

Charles Howard Helsham

Charles Howard Helsham was a well-known sportsman and sports administrator. He was admitted to the New South Wales Bar around 1898 while a clerk in the Colonial Secretary's Office, but did not practise. He was, nevertheless, listed as a barrister on the Honour Roll of lawyers in the war printed in the New South Wales *Law Almanac* in 1922.

Helsham was a founding member of the University Club and worked as the secretary of the Sydney Hospital for 15 years prior to enlistment. He was a member of the Naval Artillery Volunteers before joining the AIF in Sydney. He put his age down to 39 from 47 when he signed his papers on 26 August, 1914. He later corrected the deception.

Helsham embarked as a sergeant with the 1st Light Horse Field Ambulance aboard the *Southern*, on 23 September 1914. He travelled to war on the same ship as his brother, William, a doctor from Richmond. He landed on Gallipoli on 9 May 1915. He returned to Australia on *Port Lincoln* on 2 September 1915, as ship's quartermaster. He was appointed lieutenant and quartermaster to the 2nd Remount Unit of the Light Horse, re-embarking in Sydney aboard *Orsova* on 10 November 1915. He transferred to 5th Pioneer Battalion in Egypt 22 April 1916. He went to France in June, serving as adjutant on the voyage from Alexandria to Marseilles and throughout some of the most bitter fighting on the Western Front. The first action was at Pozieres in July 1916.

Apart from brief periods of leave in England and hospitalisation in France, he was on active duty with the unit until late 1918. He returned to Australia aboard the *Orontes* on 1 February 1919. The Australian War Memorial Unit History records that after Pozieres, Helsham's battalion fought at Ypres in Flanders then returned to the Somme for winter. In 1917, the battalion participated in the operations that followed-up the German withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line, and then returned to Belgium to join the great offensive launched to the east of Ypres. In March and April 1918, the battalion helped to stop the German spring offensive. It subsequently participated in the great Allied offensive launched near Amiens on 8 August 1918. The advance by British and empire troops was the greatest success in a single day on the Western Front, one that German General Erich Ludendorff described as 'the black day of the German Army in this war'. Helsham was part of this series of actions. He was promoted to captain on 29 November 1916 and awarded an OBE on 1 January 1919. He was mentioned in despatches twice.

The recommendations for Helsham's awards mentioned that he was on almost constant duty for months at a time and handled the administrative tasks of the unit with great skill and energy through all conditions, 'never spared himself' and was a 'source of stimulation to all around him.'

In 1919 Helsham returned to Australia and was appointed superintendent of the New South Wales Division of the Red Cross Society. He transferred from the list of barristers and admitted to practise as a solicitor at his own request 24 November 1921. He continued to practise through to the 1940s.

Charles Helsham's son, Michael Manifold Helsham had a distinguished legal and military career and was judge advocate general and chief judge in equity.