

Extract from "*The Fighting 10th*", Adelaide, Webb & Son, 1936 by C.B.L. Lock;
kindly supplied courtesy of the 10th Bn AIF Association Committee, April 2015.

SMITH, Eric Wilkes Talbot MID

Born 28 April 1892 in Kensington Park, South Australia.

Second son of Sydney Talbot Smith MA, Solicitor of 62 Halton Terrace, Kensington Park, and the late Florence Oliver Smith (nee Chettle), who on her 70th birthday (21 September 1935) died as a result of a motor accident.

He was a grandson of the late Sir Edwin Smith KCMG.

His brother

Donald Lang Talbot

114 Private in AAMC

Embarked on the *Ascanius* with the original 10th Battalion

Re-embarked as 5157 Private

with the 16th reinforcements of the 10th Battalion

Eric was educated at the Canterbury House School, conducted by the Rev F Slaney Poole MA and St Peter's College, where he Captained the school rifle club.

In 1911 he entered the Royal Military College of Australia at Duntroon, being one of the first South Australians to enter same, having proceeded from Adelaide with the son of Colonel F M Rowell, and at the time of joining the AIF was within a year of completing a four year course.

His regimental number at Duntroon was '15', and at the outbreak of the Great War he had attained the rank of Corporal.

On 14 August 1914, with all the Duntroon cadets, he was gazetted a Lieutenant in the AIF, and therefore *held the distinction of being the first Officer of the 10th Battalion to obtain a commission in the AIF.*

He was appointed a Lieutenant in the 10th Battalion at Morphettville on 19 August 1914, and was posted to original F Company. At Morphettville he was placed in charge of the Battalion scouts, and subsequently embarked with the original Battalion on *HMAT A11 Ascanius* on 20 October 1914, and proceeded to Egypt.

At Mena, Egypt, in January 1915, when his company merged with original A Company and became the new A Company, he was appointed a Platoon Commander in same.

Whilst on the *Ascanius* he acted as Assistant Adjutant from 1 November to 6 December 1914, and at Mena was appointed Secretary to the 10th Battalion sports, which were held on Christmas Day 1914.

He skillfully trained the scouts at Mena, and re-embarked on the *Ionian* with the Battalion for the Dardanelles. When practically at the eleventh hour before the landing 2nd Lieutenant Robley was invalided from the *Ionian*, and thus prevented from taking part in the landing, he was appointed Machine Gun Officer in his stead.

On the Saturday night preceding the landing he had efficiently prepared certain plans for Colonel S P Weir. At 10 o'clock that night, on board the *Prince of Wales*, he lectured his men in one of the gun casements, and illustrated his remarks with sketches on one of the 6 inch guns.

His task after landing was to hurry on and reach the Turkish battery near the objective ridge, and with this end in view he had requested one of the ship's gunners to show his party how to damage a gun by burring the screw in the breach.

He was amongst the first to land on the Peninsula, and on the tip of Ari Burnu sough, which his party of 32 scouts of the 10th Battalion, reached the shore just after the first shot was fired. From the very onset he went about his duty in a fearless manner, which earned for him the admiration of both rank and file.

Inspiring his men, he cried:

"Come on, boys; they can't hit you!"

Instructing his men to leave their packs in the boats, he ran across the beach and cried:

"10th Battalion scouts, are you ready?"

With grim and fearless determination he led them up the height, the Turks firing over their heads. From the left-hand edge of the plateau above they could see the flash of a machine gun, and with great deliberation and dash he directed his scouts towards it. As the first men were reaching the 400 Plateau he and his men were silently advancing on the Turks, who seeing them approach in the dim light began to shoot. Rifle-fire came from the enemy somewhere on the heights across the valley, and with his men he stood for a few moments on the edge of a gravel precipice and studied his map. Then they all plunged down the path by the three enemy tents to their task of finding the enemy guns.

Later that day he was in the act of firing one of the Battalion machine guns when he was mortally wounded in the head.

His death was the first reported casualty in South Australia and at a meeting at the Adelaide City Council in the afternoon of 3 May 1915, the same day as his casualty was released for publication, the Mayor of Adelaide (Mr A A Simpson) made sympathetic reference to his death, when it was unanimously resolved that a letter of sympathy be sent to his parents.

At the Norwood Council the same evening Alderman Essery referred to his death, when it was resolved that a letter of condolence be sent to his relatives.

In one his final letters to his father he wrote:

"We have been given a very responsible piece of work, which will probably mean a large percentage of casualties, but will give us an opportunity to make a name for Australians."

No.172 Bugler H A Bartholomaeus, writing from Gallipoli after his death, referred to him as follows:

"He was a brave a man as one could meet. If you had only been here to see him lead a charge you would have thought the same. He was simply wonderful, and it did our hearts good to be with a man like that."

In another letter, Bugler Bartholomeaus again referred to him:

"Poor old Lieutenant Eric Talbot Smith was killed, as you know. I was right alongside of him. He shouted, 'Come on Australians; given them the bayonet. That's all they want,' and we charged up a big hill, but when we reached the top the Turks hadn't waited for us."

He was posthumously **Mentioned in Despatches** (MID) by Sir Ian Hamilton in his first Dardanelles dispatch, vide London Gazette on 5 August 1915.

At a monthly meeting of the council of South Australia Institutes Association, of which his father was Chairman, it was unanimously resolved that a letter of condolence be forward to his father.

Colonel S P Weir, in a letter from Anzac to his mother, dated 7 May 1915 said:

"Your son Eric died at is post bravely fighting for the Empire. He was among the first to land on Sunday 25 April 1915, at about 4.15am. He had charge of the scouts, ad went about his duty in a fearless manner. After he had done all that was possible with his scouts, he took charge of our machine guns, and was in the act of firing one when he was wounded in the head. From the first we considered his would prove fatal, but he was taken aboard the hospital ship, and it was not until yesterday afternoon, when one of our wounded officers returned to duty, that I learned that Eric had passed away. I sincerely sympathise with you in your sad bereavement. Eric was a soldier who most certainly would have distinguished himself had he been spared. He proved himself of the greatest assistance during the training of the regiment at Mena. At Morphettville he had charge of the training of the Battalion scouts, whom he handled most skillfully. I was in close touch with him on the evening before we landed. He prepared some plans for me, little dreaming that we were to lose nearly half of our Battalion during the first twenty-four hours after landing."