



## Lieutenant Colonel H.J.I. HARRIS, VD

[1871 – 1915]



**The then Captain, and later Major, Harris was Honorary Secretary of the Club 1902 - 1904**

Hubert Jennings Imrie Harris was a long-time member of the United Service Institute (now USC) including a period as its Honorary Secretary, and one of the 12 Members killed in action at Gallipoli.

He was born at Dalby on 19 January 1871, the second of six children of Alfred Edward Harris (mercantile agent, nominated alderman, licensed auctioneer, sharebroker, and citizen soldier) and Jessie Esther Baily Harris (nee Imrie). Hubert's mother died when he was only six years old and his father later remarried, producing a further nine children.

Hubert was educated at the Normal School (Brisbane) prior to attending Brisbane Grammar School between January 1884 and December 1886 where he was a member of the school's cadet unit.

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Hubert was employed in a variety of roles. Until 1896 he was employed by the Australian Joint Stock Bank (now Westpac), then worked as a sharebroker, auditor (1898) company secretary (1899), Freemason Secretary to the Hiram Lodge (1899), Honorary Secretary of United Service Institute (1901-1904), Brisbane Hospital Organiser (1907), Organiser of the General Hospital (1911), and General Secretary to the Ambulance Brigade (1911-1913).

He also served as a citizen soldier, joining Queensland Volunteer Rifles on 23 December 1886 at 15 years of age as a bugler, rising to the rank of corporal until he was promoted provisionally to Lieutenant on 16 October 1890.

Between May and June 1891 Hubert and about 50 others were called-up and deployed in the Central District during the Shearer's Strike. In 1897 he was posted to the Moreton Mounted Infantry and on 20 June 1899, Acting Lieutenant Harris was appointed Lieutenant in the colony's land force.

On 30 November 1898, at Sandgate, Harris married Leila Margaret (née O'Mahony), with whom he had four children.

On 30 December 1899, his inclusion in the Second (Queensland Mounted Infantry) Contingent to the war in South Africa was announced. The contingent left Brisbane for the Boer War on 13 January 1900. Harris arrived back in Brisbane on 4 May 1901. He was awarded the Queen's South Africa Medal and five clasps.

Two months after his return, Lieutenant Harris was posted to command B Company 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion QMI and on 13 November 1903 he was recorded in 15<sup>th</sup> Light Horse Regiment. On 11 November Harris was promoted Major commanding 13<sup>th</sup> Australian Light Horse after serving as squadron leader, quartermaster, and adjutant. He was then promoted to Lieutenant Colonel.

On the outbreak of war, Harris volunteered for the AIF and was appointed Lieutenant Colonel, 5<sup>th</sup> Light Horse Regiment on 28 October 1914. The unit travelled by rail to Sydney and departed Australia from there on 21 December 1914. The unit disembarked in Egypt on 1 February 1915 and arrived at Gallipoli, without their horses, on 20 May.

During his time on Gallipoli, Harris wrote to the president of the Queensland Ambulance Transport Brigade regarding the performance of the QATB members serving at Gallipoli. Interestingly, he conveys the news that ... *"All our Q.A.T.B. bearers in the 3rd Field Ambulance are doing excellent work. Colonel Sutton<sup>1</sup> speaks in glowing terms of them... I have had copies of nearly all the branch centre reports sent me, and am pleased to see that notwithstanding the drain on the country owing to the war, the good old Q.A.T.B. still holds its own."*

Lieutenant Colonel Harris was killed on the night of 31 July 1915. 5<sup>th</sup> Light Horse Regiment, as part of 2<sup>nd</sup> Light Horse Brigade, was tasked to man the trenches and support by fire an attack by 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Brigade on 31 July 1915. The Regiment's War Diary recorded the circumstances of his death: Lieutenant Colonel Harris took up position in a machine gun Observation Post. At 2200 the infantry exploded mines and attacked. This provoked heavy shell fire by Turks. A bullet entered the loophole of the Observation Post striking Harris at the base of the neck and he died within two minutes. The precise location of his death was not recorded, but it was within Tasmania Post.

Later reports separately described him as:

*No more popular officer has ever left this State. Both in civil and military life he won for himself by his geniality and good nature a host of friends, by whom the keenest regret will be expressed at the passing of so brave and gallant a gentleman.*

In a special order issued by General Birdwood next day, reference was made to the excellent qualities of Colonel Harris, and to the conspicuous ability he had shown during the few months he

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<sup>1</sup> Sutton was CO 3rd Field Ambulance, was also a USC Member, and was the Club's first elected President in 1910.

had led his regiment on Gallipoli. *We of the Sixth knew his value, and liked him, but the Queenslanders loved him, and would follow him anywhere.*

*So here in the hills of Gallipoli there passes to the Great Beyond another good Australian, a brave and gallant officer, a kindly and courteous gentleman....the Fifth Regiment may well feel that the spirit of Hubert Harris will go with them on to victory.*

*We buried him next night. The Dean of Sydney, Chaplain Colonel Talbot, officiated, assisted by Chaplain Captain Gordon Robertson<sup>2</sup>. Officers and men of the regiment—all who could be spared from the trenches—attended, with Major Wilson, who assumed command of the Fifth. Also present were Brigadier-General Ryrie and staff, Lieutenant Colonel Cox of the Sixth, and Lieutenant Colonel Arnott of the Seventh. As the earth was shovelled in, the Brigadier remarked sadly, "The brigade has lost a gallant officer and Australia a patriot."*

Lieutenant Colonel Harris was 44 years of age and left a widow and three children, the eldest 15 years old and the youngest about eight years of age.

He now lies in Shell Green Cemetery.



Sources included:

- Various web pages
- *United Service Club, Queensland: The First Century, 1892-1992* by Flight Lieutenant Murray Adams and Lieutenant Colonel Peter Charlton
- Club Meeting Minutes, Annual Reports, and sundry documents

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<sup>2</sup> Chaplain Captain Gordon Robertson was the brother of Major S Beresford Robertson, also listed on the United Service Club's Honour Board and the subject of a separate story within this Note.