

Edward Ross was described in his enlistment papers as of modest build [5' 5" tall, 131 pounds, chest measurement 36 inches], fair complexion, blue eyes and brown hair. His religion, for that seemed to be important in September 1916, was given as Presbyterian.

Description of <u>Edward Ross</u> on Enlistment.	
Age <u>23</u> years <u>8</u> months.	DISTINCTIVE MARKS.
Height <u>5</u> feet <u>5</u> inches.	
Weight <u>131</u> lbs.	
Chest Measurement <u>36</u> inches.	
Complexion <u>Fair</u>	
Eyes <u>Blue</u>	
Hair <u>Brown</u>	
Religious Denomination <u>Presbyterian</u>	

CERTIFICATE OF MEDICAL EXAMINATION.

**A 113945** **14242** **ITALIAN MILITARY FORCES**

**AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE.**

Attestation Paper of Persons Enlisted for Service Abroad.

No. 6796 100 Name Edward Ross  
Unit 13th Bn  
Joined on 11-9-16

Questions to be put to the Person Enlisting before Attestation:

1. Edward Ross
2. In the Parish of Hamilton in or near the Town of Hamilton in the County of North Lanarkshire
3. yes
4. 23 years 8 mos.
5. no
6. yes
7. no
8. no
9. no
10. no
11. no
12. yes
13. yes
14. yes
15. yes

I, Edward Ross, do solemnly declare that the above answers made me to the above questions are true, and I am willing and freely voluntarily agree to serve in the Military forces of the Commonwealth of Australia within or beyond the limits of the Commonwealth.

\*And I further agree to allot not less than three-fifths of the pay payable to me from time to time during service for the support of my wife and children.

Edward Ross  
Signature of person enlisted.

Edward Cockburn ROSS was born on 25 November 1893 in Hamilton Lanarkshire, Scotland: slightly at odds with the detail shown on the papers as being 23 years and 8 months, but then several mistakes become apparent in the documents, chief among them the embarkation date as 8 November 1918, only 3 days before the armistice.

Apparently he had made an earlier attempt to join up because his form shows that he had been rejected in 1915 due to poor eyesight. It was probably the horrendous casualties inflicted at Verdun and the Somme that caused a rethink by the AIF. 1916 was a year that saw some of the longest and bloodiest battles of the Great War. It is generally agreed that, in terms of lives lost, the campaign for the city of Verdun was the longest and costliest.

It began in February 1916 and, by the end of June, approximately 753,000 French and German soldiers lay dead or were wounded. There were 38,000 Australian casualties during the offensive at Passchendaele. Poison gas, trench foot and gas gangrene was widespread and long-range shelling by both sides was perfected, claiming many lives. Perhaps bad eyesight wasn't considered a disadvantage in the mud and rain of the Western Front.

<http://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/scripts/Imagine.asp?B=8038283>

Ted, who lived in



George St. Thirroul, was a coal miner, taking after his family in Scotland; he gave his occupation as 'wheeler'. The wheeler and his pit pony were an important part of the early days of coalmining. Before mechanisation and conveyor belts were introduced, coal was shovelled by hand into skips, which were moved by wheelers and horses pulling them to the main haul road.



It was probably a bright, sunny, late spring day in Sydney when he embarked upon the vessel 'Port Nicholson' setting out on his adventure into the Great War. No doubt he squinted up at the ship thinking that whatever happened, his life would be more exciting than driving a pony in a coal mine in the Illawarra. Little did he know he was on his way to the coldest hell ever experienced by man.

From Devonport he proceeded to a training establishment at Codford which was a large training and transfer camp established for the tens of thousands of troops waiting to move to [France](#), before shipping across the channel from Folkstone on the SS *Victoria* mid February 1917. Codford was also the depot for the men who had been evacuated from the [front line](#) and were not fit to return to the front.

Codford's 'Anzac Badge' was the idea of an Australian Brigade Commander during World War I who wished to leave a visible memento behind his brigade when it departed. This consists of a gigantic Rising Sun badge (measuring 53 x 45 metres), carved into the grass of 'Misery Hill' (exposing the underlying bright white chalk) in 1916. The soldiers of 13 Trg Bn AIF who maintained the badge as a form of punishment named the site 'Misery Hill'. The Australian Rising Sun Badge and the War Cemetery are now the only visible reminders of a period when thousands of troops from Britain, Australia and New Zealand were stationed in and around Codford. [http://www.awm.gov.au/units/event\\_110.asp](http://www.awm.gov.au/units/event_110.asp) .

