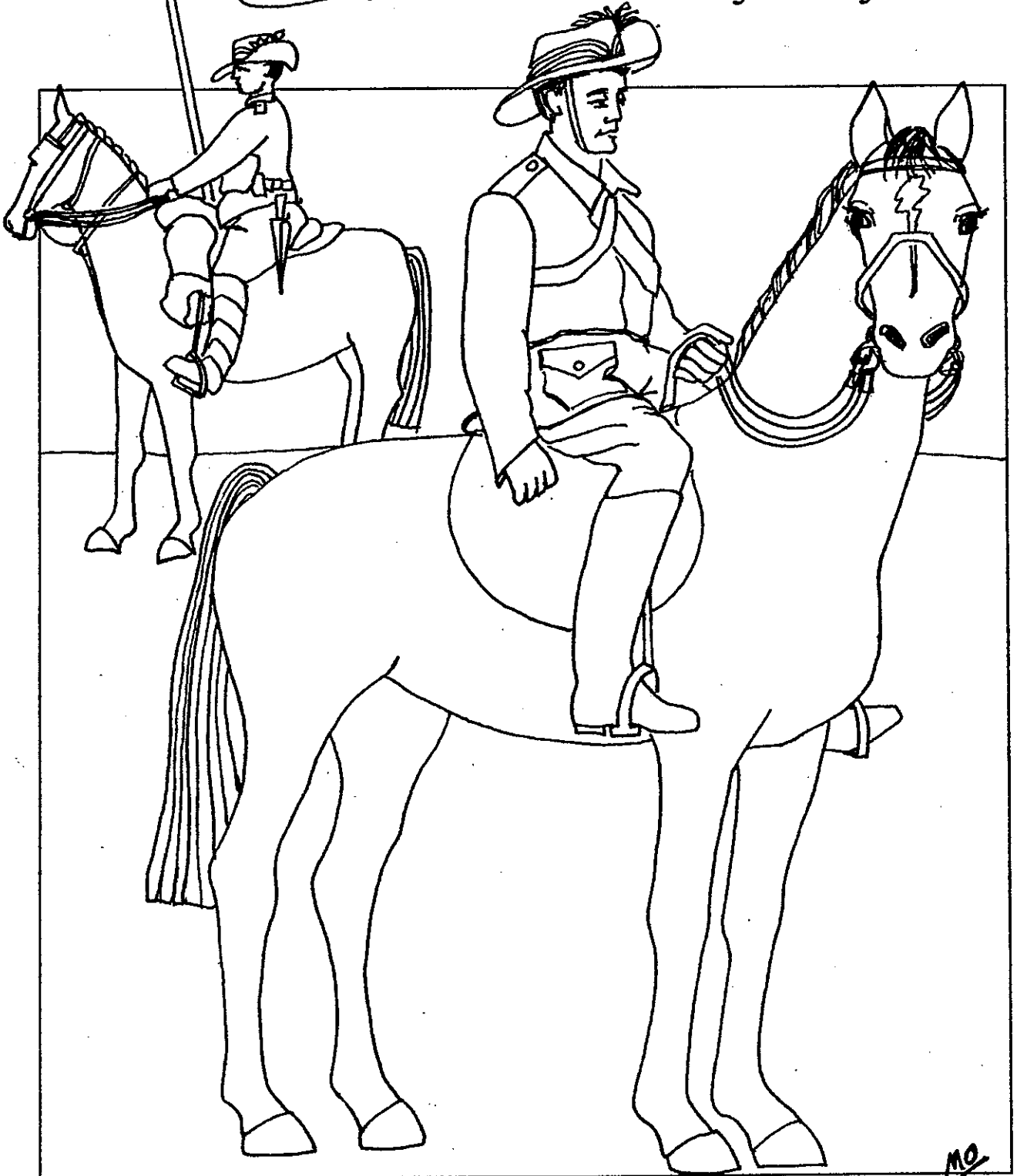


# Sandy The Waler

An ANZAC Day Story



## Foreword

This story has been written and illustrated specifically for children of ages 5-12 years.

This booklet may be used in a variety of ways:

- as a story that soldiers may wish to tell when they are invited to address primary schools in preparation for ANZAC Day.
- as a story book for children.
- as a colouring in book for children.

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Mary-Ann Oaten



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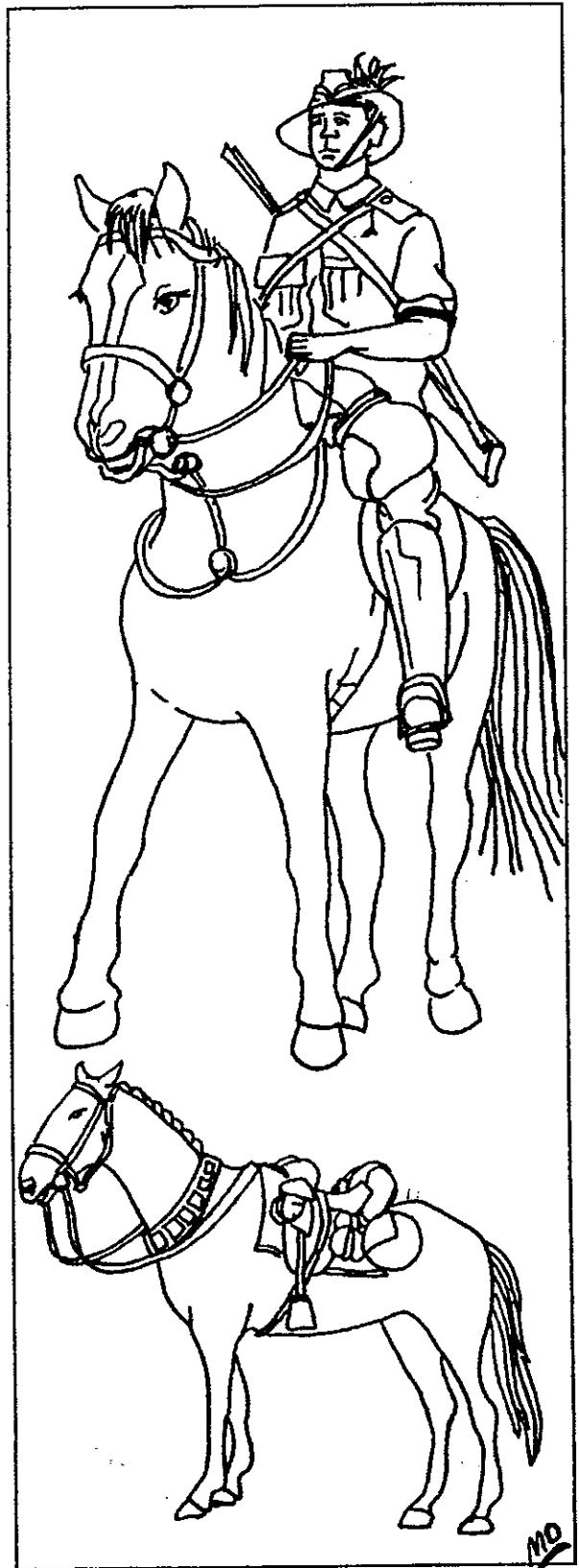
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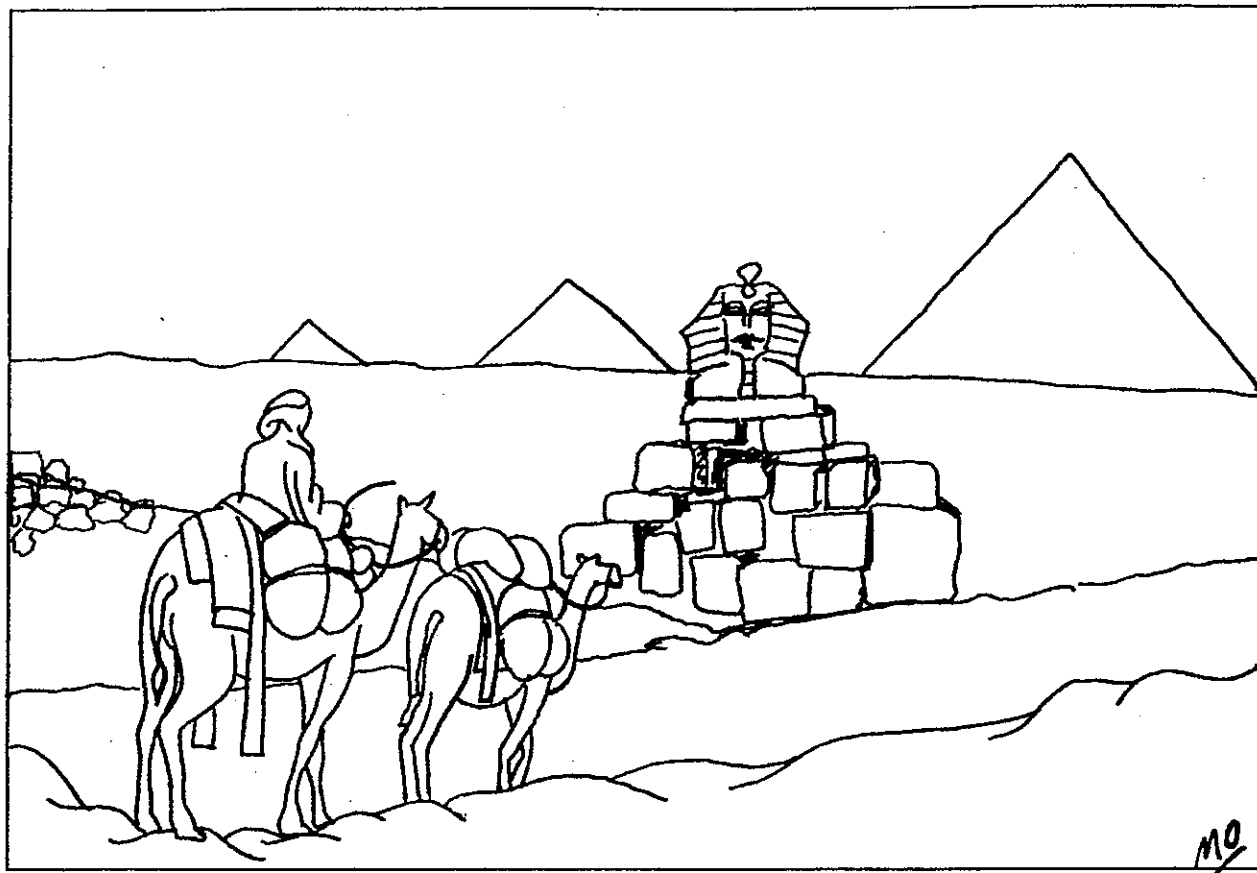
## A legend begins...

Do you know what a 'Waler' is?

A 'Waler' is a horse.

Waler is short for New South Waler. They were New South Wales stock horses which, since the 1830's had been sold to the British Army in India. These Australian horses could travel faster and farther than the horses favoured by other countries. They ate and drank less, rarely collapsed from exhaustion and recovered quickly. The Walers were used by Australian diggers in the First World War.





