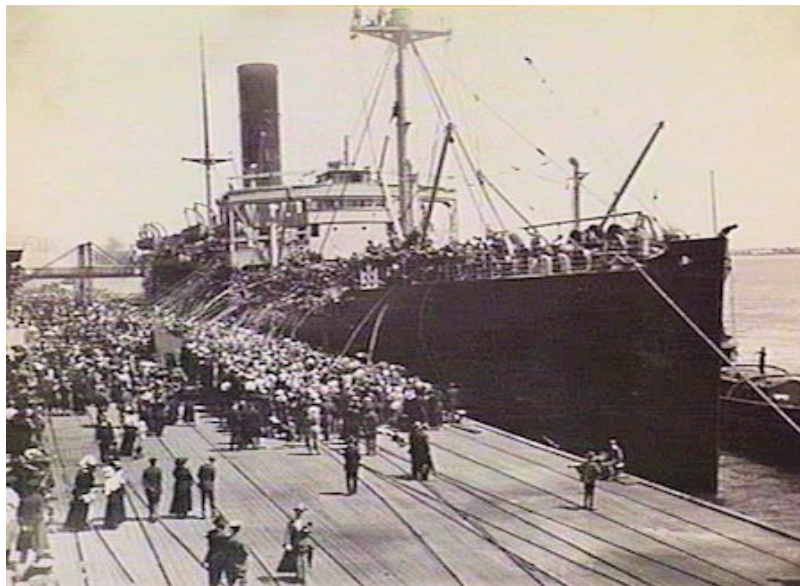


# Private Arthur William Findlay

## Rod Martin

A short (169 centimetre), stocky man of sixty-three kilos in weight, with brown hair and hazel eyes, farmer Arthur Findlay of Kensington enlisted on 17 March 1915 and was assigned to 22 Battalion. The attack at Gallipoli had not yet happened so he became one of the many described as ‘dinkum Aussies’ – the thousands of men who willingly joined up in the first few months of the war before the realities of the slaughter at Gallipoli began to hit home. For twenty-two year-old Arthur, the war probably still seemed like an adventure. The first enlistments had already arrived in Egypt, and letters home may well have indicated that the writers were having a very good time.

Arthur completed his basic training at Broadmeadows and then boarded A38 HMAT *Ulysses* on 10 May and sailed for the Middle East. By that time, the men would have known about the landing at Gallipoli, and they would have had a fair idea where they were going.