Just after Ted arrived in France, Australians in a trench near the forest of Vaulx saw a German airplane crashing. The pilot tried to reach the German trenches, but he was shot by a Lt. Pickthorne. When some Australian soldiers investigated, they discovered the pilot was none other but Prince Friedrich Karl of Prussia, the 2nd cousin of Wilhelm II the German Kaiser: Karl played tennis at Wimbledon under the name of F. Karl. During the 1912 Olympics he and his horse Gibson Boy earned a bronze medal at jumping. The Prince died on the 21st March in a nearby hospital.





Ted arrived on 5 April and settled on the disused railway easement. It was a mess of discarded ammunition boxes, empty ration containers and the detritus of war. In the days preceding the attack a heavy artillery bombardment was supposed to destroy the barbed wire but due to a lack of shells there was not enough firepower.



The weather had changed the roads into muddy ditches because, during their retreat, the Germans had blown them up with enormous mines and it became clear the barbed wire would not be destroyed on the planned date so the attack was supposed to be rescheduled for 12 April. In the night leading to the attack, the tanks were moved out of the Noreuil valley to take their positions in front of the battalion.

#### **Australians at the front line.**

**On the left of the photo, Bullecourt is visible.**

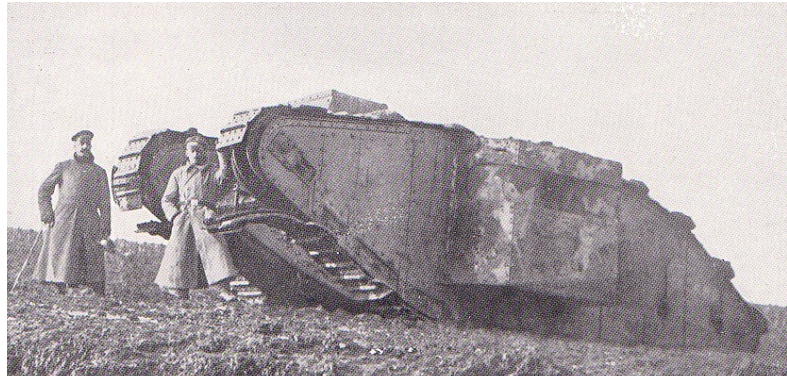


**(Source: The Official History of Australia in the war 1914 – 1918 Volume IV The A.I.F. in France 1917 – C.E.W. Bean.)**

A few tanks were lucky and managed to get a bit further, but none of them reached their destination. HQ however was convinced two tanks were at Reincourt and Hendecourt, they were in fact nowhere near the two villages. Tank No. 799 of Lieutenant Davies was captured by Lieutenant Scharbel's machinegun group. It was the first tank to be captured by German forces, the result being that German soldiers became equipped with armour penetrating bullets.

In the meantime, the attack by the Australian infantry didn't go very well either and they had many casualties. Even though many men were lost, they managed to capture the first and second German lines and even took the communication trenches running towards Reincourt.

When, at 05:00, they realized what had gone wrong, they went over the top about thirty minutes late. It had become light, the Germans were warned and a heavy machinegun fire pounded them in no-man's-land.



**A destroyed tank on the battlefield of Bullecourt.**

**(Source: The Official History of Australia in the war 1914 – 1918 Volume IV – C.E.W. Bean.)**

Later in the morning, the Australians tried to consolidate the captured area and the reserves were sent up to the front. HQ was asked to bomb the flanks, the area from which German counterattacks came. The request was ignored because the officers were convinced there were already troops in Reincourt and the risk hitting friendly troops was considered too high. At that time, not one Australian or British soldier had set foot in either village.

Albert Jacka was leading his troops in the inimitable style that would earn him a Military Medal to add to the VC he earned in Gallipoli, when a shell landed so close to Ted Ross that it threw him bodily 30 metres across the ditch in which he had been hiding. He landed onto the corner of an ammunition box, crushing his sternum and breaking three ribs. The force of the blow shifted his heart 14cm to the left and it remained under his armpit.

As he regained consciousness he heard a couple of soldiers moving amongst the dead and dying.

