



Sergeant Harry Freame photographed in England 1916.

Sergeant 'Harry' Freame, DCM

*The ANZAC 'Bushido'*¹

In August 1914, in the New South Wales town of Glen Innes, a man with somewhat unusual features presented himself for enlistment in the AIF. He gave his birthplace as Kitscoty, Alberta, Canada.²

Many assumed him to be of Eskimo extraction; some thought perhaps he was an American Indian; others believed him to be Mexican. In fact, the newly-recruited Wykeham Henry 'Harry' Freame was none of these.

Harry Freame was born in 1880 in the Japanese city of Osaka. His parents were William Freame, an Australian working in Japan as an English teacher, and Shizu Kitagawa, whose Japanese ancestry dated back to the Shoguns of the 16th century.³

The young Harry faced an upbringing of vast complexity—influenced by the inner peace of his mother's Shinto beliefs and the strict ideals and dominance of his Western father. Not surprisingly, Harry was sent to England at the age of 15 to further his education.

Though well-educated and fluent in English and Japanese, Harry chose the life of an adventurer. He fought in the Mexican Wars, serving as intelligence officer to President Porfirio Diaz and later confided to friends to joining a band of international mercenaries in German East Africa, to assist in suppressing the native uprising of 1904.⁴

He returned to Mexico in 1910, but when the Diaz Government collapsed, Harry became a wanted man with a price on his head, and was forced to escape the country by packhorse. Making his way to a Chilean port, Harry boarded a ship bound for Australia.⁴

With the outbreak of World War 1, Freame enlisted in the AIF and was allocated to the newly-formed 1st Battalion. Because of his experience, Harry was promoted to lance corporal and assigned the crucial job of battalion scout.²

As the desert training at Mena in Egypt intensified, the skills and knowledge Harry had acquired during his involvement in earlier campaigns began to surface. His confidence, swashbuckling manner and air of individuality that would soon make him an ANZAC legend were slowly evolving.

First, he modified his uniform by attaching leather pads on elbows, knees and the insides of ankles. This allowed for easy movement when leopard crawling around no man's land. Next, he discarded the standard .303 rifle and opted for a pair of pistols, worn on the hips. These were ideal for the close-in style of combat of the scout. A stout Bowie knife was sheathed in a boot scabbard. The last weapon included in his armoury was a small pistol, worn in a shoulder holster



AWM G01029A. Gallipoli Peninsula, Turkey. 8 June 1915. Sergeant Harry Freame, 1st Battalion AIF, looking through a loophole.

under his shirt. As a final touch, Harry added his trademark black and white bandanna, worn around his neck.⁴

Storming ashore at Gallipoli on the morning of 25 April 1915, Freame was attached to D Company, 1st Battalion, which landed in the second and third waves. With their backs to the sea, the Diggers of the battalion fought their way up the steep cliffs and through the rugged scrub. The battle-weary troops continued to push inland until mid afternoon when they were able to consolidate in small pockets along a bedraggled line.

Freame found himself in a location alongside an area nicknamed The Nek. The position was under the command of Lieutenant Alfred Shout, who would subsequently be awarded both the Victoria and Military Crosses. Called away from his post, Lieutenant Shout left Harry in charge. Unbeknown to both, the Turks planned to launch a savage counterattack later that afternoon with the sole purpose of driving the intruders back into the sea.

Under a formidable onslaught of small arms fire, the Turkish attack was launched. Harry called for his 14-man force to number off. During a brief pause in the bombardment, he again called for his men to respond, but this time only nine answered. There was no respite as the Turks pressed home their relentless attack. When Lieutenant Shout arrived back at the scene, he ordered the force to fall back towards ANZAC Cove. On this call only one voice was left to reply—Freame's.⁵

The next day, small pockets of men were still fighting independently. The commanding officer of the 1st Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Dobbin, was starved of vital information as to the plight of his men. Freame volunteered to make the steep climb into Monash Valley to assess the situation. On reaching his objective, he found that the Turks not only held the immediate front but also the exposed flanks of the ANZACs.

In the semi-darkness, Harry made his way slowly towards the stranded men. He found them exhausted and parched with thirst, but still fighting. Accompanied by an unknown New Zealander, Harry descended part way into the valley, obtained the much needed water and then renegotiated the steep climb—amid Turkish gunfire—back to the beleaguered soldiers.

Then, knowing that the information he had gathered was required by his commanding officer, Freame sprinted down the valley, drawing a furious hail of Turkish rifle and machine-gun fire as he went. Only after completing his report

to Dobbin did Freame admit to being hit by sniper fire—twice on the last mad dash. For his actions during those first hectic days at Gallipoli, Freame was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal.⁶

The war historian, Charles Bean, believed that Freame warranted the Victoria Cross, but at this point in the war no such award had been made to an Australian and his commanders were uncertain of the criteria for recommendation. Some believe that Harry Freame's racial origins were a major factor in the award of the lesser decoration.

On 28 April 1915, Harry Freame was promoted to the rank of sergeant.² Reports of his actions had spread throughout the ANZAC trenches. Many credited him with having an uncanny sense of direction, an ability to find his way even in the pitch-black darkness of no man's land. He continually made forays toward the Turkish lines, noting various 'safe' entry and exit points for patrols. However, Harry was fallible and made the mistake of using the same point twice. Two Turks had observed Freame on a previous sortie and they lay in wait for his return. As he approached, they pounced. Realising that resistance was useless, Harry surrendered. He handed over his two 'hip' pistols and his trusty Bowie knife, but fortunately, he was not searched, and his small pistol remained hidden under his shirt.