This is the story of a 'Waler' called Sandy and his farrikin horse-mate, Bill.

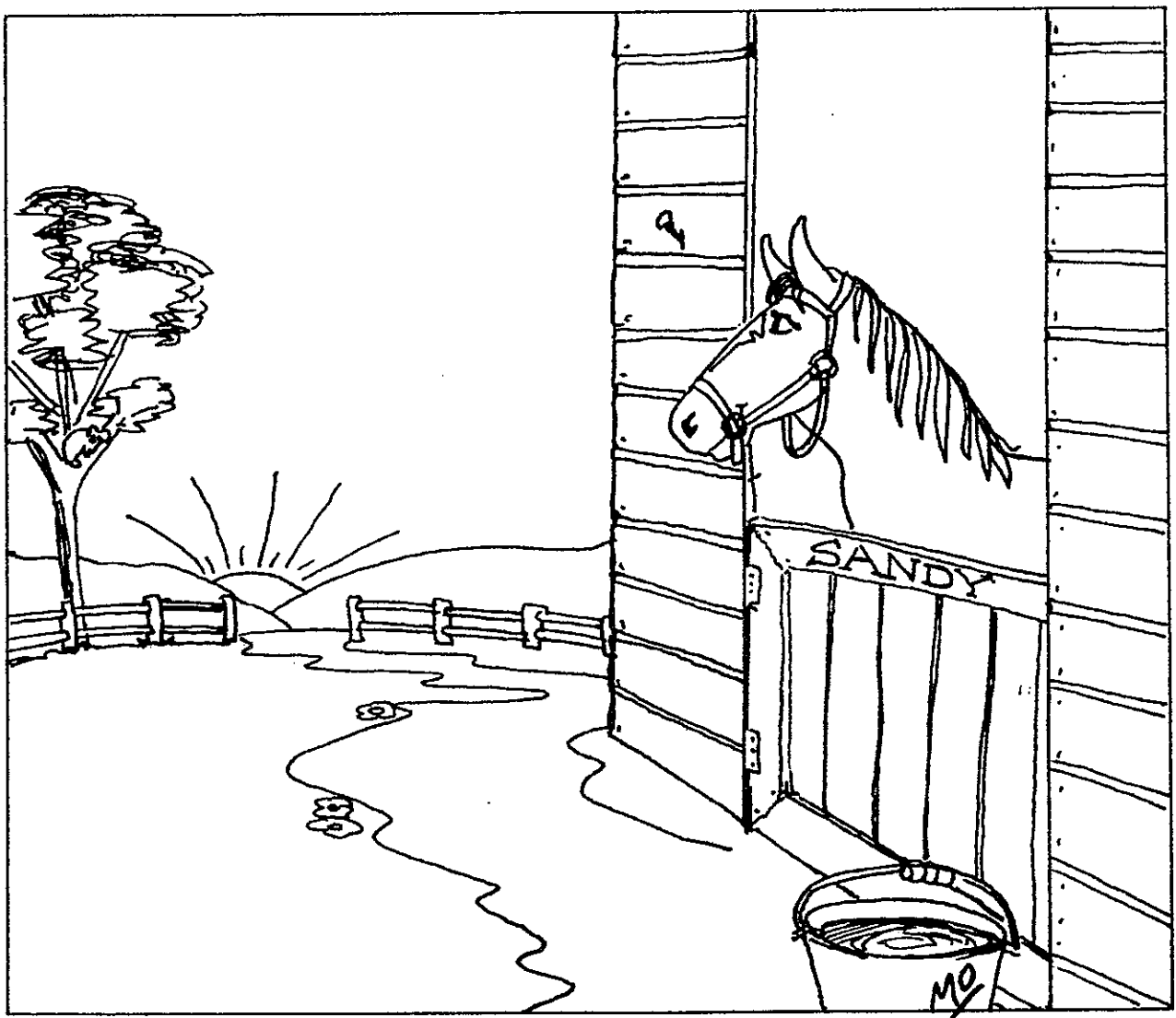
In 1915, just after the start of the First World War, the Australian Government decided to send soldiers to help fight the war in Europe and north Africa. Sandy, Bill and 160,000 other Waler horses travelled to Egypt with them. They visited the Sphinx, and lived and trained near the Great Pyramids which were the burial tombs of rich Egyptian Pharoahs and their queens.

There were many battles raging in the deserts near Egypt at that time. The Australians went there to help end the wars. Since Egypt is a vast land, the soldiers needed the Waler horses to carry them on patrols and long marches.

An adventure begins ...

The evening sun was setting far in the distance behind the sunburnt plains of 'Dunduketty' Homestead near Tamworth in northern New South Wales. Long, narrow shadows cast by the tall gum trees danced across the ground in front of Sandy's stall.

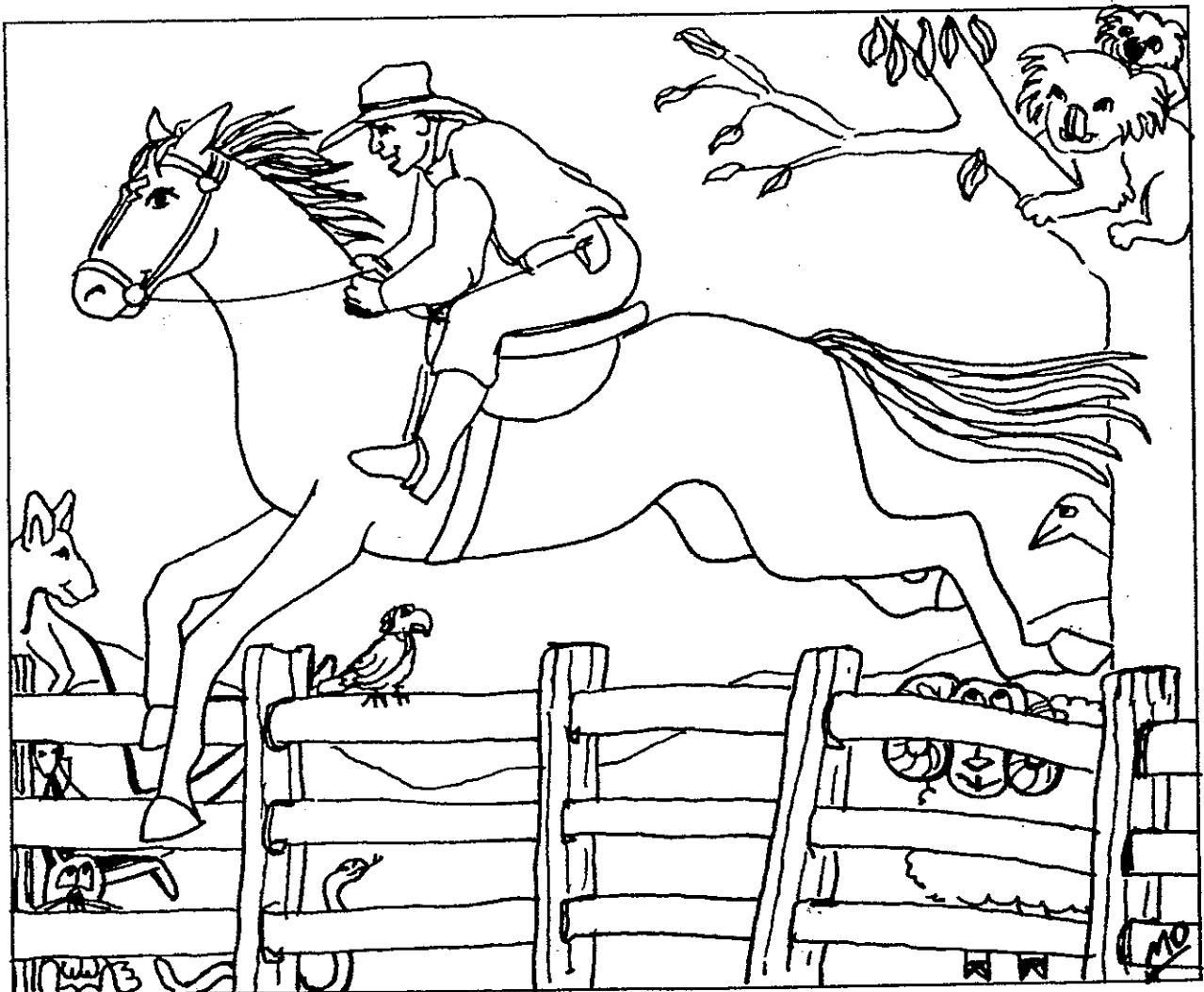
Sandy was amused by the flickering dark shapes which moved side to side in front of him. The day had been long and today Sandy had been praised, again, for his good work. There was extra grain tonight, a special reward from the old stockman.



Sandy was a typical Australian stockhorse, a breed known as the 'Waler'. Sandy could travel faster and farther than most other horse breeds. He carried the old stockman at the most remarkable speeds.

Racing through the Australian bush, they would see many of the bush animals, birds and reptiles. The bush wildlife loved to watch the old stockman and his horse as they galloped past.

