

## **RYAN William - 183 & 4911**

William enlisted into the AIF on the 27th of January 1915 in Keswick, SA at the age of 31 years and was originally allotted service number 183 was allocated to H Company Base Infantry, in Ascot Park Camp.

He listed his sister, Miss Annie Ryan, of the Hamburg Hotel, Rundle Street, Adelaide as his next of kin. (This was later changed to his brother John).

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of March he was transferred to the newly raised 27<sup>th</sup> Battalion and posted to A Company.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of April they marched into the Mitcham Tent Camp and despite the dust of the first few weeks and the mud of later days, very great pride was taken in the Battalion quarters.

Many of the businessmen of Adelaide were very liberal with gifts of goods and luxuries for the troops. Besides gifts for the comfort of the men collectively and individually, many articles for the use of the Battalion generally were received. Among other presentations was a typewriter from Messrs. Colton, Palmer and Preston, and a large clock from Mr. H. Heylen (himself an old soldier). This clock traveled with the Battalion until July, 1916, when it was packed, with other regimental impedimenta, and sent across to England. It was set up in each of their training camps and recorded Regimental time on Gallipoli, and later in France.

The newly-formed Cheer Up Society in Adelaide, founded to give cheer to local and visiting soldiers, made the comfort of the men in camp their particular care, and were responsible for countless acts of kindness and forethought which went far to relieve the monotony and tedium of life under canvas.

Early in the month of May, the Battalion and other allotted troops in camp were invited by the Society to a luncheon in the Jubilee Exhibition Building in Adelaide and they marched to the city via Unley through gaily decorated streets lined with cheering and enthusiastic crowds.

When they arrived at the Jubilee Exhibition Building they were at once seated at bountifully supplied and decorated tables, where, to the accompaniment of fervent patriotic addresses the good things of life were freely partaken of, and the men showed their appreciation in the most striking manner.

It was early ascertained that a great number of the men allotted to the Battalion were from the suburban City of Unley and in recognition of this fact the 27<sup>th</sup> was adopted as "Unley's Own".

The early morning of May 31<sup>st</sup> found the Battalion in the bustle of preparation for their first real move as an organized unit. The principal stores and equipment had already been taken on board and when final inspections were over the troops were entrained from Mitcham Camp on two special trains.

Upon arrival at Outer Harbor, where the troopship *Geelong* was lying, a very great crowd of friends was found already assembled to bid the lads Good-bye. Very little time was lost in embarking the Battalion.

The regimental band was mustered on the upper deck, and, until the transport sailed, enlivened the proceedings with a fine programme of music.

Amid the greatest enthusiasm from soldiers and civilians alike the transport slowly swung out from the wharf, while fluttering ribbons and waving flags evidenced the deep sentiment of affection which characterized the parting.

And so they sailed, these men of the 27<sup>th</sup> Battalion, bound overseas to take their part in the mighty conflict between nations, leaving behind sorrowing but brave hearts to bear the suspense of separation, and to pray for the safe return of their dear ones.

Slowly the troopship left the wharf, the long streaming ribbons grew taut and snapped and the band played farewell music.

William noted the cheering crowd fading and the groups of watching figures on the wharf merged into one another and his homeland faded from sight.

Most of the men were unused to sea life and found troopship conditions uncomfortable in the extreme, but with a ready will and buoyant spirit soon set themselves to overcome the monotony of the voyage.

A certain amount of physical exercise was possible, and regular instructional parades were held, sports and concert committees worked hard with excellent results, and after leaving Western Australia, where other troops were embarked, everybody had settled down to the novel surroundings.

As usual with troopship sailings, their course and destination were unknown, but it was generally surmised that their destination was Egypt enroute to Gallipoli.

From Western Australia their course lay direct to Suez and for a few days the ship was buffeted and tossed under the influence of monsoons, but as they neared the equatorial waters better conditions prevailed and life on board passed smoothly enough.

On the 29<sup>th</sup> of June, an incident which occasioned much sorrow on board was the passing away of their comrade Private William Albert GRAHAM, of Hamley Bridge, who died on board and was buried at sea. He was the first of the 27<sup>th</sup> Battalion to answer the roll call for the "Other World, and his death was deeply mourned.

On the night following his death, at about ten o'clock, the officers assembled in the stern of the ship, and in the absence of a Protestant Chaplain, Colonel Dollman read the burial service, and he was committed to the deep.

Then in the impressive stillness of the starlit night, the silence deepened by the fact that the monotonous throbbing of the engines had ceased and his body was gently and tenderly given to the waves.

A minute's solemn silence was held and then full steam ahead and they left their soldier to his rest.

When passing Aden, at the entrance to the Red Sea, news was received by wireless of a native rising against the garrison there, and although the possibility of their landing was discussed, their services were not requisitioned.

A day or two later, in the early morning, wireless calls reached them from a vessel in distress.

A dusty haze from the African shore made visibility difficult, but soon after daylight they sighted a British-Indian ship aground upon one of the many islands which abound thereabouts.

