



Lieutenant William John RIGBY

[1891 – 1915]



9th Infantry Battalion

William John Rigby was born in Brisbane on 9 December 1891, the fourth of six children of William Alfred Rigby (insurance manager) and Julia Rigby (nee Mitchell).

He attended Brisbane Grammar School in 1906 and 1907 after which he worked as a clerk in the insurance company of which his father was the Queensland branch manager.

His military experience prior to the Great War consisted of three years in the cadets (old organisation), three years in the Australian Garrison Artillery, one year senior cadets, and three years (1911-14) as a lieutenant with 9th Infantry.

We thank the History Interest Group and other volunteers who have researched and prepared these Notes. The series will be progressively expanded and developed. They are intended as casual reading for the benefit of Members, who are encouraged to advise of any inaccuracies in the material.

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Rigby applied to join the AIF on the outbreak of war and was appointed Lieutenant, 9th Infantry Battalion on 20 August 1914. He sailed with the unit on HMAT A5 'Omrah' that left Brisbane from Pinkenba on 24 September and disembarked at Alexandria in Egypt on 6 December 1914.



Officers of the 9th Battalion aboard HMAT Omrah (A5). Lt Rigby, is circled

The battalion was selected as part of the Covering Force for the Gallipoli Landing and Rigby landed with the first wave at dawn, as a platoon commander with B Company which was commanded by Major Robertson.

On landing, A and B companies of 9 Battalion found that they were put ashore not in the vicinity of Gaba Tepe and on the right of the covering force where they expected, but a mile to the north and on the left of 10th Battalion. Immediate confusion ensued but soon the troops started moving up the hills.

Major S.B. Robertson led B Company, including Rigby, up the broken cliffs towards Baby 700 as Captain Lalor of 12th Battalion did likewise, both arriving at The Nek about 7 am.

The Official History records the circumstances of Rigby's death near Gaba Tepe:

About 8.30 a.m. Robertson and Lalor ordered an advance to Baby 700 ... On the seaward slope the firing line was under Major S. B. Robertson of the 9th Battalion. From the outset the fighting on this slope was heavy.

The line on the left of Baby 700, whenever it went forward was exposed to fire, not only of the Turks behind the nearer spurs, but of others who were now filtering back upon the lower ends of those spurs, not far above the beach. Officers and men lying in the scrub were caught, one after another, by the scattered bullets. Major S. B. Robertson, thrice wounded, raised himself to look forward and was shot.

"Carry on, Rigby," he said to a junior beside him, and died. Lieutenant W. J. Rigby "carried on" until he too was killed.

Rigby was only 23 years old when he was killed on the heights above Anzac Cove only a few hours after landing. He was one of 12 USC members killed at Gallipoli and one of three killed in the same action. (Major Robertson, his 9th Battalion company commander, and Captain Lalor of the 12th Battalion were both killed nearby and have separate stories in this series of Notes.)

Lieutenant Rigby's remains were never recovered.

He is commemorated on Lone Pine Memorial, not far from where he was killed.



Sources included:

- Australian War Memorial
- National Archives of Australia
- Various web pages
- *United Service Club, Queensland: The First Century, 1892-1992* by Flight Lieutenant Murray Adams and Lieutenant Colonel Peter Charlton
- Club Meeting Minutes, Annual Reports and sundry documents