

Irving Thomas Gardiner Turnbull MC

Sapper (Spr) 43 Irving Thomas Gardiner Turnbull enlisted in the 1st Light Horse Brigade Signal Troop at Broadmeadows on 3 September 1914. He embarked overseas on 20 October and disembarked in Egypt in early December.

The signal troop embarked for Gallipoli on 9 May and disembarked on the night of 11 – 12 May, where they established positions in Monash Gully and at Pope's Hill a few days later.

While still on Gallipoli, Spr Turnbull was re-mustered as a Gunner and transferred to the 2nd Field Artillery Brigade (FAB) on 25 June, then promoted to Bombardier (Bdr) on 8 September 1915.

The brigade commenced their evacuation of the peninsula on 17 December and completed it two nights later, minus several of their guns, which had to be destroyed. After some time on Lemnos, they arrived back in Egypt on 3 January 1916.

Bdr Turnbull was transferred and taken on strength of the 1st Field Artillery Brigade in the 1st Australian Division at Tel el Kebir on 8 March and then promoted to Second Lieutenant (2nd Lt) on 12 March.

The brigade departed Egypt on 21 March and disembarked at Marseilles on 27 March, where they entrained to le Havre to collect their new field guns, horses and other equipment, then moved north to the Steenwerck area, where 2nd Lt Turnbull was also promoted to Lieutenant (Lt) on 13 June 1916.

The 1st FAB moved to the Somme and provided fire support for the Australian infantry operations around Pozieres and Mouquet Farm during the period from late July to mid-September 1916. For his work during the initial stages of the Battle for Pozieres, 2nd Lt Turnbull was recommended for, and subsequently awarded, the Military Cross on 16 August 1916. The citation read:

“On the occasion of the capture of Pozieres from 22 July to 26 July 1916. Throughout the operations there had been the utmost difficulty in maintaining communication between Artillery liaison right Battalion and 1st FA Brigade Headquarters. Lieut. Turnbull has organised and maintained communication by runner and telephone through the heavily shelled trenches and enemy Artillery barrages with untiring energy and gallantry. His fine example has assisted the telephonists, linesman and runners of this Brigade through the most arduous and dangerous times.”

Following the battle of the Somme and the horrendous 1916-17 winter, the Germans withdrew their defensive line to new positions in late March 1917, but before dawn on 15 April and without any warning, around 16,000 Germans attacked the 1st Division lines at Lagnicourt, behind which many of the field batteries were located, including those of the 1st FAB. They penetrated the Australian line and overran several batteries and captured 21 field guns. The situation was in fact so dire the batteries were ordered to remove their guns' breech blocks and for their men to withdraw.

At around 7.00 am, a counterattack by four AIF battalions – around 3,500 men – advanced through the Australians' own gun positions and eventually drove the Germans out of the village. They re-captured all the guns, 16 of which remained intact. Overall Australian casualties amounted to 1,010, including 300 captured, while German casualties totalled 2,300, with 362 taken prisoner. Remarkably, the Australian field guns were generally back in action by 11.30 am.

The brigade moved north to Belgium in mid-July 1917, where they came under the command of British II Corps until 3 September, during the opening engagements of Third Ypres.

Later that month the brigade moved to the east of Ypres and supported the successful Australian attack on Broodseinde Ridge on 4 October, then remained in the line. During the lead up to the unsuccessful attempt on Passchendaele a week later, Lt Turnbull sustained shrapnel wounds to his back and abdomen on the night of 11 – 12 October 1917.

He was evacuated to the 17th Casualty Clearing Station later the same day, then to the 14th General Hospital at Wimereux from 20 – 27 October, when he was transferred to England and admitted to the 3rd London General Hospital between 27 October – 30 November (where his spleen was also later removed).

He spent further time recuperating at the 5th Auxiliary Hospital, where he was also promoted in absentia to the rank of Captain on 10 January 1918, then embarked for return to Australia on 30 January.

Captain Irving Thomas Gardiner Turnbull MC disembarked in Melbourne on 21 March, where his appointment as a commissioned officer in the AIF was medically terminated on 19 September 1918.



Captain Turnbull's WW1 medal set

Name: Turnbull, Irving Thomas Gardiner	
Service Number	43, 1587
Date enlisted	3 September 1914
Place enlisted	Broadmeadows, Victoria
Rank on enlistment	Sapper
Initial Unit	1 st Light Horse Brigade Signal Troop
Previous military service	3 years – Royal Australian Garrison Artillery (serving)
Date and ship embarked for overseas	20 October 1914 HMAT A10 <i>Karoo</i>
Stated age/DOB (if known)	27 years 7 months
Place of birth	Camberwell, Victoria
Marital status	Single
Occupation	Professional soldier
Religion	Methodist
Next of kin and address	Turnbull, Mrs ME, mother, 16 Parker Street, Footscray, Victoria
Permanent address	Artillery Barracks, Victoria
Appearance	Dark complexion, dark brown hair, grey eyes, height – 6 feet, weight – 10 stone, 15 lbs, chest measurement – 37 inches
Final Rank	Captain
Final Unit	1 st Field Artillery Brigade
Theatres of war served in	Egypt, Gallipoli, France, Belgium
Fate	Returned to Australia
Date and place wounded	12 October 1917 Passchendaele, Belgium
Nature of wounds	Shrapnel wounds to back and abdomen (spleen removed)
Date and ship embarked for Australia	30 January 1918 HT <i>Euripides</i>
Date discharged	19 September 1918
Nature of discharge	Appointment Terminated (Medically Unfit)
Honours/medals	Military Cross, 1914-15 Star, British War Medal, Victory Medal
Notes	Also remembered on the Borough of Queenscliffe Roll of Honor and the Royal Australian Garrison Artillery 3 rd Military District Honor Roll.