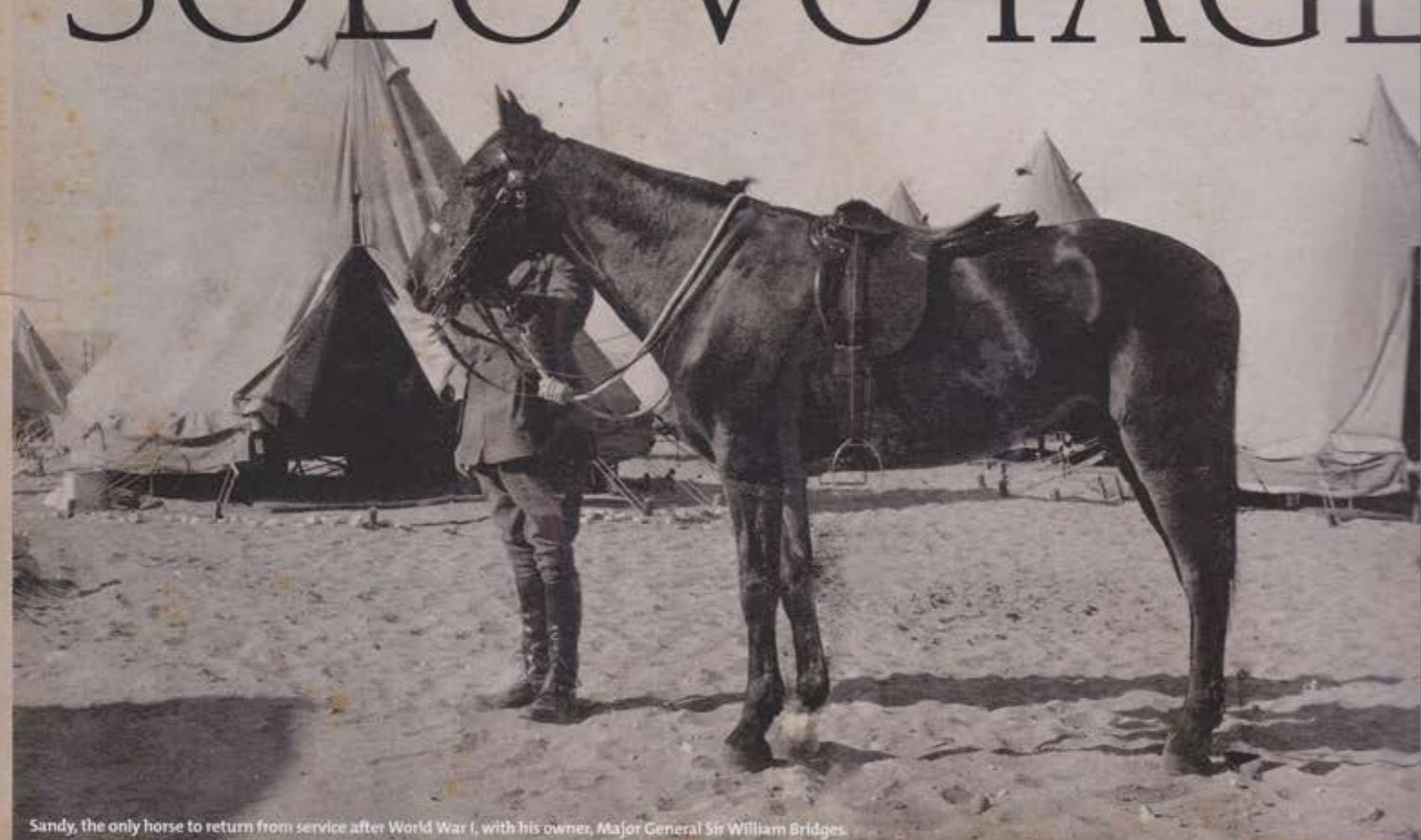


# SOLO VOYAGE



Sandy, the only horse to return from service after World War I, with his owner, Major General Sir William Bridges.

**D**uring World War I, Australians sent at least 136,000 horses overseas. These horses performed their tasks heroically, despite the harsh conditions and stress of gunfire. Carrying riders, saddles, food and equipment, they often travelled long distances with little water. On icy nights in the desert, soldiers would often sleep alongside their horses for warmth and comfort.