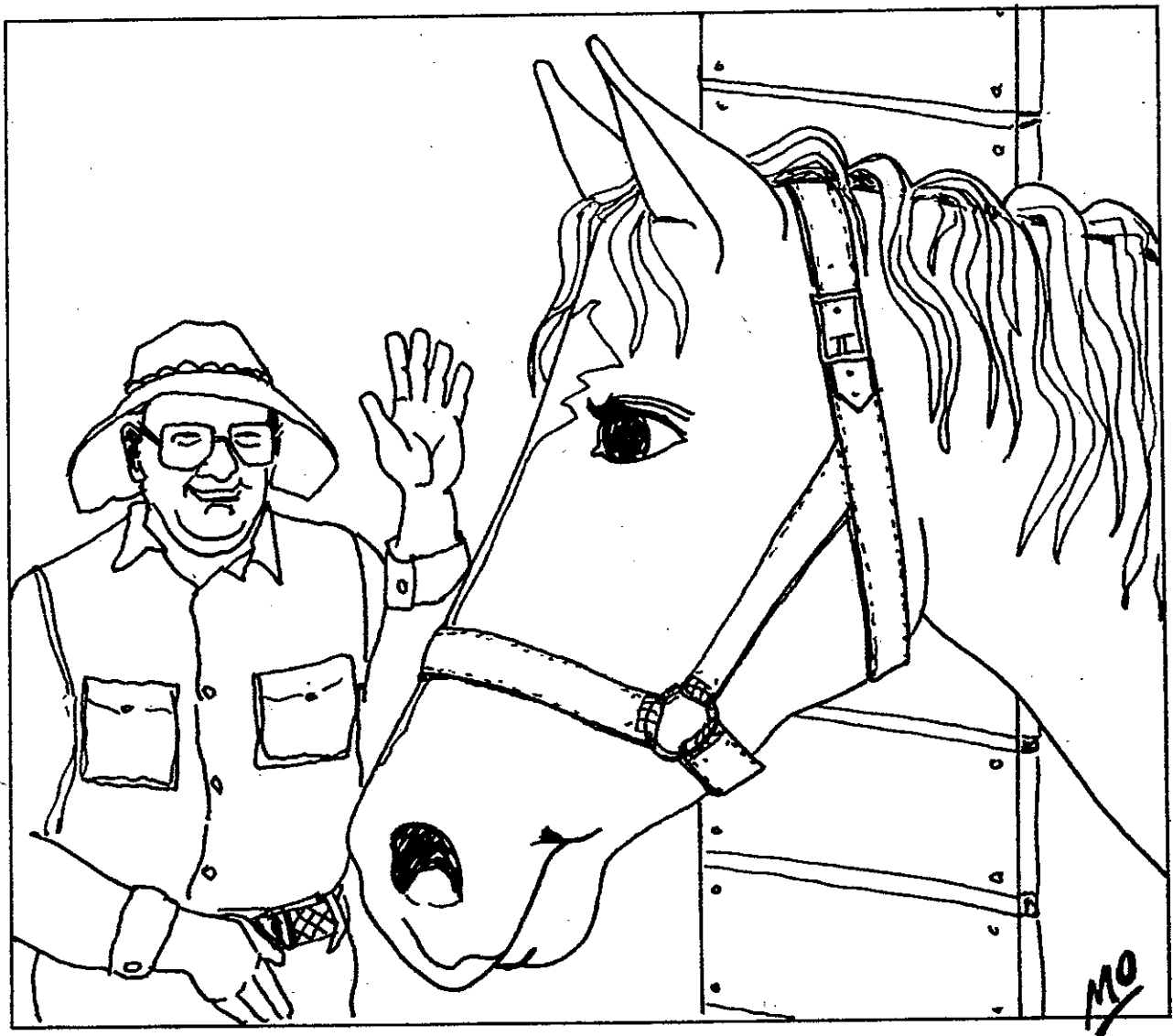
Sandy had always been careful to keep the old man safe from the dingoes and snakes which lived near the billabongs. Sandy was indeed a special horse.



The old stockman came up to the front of the stall. He gently stroked Sandy's head and removed the bridle, placing it on a nail outside the stall.

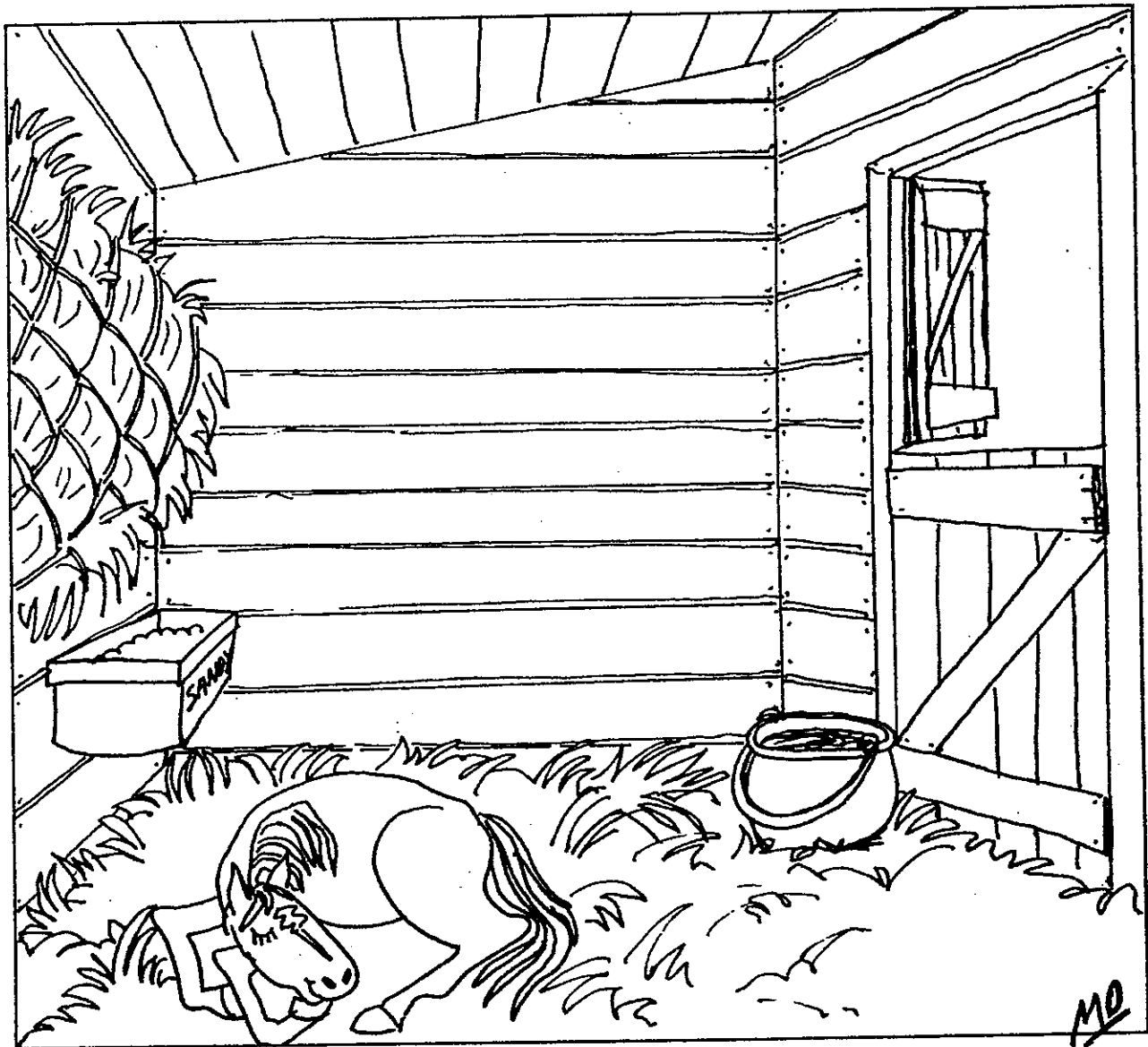
The old man looked sad. In a soft, slow voice the old man muttered, "they'll come for you tomorrow my little friend. I can't come with you, I'm sorry. I'm too old. But I will be there with you when you gallop across the plains".

"Eat your dinner now, my Sandy." One last time, he placed his old, wrinkly face against Sandy's muzzle, then turned and walked towards the house.



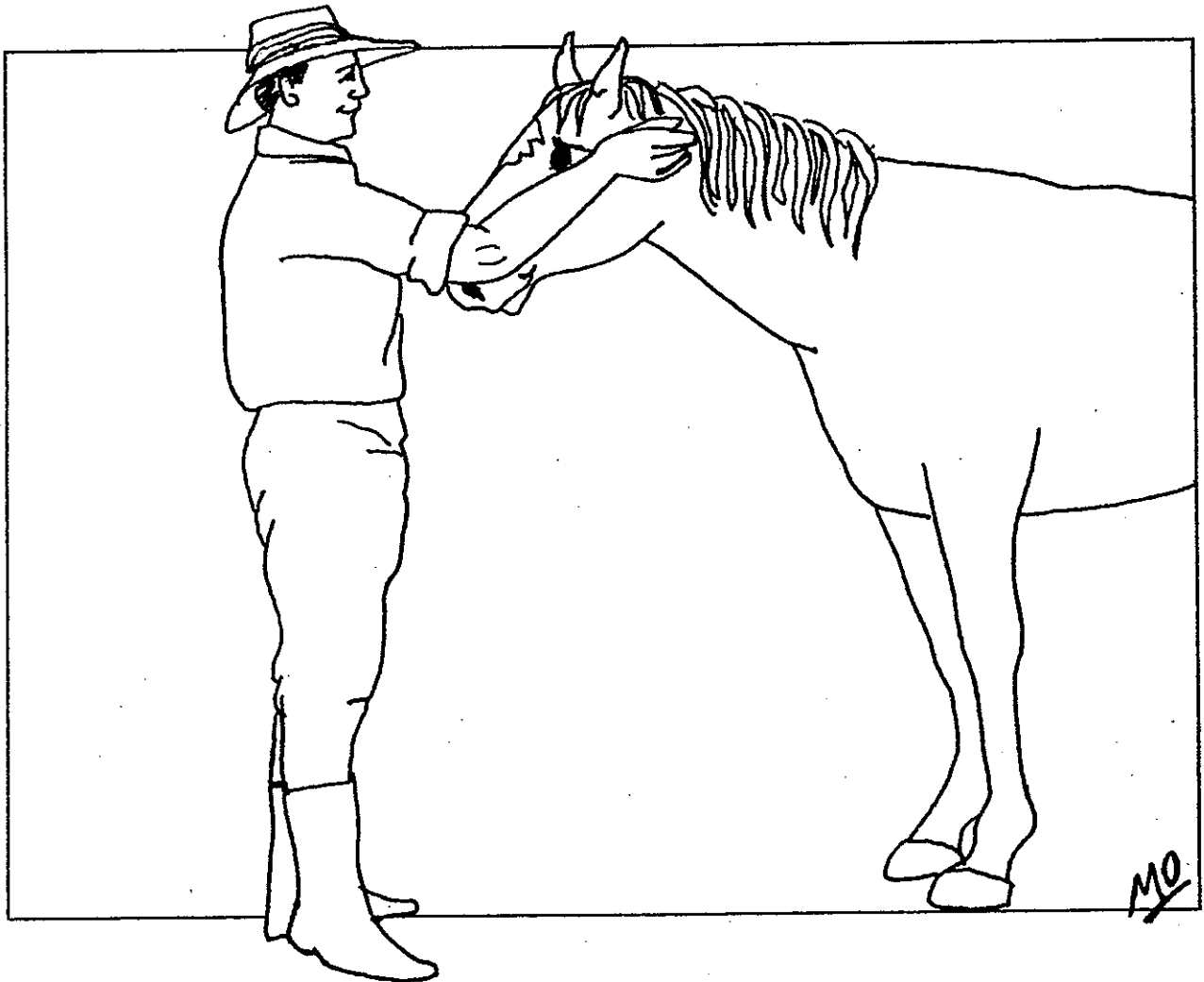
Tonight was the last time Sandy would see those beautiful dancing shadows in front of his stall. Tomorrow he would have a new home, far away from the familiar smells of the Australian bush.

Sandy was sleepy. He moved towards the pile of straw in the corner of his stall where he soon settled himself down and drifted off to sleep.





The next morning some soldiers came to visit the homestead. Because the news of the war had spread across the outback, Bushmen were offering the Army their help and their horses to fight the war. The old stockman had given Sandy to the Army. That's why he was sad.