The Turkish interrogation officer found Harry Freame to be a perfect gentleman and was amazed that an Australian could speak other languages. Freame was invited to share coffee and cigarettes with his captor. The 'pleasantries' over, Freame had little doubt that the Turkish officer's next move would be to arrange for his execution. After all, Harry had been captured in the Turkish lines—the action of a spy.

He was placed in the custody of six Turks, to be marched under guard to the headquarters, some eight kilometres away. The guards surrounded Freame, two in front, one on each side and two at the rear. Although Harry acted as a defeated foe, with head down and moving at a sluggish pace, he was formulating a plan of escape. He was pinning his hopes on soldiers being soldiers, no matter what country's uniform they wore. As he was marched away, his guards were alert and vigilant. After about a kilometre and a half, and out of direct sight of their officers, the guards relaxed. They slung their weapons and proceeded to chat animatedly among themselves. Harry saw his chance. He reached inside his shirt and drew the tiny revolver. Firing in a circular sweep and aiming for the third button above the waist belt, he hit both the front guards, missed one of those on his side and one at the rear. The surviving guards scattered in fright leaving Harry to scamper over an embankment and make his way back to his mates.⁴

On 6 June, Freame was sent out to assess the success of an earlier attack and to eliminate a troublesome machine-gun. He was accompanied by two young privates, one of whom had only recently arrived on the peninsula. Their job was to attract fire by throwing bombs into the trenches and then count the number and note the type of weapons that responded. His two companions were to protect



AWM A04029. The Southern Trench in Lone Pine, 8 August 1915.

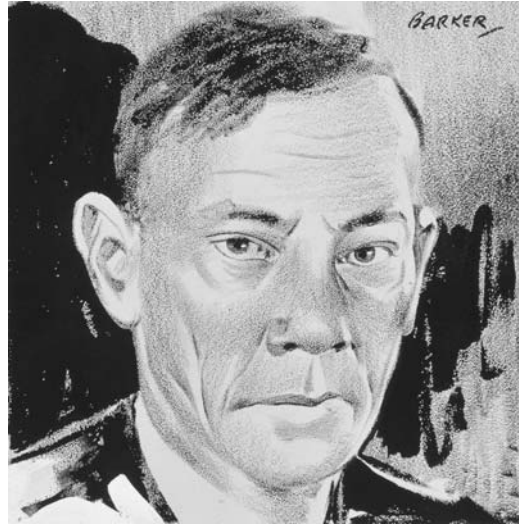
Harry's rear. Making their way towards the trench, they spied the gun. Harry stood up and emptied his pistols toward the trench and threw his bombs. The only weapon to respond was a single Turkish Mauser. With his mission complete, Harry returned to his escort and, crawling along the ground to avoid detection, the three made their way back towards the Australian lines. Although aware that a friendly patrol was outside the perimeter, an Australian sentry heard a noise and immediately fired in its direction. The round found its mark, hitting one of Freame's escorts in the eye. The round continued through his neck and shoulder and exited to strike the second man. Harry dragged both men into the safety of the trench. The first man had been mortally wounded and died in hospital some 11 days later, the other was able to return to duty after treatment.⁷ For his actions, Harry Freame was Mentioned in Despatches by General Sir Ian Hamilton, commander of the Gallipoli campaign.

In August 1915, a crucial action against the Lone Pine trenches was launched and during one of the many Turkish counterattacks a single group of Australians was to suffer 31 dead or wounded. Amongst those wounded was Sergeant Harry Freame.

Harry had suffered a serious gunshot wound to the right arm, fracturing the elbow. He was first evacuated to the Greek island of Lemnos, but, due to the severity of the wound, he was forced to undergo further treatment at the Harefield Military Hospital in England. Harry could not be rehabilitated sufficiently for him to return to active duty and he was repatriated to Australia. He was discharged as medically unfit on 20 November 1916. The master scout's days of fighting were over.²

After the war, Harry was joined by his English wife and settled on a farming property in the New England district of Armidale, New South Wales. In 1939, at the outbreak of the Second World War, Harry was seconded to again serve his country as an undercover operative. His job was to infiltrate and gain the confidence of Sydney's Japanese community.

In the latter part of 1940, Freame was appointed to the Australian legation in Japan as an interpreter. It is believed that, prior to his departure for Tokyo, his undercover activities were discovered and relayed to Japan. In 1941 it was reported that he had succumbed to a serious throat condition, and he returned to Australia for treatment. Freame himself, however, was adamant that, in fact, Japanese military intelligence agents had attempted to murder him by garroting. He died in agony five weeks after his return.⁴



AWM ART11836. Barker, David, *Sergeant Harry Freame Drawing-crayon with brush and ink heightened with white*, 1930 Sydney (Place executed), 22.2 x 22 cm 1930.

764 Sergeant Wykerham Henry 'Harry' Freame, was probably the most trusted scout at ANZAC .

Harry Freame was an adventurer, a soldier of fortune and was reputed to be the most trusted scout on Gallipoli. In times of war, he was fearless, impulsive and always prepared for the unknown. His penchant for excitement and his daredevil disposition may well have been a legacy from his Japanese ancestors. Perhaps his preferred way of life can best be summarised in the ancient expression, '... worthier to die a hero than live as a man of straw'.

Notes

- 1 Bushido: In Japanese, literally means 'military knight's way'. It is a code of honour and morals evolved by the Samurai.
- 2 National Archives of Australia: B2455, WW1 Service Records, 764 Sergeant WH Freame, DCM
- 3 Shogun: A Japanese hereditary commander-in-chief and virtual ruler pre-1868
- 4 B Tait, *The Gallipoli Samurai*, *The Weekender*, 22 April 1995
- 5 Bean, CEW, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918*, Volume I, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1936
- 6 AWM 28, Recommendation Files for Honours and Awards, AIF, 1914–1918
- 7 Bean, CEW, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918*, Volume II, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1936