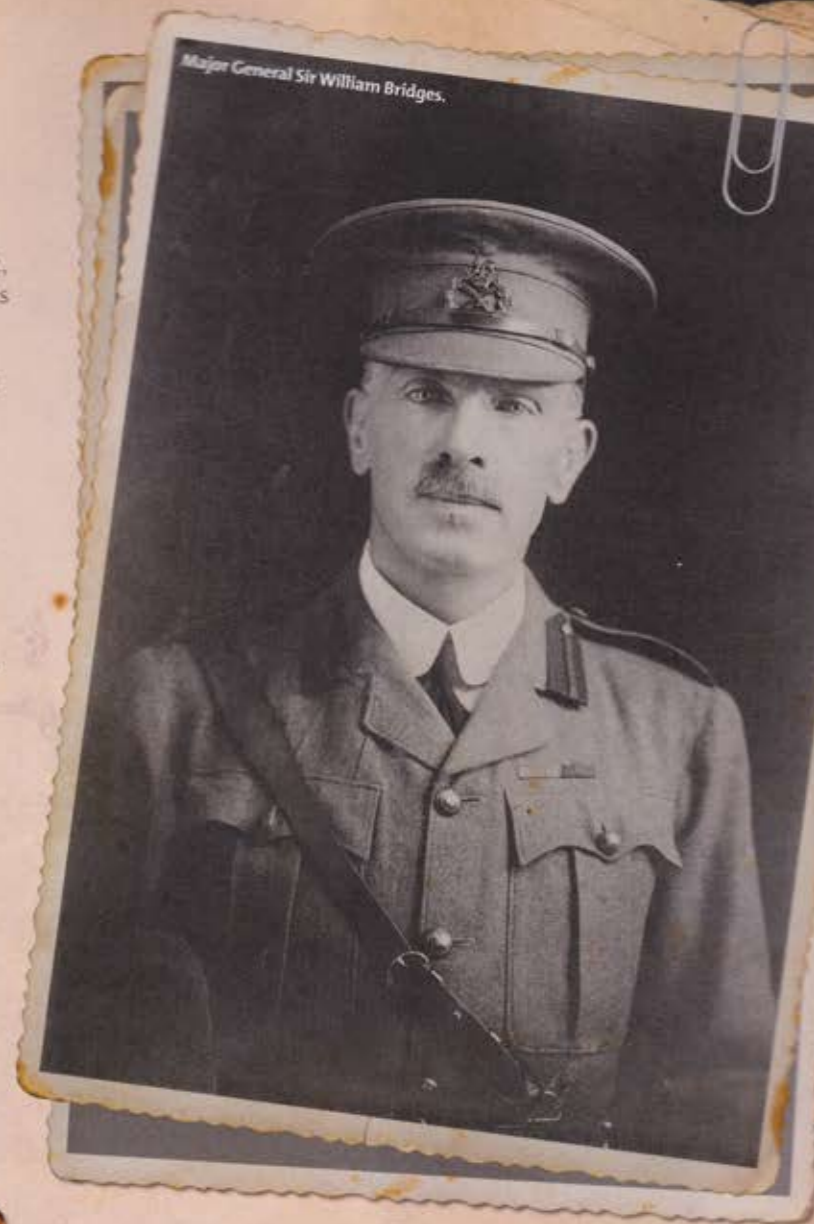
Of these magnificent horses, however, only one ever made it home to Australia – a chestnut waler named Sandy.

Sandy belonged to Major General Sir William Bridges, commander of the 1st Australian Division at Gallipoli. He was one of 6100 horses to be sent to the peninsula to accompany the ANZAC troops. However, once the horses arrived at the peninsula it was decided there was not enough room for them ashore, so they were sent back to Alexandria in Egypt.

Sadly, the horse and his commander were never to be reunited. While Sandy was off shore, General Bridges died, three days after suffering wounds from a sniper attack. His dying wish, historians report, was for Sandy to be returned home to Melbourne after the war.

Fulfilling this wish was not such a simple matter. At the time, Australia's strict border quarantine meant it was often impossible to bring war animals home. Many of the 13,000 horses that survived the war were transferred as remounts for the Imperial Army. Some older or infirm horses were put down, and some troopers chose to euthanise their own horses rather than have them taken away. While General Bridges was being laid to rest, Sandy was settling into a new life in Egypt under the care of Captain Leslie Whitfield, an Australian Veterinary Corps officer.

Captain Whitfield and Sandy remained companions until March 1916, when they were both transferred to the Australian



Major General Sir William Bridges.

Men of the 1st Australian Light Horse Brigade.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

For the Australian Light Horse soldiers who fought during World War I, horses were not only a means of transporting troops and equipment – they were their beloved companions, providing solace and comradeship through the darkness and turbulence of war. This is the story of Sandy, the only horse to make it home.

WRITER REBECCA HOWDEN



Veterinary Hospital at Calais, France. In October the following year, Senator George Pearce, then the Australian Minister for Defence, ordered Sandy to be returned home to pasture. In May 1918, this plan was at last set into motion, and Sandy was sent to the Remount Depot at Swaythling in the south of England. After three months of veterinary observation, Sandy was declared free of disease and boarded a freighter to Liverpool, before finally setting off towards home. He arrived in Melbourne in November 1918.

Back home, Sandy was turned out to graze at the Central Remount Depot at Maribyrnong, a lush stretch of land in a bend of the Maribyrnong River that was used as a staging point for horses bound for war. For the next six years, he led a calm and peaceful life in the meadows by the river. When he passed away in May 1923, he was laid to rest beneath these paddocks.

If you happen through the grounds of the Maribyrnong Community Centre today, you may notice some lingering traces of Sandy's legacy. In April this year, a commemorative plaque was embedded in a carefully prepared stone, beneath the shade of a tree in a grassy picnic area, honouring Sandy and his historic return home. This memorial serves as a fitting tribute not only to Sandy himself, but to the service and loyalty of all our warhorses, and the role they have played in our country's history.