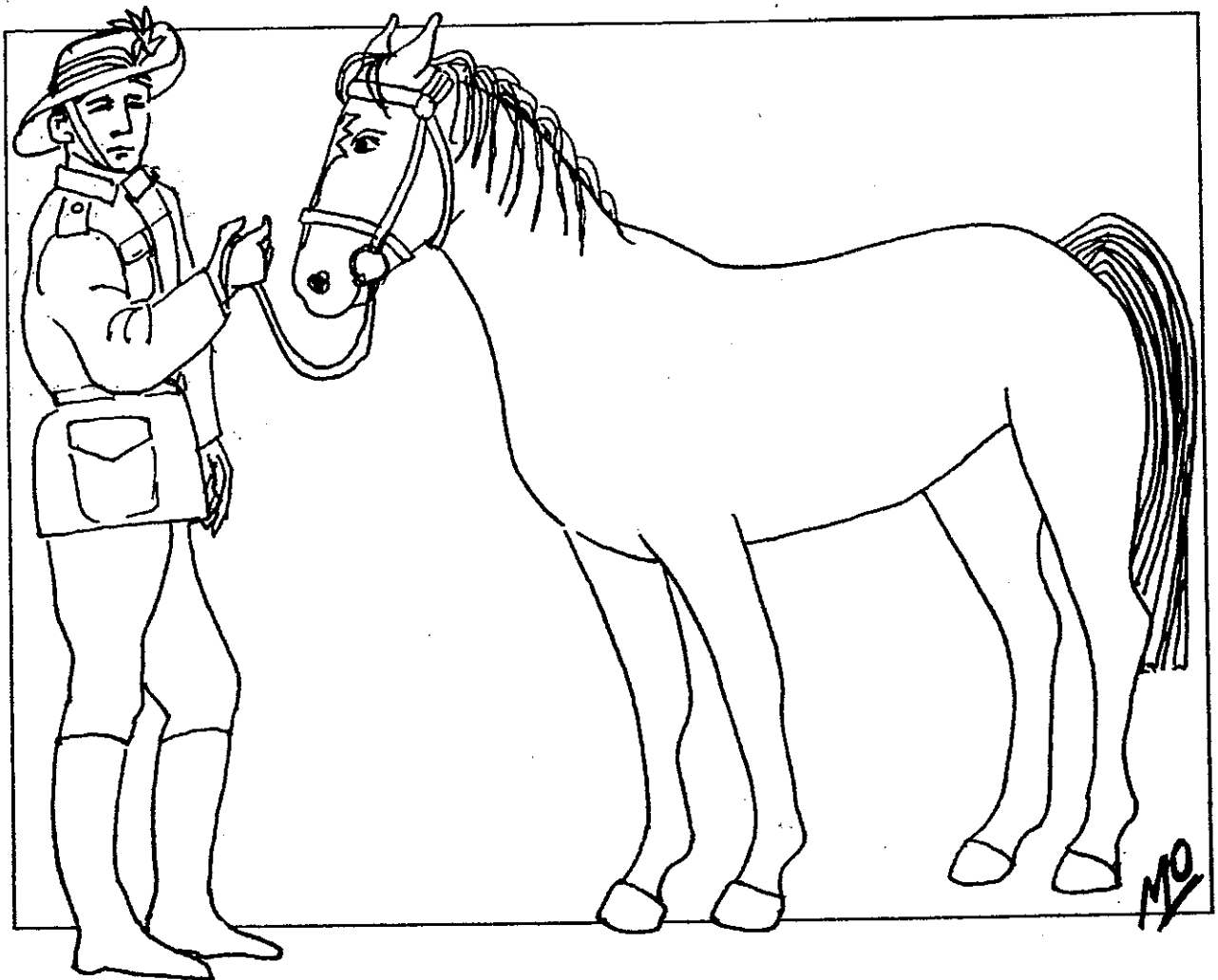


Sandy wasn't sad though, because he trusted the old man and knew that the old man's intentions were good. Sandy also liked the soldiers because they spoke softly to him. Very soon, Sandy was taken away to join a special part of the Army called the Light Horse Regiment. But first, he had to pass Recruit horse training.

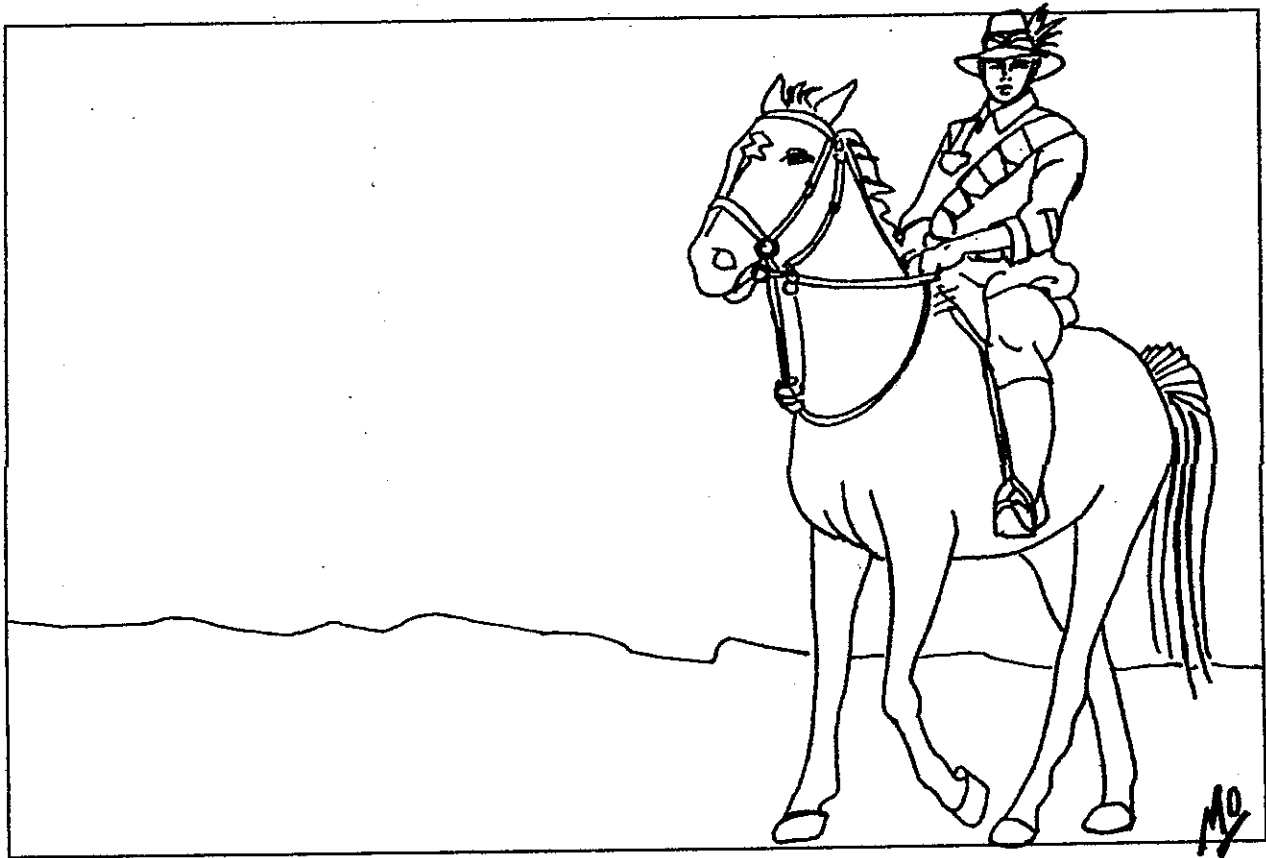
Recruit horse training was very strange. Sandy had to do everything 'by numbers' and at the exact same time as all the other horses.

Even though Sandy was the fastest galloper at the training school, he had to slow down and gallop with the other horses. It didn't take long before Sandy became a favourite recruit with all the soldiers. Sandy would easily pass recruit training because he was a fast learner.

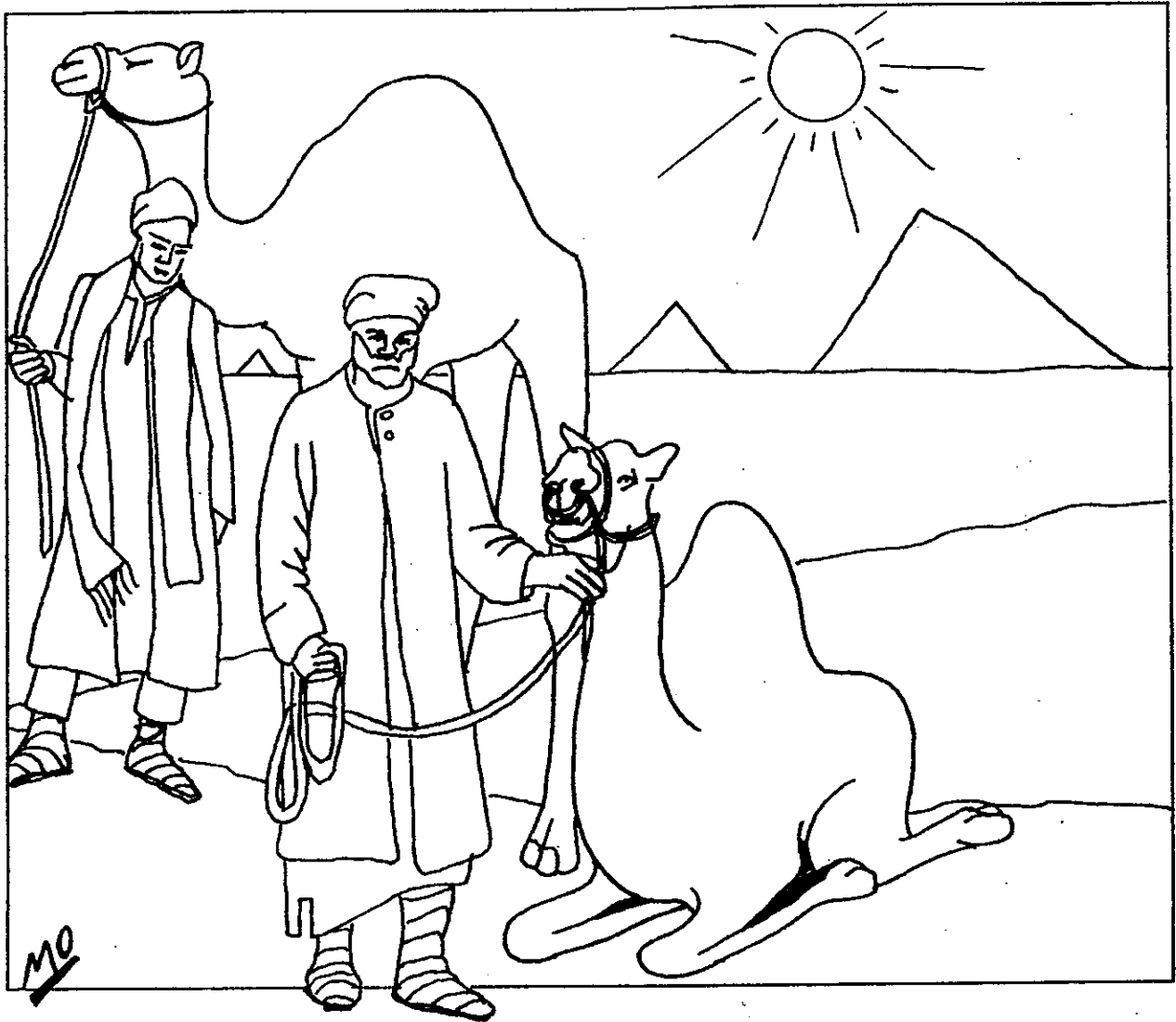
One day as Sandy was being exercised, a voice called out: "What a magnificent horse! Please bring him closer so that I can see him." Sandy was led by his handler to the source of the voice.