*I was wounded about 8 p.m. and captured, and, after being placed by the Germans in one of the hammocks slung on a pole in which they carry their wounded, was, by the order of a German officer, picked up by two of our men who had been taken unwounded, to be carried to a dressing station in the German lines. We had only just started when a shell burst by us, killing one of my two bearers and destroying three fingers on the hands of the other, who then, at my own suggestion, left me.*

*Shortly after being left I saw a German officer approaching. I knew he was an officer by his uniform and the sword he wore - but did not draw - but could not tell his rank or regiment. He was in field-grey uniform. He carried an electric torch in one hand and a revolver in the other. He approached within 15 yards of me.*

*I watched the German officer for nearly half-an-hour. He passed along among the British wounded, and as he passed each he stooped down over the man, as though examining him to see whether he was alive or dead, and I saw him point his revolver downwards at the body of one of them, and fired it. I saw the flash and heard the report. From that wounded man he passed on, and I saw the same thing repeated twice.*



*Three times he fired at three different men on the ground. I saw three flashes of his revolver and heard three reports.*

*He then came to me, stooped over me, and stirred with his foot, apparently to see whether I was alive or dead. I shammed death, and, muttering something which I did not understand, he passed on.*

*Almost immediately afterwards he passed beyond another sand dune, which hid him from my sight. The bombardment broke out again just then, and if there were any more shots from his revolver, the noise of the bombardment prevented me hearing their report.*

This witness is a man of very fair intelligence, and, so far as I could form an opinion, reliable. He made his statement with moderation and apparent fairness. He told the story of the German officer shooting wounded men in a manner which gave me the impression that at any rate he himself believed he had seen what he described.

I regret I omitted to ask him whether it was possible that he was himself light-headed (from the pain of his wounds) at the time. He suggested that the German may have shot the men in mercy to end their sufferings.

**CHARLES F. MARTELLI. Examiner,  
Staple Inn, W.C. 1, 2nd March 1918.**

<http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index.php?showtopic=41843&page=3>



No.	Regiment	Rank	Name	Place	Date	Remarks
1	1st Bn. 1st Regt. 1st Div.	Private	John Smith	Germany	1914	Wounded at Ypres
2	2nd Bn. 2nd Regt. 2nd Div.	Sergeant	James Brown	France	1915	Wounded at Arras
3	3rd Bn. 3rd Regt. 3rd Div.	Private	Robert White	Belgium	1916	Wounded at Somme
4	4th Bn. 4th Regt. 4th Div.	Private	William Black	France	1917	Wounded at Passchendaele
5	5th Bn. 5th Regt. 5th Div.	Private	Thomas Green	Germany	1918	Wounded at Spring Wood

It is unknown whether Ted's wounds were treated, or if he went to a Casualty station and if he did in fact end up in another POW camp. His Casualty Form Active Service does specify Limburg as the place where the Red Cross caught up with him. It was one of the first places of registration for a PoW whether they were actually there or not. Some were at several places whilst still registered at Limburg. A registration camp acted as a postal address for Red Cross parcels and as an administration centre for prisoner movements.





He returned to Australia on the *Darbyshire*, arriving in Sydney via Melbourne in April 1919 and was discharged two months later. He saw his new son Jacky for the first time.

He was awarded three medals, the British Star, the British War medal and the Victory medal.

13th BATTALION.

O'CONNOR, D.J. Private.  
No. 6852.

"KILLED 11.4.17"

Informant described O'Connor as about 5 ft 3 inches high, slight build, dark complexion, aged about 20.21. Left Australia together in the "Port Nicholson" in November 1916.

On 11.4.17 the Battalion was in action at Bullecourt. They hopped over early in the morning. About 4.p.m. being about 2 hours after the objective was captured, about 1,100 of our men were cut off almost all of them being taken prisoners including O'Connor and Informant. About 2 hours later when all the prisoners were in a yard awaiting to be searched, Informant saw O'Connor there and he did not appear to be wounded. Informant never saw O'Connor again and was kept a prisoner in Germany for 19 months.

Informant: Private E. Ross. No. 6796.  
13th Battalion.

Private address:-  
Esplanade West,  
THIRROUL.

W.E.G.  
Victoria Barracks, SYDNEY.  
25.4.19.

SYDNEY BUREAU. S

Ted went on to have a total of 13 children, including Martha Simpson, my mother, [who has her own story of war service in WW2,] and died in 1969. One of Mum's favourite stories is about Ted attending a repat doctor to have a check up in the 1920's. The young doctor's face fell when, applying the stethoscope to Ted's chest, he couldn't find a heartbeat. Imagine his relief when Ted told him he had lived a fecund life notwithstanding his heart being in his armpit.