

THE IMPACT OF WORLD WAR I ON SYDNEY FOOTBALL

Cyril Emerson Hughes

Cyril Emerson Hughes was born in 1889 at Launceston Tasmania¹. He was articled to the Tasmanian engineering firm of C M Archer, qualifying as a civil engineer and surveyor². He served for 3 years in the militia in Tasmania in the 12th Light Horse Regiment³.

By 1911 he had moved to Sydney and was described by Jim Phelan as a leading player with the South Sydney club⁴. In that year his professional skills were utilised by the NSWFL in surveying the old Rosebery racecourse when it was being considered by the League as the site of a ground to be owned and controlled by the League⁵. [more on his playing career to go here?]

In 1914 he was South Sydney's delegate to the NSWFL.



SOUTH SYDNEY AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL CLUB - 1914 PREMIERS

Back Row: J. R. C. Hughes (Delegate), M. Carney, Tom Sheeley (President), L. Long, A. Dalbridge
Standing: second row: G. Francis, L. Rigall, G. Lane, R. Stevenson, W. Kinnock, C. Murphy, J. Barrett, Dick Duggan (Sec-Treas)
Seated: E. Hughes, Cornelius Murphy, J. Fisher, R. Pascoe (Capt), G. Marriott, Jack Maine, R. Sands
Front: J. Kelly, P. Barry, G. Dawson, E. Stevens, W. Eagle

Cyril Hughes, far left back row, 1914

Hughes enlisted in the AIF on 20 January 1915 and was, because of his previous militia experience, allotted to the 1st Light Horse Regiment. He left Australia with the 3rd reinforcements on 6 February 1915. He served on Gallipoli from 12 May 1915⁶. The 1st Light Horse was employed primarily on defensive duties but suffered 147 casualties out of 200 during its attack on "the Chessboard" as part of the August offensives. In September Hughes wrote to Tom Sheeley, President of the South Sydney club noting that he had been promoted and detailing some lucky escapes from death or wounding, including "on one occasion [when] a bullet smashed his water-bottle which was slung across his shoulder."⁷

At the end of October, while remaining at ANZAC, Hughes was transferred from the Light Horse to the 5th Field Company, Australian Engineers, presumably to make use of his professional training and skills. He stayed on Gallipoli until the evacuation when he was posted to the staff of the Director of Works in Cairo. In February 1917 he was commissioned as a second lieutenant. Hughes spent some time in hospital with malaria and the appendicitis before being promoted to lieutenant in the 2nd Field Squadron, Engineers, in the Australian Mounted Division⁸.

¹ Attestation form

² ibid

³ ibid

⁴ Jim Phelan's reminiscences, 1938, at <http://footystats.freesevers.com/Special/history.html>

⁵ ibid

⁶ B 103

⁷ *The Referee*, 1 September 1915

⁸ B 103

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Immediately after the armistice Hughes was sent back to Gallipoli as the Officer in charge of the Graves Registration Unit for Gallipoli. Here he was responsible for locating cemeteries, marking graves and burying the unburied dead in the Anzac sector.



Lieutenant Cyril Hughes and Sergeant Woolley marking out graves at Brown's Dip Cemetery in 1919 [AWM G01935]

In July 1919 Hughes was appointed temporary captain⁹ and in December he was awarded an MBE in the military division as part of the end of war lists of honours and awards for his service during the war¹⁰. He stayed on at Anzac Cove as the Director Director of Works in control of the Imperial War Graves Commission's (now Commonwealth War Graves Commission) cemetery and memorial construction program on Gallipoli. As the Department of Veterans' Affairs' Visiting Gallipoli website puts it of Hughes

Under him was a mixed labour force of Turks, Greeks and White Russians, none of whom spoke English. Hughes, in his own words, communicated with them in 'a mixture of Arabic, Turkish, and Greek'. He found that 'the fact that I'm an Australian is better still'. Hughes was also impressed by their capacity for work and remarked 'Thank goodness all my fellows can do about fifteen things'.

For the building work Hughes developed a Turkish quarry on Gallipoli at Ulgardere. According to one authority, the stone there was of 'that same class as that of which the Homeric walls of Troy were built'. Some of this stone was brought in by lorry but the rest was transported by sea to North Beach where an aerial ropeway was constructed to take it up on to the ridge and down to Lone Pine. As construction work proceeded, the peninsula received its first visitors, although the intention was to keep them firmly away until all work was finished.¹¹

⁹ B 103

¹⁰ AWM Honours and awards lists

¹¹ <http://www.anzacsite.gov.au/2visiting/grave.html>

NSW Australian Football History Society Inc
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Sir James Allen and Lt Col Cyril Hughes at Lone Pine, Gallipoli, August 1923 [NZNL PAColl-9322-4]

The Gallipoli cemeteries as we know them now are largely the work of Hughes. He stayed on with the War Graves Commission, being given honorary rank as Lieutenant Colonel by 1923 and being awarded a CBE in 1924¹².

He later worked in Cairo as Australian Government Commissioner¹³, and in 1936 returned to Sydney for a visit. At least one dinner was held in his honour¹⁴. He was attached to the RAF in the Middle East in some capacity in 1940¹⁵, and apparently remained in Egypt after the war. He had died before 1964¹⁶.

¹² *Who's Who in Australia* 1944, p.446

¹³ *ibid*

¹⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 December 1936, p 10

¹⁵ *Who's Who in Australia* 1944, p.446

¹⁶ Letter from CARO to Mr A Harrison, 10 July 1964 (copy on Hughes's service record file)