Sandy, who had become the most outstanding recruit horse had fire and spirit in his eyes. As he moved across the yard, Sandy's clipped coat glistened in the sunlight making him look even more impressive. Sandy had been noticed by Major General Sir William Throsby Bridges, who was in charge of the whole Australian Army.



The General was immediately taken by Sandy and asked that the Waler be given to him. Together they would become a formidable sight on the sandy dunes of Alexandria in Egypt where they would soon be sent to prepare for battle.

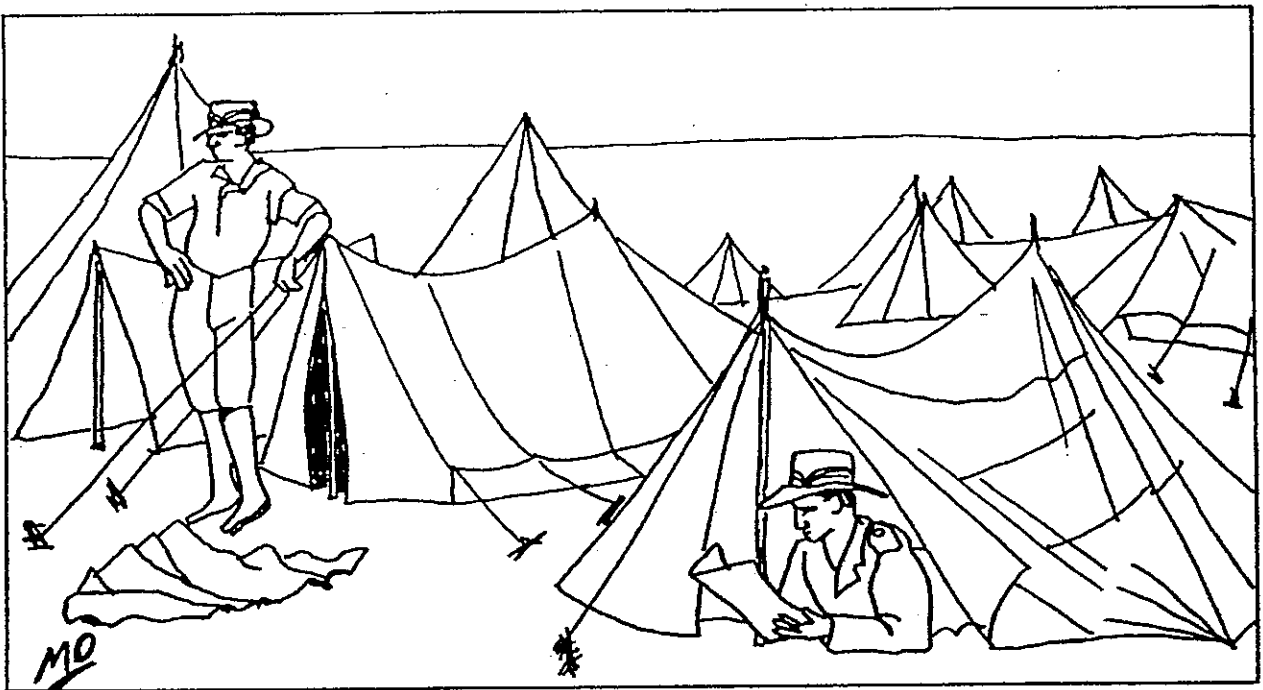


The voyage to Egypt had taken many days. Soldiers and horses arrived in the hot lands of Egypt and quickly moved to a tented city which would become their new home. This new land was full of exotic spicy smells and strange looking people wrapped in long flowing robes which provided protection from the blazing sun.

The training for battle began once the men and their horses had recovered from the tossing and swaying of the ship. Some had suffered badly from sea-sickness and needed time to rest. Sandy had met another horse on the ship called, 'Bill.'

Bill was not as well-mannered as Sandy. He was nicknamed 'Bill the bucker', because he rarely galloped without trying to throw his rider off. Bill was a tall, chestnut coloured horse who was strong and feisty. Bill only liked one person, and didn't like to be ridden by anyone other than his handler, Major Shanahan.

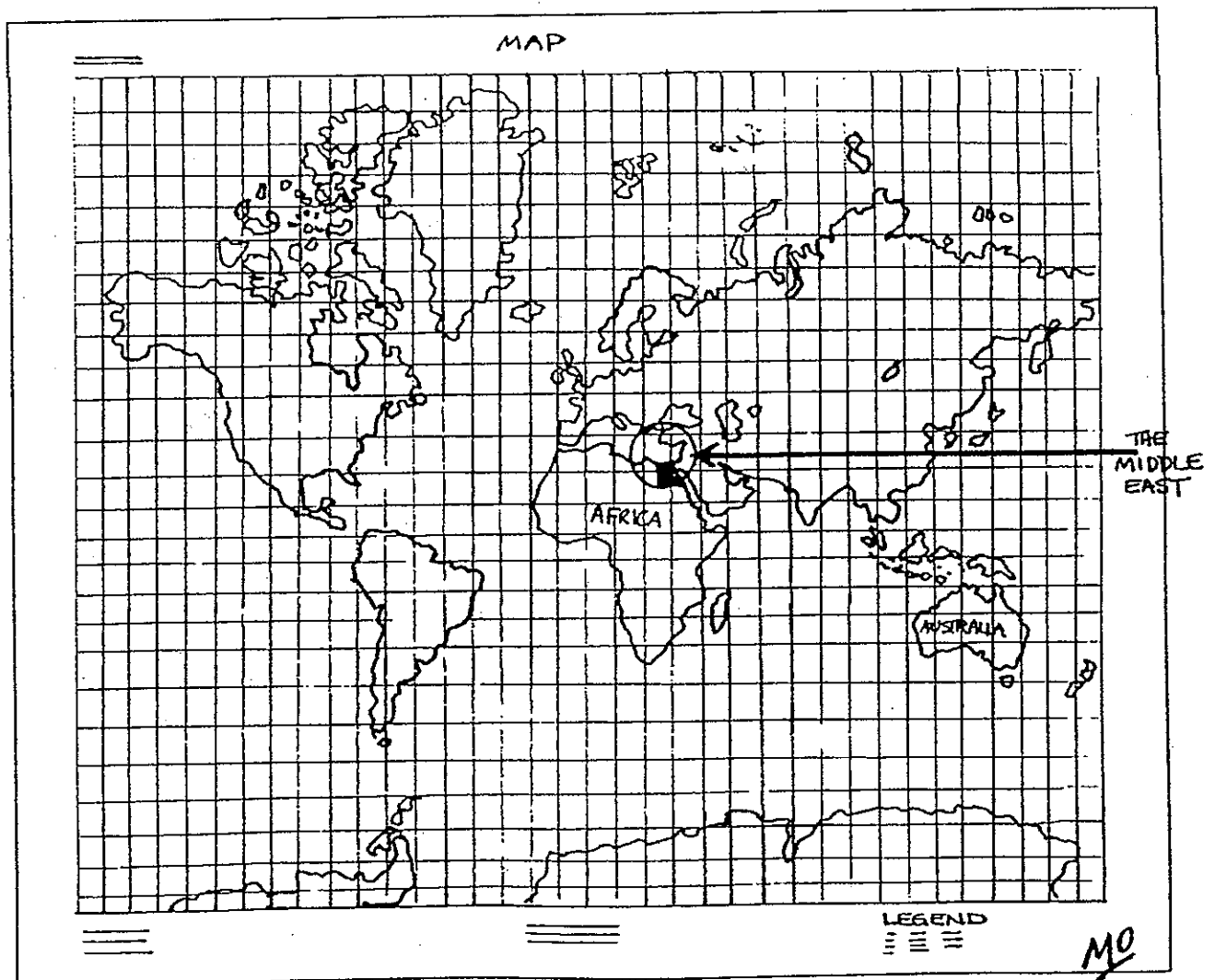
As well as marching and patrolling, there was always plenty of time to enjoy fun and games in the desert. The rough-riding displays and wrestling on horseback tournaments kept the soldiers occupied and amused.



The Bushmen soldiers were excellent horsemen. They always enjoyed showing off their riding skills and were famous for their commitment and mateship. Back in Australia, they were used to living off the land out in the bush and were very good at getting from place to place in all sorts of weather.

Sandy and Major General Bridges had become good friends. The General was very fond of his Waler and considered that he had made a good decision to keep Sandy for himself. Everyone knew that Sandy was the General's horse and they were rarely separated. Sandy was always on hand when the General was making important decisions about his men and their training.

One day Sandy saw the map. It had been flung onto the ground and the officers were standing above it, pointing towards the desert and discussing which way would be the best. This small piece of paper seemed so important to the General because it was always safely packed away after each viewing until it was needed again.

