop them!

Unfortunately, Midnight and Lieutenant Guy Haydon were two of the casualties that day. A bullet went through Midnight's stomach as she jumped the trench, continued through the saddle and lodged in Guy's back, millimetres from his spine. This magnificent black champion sacrificed her life on her 12th birthday, but saved Guy's.



Guy lay all night in agony in a pit with the bullet wound in his back. There was carnage all round him. Four of his mates died right next to him. He humbly accounts that there were others worse off than he, given the groans of agony he could hear. His mare was lying dead just nearby. It was a long, freezing, painful night – the longest in his life.



He was eventually moved the following morning and sent by train to El Arish then on to Cairo, arriving five days after the charge. The bullet was removed but infection was a problem and he had ongoing pain for the rest of his life. His family still have the bullet that was removed.

Back in Australia after recovering, he became a grazier, but was greatly involved in community work, serving on several local boards including a government committee for resettling ex-servicemen and as a city councillor for the Tamarang shire. He had three children, the first being born while he was serving overseas. He passed away in August 1965, aged 76.

Barney survived the charge and rode on into town to secure the wells. He and Polo made it right through to the armistice and he later returned to Australia to become a leading horse judge.

Pictures:

1. <http://www.haydonhorsestud.com.au/news/midnight-the-full-story/>
2. <https://theflyingshetlands.wordpress.com/2016/04/09/midnight-the-story-of-a-light-horse-tells-a-story-of-war-horses-in-a-part-of-world-war-i/>
3. Midnight's Last Charge – painting by Jennifer Marshall www.lighthorseart.com.au

Powerpoint:

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3. Troops returning to Romani <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/J06076>
4. Injured on camels Romani <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/J01097>
4. <http://www.haydonhorsestud.com.au/>
5. Text only
6. Disputed picture of the charge at Beersheba (or re-enactment) – Australian War memorial <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/A02684/>. It was probably taken when two regiments of the 4th Brigade, Australian Light Horse, re-enacted the charge for the official photographer Frank Hurley, at Belah on 7 February 1918.
7. Midnight's Last Charge – painting by Jennifer Marshall www.lighthorseart.com.au
8. The bullet that struck Guy Haydon and Midnight – J Curry
9. Barney Haydon from a photograph at the Haydon property – J Curry
10. <http://www.haydonhorsestud.com.au/>;
Peter Haydon with 'War Horse' at the Haydon property – J Curry