

# The Falconer Family: Service, Sacrifice, and Motors

*A Toowoomba family's remarkable story of wartime service and post-war entrepreneurship*

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As we commemorate ANZAC Day, we remember the countless men and women who served and sacrificed for Australia. Among Toowoomba's notable families, the Falconers stand out—not only for their extraordinary military service across two world wars but also for their lasting contribution to the local community through Falconer Motors.

## From Ireland to Queensland

The Falconer family's Australian story began on March 25, 1909, when Adam and Hessie Falconer arrived in Queensland aboard the *Oswestry Grange*. The farming family brought with them eight sons: Hugh (17), James (15), John (14), Adam (12), Nathaniel (10), Thomas (9), William (6), and Quinton (1). Little did they know that their sons would soon be called upon to serve their adopted country in its darkest hours.

## The Great War: Four Brothers Answer the Call

When World War One erupted, the four eldest Falconer brothers—Hugh, James, John, and Adam—enlisted to serve. Remarkably, all four would return home, though not without bearing the scars of war.

### Hugh Falconer: A Sacrifice in 48 Hours

Born July 27, 1891, in Balleymoney, Ireland, Hugh's (#5229) active front-line service lasted just two devastating days. After enlisting in August 1915, he arrived with the 47th Battalion at the front in August 1916. Within 48 hours, a shell struck Hugh and two other officers. While his companions were killed instantly, Hugh lay wounded for hours before being rescued.

The injuries cost Hugh his right leg. Yet his service was far from over. After a lengthy recuperation in English hospitals, he was promoted to Lieutenant in June 1917, fitted with an artificial leg, and assigned to an AIF Depot in the UK—defying official advice that he should return to Australia. He finally set sail for home in mid-1918 and was formally discharged shortly before war's end. Hugh would pass away in Toowoomba on February 10, 1963.

### James (Jim) Falconer: From Ambulance Bearer to Motor Mechanic

Jim (#7288), an ambulance bearer by trade, served with the 6th Engineers. Arriving in France in August 1916, he experienced a relatively uneventful war compared to his brothers. He was eventually assigned to the 3rd Motor Transport Company before returning to Australia in mid-1919.

This wartime exposure to motor vehicles would shape his future. After the war, Jim became a mechanic and foreman at Falconer Motors, the garage established by his brother Hugh. His son, Ashley James, would later attend Toowoomba Grammar School (Class of 1974).

## **John Falconer: The Soccer Player's War**

John (#270) was a keen soccer player whose military service took an unusual turn when he suffered a sporting injury in February 1918. Playing for the 11th Light Horse Regiment in Tripoli, John collided with another player and injured his right knee—an incident that triggered a formal inquiry to determine if disciplinary action was warranted. The investigation concluded the injury was accidental and occurred during military duty.

John had been the first of the three eldest brothers to enlist, joining in January 1915. He saw action at Gallipoli that August, only to be evacuated to Malta months later with dysentery. After recovering, he served with the 11th Light Horse in Egypt and Palestine before returning home in 1919.

In a poignant postscript, John wrote to the AIF Records office in 1938 requesting replacement medals. He had lent his originals to fellow veteran Alex Tame for a photograph. Tame never returned them and was later admitted to a mental hospital, where he died. The medals were never recovered. John himself passed away in 1981.

Three of the brothers—Jim, Hugh, and John—all appeared on the Toowoomba British Football Association honour board, with family connections to the Park Rangers club before the war.

## **Adam Falconer: Two Wars, Two Services**

Born June 11, 1896, in Ballemoney, Northern Ireland, Adam was a machinist when he enlisted (#2307) in WWI in February 1917 and left Australia as part of the 1917 Reinforcements, Imperial Camel Corps. Upon arrival he was posted to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion and served his war in Egypt. He ended up as a driver with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Field Company Engineers.

## **World War Two: The Family Serves Again**

When Australia entered World War Two in 1939, the Falconer family once again answered the call. All the brothers enlisted, serving in both the Army and RAAF. Once more, fortune smiled upon the family—all returned safely to Australian soil.

Those known to have served in WWII included:

- Hugh Falconer (Q142540)
- James Falconer (Q119860)
- John Falconer (6358)
- Adam Falconer (Q227882)
- Nathaniel Falconer (QX49916)
- William Falconer (QX32029)
- Quinton Falconer (22966)
- Thomas Falconer (believed to have joined)
- Edsel Falconer (QX44292) - Hugh's son

## **From Repatriation Loan to Toowoomba Institution**

In 1918, the Australian Government established the Repatriation Department to help returned veterans rebuild their lives. Through vocational training, employment assistance, pensions, and loans, the

department worked to support veterans' independence. The states also administered soldier settlement schemes.

The four eldest Falconer brothers each received a loan of one hundred dollars. Hugh seized this opportunity and in 1919 established Falconer Motor Company at 153 Ruthven Street, at the corner with Little Street (the site of the former Loch's Livery Stable). The garage specialized in Ford vehicles.

Hugh also became President of the Toowoomba chapter of the Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League of Australia (later the RSL), continuing his commitment to veterans' welfare.

During World War Two, Falconer Motors was taken over by the army. Hugh, by then holding the rank of Captain, continued running the workshop throughout the conflict.

## **Growth and Legacy**

After the war, the Falconers built an impressive new showroom on Ruthven Street, establishing themselves as Toowoomba's premier Ford dealership. Hugh's son Edsel eventually took over the business and became a well-known rally driver in the region.

Between 1958 and 1961, road races were held on public roads at Middle Ridge, a Toowoomba suburb. The approximately 4.2-kilometer circuit attracted top interstate drivers for annual race meetings that coincided with the Toowoomba Carnival of Flowers. Edsel Falconer made headlines in September 1960 when, as Dealer Principal of Falconer Motors, he gave the new Ford Falcon its first taste of competition at the Middle Ridge Circuit.

When Edsel died in September 1973, Dr. Jim Falconer (Toowoomba Grammar School, Class of 1945) took over before eventually selling the business to Southern Cross. The building later became the headquarters for Len Patti Mitsubishi, but the Falconer name remained synonymous with quality automotive service in Toowoomba for decades.

## **A Family's Enduring Legacy**

The Falconer family's story represents the best of the ANZAC spirit: courage in service, resilience in adversity, and dedication to building a better future. From the battlefields of Gallipoli, France, and Palestine to the streets of Toowoomba, they embodied the values we honor each ANZAC Day.

As we remember those who served, the Falconer family reminds us that the ANZAC legacy extends beyond the battlefield—it lives on in the communities' veterans helped build when they came home.

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*Lest we forget.*

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Ann Hallam

Toowoomba RSL Sub Branch Volunteer