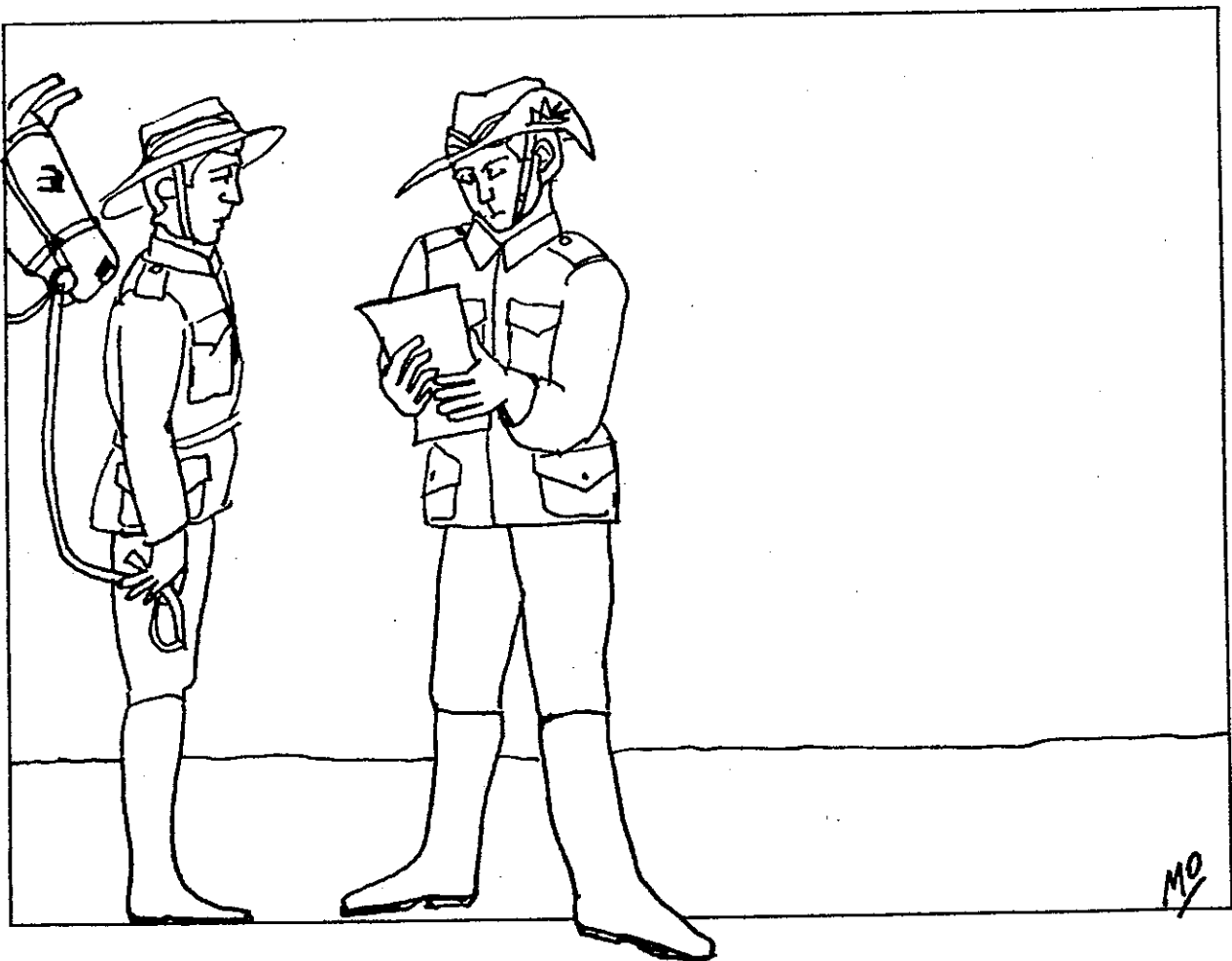


Early one morning, during one of the important map discussion sessions, a dusty rider interrupted the briefing.

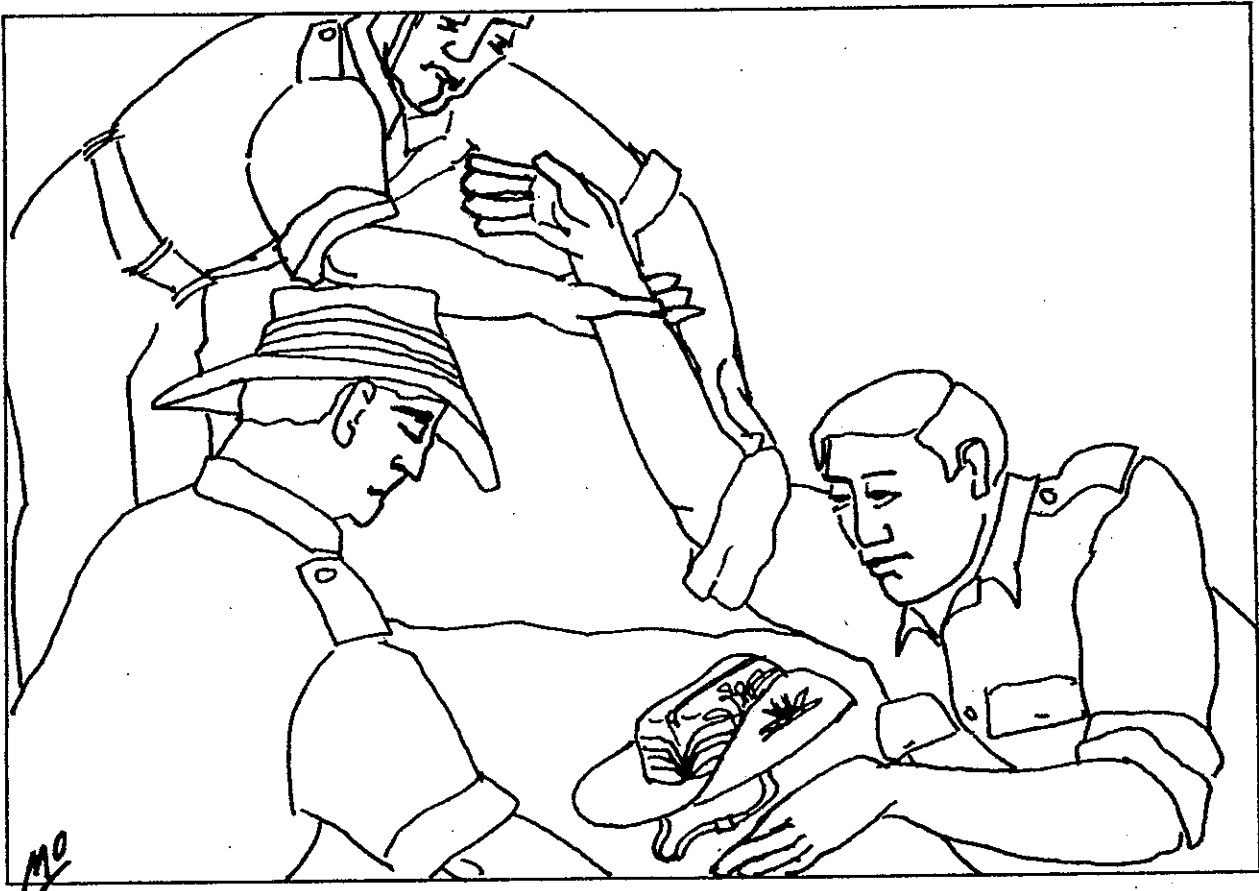
"General Bridges, an urgent message from headquarters." The General unwrapped the letter which was packed inside a protective leather case and read the message.

"We're going to the Dardanelles and our horses will remain behind in Egypt." he said.

No one spoke for a very long time. Sandy looked at the General who now was beginning to collect his thoughts. In an instant the initial worried look was replaced by a smile and a word of encouragement as he dismissed his officers and ended the briefing.



Over the next few days the General and his men readied themselves for the voyage to the Dardanelles. In time Major General Bridges and his men would become Anzac heroes, battling the Turkish soldiers under impossible odds at Gallipoli.



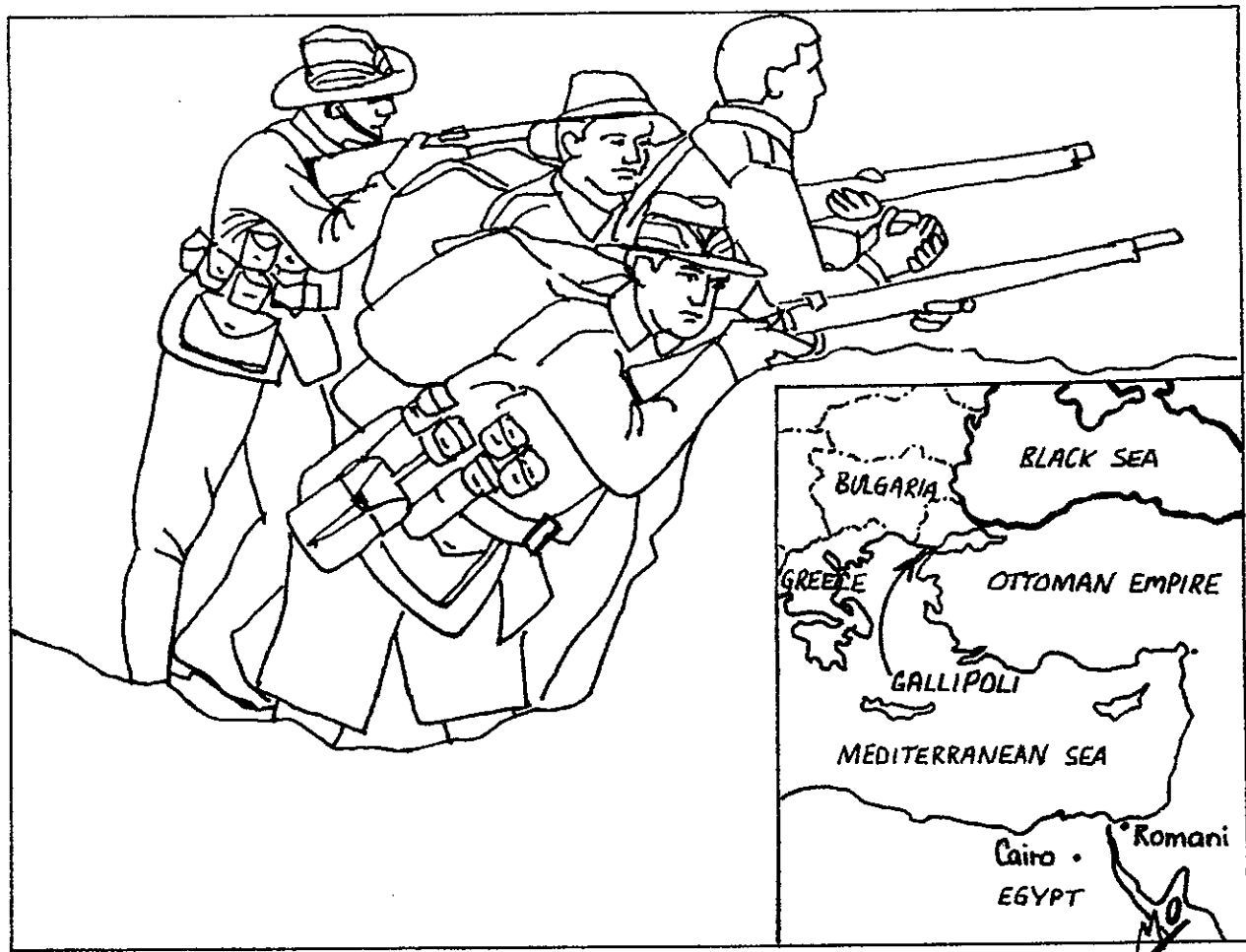
On 16 May 1915, three weeks after the landing at Gallipoli, Major General Sir William Throsby Bridges was shot in the leg by an enemy sniper. The bullet severed an artery in his left thigh. General Bridges refused to let the stretcher bearers carry him saying, "Don't carry me down. I don't want any of your stretcher bearers hit." He died two days later.



Following nine months of fighting at Gallipoli, the Australian and New Zealand soldiers, who were known as ANZACS, withdrew to Egypt where they were re-united with their Walers.

