



Fig. 1: Soldiers During the charge at the Nek in Gallipoli, by George Lambert-Revisiting the charge at the Nek, Australian War Memorial¹

Every April, Australians and New Zealanders pause to remember the Anzacs landing at Gallipoli. Is there another event from the Gallipoli Campaign that is equally deserving of commemoration?

Every April, Australians and New Zealanders remember the steadfast dedication of the ANZACs landing at Gallipoli. But there is another event within the Gallipoli campaign that becomes overshadowed by the valour on that beach, and is equally deserving of commemoration. One that is just as courageous, just as heroic, far more tragic- yet less acknowledged. This event: is the doomed first charge in the Battle of the Nek. While spanning only 60 seconds, the exact values exhibited during the landing by ANZACs including loyalty, sacrifice, and courage were displayed, then extinguished.

‘If this is the last you hear, know I was thinking of you,’² were the final words put to paper by Trooper Harold Rush. ‘Goodbye Cobber, God bless you,’³ were his final words before ascending out of the trench at 4:30am on the 7th of August 1915. Mere seconds later, he was gone, along with him, nearly 150 men⁴ silenced by the barrage and forgotten with the dawn. Such solemn farewells attest that he faced the end, not in fear, but in acceptance, bravery, and courage. Harold Rush knew death was near, yet he complied with his orders, represented his country, and loved

¹ Figure 1 image, <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/blog/revisiting-the-charge-at-the-nek>

² Personal letters of Trooper Harold Rush, last words and final farewell, Australian War Memorial - Letters and Diaries Collection, <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C10935>, accessed July 2025.

³ “Goodbye Cobber, God bless you” — final words before the charge at the Nek, Australian War Memorial - Personal Accounts, <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C10935>, accessed July 2025.

⁴ Casualty figures in the first wave charge, Australian War Memorial - Battle of the Nek overview, <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/E02706>, accessed July 2025.

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his family, town, and country—even on his final day, in his final moments. Though death was imminent, his values and actions are proof of the similarities between the values of first wave charge and the landing at Gallipoli. Rush is a reflection of the ANZACs, and is one of many examples that demonstrate why the first wave deserves to be remembered alongside the landing at Gallipoli.

The Nek was a narrow ridge between Russell's Top and Baby 700, dominated by Turkish machine-gunners holding a higher ground.⁵ In a mission that was aimed to attract Turks to the Nek, Australian light horsemen were ordered to make the charge across this field on foot.⁶ This frontal assault was already extremely perilous, but due to premature cessation of Australian artillery, which halted seven minutes before the first wave,⁷ the Turkish were fatally prepared. 'The attack was a tragic failure that resulted in heavy casualties for little or no gain,'⁸ describes Australian war memorial, highlighting the tragic bravery and relentless obedience of the soldiers, as they faced this deadly mission.

Prior to the charge, the shared nature of Gallipoli trenches was felt. Soldier Ellis Silas had described the cold, eerie silence in these environments before chaos ensued as "the silence was intense, broken only by the distant rumble of guns.....waiting for the inevitable."⁹ But until it did, men smoked their last cigarettes, clutched their rosary beads, wrote their final letters. Others simply sat and stared, resigned to the fate which waited just beyond the ridge. Nonetheless, in such dire conditions the order stood. So when it was time and the whistle echoed, every soldier rose from the mud — not in hope of victory, but in obedience and loyalty to their countries.

The first wave of soldiers left the trench at 4:30am. Some were deemed lucky for charging ten metres. As Australian war memorial cites, 'It took only thirty seconds to wipe out the first line, killed or wounded.'¹⁰ Others perished instantly. But the majority of the first wave were all dead before 4:31am.¹¹ Australia's official war correspondent, Captain Charles Bean, wrote "[soldiers] fell in that short, mad minute as they stood, their bodies heaped in lines as if still in the trenches."¹² Such a vivid description captures the unwavering loyalty and harrowing sacrifice of

⁵ Australian War Memorial, "Russell's Top", <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/PL78>. Accessed 1 August 2025.

⁶ Profiles of ANZAC soldiers who fought in World War I, "The Nek at Gallipoli," confirming that Australian light horsemen were ordered to make a charge on foot during the Battle of the Nek at Gallipoli, <https://education.qld.gov.au/about/Documents/the-Nek.pdf>. Accessed July 2025.

⁷ The Queensland Government's Profiles of ANZAC <https://education.qld.gov.au/about/Documents/the-Nek.pdf>. Accessed 31 July 2025.

⁸ Australian War Memorial, *Charge at the Nek*, <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/E84701> (accessed 6 August 2025).

⁹ Ellis Silas, diary entry, May 1915, Gallipoli, transcript, *Anzac Portal*, Department of Veterans' Affairs, accessed August 5, 2025, <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/ww1/where-australians-served/gallipoli>.

¹⁰ "The Nek", fast fatality rates, <https://www.awm.gov.au/visit/exhibitions/gmaps/trench/nek?>

¹¹ Australian War Memorial, <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/E84701>. Accessed 31 July 2025.

¹² *Notes from the Western Front*, Australian War Memorial, Notes from the Western Front | Australian War Memorial. Accessed 31 July 2025.

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the soldiers up until their last moments. This confirms the ANZAC spirit, upheld by the soldiers and strongly enforces their sacrifices.

The overall battle spanned for hours longer with two more waves, and hundreds more casualties. Yet, it was this first wave -this first sixty seconds- that exposed the haunting cost of war, while demonstrating the exact values of sacrifice, courage and bravery, that are commemorated in the landing.