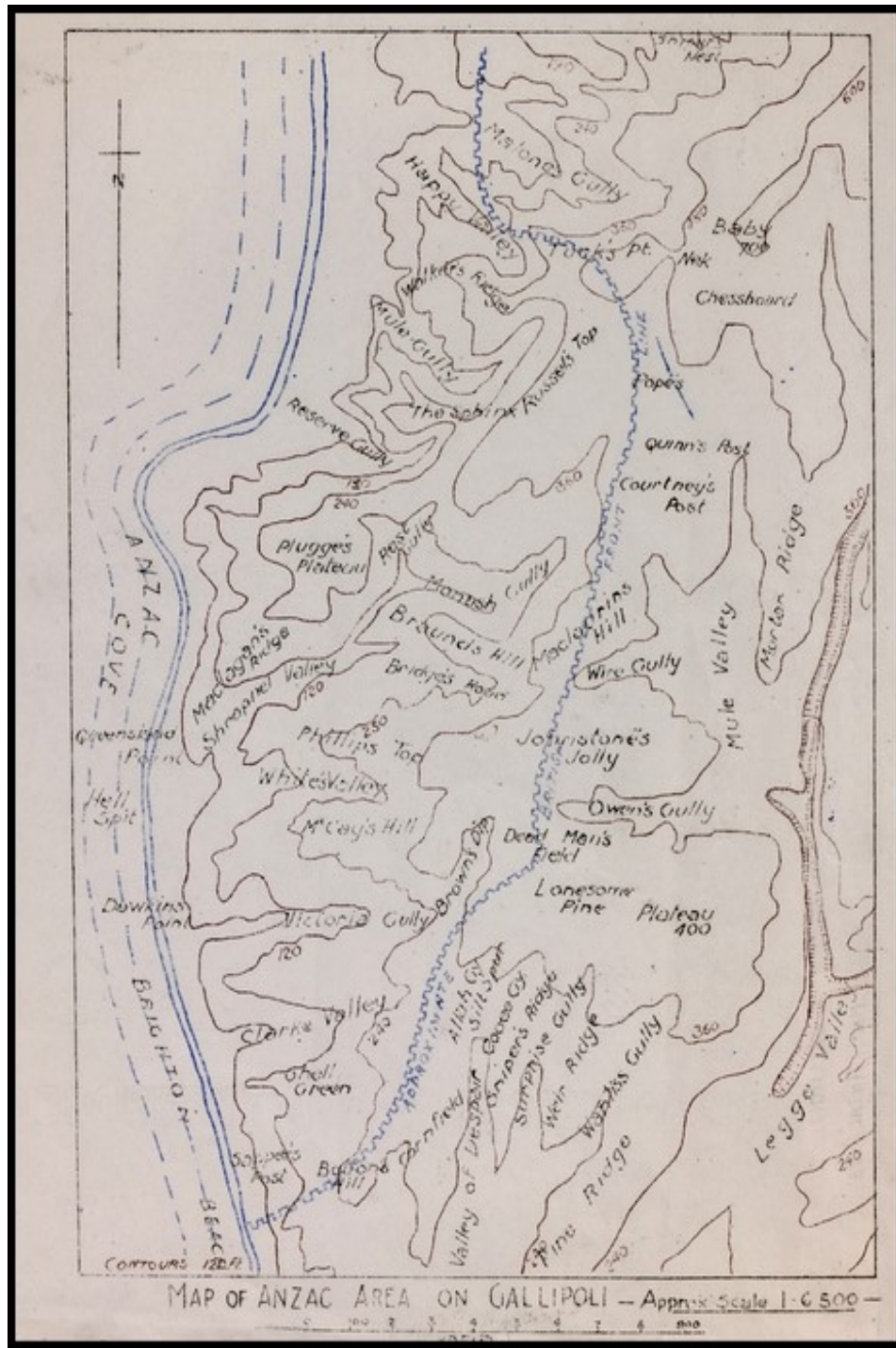


A38 HMAT *Ulysses*

(State Library of Victoria)

The war diary for 22 Battalion begins in August 1915. Arthur and his comrades are located at Heliopolis in Egypt, ready to sail for Gallipoli. On the thirtieth their ship leaves Alexandria and heads north-west. They sailed via Lemnos and arrived at Gallipoli on 5 September. The men were located in dugouts and some had to dig out several bodies, probably buried in cave-ins caused by shells exploding nearby. The experience would have quite horrific for the new arrivals. There were more horrors awaiting the men as they moved up to the front line. Dead bodies lay in the narrow stretch of No Man's Land between them and the Turkish trenches. Bodies also lay in the trenches themselves. The stench and flies were described as being awful. 22 Battalion was manning the southern part

of the line, near the so-called Pine Hill (Lone Pine). The men could see Turkish and Australian bodies left over from the assault on Lone Pine the previous month. That assault and the other feints conducted in August marked the end of the big battles on Gallipoli.



From September to the final evacuation in December, the war was one of piecemeal attrition on both sides: shelling, bombing (including gas) and sniping. From time to time there was banter between the lines, some of it humorous. However, Arthur and his comrades had to be very careful moving about, especially from their dugouts to the trench line. Enemy snipers would fire at anything that moved. The same applied for those on the Turkish side.



22 Battalion men in a trench at Lone Pine 1915. Note the sniper using a periscope rifle, and his compatriot watching the results, also using a periscope.

(AWM C02463)

Gallipoli was finally evacuated in December 1915 and the men taken back to Egypt. 22 Battalion's withdrawal was completed by the nineteenth of the month, and the troops were in Lemnos by the next day. Once there they received a lot of backed-up mail as well as Christmas 'billies', presumably from the government or a large support organisation. One irony noted in the war diary was that the billies were wrapped in a paper jacket showing a kangaroo kicking a Turk off Gallipoli! The caption read: 'This bit of the world belongs to us.'

The battalion returned to Egypt just after new year and spent most of January and February at Ismailia, guarding the Suez Canal from possible Turkish attack. In March, fully staffed and equipped once again, the unit moved to Moascar and then on to Alexandria, whence the men sailed for Marseilles and the Western Front. They arrived at Marseilles on the twenty-fifth and were carried northwards by train, heading for the front near Fleurbaix, in the northern part of the country. They were located in the so-called 'nursery sector', a relatively quiet part of the front near Armentières where they could acclimatise themselves to the realities of modern industrial warfare against a very well-equipped and efficient enemy. 22 Battalion entered the trenches at Fleurbaix for the first time on 13 April. Some sniping occurred and very little movement was noted. Just to indicate that there was action

on a regular basis in the 'nursery sector', however, a patrol sent out that night was caught by machine gun fire. Three men were wounded, one seriously. Similar action occurred over the next few days, with sporadic sniper and artillery fire emanating from both sides.

The battalion was relieved on the nineteenth and billeted in Fleurbaix. The men were not even safe there. as one of their billets was shelled for seventy-five minutes on the twenty-first, wounding two men. On 25 April, the first Anzac Day, the troops were back in the trenches again. A little light-hearted banter occurred at 8.30 that evening, while it was still light. The Australians set up a gramophone on their parapet and played two musical selections. The Germans then responded by shouting out 'Bravo! Encore!' At that, the Australians fired two rounds each at the German trenches. The Germans replied by firing machine guns at the Australian parapet. No one on the Australian side was hurt. However, the first death in the battalion occurred later that night. An exchange of artillery shells led to two explosions in the battalion's trenches, killing one man and injuring four others. The time for any false levity was probably over.

22 Battalion was relieved on 30 April and billeted at nearby Erquinghem. The men were employed in fortifying and reinforcing a number of observation or firing posts. The work was dangerous because the Germans could see the men while it was daylight. Just how dangerous it was was proved on 5 May when a number of positions were bombarded by the Germans, just as the men were to move off to another location. One officer was killed and one 'other ranks' was wounded. Arthur was the wounded man.



Ruins of a dye works at Erquinghem, December 1916. Before being destroyed it had been used by the Australians as a laundry and bath house. (AWM H15704)

Arthur received a wound to his jaw. He was taken to a hospital and received his initial treatment there. His injury was obviously serious, however, because he was transferred to a

hospital at Wandsworth, London, in August 1916. How long he was there is not known. Perhaps he had some rehabilitation treatment and also some convalescent leave in London. However, he was out of the action for good, and he sailed for Melbourne on HMAT *Benalla* the following year, arriving home on 10 April 1917. He was discharged from the AIF in June that year as being medically unfit. His war was over.

## Sources

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