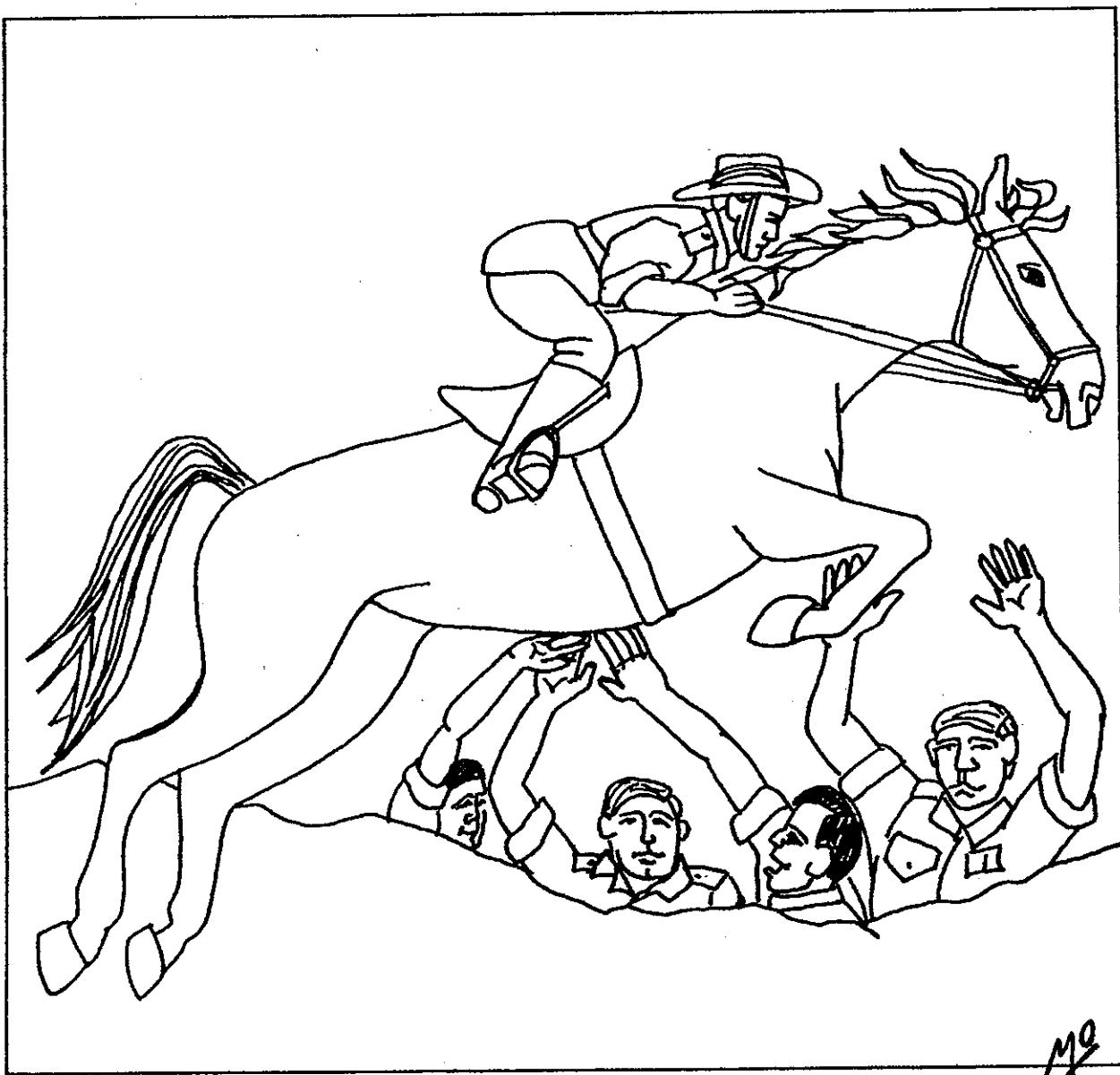
They then fought for more than a year in the sand dunes of the Sinai desert against the Turks. Sandy and Bill were in the thick of things as the Australian Light Horse Regiment defended Egypt against many Turkish attacks.

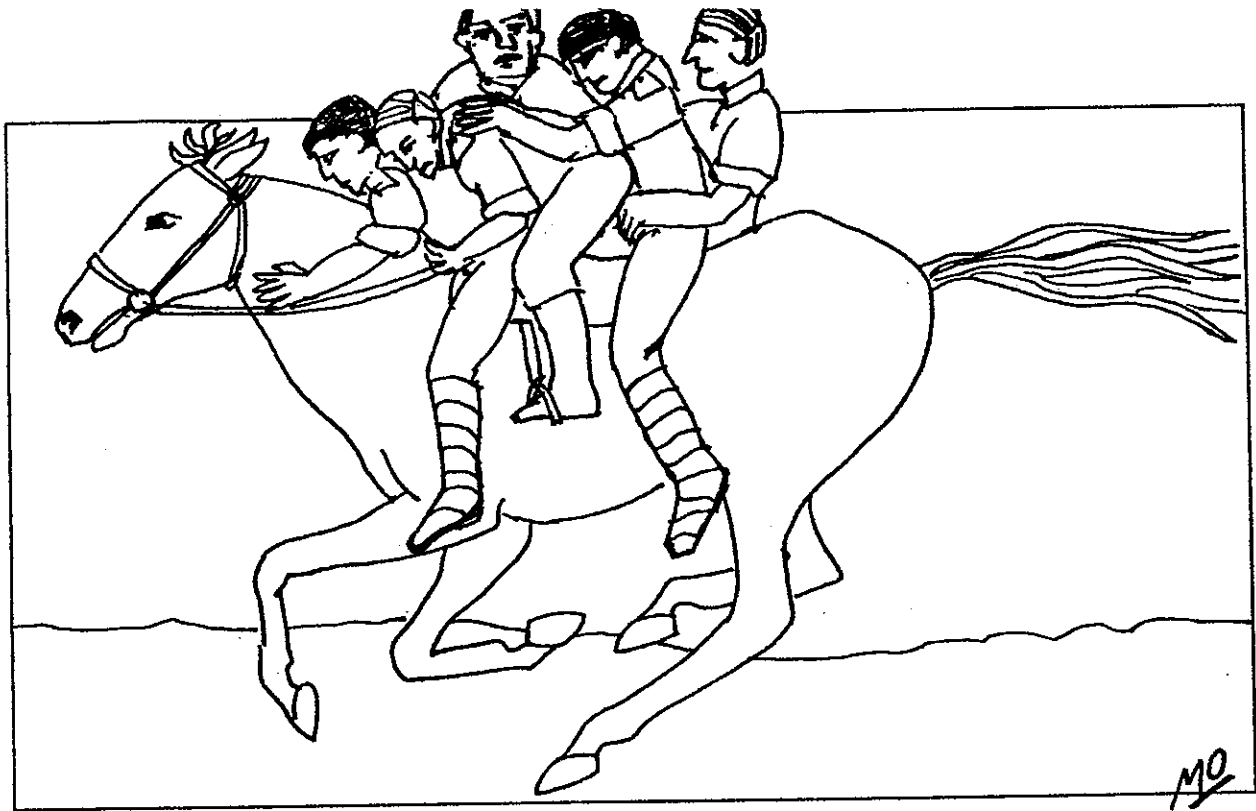
Then one day near a place called Romani, Bill became a hero. Twelve thousand Turks had attacked the two thousand Australian and New Zealand soldiers who were in the desert a few kilometres from Romani.



During the battle, Major Shanahan and Bill rode around the remains of the compound. They could see where the Turkish soldiers had broken through the Australian defensive trenches. Soldiers were running everywhere.

Suddenly, Major Shanahan saw four of his men trapped in a corner of the compound. Their horses were dead, and they would be next.





The Major turned Bill's head towards his men and together they galloped to the rescue.

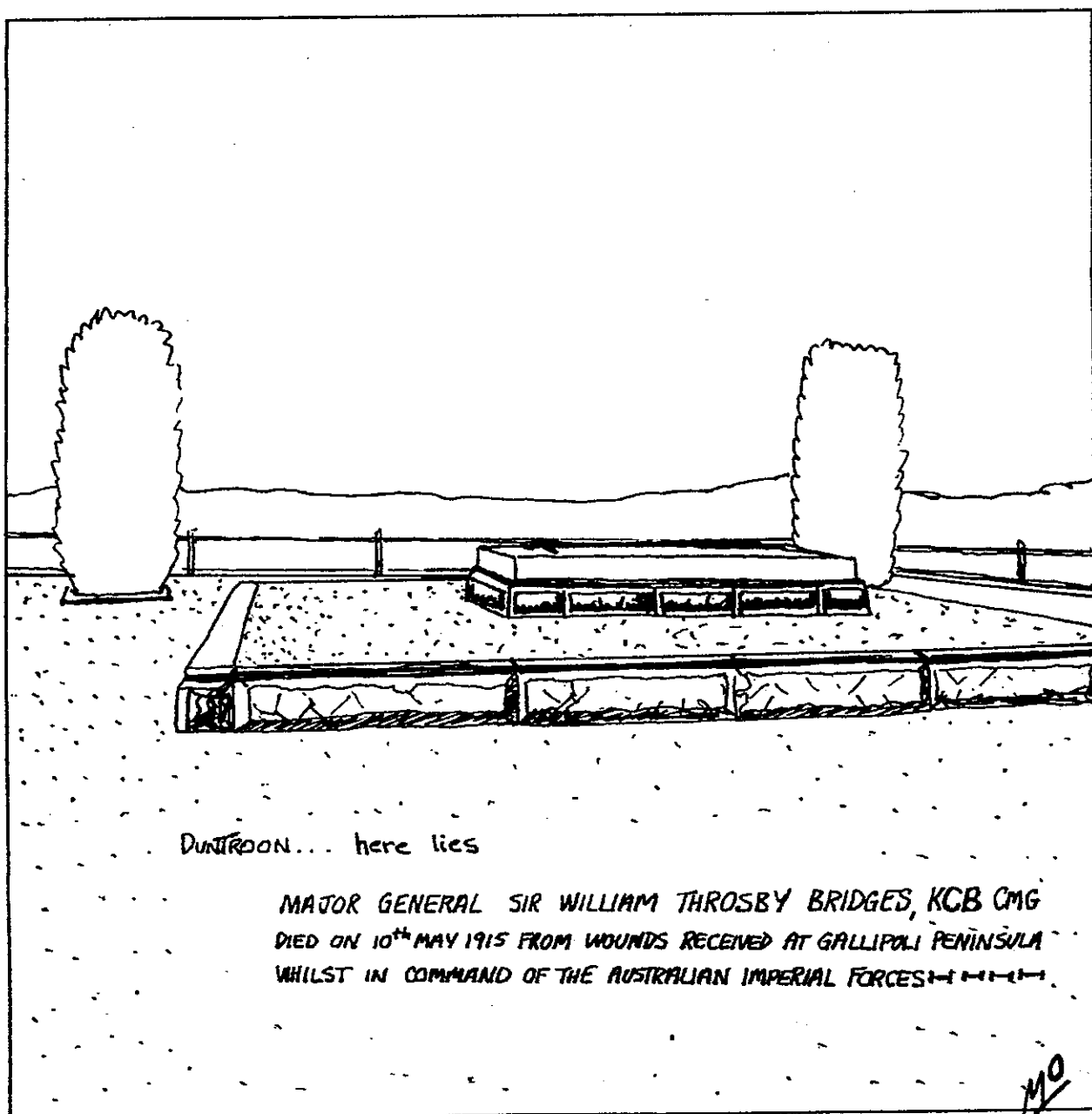
"You two men, jump up behind me and you other two, get a foot hold in each stirrup", the Major yelled through the noise of the fighting.