The real strength and devastation within this event was represented by the families left staring at empty chairs, and the survivors who returned with grief that would outlive the battle itself. Australian soldier Charles Crathew of the 8th Regiment died for his country during the first wave charge.¹³ In the weeks prior, he would frequently send notes to his mother back home in Victoria. Only, she received a different message one morning — from his commander. One that carried pain and emptiness, yet embodied the strength of Charles and every other soldier who fought at the Nek. ‘A soldier and a man ... beloved ...’ it read. ‘Your one consolation is that he died fighting for his country ... the best death a soldier can die.’¹⁴ These words are almost too formal, too final-enough to shatter families apart, but remind us why the sacrifices made at the Nek deserve to be remembered just as much as those at the landing.

Alternatively, those deemed fortunate to survive carried invisible scars upon their return home. With the small number of first wave soldiers making it out alive, very few recorded or spoke about their experiences, or sought support for their trauma.¹⁵ Yet the psychological effects were undeniable, and echoed in third-wave soldier Hugo Throssell.

Throssell, of the 10th Regiment, witnessed this one minute unfold at 4:30am. Following his participation in the third wave, though fortunate enough to walk away physically stable, he was never the same again. The images of his comrades’ sacrifice lingered long after the guns went silent. While blessed with a second chance, the post-traumatic stress disorder, guilt, and horror were burdens he would carry like an unseen wound to his grave. Overwhelmed with despair, Hugo committed suicide on November 19th, 1933.¹⁶

This is what the true aftermath of war is-Crathew died, and the impact on his loved ones long remained. While Throssell lived, he was not the same person who left for war, and the impact of his experience was too much to live with. But if the cost of death and survival is akin to the landing, then why are these soldiers sacrifices not commemorated?

¹³ Lieutenant Charles Carthew of the 8th Australian Light Horse regiment death, <https://vwma.org.au/explore/people/101311>, accessed July 2025

¹⁴ Major McLaurin’s condolence letter to Carthews mother, ‘Last post ceremony’ <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C2846667>, accessed July 2025

¹⁵ Psychological trauma and effects of survivors including Hugo Throssell, <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/stories/biographies/hugo-vivian-hope-throssell>, accessed July 2025

¹⁶ Hugo Throssell experience at the Nek, survival and eventual suicide, <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/stories/biographies/hugo-vivian-hope-throssell>, accessed July 2025

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The landing at Gallipoli is justly etched into Australian history, because courage, loyalty, and valour help define our nation. But as primary sources, including letters and quotes, have shown earlier, the hopeless first wave charge and its devastating aftermath is proof that the same values were present at the Nek and the landing. While only a minute, this time was everything for the soldiers at the Nek. They charged with bravery, died with honour, and survived with courage. So, it's not about replacing or disregarding the landing — it's about expanding remembrance, and giving the soldiers at the Nek, who demonstrated the same ANZAC spirit, equal commemoration.

Every moment of sacrifice revealed its similarities to that of the landing. But every moment leading up to the first wave charge reveals its contrasts. Prior to the landing at Gallipoli, soldiers were oblivious to their fate. Prior to the charge at the Nek, soldiers knew exactly what was about to unfold, as Charles Bean had earlier wrote "The men knew that they were going into almost certain death. The silence in the trenches was heavy with the knowledge that the Turks were ready and waiting."¹⁷ Every soldier knew they were staring into the face of death, but not once did their courage subside. In their last moments before their worlds were turned upside down, they obeyed their orders even though the outcome would gain them nothing.

When the whole battle ceased and the gunfire faded, a heavy silence washed across the ridge. Charles Bean had later recounted the aftermath describing that "the sun of that burning day climbed higher, such movements ceased: over the whole summit the figures lay still in the quivering heat."¹⁸ But as it hung fixed in the warm August air, the quiet spoke more than words ever could. Letters tucked which were tucked neatly in breast pockets screamed to be read. Rifles, clutched in lifeless hands, begged for retaliation. But most of all, the souls of the bodies that lined the floor demanded to be remembered. They ran towards death, died in silence, and were laid to rest beneath a nation that remembers — yet looks away.

Ultimately, it is our duty to commemorate the First Wave charge on August 7th, 1915, with equal devotion as the landing in Gallipoli. By recognising the values of the soldiers, we honour the circumstances and the moments within the event that stripped real people of hopes, stories and futures. These men deserve more than praise, yet history barely whispers their names. Nonetheless, bringing the Battle of the Nek's first wave charge to light is not just about remembrance — it's about answering the acceptance, bravery, courage, and love of those who never made it past 4:31am. In the words of Captain Charles Bean; 'Let us not forget it.....[was] a deed of self-sacrificing bravery which has never been surpassed in military history – the charge of the Australian Light Horse into certain death at the call of their comrades need during a crisis in the greatest battle that has ever been fought on Turkish soil.'¹⁹

¹⁷ S Charles Bean, *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918*, describing soldiers' awareness before the charge at the Nek, Archive.org, <https://archive.org/details/officialhistoryo01charrich/page/n297/mode/2up>, accessed July 2025.

¹⁸ Description of aftermath at the Nek ridge, <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/ww1/where-australians-served/gallipoli/august-offensive/the-nek>

¹⁹ Captain Charles Bean's quote praising the bravery of the Australian Light Horse charge at the Nek, <https://www.lighthorse.org.au/charge-of-the-3rd-light-horse-at-the-nek>, accessed July 2025.

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Figure 1:

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