The *Geelong* stopped, the stranded ship put off a boat and some of her officers boarded the *Geelong*.

Then a wireless message from Aden was received that a rescue ship had been dispatched, which enabled the *Geelong* to continue the voyage towards Suez.

Suez was sighted on the 5<sup>th</sup> of July and the next morning instructions reached them to disembark and proceed by train to Cairo.

While lying at the wharf they saw the troopship *Ballarat* leave for Australia, with the first batch of wounded men from Gallipoli.

They entrained from Suez to Heliopolis in three special trains to their first camp, which was on the outskirts of the city and was known as the Aerodrome Camp. Here they were attached temporarily to the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade as the other Battalions of the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade had been isolated on account of an outbreak of measles while on the voyage.

They slept in airy tents and as an issue of tropical clothing was made, the troops very soon adapted themselves to the new conditions.

Reveille was at 4am daily and training was carried on till breakfast at 8am before theoretical training occupied the time between 10 and noon.

At 4pm training recommenced and continued until 7pm. Limited evening leave was given and each week-end a liberal proportion were given freedom on the Saturday and Sunday afternoons.

About a fortnight after their arrival they moved camp to Abbassia and joined the other units of the brigade. A detailed programme of work was carried out, including trench digging, night marches, and attack and defence practices.

Among the duties which fell to the 27<sup>th</sup> Battalion was that of garrisoning the Kasr-el-Nil Barracks at Cairo and supplying a town picquet and several guards.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of August William was transferred to the newly raised 2<sup>nd</sup> Division Signal Company in Heliopolis as a driver and reallocated the service number 4911.

The signal company's primary function was to provide and maintain communications for the division, using methods like laying telephone wires, operating wireless sets, and employing visual signalling techniques.

It is unknown if William was aware, but his mother, Margaret, died on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 1915 and is buried in the West Terrace Catholic Old section.

On the 29<sup>th</sup> of August William embarked from the Dardanelles on board HMT *Southland*.

Four days later, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September, they were torpedoed at 9.47am about 40 miles out from Mudros Harbour.

They took to the life boats and were picked up by the rescue carriers and transferred to HMT *Transylvania*.

Two days later they were transhipped to HMS Partridge at 1pm and arrived on the shores of Gallipoli on the 4<sup>th</sup> of September.

Here they set up a signal office in Rest Gully and then opened communications with the various Brigades by laying communication lines.

They spent their time at Gallipoli laying, maintaining and repairing these lines. William spent Christmas 1915 at Gallipoli before they embarked for Egypt on board HMAT *Ascanius* on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January 1916. They disembarked in Alexandria 5 days later and entrained to Tel-el-Kebir Camp where they remained in rest and training until the end of the month when they entrained to Ismalia and marched to the staging camp at Ferry Post.

In early February they marched out to the Suez Canal defence and whilst her William suffered from Gastric Inflammation and was hospitalised for a few days.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of March they embarked from Alexandria on board HMAT *Themistocles* and called at Malta before disembarking in Marseilles on the 21<sup>st</sup> and entrained to St Omer before moving to Fleurbaix.

Here they were engaged in maintaining the communication and by July they had moved to Longpre and Vaux and then to Sausage Valley for the battle at Pozieres.

In early August they were relieved and moved to Brickworks and then to Mouquet Farm and in September they were at Poperinghe in training.

In October they moved to Ypres and into the railway dugouts and spent the month here before moving to Eperlecques.

Their next move was to Buire and by November they were in Flers, before they moved to Ribemont for rest and training.

Christmas 1916 was spent in the line before they moved back to Ribemont for a rest in the middle of January, before returning to the front.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of February William suffered from scabies and was admitted into the 6<sup>th</sup> Australian Field Ambulance and transferred to the 1<sup>st</sup> ANZAC Hospital for 2 weeks. William was promoted to 2<sup>nd</sup> Corporal on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April and then they moved to Bullecourt in the middle of May.

The entire month of July was spent at Bancourt in rest and training before they moved to Renescure, where they spent August and most of September in training before moving into the line at Reninghelst.

William spent Christmas 1919 at Revelsberg, dug a trench and buried cables across Messienes Ridge in January, then moved into the Hazebrouck sector, before returning to Ravelberg.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of June William was granted 2 weeks leave to England and when he returned to his Company they were at Glisy in the line. William was then detached to the Signals Company Depot in Abbeville on the 20<sup>th</sup> of September and was still here when the Armistice was signed on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November.

William spent his last Christmas away from Australia here and then on the 14<sup>th</sup> of January 1919 he marched out to Le Havre for return to England. Five days later he embarked to England and marched into the 3<sup>rd</sup> Training Battalion in Longbridge Deverill.

William embarked from England on board HMAT *Tras Os Montes* on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April 1919 and disembarked in Adelaide on the 20<sup>th</sup> of May.

William was discharged from the AIF on the 19<sup>th</sup> of July 1919 and awarded the 1914/15 Star, British War & Victory Medals.

William RYAN's name appears on the honour board at the Marion RSL.