



## Major Sydney Beresford ROBERTSON

[1886 – 1915]



9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion

Sydney Beresford Robertson (his mother asserted he was always known as S. Beresford Robertson) was born on 28 October 1886, the second youngest of six children of Reverend Joseph Robertson MA (Congregational Minister) and Catherine Ross Robertson (nee Wilson).

His father's vocation as a Congregationalist Minister required moving the family around Australasia as the children were born in a number of locations (Hawthorn Victoria, Auckland NZ, Adelaide South Australia). By late 1914 the family was living at Quarry Street Ipswich.

*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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He was educated at Prince Alfred Grammar School Adelaide (First prize Lower Fifth Form 1901) and in 1902 he attended Muirden College where he was awarded bookkeeping and typewriting certificates.

Robertson had an initial aspiration for an army commission, but when this hope was frustrated by the formation of the Australian military college, he took up a position as a law clerk.

He served in the militia from 1907 to 1914, including as a Lieutenant in 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion and Captain in Australian Intelligence Corps (1912).

Descriptions of his personality and qualities include: *splendid personality, manly bearing, and general kindness; lofty ideals and fine thoughts; adored by his men; and a great favourite with his brother officers because of his happy disposition, and faculty for keeping everybody happy.*

On the outbreak of war, he applied to join the AIF and was appointed Captain, 9<sup>th</sup> 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. He was promoted Major on New Year's Day 1915.

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

On landing, A and B companies of 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion found that they were put ashore not where they expected on the right of the covering force but under on the left of 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Immediate confusion ensued but soon the troops started moving up the hills.

Robertson led his Company up the broken cliffs towards Baby 700 as Captain Lalor of 12<sup>th</sup> Battalion did likewise, both arriving at The Nek about 7 am.

The Official History records the circumstances of Robertson's death:

*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 9<sup>th</sup> 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 .... 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.*

An eyewitness wrote to his parents from a hospital ship on 29 April:

*...Going up that hill was just awful...I was just alongside Major S. B. Robertson, and never left him. I was in charge of his person and signalling staff....*

*Our chaps were by this time nearly a mile inland...On the ridge here we started to entrench, and were just getting the trenches a bit ship-shape when the order to advance came along. Then came the worst part of the battle...The Turks had come back with reinforcements, and a howitzer battery.... It was hardly possible for a rabbit to live in the fire we were under. Put your head up, and whiz went past half-a-dozen bullets. Our chaps, and the officers especially, were going down by the dozens. I had some awfully narrow escapes.*

*About 4 o'clock Major Robertson got one, and almost died at once. I went from officer to officer of the company, but they were nearly all hit.*

Robertson was only 29 when he was killed after being wounded three times, only about twelve hours after the Gallipoli Landing. He was one of 12 USC members killed in action during the Gallipoli Campaign, and one of three who were killed in this action. (Captain Lalor and Lieutenant Rigby were USC members killed nearby. Their stories are part of this series of Notes.)

Major Robertson now lies in Beach Cemetery Gallipoli.



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