" Don't buck Bill, just this one time, get us out of here."

Bill's brave ride carried those five men across the soft desert sand to the safety of a trench more than one kilometre away. The sight of the big, chestnut flying through the Arabian night with the five men on his back was a sight to be seen. As a reward for his gallant ride, Bill served out the remainder of the war as an officer's pack horse.

Bill did not return home, but he will be remembered for his brave ride which saved the lives of five Australian soldiers at the Battle of Romani in 1916.

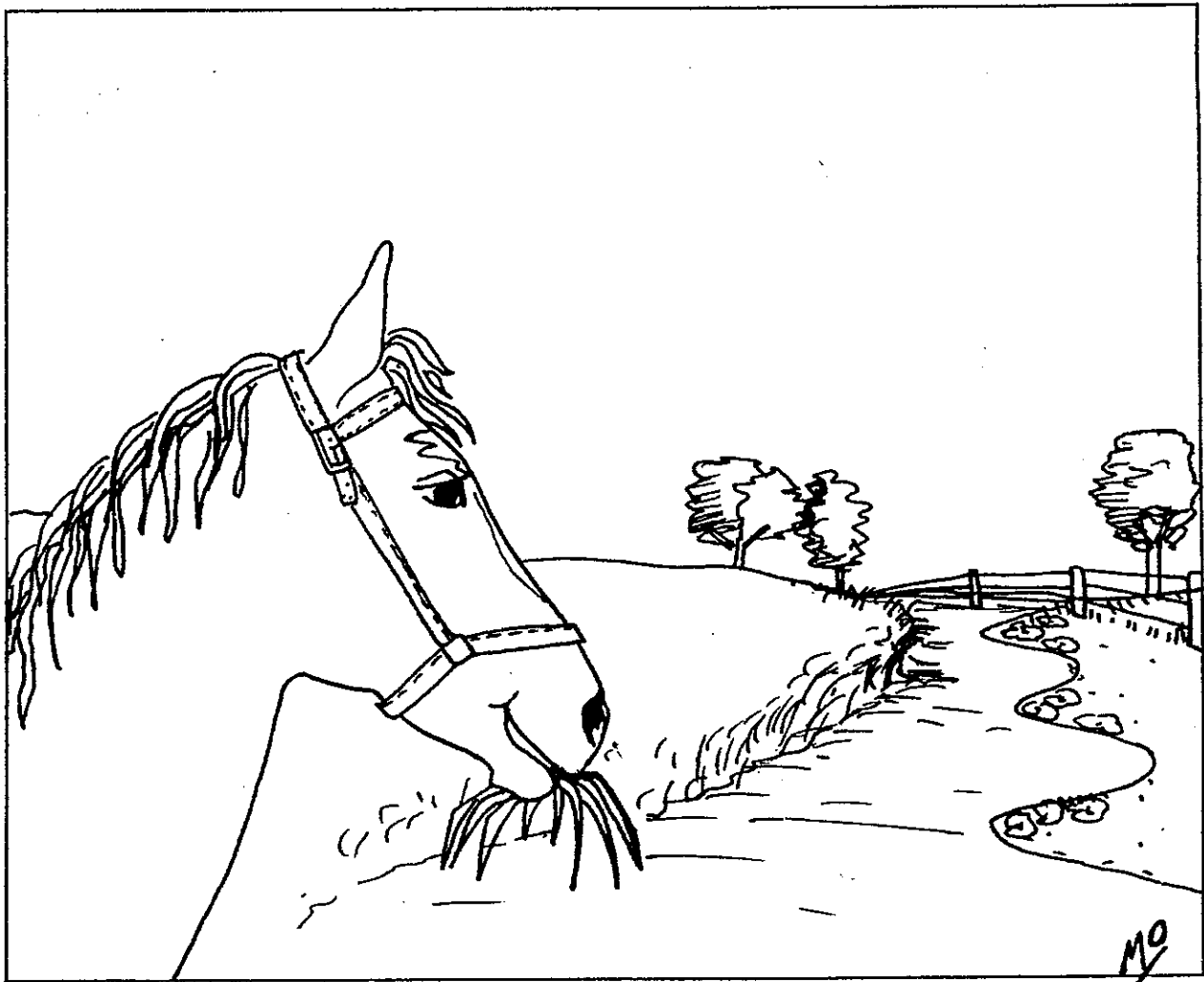
In recognition of his service to Australia, Major General Bridges was given a special funeral and his body was buried on a site overlooking the Royal Military College, Duntroon, in Canberra. It was a site which Bridges had himself chosen for a future chapel building. They also planted an English oak tree in the gardens of Duntroon House as a memorial. This tree and General Bridges' grave are still there today and Officer Cadets from Duntroon go to the grave site every year on Anzac Day to pay their respects.



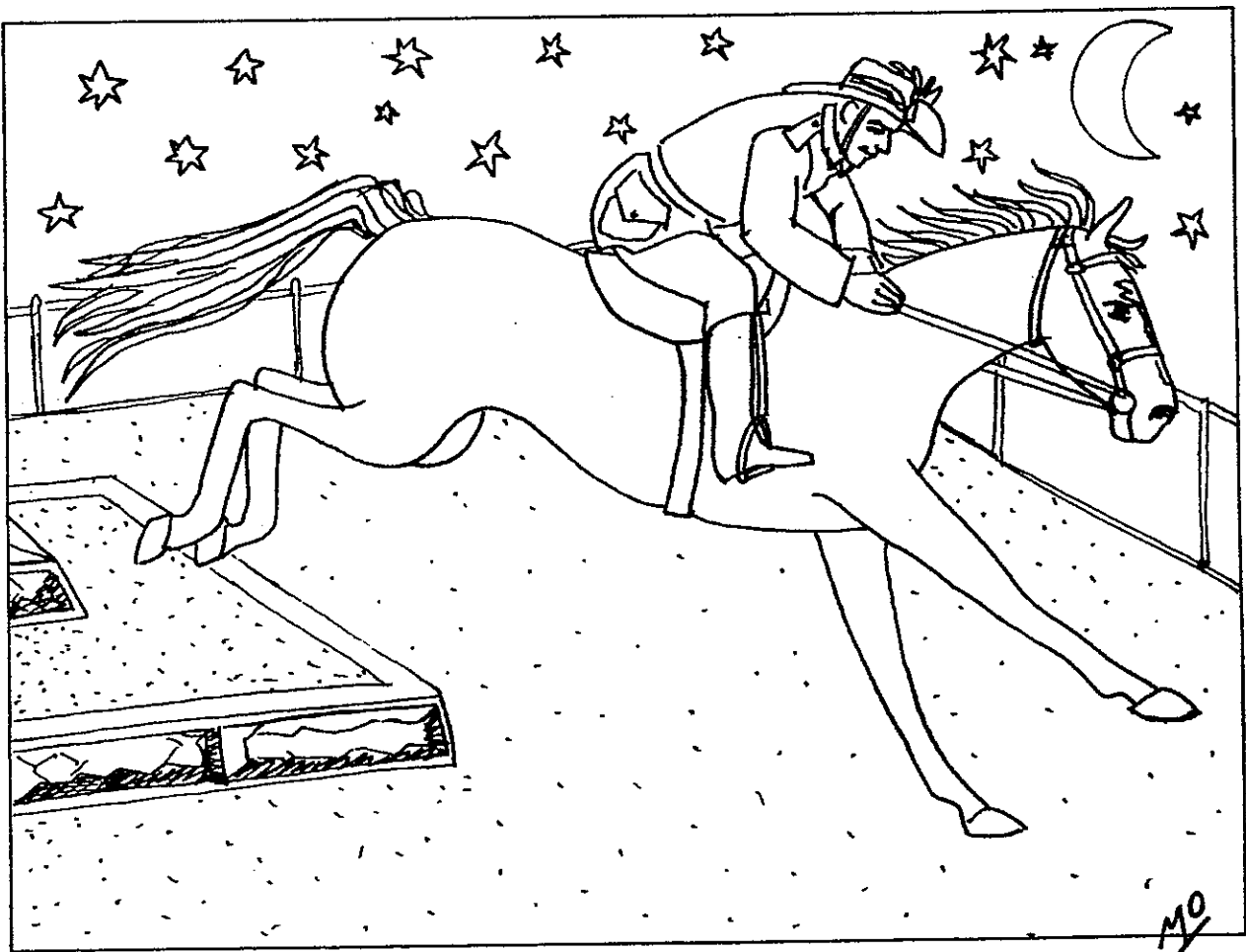
In 1917, two years after General Bridges' death, the Minister for Defence ordered that Sandy be returned to Australia as a special tribute to the General and the soldiers of the Australian Light Horse Regiments. Sandy was pensioned off to graze in the paddocks near Duntroon and was a familiar sight to passers-by.

Sandy was the only one of the 160,000 Waler horses shipped overseas, to return home to Australia.

Sandy enjoyed those years of grazing on the lush green grasses of Duntroon. There were many other horses in the paddocks, so Sandy was never lonely. As the years passed, Sandy aged gracefully and soon he too was gone.



Don't be sad though, because if you go into Duntroon, preferably at midnight, and wait silently near the grave of Major General Sir William Throsby Bridges, you might see the General and his beloved horse, Sandy, galloping across the misty playing fields of Duntroon.



They still enjoy the excitement of the ride and together they remember the desert sands of Egypt and the Australian soldiers who rode with them.

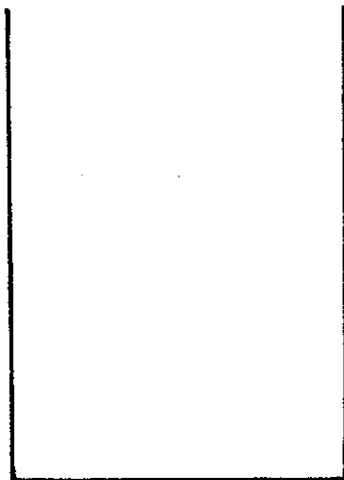
The End



"Sandy the Waler" is one of the many stories that make up the ANZAC legend. It helps to remind us why ANZAC Day is such an important occasion each year.

The soldiers of the Light Horse Regiments and their Walers are a significant part of Australian history.

On ANZAC Day you will see members of the Light Horse Association, dressed in the uniforms of the First World War with their slouch hats and emu plumes, proudly riding their horses in the parade.



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